GRASSROOTS FAMILY LEADERSHIP: A
QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF EQUITY AND
ENGAGEMENT

By

JESSICA ANN NOONAN

Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education
University of Tulsa
Tulsa, Oklahoma
2007

Master of Education in Reading
Oklahoma State University
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma
2011

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 2020

GRASSROOTS FAMILY LEADERSHIP:

A QULITATIVE CASE STUDY OF

EQUITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Katherine Curry

_____

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Ed Harris

_____

Dr. Jackie Mania-Singer

_____

Dr. Maryjo Self

_____

ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my village for supporting me through this process. Completing this dissertation has been an exercise in endurance, and without guidance, support, and encouragement, I don't know if I could have finished it.

First, I would like to thank my family. Thanks to my husband, Matt, for always making me feel like I can conquer the world! Having him in my corner makes anything feel possible. I would also like to thank my mom, Cathy Carter, for being amazing. As a single mom, she often made sacrifices that made it possible for me to get a great education. My mother-in-law, Theresa Noonan, has been a huge support as well, always helping and caring for my son when I needed to write. I also want to acknowledge my son, Ezra, whose zest for life and learning throughout his four years have been an inspiration to me.

Next, I am so appreciative of my professors and dissertation committee. Dr. Kathy Curry has been my advisor, and her feedback has helped to make this dissertation something I can be proud of. When I felt moments of defeat during this process, she always provided me with encouragement that kept me going. I would also like to thank Dr. Jackie Mania for being a great mentor and encouraging me to examine everything through a social justice lens. Dr. Ed Harris has also been hugely supportive of me, and his warmth and humor have helped me surpass moments of self-doubt.

Finally, I would like to thank my participants. Not only did they volunteer their time for interviews that made this dissertation possible, their perspectives have helped to profoundly influence me as an educator and citizen. I am thankful that this dissertation has led me to be more closely tied to my community, and I hope that I can continue to learn from the wonderful people who live and work here!

Name: JESSICA NOONAN

Date of Degree: MAY, 2020

Title of Study: GRASSROOTS FAMILY

LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF

EQUITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

Abstract: This qualitative case study explores a grassroots family leadership initiative in a high poverty, Midwestern, urban school setting. Using community cultural wealth as a theoretical lens, this study considers how shared leadership with diverse families influences family engagement perspectives and practices. Findings suggest the inclusion of culturally diverse families in school leadership holds potential for invigorating a school with fresh ideas and stronger community connections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"It takes a village to raise a child" is a proverb commonly used to explain the need for

communities to collectively raise the next generation. The idea that supporting the development

of children is a communal responsibility is not new. Indeed, the "it takes a village" proverb is so

prevalent that it is difficult to trace its origins (Goldberg, 2016). Sharing the work of child-

rearing is a practice dating back to the Stone Age (Van Vugt, 2013), though the amount of

collective responsibility for children varies greatly across time and culture.

In the United States, public schools have accepted part of the responsibility for preparing

children for adulthood since the Boston Latin School began in 1635 (National Geographic,

2013). In 1897, the first iteration of the Parent Teachers Association began with the idea that

parents (mostly mothers) should collectively advocate for the betterment of their children

(National PTA, 2019). Since that time, the idea that families and schools should work together

on behalf of children has become commonly accepted. Federal legislation tied directly to

funding stipulates that schools strategically engage families (U.S. Department of Education,

2012).

The need to understand how families and schools can best work together has resulted in

a voluminous collection of scholarly research. Since the early 1990s, the seminal work of Joyce

Epstein on parental involvement strategies has equipped researchers and practitioners with both

theories and tools to bolster parent and school collaboration (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013). More recently, scholars have begun to call into question these widely-accepted strategies by discussing their failure to consider societal inequities or acknowledge "fundamental historical, cultural, and social divides between parents and their schools" (Ishimaru, 2013, p. 189). It is important to note that within this field of research, there has been a paradigm shift from "parent involvement," which typically focuses on strategies employed by schools to work with parents individually, to "family engagement," which is aimed at empowering families to become change agents within their school community to address systemic barriers (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

A great deal of research demonstrates that family-school engagement has positive effects. A litany of benefits for students, families, and schools have been noted. For example, parent and community involvement have been shown to reduce disparities between low and high-SES students' school achievement (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013). Also, research has shown increased parent involvement can have a positive effect on several key measures: student motivation (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012), student behavior (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), student optimism towards schooling (Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014), and student attendance (McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Sheldon, 2007). Additionally, Ackley and Cullen (2010) found that home-school collaboration had a positive effect on family relationships, reducing stress on parents and children.

Despite the benefits associated with family-school engagement, research has also shown that engagement between schools and low-income families or families of color is sometimes less effective than engagement between schools and White, middle-class families. For example, Rispoli, Hawley, and Clinton (2018) found higher levels of parent involvement among White

parents than Black or Hispanic parents. Additionally, socioeconomic factors have been shown to be predictive of involvement (Bardhoshi, Duncan, & Schweinle, 2016; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

One potential reason for this anomaly is that family engagement is often framed by White, middle-class paradigms that fail to acknowledge the structural challenges faced by low-income families (Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000) or the cultural contributions low-income and/or minoritized families bring (Ishimaru, 2014). In order to disrupt barriers and integrate the cultural capital of diverse families, some schools have begun to position parents as leaders and decision makers. These instances are rare because power sharing between schools and families can be disruptive to existing practices, and they require consistent attention to implement with fidelity (Ishimaru, 2013). One school district in the Midwest, however, has created a platform for parents to share in decision and leadership processes. This grassroots family engagement initiative has the purpose of empowering parents as decision makers so that they become more engaged in the education of their children. This study focused on how positioning family members as leaders of a school's family engagement practices can influence family engagement perspectives within a school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how a grassroots family leadership initiative influences family engagement perspectives and practices within the context of a high-poverty, predominately Hispanic elementary school.

Research Questions

1. How do faculty and families describe their perspectives on family engagement?
    a. What perspectives on family engagement exist within the school?

3

   b. What family engagement practices are used within the school?

   c. How do power relations and cultural factors explain these perspectives and practices?

  2. From the perspectives of educators, families, and community members, how does this grassroots family leadership initiative influence family engagement practices and perspectives within the school?

   a. What power relations exist within the school and how do they impact the family leadership initiative?

   b. How has this leadership structure facilitated engagement and overcome barriers?

  3. How does the theory of community cultural wealth explain the data?

Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological perspective framing this study is critical subjectivism. According to Crotty (1998), subjectivism is the philosophical belief that there is no objective truth and that meaning is created by individuals. However, meaning is not created by a straightforward interaction between an individual and an object, as constructionists maintain. Rather, "meaning is imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Further, how an individual ascribes meaning to an object is not a neutral process, but one based on one's experiences and social/historical location (Crotty, 1998). One major theoretical perspective within the subjectivist epistemology is critical inquiry. Criticalists believe power, privilege, and oppression shape thought (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Crotty (1998) explained that critical inquiry "reads [a] situation in terms of conflict and oppression…and seeks to bring about change" (p. 112). The critical researcher does not simply interpret and report their findings from a neutral standpoint; they examine them in terms of how societal inequality may have created their

findings and then consider how their findings can help to achieve a more just society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). It is with this critical viewpoint that I approached my study.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of community cultural wealth (CCW) served as a lens to analyze findings in this study. CCW was introduced by Tara Yosso in 2005 as a response to prevailing theories on cultural capital, such as Bourdieu (1977) and Coleman's (1998) theories of cultural and social capital). CCW draws on the work of critical race theory (CRT) by pointing out that it is common practice to define cultural capital in comparison to a standard that is defined by White, middle-class communities (Yosso, 2005). CCW asserts that families of color have a great deal of cultural capital that may go unrecognized by White, middle-class educators who may have a deficit mindset toward families of color (Yosso, 2005). CCW recognizes six types of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Yosso, 2005), which are presented in Figure 1 below.

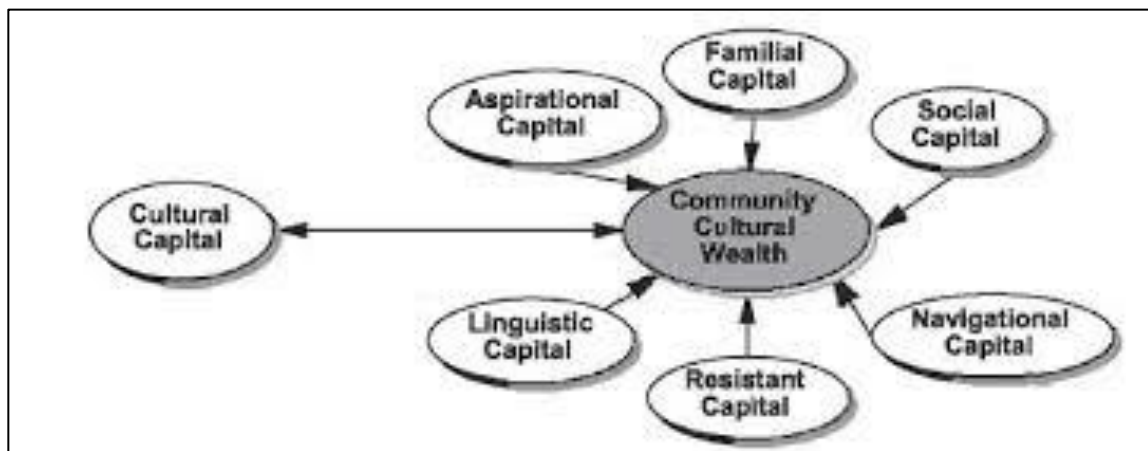**Figure 1** Theory of Community Cultural Wealth

Figure 1. Six types of capital recognized within the Theory of Community Cultural Wealth. Adapted from "Whose culture has capital?" by T. Yosso, 2005, *Race, Ethnicity and Education,* *8*(1), 69–91. Copyright 2005 by Race, Ethnicity, and Education.

The six forms of capital can be harnessed to empower individuals and provide a

framework for recognizing the strengths and cultural assets of communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Each component of CCW is explored in detail in Chapter Two. CCW is particularly well-suited for this study because it provides a framework for examining how the cultural assets of a community can be instrumental in shaping perspectives within a school.

Procedures

This study utilized a transformative, qualitative case study design. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the distinguishing characteristic of a case study is its focus on a bounded system in which a particular phenomenon cannot be separated from its context. Stake (2005) explained that case studies sometimes begin based on a researcher's prior interest in a particular case. For this study, the case was selected based on my involvement in a family leadership initiative bounded within an elementary school in a Midwestern city and my interest in how the development of this initiative could influence family engagement. Using transformative case study methods, I sought to illuminate inequities within this context, and during analysis, I considered how greater social justice could be achieved within this context (Mertens, 2009).

Data was collected from multiple sources, including interviews, observation, document collection, and an informal survey. In order to answer the proposed research questions, it was necessary for me to interview a sample of participants from the following populations: (a) parent leaders, (b) other parents/caregivers, (c) teachers, (d) school leaders, and (e) employees of a community partner agency that assisted with the family leadership initiative. I interviewed 11 individuals, which allowed for representation of two to three members from each participant group. In addition to interviews, I engaged in prolonged observation within the school and neighborhood in activities that involved family engagement. Observations included the following: (a) Parent Leadership Council meetings,

(b) school and family interactions during daily routines such as dismissal, (c) special events such as family literacy night, and (d) neighborhood meetings. The final source of data included documents and artifacts relating to family engagement, such as (a) flyers for events and activities, (b) teacher and school newsletters, (c) photos of the school's marquee, and (d) photos of school bulletin boards. Including data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, documents/artifacts) allowed for triangulation, or substantiation, of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My own positionality as a researcher was a necessary consideration throughout this study. As an exercise of critical inquiry, this study was grounded in the assumption that power relations based on race, social class, gender, language, and citizenship status envelop all interactions as well as the generation of knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, an acknowledgement of power and privilege was an essential component in this study. My own status as a college-educated, White, English-speaking woman bears a certain degree of privilege to me that many of my participants do not have; therefore, I carefully considered in planning and executing this study how such power differentials may have influenced not only my study but the participants themselves.

Significance of the Study

To Research

Family engagement boasts a large body of research. This study adds to the existing research body on family engagement in two ways. First, few studies have explored the leadership efforts of low-income and minoritized families within schools. Second, there is an emerging theme in the literature on family engagement that highlights a need to directly confront a deficit paradigm by illuminating the strength and resiliency of nondominant families (Ishimaru, 2014). This study adds to the research body on family leadership and contends with

deficit perspectives that have prevailed in major discourses on family engagement.

To Theory

This study expands upon the theory of community cultural wealth (CCW) by examining its manifestation within a family leadership initiative. CCW is a relatively new theoretical framework, having been introduced in 2005, and remains a fresh lens for examining issues of social justice and equity in education. The theory has been applied to family engagement (Gil, 2017; Walker, 2016), but has not been used extensively to examine family leadership within schools.

To Practice

This study informs to family engagement practice as well. Family engagement has proven in many contexts to be beneficial, and this study discusses new ways of engaging families who have typically been underrepresented or perceived as being uninvolved in children's schooling. Much of what happens in schools to engage families still largely hinges on traditional approaches that may isolate families from nondominant backgrounds. In contrast, this study illuminates many equitable practices that celebrate the strength and diversity of all families that allow for new pathways of collaboration, communication, and shared understanding between schools and families.

<div align="center">

Definition of Terms

</div>

1. Equitable family engagement: A culturally-responsive partnership between families and schools in which goals and actions are defined collaboratively in order to improve outcomes for students (Stefanski, Valli, & Jacobson, 2016). It is also important to note that scholars distinguish family engagement from parent involvement. Family engagement acknowledges community-level barriers and invites families to become change agents, while parent involvement typically

focuses on the individual efforts of parents to support the agenda of the school (Alameda- Lawson, 2014).

2. Nondominant: groups "such as low income, immigrant/refugee, and other communities of color, who have been marginalized by dominant institutions, policies, and practices" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 852).

3. Parent Leadership Council: This is the name assigned to the core group involved in the parent leadership initiative discussed in this study. Throughout this paper, I refer to members of this group as parent leaders or Parent Leadership Council members.

4. Minoritized: Individuals and groups who have significantly less privilege or access to power than others due to historical, social, and political oppression (Smith, 2016). This verb is used to provide contrast to the term *minority*, which simply means any group that comprises less than half of a population. To illustrate this concept, consider the majorite-Black school, which typically receives less funding and resources than majority-White schools. Students in such schools are not minorities in those settings, yet they still remain minoritized.

Summary of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study including the research problem, purpose, and questions. Additionally, the researcher's epistemological perspective and theoretical framework were discussed, along with potential significance and key terms used in the study. Chapter II provides an in-depth discussion of the literature on family engagement as well as a detailed overview of each component of the theoretical framework. Chapter III outlines the methods and procedures used in this study.

Chapter IV includes a detailed description of the study's sample and outlines findings thematically. Finally, chapter V discusses findings through the lens of community cultural wealth, considers how findings relate to other literature, and presents implications and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parent involvement has been recognized in research and policy as a promising avenue for school reform. Gordon and Louis (2009) explained the importance of such reform measures in past legislation:

> Calls for increasing parent and community participation, both formally in mandates such as Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind and in the inclusion of parent and community involvement in widely disseminated whole school reform programs as well as informal grassroots action. (p. 2)

A great deal of research supports the potential benefits of collaboration between schools and members of the surrounding community (Ackley & Cullen, 2010; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Oberg De La Garza & Kuri, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Sheldon, 2007). Education policy makers have heeded such findings and recognize that parent involvement has the potential to positively impact students. In the following review of literature, major themes surrounding this topic are discussed, including (a) seminal literature in the field; (b) relationships between demographic factors, such as race and socioeconomic status, and parent involvement; (c) deficit paradigms and systemic barriers; and finally (d) the theoretical framework of community cultural wealth.

Research Traditions and Benefits of Parent Involvement

This section of the literature review focuses on seminal studies in the field. Additionally, benefits of parent involvement are presented. Finally, relevant policy is discussed to demonstrate this topic's significance.

Traditional Approaches to Family Engagement/Parent Involvement

For many years, discussion in the research literature on involving or engaging families in schools hinged around the seminal work of Joyce Epstein (1995; 2001). It is important to note that parent involvement was the term used by Epstein and colleagues to describe how parents could support their child's education; family engagement is the term du jour and is discussed later. Epstein (2001) offered the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which asserts that students operate under the guidance of home, school, and community factors. Further, the greater the overlap between these three spheres, the more positive the impact on the child's education. Epstein (1995) also provided a practical model for parent involvement that includes six components, which are presented below in Table 2. Epstein (2001) asserted that when schools work strategically to involve parents using the six strategies mentioned previously, a variety of positive student outcomes may be achieved. Epstein's framework for parent involvement provided the most prominent lens for empirical research as well as practitioner-focused literature throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Stefanski, Valli, & Jacobson, 2016).

Table 2

Epstein's Framework for Parent Involvement

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with the Community
Assist families with	Communicate with families	Improve recruitment,	Involve families	Include families as	Coordinate resources and

12

parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each and grade level.	about school programs and student progress.	training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations.	with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities.	participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.	services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities.
Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.	Create two-way communication channels between school and home.	Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.	Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.		Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Adapted from "School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for Action" by J.L. Epstein, M.G. Sanders, B.S. Simon, K.C. Salinas, N.R. Jansorn, & F.L. Van Voorhis. Copyright 2002 by Corwin.

Another seminal study on parent involvement came from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995). This study presented a theoretical model to explain why parents become engaged in their child's schooling. According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, parents become involved due to two motivating factors: role construction and self-efficacy. Role construction is how a parent envisions they should participate in their child's education. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to act in order to achieve desired outcomes. Many quantitative studies have relied on the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model to examine factors that influence

parental involvement (see, for example, Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, & Koziol, 2013).

In considering how the seminal work of Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have influenced current literature, it is important to note that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model focused on the psychological aspects of parent motivation. Conversely, Epstein's framework focused on parent involvement strategies that could be used by schools. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model provided an avenue for considering how social factors, such as group norms, could influence a parent's motivation for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and Sanders (1997) emphasized that there must be the sense by parents of being "invited" into the educational process from both the child and the school in order to facilitate engagement. Epstein's framework, on the other hand, did not directly address how social or cultural factors may play a defining role in the effectiveness of parent involvement practice (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Further, policy decisions that were based on Epstein's strategies failed to consider how these strategies could have a potential negative influence on families from nondominant cultural backgrounds (e.g. helping students with homework may take away families' time to engage in culturally-affirming home practices) (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

In recent years, scholars have taken issue with Epstein's model for parent involvement, asserting that Epstein's model may unconsciously proliferate a deficit perspective among educators by focusing primarily on the efforts of individual families rather than addressing community-level barriers (Ishimaru, 2014). Terminology about working with families has also changed; newer, preferred terms include family engagement and family empowerment rather than parent involvement (Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Stefanski et al., 2016). Family engagement models presuppose that parents are already doing what they can individually, and that community or structural factors must change in order for parents to become able to work more closely with their children's educators (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). Engagement/empowerment

models also attempt to address imbalances of power between educators and parents by inviting parents to make collective decisions with educators and to "work with parents in ways that give them numerous opportunities to participate in creating a school environment where children can learn, play, and feel safe" (Christianakis, 2011, p. 161). Sanders (2010) asserted that when educators do not address power imbalances, it can result in parent distrust. Conversely, because the empowerment/engagement framework directly and openly addresses power differences, it may allow for trust to develop between educators and parents.

The contrast between parent involvement and family engagement has been highlighted by several researchers, but Ferlazzo (2011) provided a clear distinction: A school that focuses on parent involvement "leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute," whereas a school focused on family engagement "lead[s] with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about…not to serve clients but to gain partners" (p. 12). Though scholars may have differing conceptions of how best to work with families and what to call such work, there is a preponderance of evidence that suggests when schools and families work together to support students, it is beneficial. The supporting research for family engagement is discussed in the following section. In describing researchers' findings, I have used their selected terminology (parent involvement or family engagement), therefore both terms are used throughout this paper.

Positive Effects of Family-School Engagement

Family-school engagement is associated with a number of positive outcomes. In their seminal review of literature, Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated,

> The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in

school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 7)

In the following sections, the benefits of family engagement for relationships, attendance, achievement, and affective factors will be discussed.

Relationships. Parent involvement is associated with better relational outcomes for students. For example, Wyrick and Rudasill (2009) found that higher levels of parent involvement were associated better teacher-child relationships. The authors posited that parent involvement likely influences the teacher-child relationship by modeling a positive attitude about school for the child and by encouraging teachers to have positive perceptions of the child. Moreover, parent involvement was found to be particularly significant for low-income students; evidence indicated it reduced poverty-related risks of academic failure (Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009). Moreover, family-school engagement not only influences teacher-child relationships, it is also associated with better within-family relationships and reduced stress for both parents and children (Ackley & Cullen, 2010).

The parent-teacher relationship has also been a topic of study in the literature. Kim et al. (2013) reported that parent motivation was associated with high-quality parent-teacher relationships. However, they were not able to pinpoint whether increased parent motivation led to better parent-teacher relationships or whether quality parent-teacher relationships increased parent motivation. They speculated that "parents may be more likely to share expectations and values for children with teachers when they have close relationships with them, thus making these expectations consistent across home and school contexts" (p. 183). In other words, when teachers and parents trust one another and communicate regularly, students benefit from teachers and parents' shared understandings.

According to Serpell and Mashburn (2011), family-teacher relationship quality is positively associated with social competence, fewer behavior problems, teacher-student

closeness and less conflict between parents and teachers (Serpell & Mashburn, 2011). Further, "the social resources afforded by quality parent-teacher relationships can help ameliorate disadvantages associated with social and economic risks" (p. 42). Similarly, family and community involvement in schools may reduce achievement disparities between high and low-income students (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013).

Student attendance. Family engagement has also been linked to improvements in student attendance. Sheldon (2007) found that schools who engaged in family partnership practices were able to improve student attendance, while schools who did not actively engage families saw declines in student attendance. This was primarily due to the fact that schools focused on family engagement had strategies in place to reach out to families, which made it possible for families to intervene to correct attendance issues (Sheldon, 2007). A positive relationship between parent/family engagement and student attendance was also noted by McConnell and Kubina (2014).

Student achievement. Other studies have linked student achievement to family-school engagement. Increased home-school communication and providing school-based services to parents are associated with higher student achievement scores (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013). Another important finding was noted by Hughes and Kwok (2007): when students' families have supportive relationships with teachers, students are likely to have higher achievement in first-grade reading. Furthermore, this effect continues indirectly into subsequent years since it increases student engagement (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

Additionally, Gandhi et al. (2018) found that when family engagement is included in an overall focus on addressing students' nonacademic needs, student achievement can improve significantly, particularly for English Learners. In addition to student achievement gains, researchers have linked family engagement to affective benefits.

Student behavior, motivation, and optimism. Sheridan, Bovaird, Glover, Garbacz, and Witte (2012) noted that when problem-solving and supports for student behavior are shared by teachers and parents across home and school contexts, improvements in student behavior can be observed. Further, these improvements surpass those noted in school-only interventions (Sheridan et al., 2012). Likewise, in a longitudinal study of the relationship between parent involvement and student behavior, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) discovered that increased use of parent involvement strategies was associated with fewer student discipline referrals. Additionally, when schools improved the quality of their parent involvement programs, student discipline infractions were reduced within those schools (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Thus, improvements in both quantity and quality of parent involvement can yield positive results.

Other scholars have linked family engagement to motivation and optimism. For example, Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) deduced that children's improved motivation and ability to self-regulate in a learning environment was associated with greater parent involvement in school. Oberg De La Garza and Kuri (2014) surveyed a population of high school dropouts and found that most reported one key factor that would have helped them complete school was more connection between home and school. Further, their "research indicates that students whose home and school lives are connected are more optimistic about their ability to succeed" (Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014, p. 120).

Policies related to Family Engagement

Family engagement is an important topic because it has been leveraged as a key reform in federal educational policy. Parent involvement has always been an included component in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was first passed in 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; a reauthorization of ESEA) was passed in 2001, it included a statutory definition for parent

involvement that focused on two-way communication about students' learning and other school activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Additionally, NCLB specified that particular effort should be made to involve low-income and non-English speaking families, though school districts were given great latitude in how they accomplished this (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Under NCLB, a great deal of education funding was allocated to parent involvement activities. School districts that received Title I funds were required to spend at least one percent of their allocation on parent involvement activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Additionally, schools and districts were allowed to use monies from other federal programs including Reading First, Even Start, and 21st Century Learning Centers to improve family engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Therefore, a substantial amount of federal monies was earmarked to engage families in children's education.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed as the most contemporary reauthorization of ESEA. ESSA included similar provisions for working with students' families, but included a few changes (Henderson, 2016). The term "parent involvement" was replaced with "family engagement" to reflect the shifting terminology used in the literature. Additionally, each state's Parent Information Resource Center was replaced with a Statewide Family Engagement Center and funding was reestablished after a hiatus since 2011. A final significant change was the requirement that districts engage in at least one of several identified strategies, including professional development for staff, home-based activities, collaboration with local nonprofit agencies, and information dissemination (Henderson, 2016).

In conclusion, ESSA continued the federal push to engage families as part of students' education and directly allocated Title I funding for related activities. Because family engagement remains a national focus in school reform, exploring family engagement,

particularly in low-income schools that receive Title I funding, is an important research endeavor. The following section explores how race and class impact family engagement.

<p style="text-align:center;">**The Interaction of Race and Socioeconomic Factors with Family Engagement**</p>

As demonstrated by the literature discussed in the previous section, parent involvement holds a great deal of promise for positively affecting students. However, including parents in students' educational lives is not without challenges, especially in schools and districts serving lower socioeconomic status (SES) student populations. Christianakis (2011) contended that parent involvement in low-SES schools tends to be less frequent and of a different quality than that in middle or higher income schools. An additional challenge is posed when students' parents do not speak the dominant language because these parents may be hesitant to communicate with educators (Christianakis, 2011). Further, when students' parents come from vastly different cultural backgrounds than educators, educators may actually be fearful of communicating with families (Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 2010). The social status and cultural differences between parents and educators does not just affect communication; it also affects whether parents are invited to the decision-making table in school settings. Sanders (2010) argued that parents are not viewed as equal partners in making educational decisions due to the unequal distribution of power between low-income parents and middle-class educators. This power differential can cause a fractured relationship that may prevent educators and parents from working together to meet students' needs. Creating a high degree of parent involvement in low-SES schools, though the practice holds promise, is wrought with challenges.

Equity Issues in Family Engagement

Like other school reforms, considering equity when assessing the success of family engagement efforts is critical. In 2012, Jeynes published a meta-analysis on the effects of urban

parent involvement programs, and concluded that such programs have significant, positive effects on student achievement. This study was important because it focused on school-initiated family engagement rather than voluntary parent involvement activities. His findings indicated that engaging families to be part of children's education, through activities such as shared reading, parent-teacher communication, and parent-school partnership programs, is beneficial for children. However, Jeynes acknowledged that parents sometimes feel their efforts are undermined by educators. Therefore, educators must be sensitive to parent perceptions and "do more to back what parents are already doing at home" (p. 733) rather than insisting on conformity to practices that may not align with parents' values or cultural norms.

Other researchers have noted the need to consider equity issues in family engagement research and practice. Ishimaru, Lott, Fajardo, and Salvador (2014) asserted that most quantitative studies on family engagement focused on normative forms of parent-school "partnerships," neglecting to consider the cultural or contextual aspects that may be important to nondominant families involved in such programs. Other research has indicated that normative family engagement models may unintentionally result in disengagement among families of color (Dyrness, 2010; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Olivos, 2006). Boutte and Johnson (2013) asserted that though urban, suburban, and rural schools tend to encourage parent involvement, how schools support parent involvement in urban contexts differs due to unique social challenges, such as poverty and housing disparities. O'Donnell (2008) noted that "schools often have difficulty effectively bringing low- income, diverse parents onto school campuses even when they are involved in their children's education in the home" (p. 147). Ishimaru and Bang (2016) offered the following critique of traditional parent involvement programs:

> The default approach in schools tends to focus on narrower aims of individualistic academic achievement, driven exclusively by policymakers' and educators' agendas and

expertise. These conventional ways of engaging families tend to disregard issues of race,

power, class, language and history even as they enact theories of change focused on

"fixing" marginalized parents and communities. These efforts align with prevailing

racialized narratives about low-income parents and families of color that implicitly

blame them for their children's academic struggles. Though well meaning, the dominant

mode of engagement emphasizes "training" parents to become, in a sense, compliance

officers who ensure their children do their homework, attend school, behave in

accordance with school expectations. (p. 6)

Such practices are problematic from an equity standpoint, particularly when considering the

positive influence families of color can have on schools. For example, Au (2009) argued that

when diverse family and community groups are authentically engaged, schools become more

equitable and culturally responsive. Ishimaru and Bang (2016) stated that equity issues have

only recently emerged as an area of inquiry within the context of family engagement in schools.

Exploring equity issues, then, remains an important research endeavor within the field.

Racial Disparities in Family-School Engagement

One primary consideration in equitable family engagement is race. Several researchers

have noted racial disparities in engagement practices. For example, Hughes and Kwok (2007)

found African-American students and parents had poorer quality relationships with teachers, as

compared to White and Hispanic students, which may be related to African American students'

lower achievement in early grades. Further, these early social experiences may serve as a

catalyst for a widening achievement gap (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). In a study of teachers'

perceptions, Thus and Eilbracht (2012) found teachers reported poorer relationships with

minoritized parents. In their qualitative case study, Bronson and Dentith (2014) found that

White teachers were less comfortable forming relationships with Black parents, despite the fact

that 90% of students in the school were Black. Reynolds (2010) argued,

> Educators often assume that Black parents' culture, values and norms do not support or
>
> complement the culture of education; thus, many educators, along with policy-makers,
>
> have come to accept the idea that Black parents are more of a deficit to their children's
>
> educational development than an asset. (p. 148)

Racial differences may also influence how parents perceive school representatives.
Cousins, Mickelson, Williams, and Velasco (2008) studied the development of a school and
community collaboration and noted that issues relating to identity, culture, and power dynamics
created significant barriers. More specifically, Black community members mistrusted White
program facilitators, resulting in a great deal of initial conflict and questioning of program
integrity (Cousins et al., 2008).

Rispoli, Hawley, and Clinton (2018) studied the parental involvement of children using
Head Start data and found that White parents tended to be more highly involved than the parents
of Black or Hispanic children. Data used in this study came from parents' self-reports of their
involvement in supporting their children's schooling in specific ways. This finding among
Headstart parents is particularly significant since other research purports higher levels of
involvement and parent engagement programming among parents of very young children,
which tends to taper off as children age (Jeynes, 2011; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2005).
Therefore, if there is already a racial gap in parent involvement of prekindergarten-aged
children, it means that certain children's families are likely to have little sustained involvement
in their schooling. However, it is important to note that research and policy tends to reflect the
cultural practices and norms of more affluent, White families (Curry-Stevens, Lopezrevorido, &
Peters, 2013). Further, Curry-Stevens, Lopezrevorido, and Peters stated,

> Parent engagement has long favored self-motivated parents who are aligned with

dominant school culture, meaning white professionally-credentialed parents. This leaves

many parents left out, to the detriment of both schools becoming the hub of their

communities and the elimination of disparities. Without meaningful parent engagement

across the student population, many school initiatives will continue to manifest

disparities. (p. 20)

This suggests that the findings of Rispoli et al. (2018) may not fully account for all the ways

parents become involved in their children's schooling; certain types of involvement may simply

go unrecognized through the normative lens.

Henderson (2007) asserted that family engagement hinges on certain types of cultural

capital, such as familiarity with educational terminology, feeling empowered to speak with

educators, and understanding the structure of schools. These examples of cultural capital are

common among middle-class, White families, but are less common among low-income families

of color (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Therefore, family engagement programs must be designed

around the unique cultural attributes of a school community in order to equitably serve that

community (Curry-Stevens, Lopezrevorido, & Peters, 2013).

In other research, it was discovered that families of color had experienced both overt and

subtle acts of racism by school personnel. In a 2004 study of urban Los Angeles schools, an

overwhelming majority of African American and Latinx parents responded that their opinions

were not considered within school decision-making, community issues were ignored, and their

concerns for their children were not taken seriously by school personnel (CADRE, 2004).

Further, parents overwhelmingly perceived that schools displayed biases related to race, class,

immigration status, and language that prevented trusting relationships between themselves and

their children's school. Parents surveyed also named specific school practices that prevented

equity, including receiving untranslated documents, receiving notifications of important

meetings too late to attend, being denied access to their child's classroom, and the use of bureaucratic rules to defend inaction by school personnel (CADRE, 2004).

Similar to findings in the CADRE study, Yull, Blitz, Thompson, and Murray (2014) found that middle-class families of color who lived in predominately White communities also perceived problems related to racism and biases. They experienced a sense of isolation, lack of culturally-engaging activities, and colorblind racism and/or cultural ignorance (Yull et al., 2014). Some parents also felt apprehensive about being stereotyped as the 'angry Black parent' if they needed to have a critical conversation with a school representative (Yull et al., 2014). These findings illustrate that race and equity issues are important factors to consider in family engagement.

Several researchers have noted that dominant parent engagement models do not adequately address race and cultural issues. Greene (2013) contended that Epstein's model of parent involvement assumes an equal playing field between families and schools and does not acknowledge differences in power and privilege. Similarly, Howard and Reynolds (2008) argued that most parent involvement literature does not fully consider the influence of race and class. Yull et al. (2014) stated that school systems tend to operate from a Eurocentric perspective, avoiding discussions about race and promoting a colorblind agenda, which fails to acknowledge the structural, systemic causes of racism and can promulgate the view that families of color are not capable partners in their child's education.

Some experts have argued that racial discrepancies in family engagement are due primarily to differences in levels of income (Park & Holloway, 2013). Indeed, there is a great deal of overlap between income level and race (Rothstein, 2004). In the following section, findings in the literature relating to SES disparities in family engagement will be discussed.

Socioeconomic Disparities in Family-School Engagement

Some researchers have concluded that socioeconomic, demographic variables are less important than contextual factors in influencing parental involvement in education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). However, other researchers have found a statistically-significant, positive relationship between SES and parent involvement practices (Fan & Chen, 2001). Indeed, many family engagement practices have focused on increasing the involvement of low-income parents with the assumption that engagement can lessen the detrimental effects of poverty on student achievement (Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004). Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000) conducted a comprehensive quantitative study on the relationship between parent demographic variables and parent involvement. They noted that parent involvement did not differ by race, rather by socioeconomic variables such as parent education level and single-parent status. Single mothers or parents with low levels of education were less likely to have quality relationships with their children's teachers (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) suggested that much family-school engagement efforts are based on a framework necessitating a two-parent, middle-income family structure, in which mothers provide much "invisible labor" for the school in the form of volunteering. Low-income families or single-parent families may lack the resources that allow for one parent to volunteer within the school, which results in a socioeconomic disparity in family-school engagement (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010).

Socioeconomic factors have been noted by other researchers as well. Pepe and Addimando (2014) discovered that teachers were more likely to perceive parents with lower levels of education as uncooperative or uninvolved. Gonzalez and Jackson (2013) noted SES variations between family engagement and improved student outcomes. More specifically, the "relationship between a school's efforts to engage with parents and student achievement varies as a function of the average socioeconomic status of families" (p. 329)

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) discovered that parent-school interactions were more frequent among preschool parents who did less pre-academic activities with children, indicating these parents actively sought support from the school. However, as these children progressed into kindergarten, the frequency of interactions decreased significantly. Further, they posited that the decrease in family involvement in the elementary years may exacerbate disparities in among middle-class children and low-SES children (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005).

Socioeconomic status has been noted to have an effect on school-parent communication and relationships as well. Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, and Benz (2012) determined that family and school relationships tend to be weaker in schools where a larger percentage of students receive free or reduced lunch services and that low-income families were less likely to respond to school-initiated family engagement activities. Other researchers have found that low-income parents tend to be less satisfied with how teachers and school personnel communicate with them (Matthews, McPherson-Berg, Quinton, Rotunda, & Morote, 2017; Wanat, 2010). Though parents placed value on quality communication with their child's teacher, when they perceived that they were being judged, treated poorly, or simply not invited to collaborate, they felt their involvement was discouraged (Wanat, 2010). Bardhoshi, Duncan, and Schweinle (2016) explained the need for schools to consider the outreach needs of low-income families:

> Parents of lower socioeconomic status may need to feel this invitation even more explicitly. Schools may need to find ways to allow all parents to be involved while also recognizing that certain logistical barriers may inhibit some individuals' ability to participate through more traditional methods. (p. 17)

In summary, though family engagement is linked to a litany of benefits for children, parents, and schools, research has repeatedly found that school-family relationships and cooperative efforts tend to be less effective among lower-income families and/or families of color. The

following section explores how systemic barriers and deficit mindsets impact family engagement.

<div align="center">

Systemic Barriers and Deficit Mindsets

</div>

As mentioned previously, schools and educators sometimes have expectations for parent involvement based on a normative, Eurocentric, middle-class mindset. In communities that do not conform to these expectations for involvement, research has shown that families feel a sense of isolation or rejection, which compound with logistical barriers, resulting in strained, less-effective family engagement.

Cultural Differences between Families and Educators

Many researchers have explored the influence of racial and cultural differences on parent involvement. For example, in their study of teacher-parent relations, Bronson and Dentith (2014) found that White educators felt uncomfortable confronting issues of race and privilege with Black parents and avoided interactions that could be difficult or awkward due to cultural differences. In another study, Wong and Hughes (2006) studied parent and teacher perceptions on involvement and found that Black parents viewed themselves as highly involved in their children's education. However, teachers perceived black parents as the least involved ethnic group, which points to cultural differences in the expectations of parent involvement between White teachers and Black parents. These differences may perpetuate a cycle in which educators make fewer attempts to engage black parents (Wong & Hughes, 2006). Hughes and Kwok (2007) noted differences in African Americans' cultural beliefs about education and parenting practices may make it more challenging for teachers and parents to establish mutual trust. Additionally, Laluvein (2010) asserted that when educators place unequal value on different types of cultural knowledge, it impedes relationship building and mutual understanding between families and educators.

In her study of parent-teacher relationships, Lasky (2000) found that teachers who didn't form relationships with parents held stereotypical views of them, based on their own cultural norms for parenting. Further, teachers became frustrated when they felt parents did not behave according to their cultural norms or when parents did not respect their professional judgement. Moreover, teachers had a tendency to position themselves as experts within the parent-teacher relationship. Lasky also noted the bureaucratic, top- down management culture of schools may result in need for teachers to maintain 'professional distance' between themselves and parents, which impinges parent-teacher relationships. Lasky stated,

> teacher-parent relationships that are robust and multifaceted require commitments and conditions that can allow emotional understanding to occur between individuals. Yet, a great deal of the history, culture, and organization of teaching makes achieving such understanding difficult or impossible. (p. 845)

Similarly, Hirsto (2010) found that teachers typically initiated communication with the intention of passing on information and that teachers rarely sought input from parents or used parents as a resource. Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) noted that teachers felt hesitant to act as parent educators because they lacked training and felt this could create tension in their work with students. It would seem that the culture of teaching and teacher preparation may not be adequate to equip teachers to collaborate with families, particularly families of color.

A key concept in the literature on cultural factors in parent involvement is deficit thinking. The work of Ann Ishimaru has been instrumental in exploring how deficit mindsets influence parent involvement. Ishimaru (2013) explained

> Deficit conceptions root educational disparities in deficiencies in the skills, knowledge, culture, support, values, or engagement of students, families, and communities rather than in systems and societal inequalities. Consequently, students, parents, and

communities in struggling educational systems are often seen as part of the problem, not

as resources for change efforts. (p. 189)

Ishimaru (2013) further contended that deficit thinking fails to address the "fundamental

historical, cultural, and social divides between parents and their schools" (p. 189). Darder

(2017) noted that deficit thinking proliferates notions of meritocracy and disposability.

Essentially, if one denies the historical, societal influences that have resulted in oppression and

inequality, it leads to acceptance of the idea that all Americans have an equal opportunity to

achieve their dreams. Further, current conditions such as the Black-White achievement gap,

mass incarceration of people of color, and the increasing wealth gap between Blacks and Whites

are explained away by the notion of individual agency, and are thus acceptable rather than

morally reprehensible (Darder, 2017).

Other researchers have also noted how deficit thinking influences parent involvement

practices. Christiankis (2011) discovered, in a study of relations between White educators and

African American parents, that teachers' positioned parents as helpers or laborers, not as equal

partners. Moreover, he noted that when parents were not available during school hours, teachers

perceived those parents as uninterested in their child's education; teachers did not acknowledge

that parents may be limited by constraints such as an inflexible work schedule. Teachers did not

consider how they could "come together with parents in order to jointly accomplish sustained

change" (Christianakis, 2011, p. 173).

Deficit mindsets towards families are problematic in education because by failing to

acknowledge such powerful institutional and societal influences, leaders of parent involvement

initiatives may be taking a short-sighted approach that fails to fully address the strengths and

needs of students and their families. Such an approach is inherently limiting and may simply

seek to "train individual parents to better conform to existing educator expectations and school

practices" (Ishimaru, 2013, p. 191). When educators have deficit mindsets and assume families do not want to be involved in their child's education because their behaviors do not conform to normative, White, middle-class expectations, it creates relational barriers between schools and families (Reynolds, 2010). This is unfortunate since it has been noted that positive family-educator relationships provide a window into the parenting practices of families who may be economically or culturally different from educators (Serpell & Mashburn, 2011, p. 43). Cultural barriers and deficit mindsets prevent the ability to form shared understandings that are essential to family engagement.

Structural Challenges Faced by Parents and Families

Another criticism of parent involvement efforts noted in the literature is that it has traditionally operated without consideration of the needs of low-income families (Auerbach, 2010, 2012; Cooper, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2009; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). Moreover, most parent involvement programs and related research have centered on how families can support the efforts of the school (Olivos, 2012). The problem with this approach is that it does not acknowledge systemic or structural barriers that prevent low-income families or families of color from participating (Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2016). In other words, when parent involvement efforts focus on isolated attempts to modify individual parent behaviors rather than acknowledging and addressing community-level barriers to parent involvement (i.e. crime, poverty), many parents and families are simply left out. Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) asserted,

> Policies advocating increased parental involvement appear to be based on normative assumptions about families and their resources. There is little systematic recognition that schools in low socio-economic communities require additional funding in order to provide some of the advantages middle-class children receive at home. (p. 511)

Without addressing community-level barriers, family engagement programs cannot equitably engage families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

In their study of barriers to family involvement, Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016) recognized several challenges faced by families: lack of time to attend school- based events due to inflexible work schedules or the need to work long hours, communication and language barriers, feeling unwelcome in the school environment, school security protocols (e.g. background checks required of volunteers), and lack of transportation. Further, they noted school-based personnel could identify all such structural challenges that impeded parent involvement, but struggled to conceptualize the need to address such barriers or suggest strategies that might help (Baker et al., 2016). This suggests that even when educators understand poverty-related constraints on parent involvement, they lack the training and resources necessary to effectively and equitably engage all parents.

One model that explicitly aims to address systemic barriers is the school-community partnership model (sometimes referred to as community schools), which brings community-based resources and services into the school (Sanders, 2016). Family engagement is often a centerpiece of this model (Stefanski et al., 2016). Though school- community partnerships have a great deal of potential to address community-level barriers, the isolation schools have traditionally operated under make their implementation challenging (Kladifko, 2013). According to Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon (2011), "many educators, families, and students are unaware of the resources in their communities. Indeed, many are unclear where their community begins and ends" (p. 462). Without an awareness of the people, organizations, and groups operating in the community, it can be a challenge for educators to begin to form community partnerships or implement them effectively. Ishimaru (2013) contended many community-school partnerships "tend to focus on providing discrete supports through special

projects or interventions at the expense of coordinated, ongoing efforts to transform systems"
(p. 191) Further, within such partnerships, community organizations do not typically take the
lead; rather, partnerships must be enabled by the school (Billet, Ovens, Clemans, & Seddon,
2007). As discussed previously, schools and educators may struggle to conceptualize, create,
and sustain systems that address poverty-related constraints.

Another alternative model to traditional parent involvement is known as collective
parent engagement (CPE) (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2016). This model acknowledges
structural barriers and attempts to engage parents/families collectively as change agents in their
communities. In their study of CPE in three urban communities, Alameda-Lawson and Lawson
examined how parents were positioned as partners in addressing needs they had perceived in the
community. Community stakeholders, including families and service agencies, worked
collectively to bring necessary resources into the school that directly addressed families' needs
and perceived barriers. Families also worked to address concerns such as student attendance and
a large number of discipline referrals. They found that CPE was positively related to parents'
feelings of empowerment, student test scores, student behavior, and student attendance.

Ishimaru (2014) also noted the importance of empowering families to be the drivers of
systemic change. She suggested educators should move beyond top-down approaches that place
leaders as the drivers of educational change and allow educational change to be rooted in
grassroots, community-based, collaborative approaches. Further, this type of collaboration can
yield many benefits, including:

> Voices of nondominant parents in reform efforts, enhanced community participation and
> understanding of the reform system, political support for equity- based reforms, greater
> trust between schools and communities, more inclusive district and school climates,
> improved student outcomes, and ultimately, systemic transformation within a more

equitable society. (Ishimaru, 2013, p. 212)

Addressing systemic barriers alongside families, then, is essential for equitable family engagement to result in long-term, meaningful transformation. The following section provides recommendations for equitable family engagement practices found in the literature.

Recommendations for Changing Family Engagement Practices

According to Pepe and Addimando (2014), a "one-size-fits-all" approach to parental engagement ignores socioeconomic differences between parents, such as education level and SES, and often only boosts involvement for those who were already highly involved. Therefore, family engagement efforts should focus on shifting structural factors in such a way that low-SES parents can be included (Pepe & Addimando, 2014). Additionally, engaging parents to collectively address systemic barriers, as opposed to addressing parent involvement on an individual case-by-case basis, may allow for educators to provide a context for sustained community change by positioning parents as empowered agents of change in the community (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

Smith (2002) studied how a school may actively shift its family engagement practices to acknowledge cultural differences and economic constraints. Teachers were offered training on working with low-income families and the conception of family involvement shifted within the school so as to be more inclusive of families from nondominant backgrounds. As a result, parents began to feel more included within the school community and more empowered to act as advocates for their children. In another study, Yull et al. (2014) recommended that school employees be offered professional development on how race, power, and privilege have influenced the history and current social dynamics of the United States. They also noted that collaboration with diverse community members allowed school personnel to better understand the strengths, needs, and experiences of that community, which can improve and sustain family

engagement efforts.

Consideration of relational practices between educators and families is also important. Wanat (2010) found that when parents become dissatisfied with their relationships with teachers and school personnel, they tended to interact less frequently with educators. Wanat noted that certain issues, such as restricting parents from visiting classrooms or failing to respond to a parent's request to communicate, resulted in parent dissatisfaction and waning parent involvement. Therefore, it is important that educators continually reevaluate their relational practices so as not to create barriers between themselves and parents (Wanat, 2010). Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) noted that interpersonal relationships were "the driving force behind [parents'] involvement in children's education" (p. 541). This is significant because it reveals that the family-school relationship is reciprocal. Therefore, building relationships based on trust and mutual understanding between teachers and families is critical.

In their study of family-school collaboration, Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, and Turnbull (2015) discovered that families valued the opportunity to be leaders and decision-makers within the school. Additionally, families felt it was important for the school to get their input in communication strategies so that communication could flow freely between the home and the school and could result in mutual benefits for families and educators (Haines et al., 2015). Similarly, Laluvein (2010) found that when educators and families spend time together engaging in dialogue, it creates an opportunity for the creation of mutual understanding. Without this, teacher expectations may conflict with parents' conception of their role. Further, when parents and teachers work together to meet students' needs, it allows "for joint meaning-making and continuity of agreed strategies. Such partnerships have within them the potential to address and overcome the problematics of status and power which undermine so many professional-lay relationships" (p. 186). However, schools' traditional structures of power may

inhibit such democratic processes (Laluvein, 2010).

In a comprehensive review of literature, Stefanski et al. (2016) found parent empowerment was associated with substantial positive outcomes. Several key practices led to greater empowerment of families: relationship building, addressing culture and power gaps, and developing family leadership. This occurs "by partnering with groups that have community roots, credibility, and the capacity to bring in a large, diverse part of the community…and cultivating a core group of family members who represent and advocate for their broader constituency" (p. 155). To achieve such outcomes may require transforming traditional school norms as well as the input of significant time and resources, but parent empowerment can have significant benefits for the entire school community (Stefanski et al., 2016).

In conclusion, family engagement is a promising avenue for school reform. It has been associated with benefits for students, families, schools, and communities. However, family engagement has not always been practiced equitably, but a growing body of literature is beginning to demonstrate the positive effects of equity-focused family engagement practices. The following section discusses this study's theoretical framework, community cultural wealth, which provides an equity-focused lens for considering the impact of family leadership on school-based family engagement.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of community cultural wealth (CCW) will serve as the theoretical lens for this study. CCW was introduced by Tara Yosso in 2005 as a response to prevailing theories on cultural capital which suggest that parents secure their children a place in the social hierarchy by equipping them with social and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Yosso stated that these theories often lead to the assumption that

People of Color 'lack' the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. As a

result, schools most often work from this assumption in structuring ways to help

'disadvantaged' students whose race and class background has left them lacking

necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital. (p. 70)

CCW draws on the work of critical race theory (CRT) by pointing out that it is common

practice to define cultural capital in comparison to a standard that is defined by White, middle-

class communities, which sometimes portrays people of color through a deficit lens (Yosso,

2005). Yosso stated that deficit thinking is one of the most significant forms of institutionalized

racism because it blames minoritized parents for failing to provide their children with

appropriate cultural knowledge or placing sufficient value on their children's education. In

essence, educators who subscribe to deficit thinking believe schools are working well and that

families and communities need to change to better fit the school system. CCW asserts that

families of color have a great deal of cultural capital that may go unrecognized by White,

middle-class educators who may have a deficit mindset toward families of color (Yosso, 2005).

CCW recognizes six types of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social,

navigational, and resistant (Yosso, 2005), which are presented in Figure 1 below.
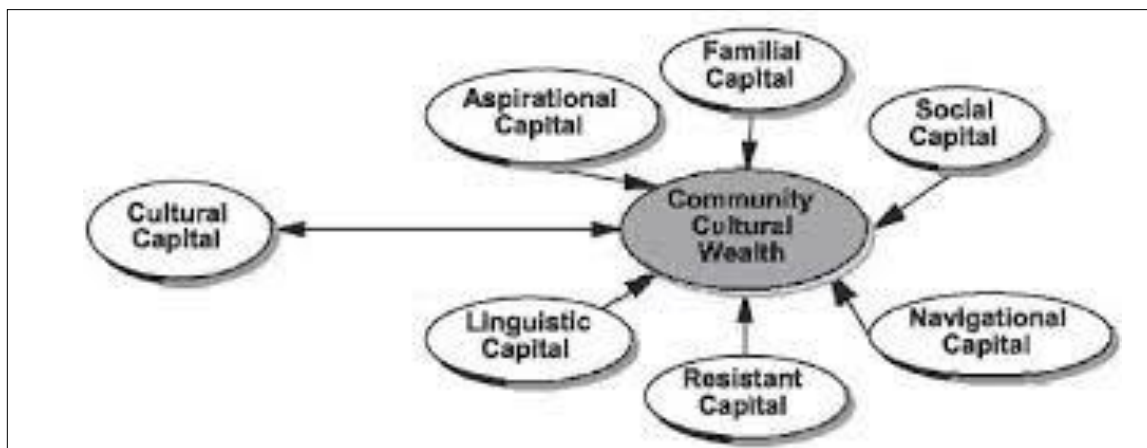
Figure 1 Theory of Community Cultural Wealth

Figure 1. Six types of capital recognized within the Theory of Community Cultural Wealth.

All six forms of capital can be harnessed to empower individuals, and they are "not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The six forms of capital are defined below:

1. *Aspirational capital* "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers" (p. 77). Resiliency and the belief that one's future can be better than the present reality are central to this form of capital.

2. *Linguistic capital* "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style" (p. 78). This form of capital also ascribes value to cultural traditions of storytelling, art, music, and the ability to communicate with diverse audiences.

3. *Familial capital* "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79). It is important to note that the notion of *familia* refers to extended family who may not have biological ties, but function collectively to share resources and raise children.

4. *Social capital* "can be understood as networks of people and community resources" (p. 79).

5. *Navigational capital* "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80). This ability to navigate institutions that have historically disenfranchised People of Color is facilitated by a combination of individual agency as well as drawing on social networks and resources.

6. *Resistant capital* "refers [to] those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). In recognizing this form of capital, it is

important to note that it extends from a resistance to forced, racialized subordination. Yosso asserted that CCW is a theory that recognizes cultural wealth of people of color that is "abundant in their communities" (p. 82) and that recognizing cultural wealth is transformative because it challenges prevailing norms that place exclusive value on White, middle-class cultural practices.

CCW has been used to study how cultural wealth is activated within a variety of contexts. CCW has been used in several studies to explore how students make use of their cultural wealth to engage in learning activities or to navigate educational environments (DeNicolo, Gonzlez, Morales, & Romani, 2015; Jayakumar, Vue, & Allen, 2013). The framework has also been used to analyze parent and family perspectives on education. Guzman, Kouyoumdjian, Medrano, and Bernal (2018) used CCW to examine immigrant families' perceptions of their contributions to their children's education. CCW has also been used to analyze family engagement. Fernandez and Paredes Scribner (2018) analyzed how Latinx families used their cultural wealth to implement a family leadership initiative.

CCW is particularly well-suited for this study because it provides a framework for examining how the cultural assets of a community can be instrumental in shaping perspectives and practices within a school. In this context, CCW will offer an interpretive framework for exploring how culturally diverse families traverse leadership roles that are traditionally held by White, middle-class, English speaking individuals. Additionally, CCW provides a means for exploring how families activate their cultural wealth in order to navigate traditional, normative school governance structures and parent involvement expectations. In the context of this study, the six types of capital identified within CCW will provide language and meaning for interpreting how families harness their unique cultural capital to implement a grassroots family leadership initiative in which roles, structure, and relationships are being continually defined

and refined. Additionally, two forms of capital identified in CCW, navigational capital and resistant capital, provide a lens for examining how power relations are manifested in a school that primarily serves low-income and minoritized families. Finally, because CCW inherently recognizes families' cultures as sources of strength and resiliency, it is an appropriate theoretical lens for this transformative study.

Summary

Chapter II provided an in-depth review of literature on family engagement. First, seminal viewpoints on parent involvement were presented along with a discussion of how parent involvement has benefitted students. Next, equity issues related to race and SES were presented. Then, a discussion of deficit thinking and systemic barriers was offered. Finally, the study's theoretical framework was introduced. The following chapter, chapter III, outlines the proposed methods and procedures for completing this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The field of education presents many complex problems worthy of investigation. For many years, educational research was guided by the objectivist paradigm, which attempts to emulate research practices of the "hard sciences" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This is evident when one considers the types of studies that are used to inform education policy, such as those produced by the National Research Council (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, there are some questions positivist and post-positivist research simply cannot answer. The renowned ethnographer James P. Spradley (1979) described his aims as a researcher:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34)

This quote illuminates the strengths of qualitative methodology. It allows the researcher the unique opportunity to consider the lived experiences of participants. Qualitative research can also give voice to oppressed and marginalized groups who have traditionally been left out of hegemonic, Western constructions of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

It was with this hope of gaining insight into other people's meanings and experiences

that I approached my study of family leadership. I hoped to shed light on the perspectives and voices of families who have not traditionally been positioned as leaders or perhaps even valued members of school communities. This chapter outlines the methodology I employed in this endeavor.

Statement of the Problem

A great deal of research demonstrates that family-school engagement has positive effects for students, families, schools and communities (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014). However, there is also a significant body of research demonstrating that family engagement is less effective and less equitable in certain contexts, particularly in schools serving large populations of low- income and/or students of color (Bardhoshi, Duncan, & Schweinle, 2016; Green et al., 2007; Rispoli, Hawley, and Clinton, 2018). This discrepancy may be due to the fact that family engagement initiatives are often shaped by White, middle-class paradigms that do not acknowledge systemic challenges faced by low-income families and/or do not acknowledge cultural assets possessed by families of color (Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Ishimaru, 2014). This study focused on how a grassroots family leadership initiative could inform family engagement perspectives and practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how a grassroots family leadership initiative influences family engagement perspectives and practices within the context of a high-poverty, predominately Hispanic elementary school.

Research Questions

1. How do faculty and families describe their perspectives on family

42

engagement?

    a. What perspectives on family engagement exist within the school?

    b. What family engagement practices are used within the school?

    c. How do power relations and cultural factors explain these perspectives and practices?

2. From the perspectives of educators, families, and community members, how does this grassroots family leadership initiative influence family engagement practices and perspectives within the school?

    a. What power relations exist within the school and how do they impact the family leadership initiative?

    b. How has this leadership structure facilitated engagement and overcome barriers?

3. How does the theory of community cultural wealth explain the data?

Research Design

"Choosing a qualitative research design presupposes a certain view of the world that in turn defines how a researcher selects a sample, collects data, analyzes data, and approaches issues of validity, reliability, and ethics" (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). Each of these components is discussed herein.

My epistemological viewpoint, critical subjectivism, undergirds this study. Crotty (1998) described subjectivism as the belief that subjects impose meaning upon objects. Further, he explained that humans do not create meaning from nothing, rather we import meaning from our past experiences and prior knowledge. In the context of my research, this means that I fully acknowledge my exploration and interpretation of family engagement is rooted in my own

experiences as well as my social location. Moreover, my experiences and scholarly pursuits have led me to embrace the critical, or transformative, theoretical perspective. Critical researchers acknowledge the influence of societal oppression and strive to undertake research that disrupts the status quo (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, I approached this study with a desire to deepen my own understanding and build awareness as to how institutionalized oppression affects family engagement.

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore a grassroots family leadership initiative. In explaining the focus of case study methods, Merriam (1998) stated, "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study focuses on holistic description and explanation" (p. 29). Merriam also explained that case studies are an appropriate method to use when a researcher is interested in process or when the phenomenon of interest cannot be separated from the context in which it is embedded. Further, Merriam suggested, "a case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to" (p. 33). Additionally, the case study provides a means for exploring complex social systems and providing tentative hypotheses about a phenomenon that can spur future research and inform practice (Merriam, 1998). Because I was interested in exploring the development of a family leadership initiative housed in a unique, bounded context and because I hoped my study could lead to improved family engagement practices, case study methods were most appropriate.

Since this is a transformative case study, I combined case study methods with a critical orientation. Mertens (2009) described the need for transformative case studies to explore and report on patterns of inequities embedded in the case. Therefore, rather than simply describing or

interpreting the case from a value-neutral perspective, my interpretation was rooted in the complex, perhaps conflicting perspectives of my participants. Attention was given to participants' experiences of empowerment and disempowerment within the power structures embedded in the case study site.

Case and Participant Selection

In order to provide a rich, holistic description of a contextually-embedded phenomenon, the case study relies on the strategic use of sampling in two ways. Merriam (1998) explained,

> Two levels of sampling are usually necessary in qualitative case studies. First, you must select "the case" to be studied. Then, unless you plan to interview, observe, or analyze all the people, activities, or documents within the case, you will need to do some sampling within the case. (pp. 64-65)

The selection of the case itself is important because it provides the window into studying the educational innovation or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

The case and its population. Sometimes the selection of a case relies on the researcher's prior exposure to a unique, embedded phenomenon (Stake, 1995). I selected this case based on my prior involvement in a school-based Parent Leadership Council housed within an urban elementary school in a Midwestern city. I was first exposed to this council's formation in the fall of 2018 in the course of pursuing principal certification. I was beginning my principal internship when my mentor, the school principal, explained that school leaders and community partners had collectively decided to terminate the school's PTA in the spring of 2018 due to low involvement of family members. Instead of a PTA, school leaders worked with one of the school's partnering organizations and began to form a new coalition named the "Parent Leadership Council." The Parent Leadership Council (PLC) began as a grassroots initiative to

include a larger and more diverse group of parents and caregivers in school decision-making and to increase family engagement within the school. The PLC was composed of one parent captain and 12 members. The parent captain is a mother of several children in the school, and is bilingual and highly connected many families in the neighborhood. She, along with school leaders, selected other members to be part of the Parent Leadership Council. The group met monthly within the school to discuss issues important to its members and to strategize about how best to engage other families in school activities.

Because of my interest in family engagement, I offered to attend council meetings and assist the group in any way I could. I soon began to realize the PLC, and its relation to the larger school community, would make for an interesting case study to explore an alternative leadership structure that intentionally included diverse families. In this way, the case was selected. This case provided an excellent context for exploring how minoritized and low-income families, who are traditionally not involved in school leadership (CADRE, 2004), harnessed their cultural capital to navigate power structures and influence family engagement practices.

The PLC was housed within an elementary school, which has been assigned the pseudonym "Central Elementary School." Central Elementary School (CES) is located near the city center of a large Midwestern metropolis and serves a diverse student population. CES is a Title I school in which an overwhelming percentage of its approximately 800 students live at or below the poverty line, therefore 100% of students receive free breakfast and lunch daily. Close to 60% of students are classified as English Learners (ELs), which means they qualify for supplemental instructional services to support their English language development. A majority of students and their families speak Spanish as their primary home language. Language barriers between staff members and students' families are quite common.

The PLC was facilitated through a joint effort with a nonprofit organization, which has been assigned the pseudonym Neighbors United (NU). NU's staff was pivotal in the formation of the Parent Leadership Council. In conjunction with school leaders, NU helped to identify council members and facilitate the council's formation.

Sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling was employed to select interview participants and observation scenarios. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). In order to answer the proposed research questions, it was necessary for me to interview a sample of participants from the following groups: (a) Parent Leadership Council members, (b) other parents/caregivers, (c) teachers, (d) school leaders, and (e) employees of NU, the community partner agency that has assisted with the family leadership initiative. I applied criterion-based selection to each of these groups to determine which individuals should be included in the sample for individual interviews (Merriam, 1998). The following table, Table 3.1, outlines selection criteria applied to each participant group.

Table 3.1

Participant Selection Criteria

Participant Group	Sample Size (n)	Selection Criteria	Rationale
Parent Leadership Council members	2	• Parent captain • One other member who consistently attended meetings since the group's formation in fall 2018	These individuals were highly aware of the group's activities and could provide key insights into the group's goals, initiatives, and social factors that affect the group.

Other parents/caregivers	3	• One parent/caregiver of a child in grades K-2 • One parent/caregiver of a child in grades 3-6 • Each participant must have had their child enrolled at the school for at least one full academic year	Parents tend to have different levels of involvement as their children grow older, and it is important that participants have had sufficient time to interact with school personnel.
Teachers	2	• One PreK-2nd grade teacher • One 3-6th grade teacher	Parent-teacher interactions tend to differ across grade levels, thus including teachers from the lower and upper grades provided a more holistic understanding of family engagement practices.
School leaders	2	• Principal • Learning director	These individuals' perspectives on sharing leadership with the Parent Leadership Council was critical to understanding key aspects of the case.
Neighbors United representatives	2	• Director of Operations • Parent Mobilization Specialist	These individuals' perspectives on the formation of the Parent Leadership Council and shared leadership practices was critical to understanding key aspects of the case.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected from multiple sources including interviews, observation, an informal survey, and document collection. Including data from multiple sources allowed for triangulation of findings (Merriam, 1998). It should also be noted that "data collection in a case study is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to

subsequent sources of data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 134). For example, survey techniques were not part of this study's initial proposal, but due to factors discussed in chapter four, was an appropriate additional data source.

Interviews. Interviews provided the primary source of data for this case study. Patton (1990) stated that interviews are the most appropriate data collection technique when the researcher wants to discover "what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 278). Because I desired to adequately represent participants' perspectives (rather than my own), it was imperative I conduct effective interviews with participants. I used a semi-structured interview format, which allowed for specific information to be collected from all participants, but also allowed me "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). Merriam (1998) offered several guidelines for conducting semi-structured interviews, which include: (a) ask open-ended questions that are free from confusing jargon and implied biases that could impede truthful responses, (b) utilize probes to learn more about significant information, (c) establish rapport with interviewees. It is with these criteria in mind that I created interview guides for each participant group, which are discussed in the subsections below.

Parent Leadership Council members. Members of the Parent Leadership Council included one parent captain as well as 11 other mothers/grandmothers. When I contacted the parent captain to request an interview with her and other members, she suggested that a group interview would be more comfortable. Though I attempted to include more members of this group, only the parent captain and one other member agreed to participate. The interview took place in a local bakery, which was selected by the parent captain. Pre-planned interview questions included the following:

1. How do families and educators in this school work together?

2. What challenges/barriers exist?

3. In an ideal world, how would families and schools relate to one another or work together?

4. What do you think this school does well in terms of working with families?

5. What could the school do better in terms of working with families?

6. What could families do better to work with the school?

7. How did you become involved with the Parent Leadership Council? (background/context)

8. What do you think the purpose of the Parent Leadership Council is?

9. What do you want to accomplish by being part of the Parent Leadership Council?

10. How will the group achieve its goals? (follow-up question: What might stand in the way of reaching these goals?)

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about family-school collaboration in this school?

   Parents, family members, and caregivers. This group includes hundreds of individuals, which meant sampling was key to selecting participants. In order to fully represent this group, I purposefully selected three participants who have children from different grade levels (preK-6th grade). One-on-one interviews were conducted with these participants in locations they selected. Pre-planned questions included the following:

1. How do families and educators in this school work together?

2. What challenges/barriers exist?

3. In an ideal world, how would families and schools relate to one another or work together?

4. In this school, in what ways do families help lead the school and make decisions? (follow-

up: How do you feel about that?)

5. What do you think this school does well in terms of working with families?

6. What could the school do better in terms of working with families?

7. What could families do better to work with the school?

8. What do you know about the Parent Leadership Council?

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the topic of family-school collaboration?

Teachers. Two teachers, one upper grade and one lower grade, were interviewed in their classrooms. Pre-planned questions for this group included:

1. How do families and educators in this school work together?

2. What challenges/barriers exist?

3. In an ideal world, how would families and schools relate to one another or work together?

4. In this school, how is decision making shared between educators and families?

5. In an ideal situation, how should leadership and decision-making be shared between educators and families?

6. What do you think this school does well in terms of working with families?

7. What could the school do better in terms of working with families?

8. What could families do better to work with the school?

9. What do you know about the Parent Leadership Council? (Follow-up: If participant doesn't know much, provide them with a synopsis of the group's stated purpose, and then ask: How do you think the PLC can benefit family-school engagement; what are the barriers it must overcome?)

School leaders. The study site employs four school leaders: one principal, two assistant principals, and a learning director. I interviewed the principal and the learning director

individually within the school office. Pre-planned questions included:

1. How do families and educators in this school work together?

2. What challenges/barriers exist?

3. In an ideal world, how would families and schools relate to one another or work together?

4. In this school, how is leadership shared between administration, teachers, and families?

5. In an ideal situation, how should leadership and decision-making be shared between administration, teachers, and families?

6. What do you think this school does well in terms of working with families?

7. What could the school do better in terms of working with families?

8. What could families do better to work with the school?

9. What is the purpose of the Parent Leadership Council?

10. What do you hope is accomplished by the Parent Leadership Council? (Follow-up: What barriers might get in the way of this?)

11. How do you work with and/or support the Parent Leadership Council?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the topic of family-school collaboration?

   Partner agency employees. The PLC was facilitated via NU, a community partner agency. I interviewed the agency's Director of Operations and the Parent Mobilization Specialist individually in locations they selected. Pre-planned questions included:

1. How do families and educators in this school work together?

2. What challenges/barriers exist?

3. In an ideal world, how would families and schools relate to one another or work together?

4. In this school, how is leadership shared between administration, teachers, and families?

5. In an ideal situation, how should leadership and decision-making be shared between

administration, teachers, and families?

6. What do you think this school does well in terms of working with families?

7. What could the school do better in terms of working with families?

8. What could families do better to work with the school?

9. What is the purpose of the Parent Leadership Council?

10. What do you hope is accomplished by the Parent Leadership Council? (Follow-up: What barriers might get in the way of this?)

11. How do you work with and/or support the Parent Leadership Council?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the topic of family-school collaboration?

Though pre-written interview questions provided structure and guidance for all interviews, probes and follow-up questions were utilized in order to provide clarification or respond to unanticipated information (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, I audio-recorded interviews and took detailed field notes. Field notes captured subtle factors, such as participants' overall demeanor as well as nonverbal cues to implied meanings. I fully transcribed interviews as soon as possible after completing them so that I can add more detail to my field notes. I also wrote memos immediately after conducting each interview to capture my own reflections and working hypotheses.

Observations

In addition to interviews, I engaged in prolonged observation within the school and neighborhood during activities that involve family engagement. Merriam (1998) stated, "observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest" (p. 94), thus they allow the researcher the opportunity to gather data that has not been filtered through

participants' perceptions. Observations also helped to identify key informants for interviews.

Observations included the following: (a) Parent Leadership Council meetings, (b) school and family interactions during daily routines such as dismissal, (c) special events such as family literacy night, (d) a variety of teacher and administrator meetings, and (e) neighborhood meetings. My level of participation varied within each of these contexts from *complete observer* to *participant as observer* (Merriam, 1998). Because I had attended PLC meetings prior to beginning formal data collection, my participation was expected. However, it was important for me to acknowledge that both my presence, and especially my participation, may have had some influence on the activities and interactions I observed. Therefore, it was important that I considered the effect I may have had on observed events when interpreting data (Merriam, 1998). During observations, I made note of the physical setting, the participants, interactions and activities, subtle factors, and my own behavior (Merriam, 1998). Because it would have been impossible for me to note everything of significance during observations, I wrote memos immediately after each observation. Memos included researcher commentary and working hypotheses (Merriam, 1998).

Survey

An informal survey was distributed to parents at several school events. Initially, survey methods were not part of the design of this study. School leaders requested that I survey parents to provide information to them on family engagement, and results from these surveys are discussed in chapter four.

Documents and Artifacts

The final sources of data were documents and artifacts relating to family engagement. Examples of artifacts included the following: (a) flyers for events and activities, (b) teacher and

school newsletters, (c) handouts and information recorded on whiteboards at meetings, (d)

photos of school bulletin boards, and (e) preexisting, relevant data such as climate and culture

surveys. As I collected artifacts, I considered their authenticity and accuracy (Merriam, 1998).

Data Storage and Security

In order to protect participants' confidentiality, secure data storage is imperative. Table

3.2 outlines techniques that served this purpose.

Table 3.2

Data Storage and Security

Data Type	Storage Location	Security Techniques	Length of Researcher Possession	Inclusion of Identifying Information
Field notes from observations and interviews	Researcher's notebook; stored in home office	Handwritten notes were scanned into digital form and then destroyed. Digital copies were stored on password-protected laptop.	Paper copies: no more than 30 days after collection Digital copies: approximately one year after data collection	Participants' first names and roles within the school
Audio recordings of interviews	Researcher's cell phone; Researcher's laptop and external hard drive	Recordings were deleted from phone after being uploaded to password-protected laptop.	Approximately one year after data collection	Participants' first names and roles within the school
Audio memos	Researcher's cell phone; Researcher's laptop and external hard drive	Recordings were deleted from phone after being uploaded to password-protected laptop.	Approximately one year after data collection	Participants' first names and roles within the school

Transcriptions of interviews and audio memos	Researcher's laptop and external hard drive	Transcriptions were assigned a code in order to remove identifying information; list matching codes to participant names was kept on a separate, password-protected document.	Approximately one year after data collection	Participants' name and roles within the school
Documents	Researcher's notebook; stored in home office	Documents were scanned into digital form and then destroyed. Digital copies were stored on password-protected laptop.	Paper copies: no more than 30 days after collection Digital copies: approximately one year after collection	Participants' names (potentially)

Data Analysis Strategies

This study utilized the *constant comparative* method of data analysis as defined by Merriam (1998). Merriam offered the following explanation of this method:

Data collection and analysis is a *simultaneous* activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to the refinement or reformulation of questions, and so on. It is an interactive process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings. (p. 151)

Merriam also emphasized that immediate, ongoing analysis results in a more robust understanding of data because when researchers wait to analyze data until collection is complete, they must rely on memory, which is fallible. Thus, data analysis in this study

followed an iterative process rather than a linear one.

After each observation and interview, I wrote memos in which I commented and reflected on the data. Memoing allowed me a richer understanding of the data, generated working hypotheses, and determined next steps in data collection. I also fully transcribed each interview as soon as possible. Then, I coded data as soon as possible, which meant I read through transcriptions and assigned shorthand designations to units of data that seemed significant, which aided in later retrieval (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A similar process was applied to field notes from observations and collected artifacts.

To facilitate data analysis, I used NVivo software, which allowed me to create an organized database in which I coded data. It also allowed me to easily index data, and using the codes I assigned, group data into emerging categories. In the beginning stages of data analysis, this was an entirely inductive, open coding process in which all data were considered as potentially meaningful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, in later stages of collection and analysis, the process involved more comparison and deduction in which codes were grouped into emerging categories or themes (Merriam, 1998). Merriam explained, "devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 179).

In this case study, after most data was collected, analysis focused more on how new data compared to previous data, answered research questions, and related to the theoretical framework, a process referred to as analytic or axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the later, more intensive phases of data analysis, NVivo was used to bring all data—interview transcriptions, field notes, memos, documents, and artifacts—together in order to examine how

57

well themes or categories fully explained the data. Themes were considered sufficient if they reflected the study's purpose, were mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and conceptually congruent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The theoretical framework, community cultural wealth, was applied to interpret findings. After all data was analyzed in these ways, the final step was to employ a deductive process in which thematically-sorted data were analyzed for particularly illuminating units (typically participant quotes), which were included in the final report.

Trustworthiness Strategies

The qualitative research paradigm is built on the rejection of naïve realism and the assumption that multiple realities are constructed by individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the qualitative researcher's task is to represent those multiple constructions truthfully. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility is the qualitative substitute for internal validity. Ensuring credibility involves structuring research so that reliable findings will be produced and employing an "external check on the inquiry process" (p. 301). They suggested seven specific techniques to increase credibility: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. Specific examples of how each of these techniques were used in this study are presented in Table 3.3 below.

In traditional research, external validity provides a means for generalizing findings to the population, but this is not a possibility or an aim in qualitative research. Instead, the qualitative researcher aims for transferability, which can "enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility"

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Transferability is achieved through thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability and confirmability serve as parallels to reliability and objectivity, which are employed in post-positivist research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability refers to the likelihood of a study's findings being replicated, while confirmability refers to the likelihood of another researcher having a similar interpretation of findings. Inquiry audits and reflexive journaling are techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure both dependability and confirmability. The following table displays procedures that were used in this study to ensure trustworthy findings and interpretations.

Table 3.3

Trustworthiness Techniques and Examples

Credibility		
Criteria/Technique	*Intended Results*	*Examples*
Prolonged engagement	• Understand the culture of the case study site • Build rapport and trust with participants • Prevent preconceptions or misconceptions from influencing findings	• Observations occurred for over one year • Communicated with participants regularly via social media and face-to-face interaction
Persistent observation	• Provide depth and context to observation • Explore salient factors in detail	• Observations occurred for over one year and in a variety of situations
Triangulation	• Multiple sources of data provide checks and verification	• Data was collected via interviews, observations, and artifacts • Interviewed participants from multiple roles within the site
Peer debriefing	• Test working hypotheses • Gain additional perspective • Ensure sound judgment and clear reasoning	• Discussed emerging findings with peers and advisor

Negative case analysis	• Ensure working hypotheses and emerging findings are actually a good fit for the data	• Used the constant comparative method of analysis • Purposefully searched for aberrant data
Referential adequacy	• Allow for novel interpretation and prevent misconceptions	• Stored all data for later recall and comparison
Member checks	• Prevent misinterpretation of data • Verify interpretations and conclusions	• Followed up with participants to ask for clarification when necessary • Sought feedback from participants on working hypotheses and emerging findings
Transferability		
Criteria/Technique	*Intended Results*	*Examples*
Thick description	• Provide sufficient detail to allow readers to make judgements on soundness of transferring findings to other contexts	Wrote richly detailed narrative of the case—the site, participants, interactions, and other salient details
Dependability/Confirmability		
Criteria/Technique	*Intended Results*	*Examples*
Inquiry audit	• Confirm accuracy of findings and analysis	• All data was compiled into a database and made available to audit
Reflexive journaling	• Allow for consideration of biases continual reexamination of my own perspectives	• Post-interview memos and researcher comments included in study database

Adapted from "Naturalistic Inquiry" by Y.S. Lincoln & E.G. Guba. Copyright 1985 by SAGE.

Researcher Role

As a qualitative study, this study relied on me to serve as the research instrument.

Therefore, it was essential I consider my own biases in order to remain reflexive. It was also

important to consider ethical issues, particularly since the study involved a great deal of direct

contact and interaction between myself and participants. This section discusses consideration of

issues related to bias and ethics.

Researcher Bias

Integrity in qualitative research demands the researcher acknowledge their preconceptions and assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my case, my background as an educator has undoubtedly shaped my worldview and may affect how I conduct my study. As a scholar and educator, I have been phenomenally influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and his call to connect learning to emancipation and social justice. Freire (1970) asserted that the critical thinker "perceives reality as process and transformation, rather than as a static entity" (p. 92), and does not separate thought from action. Scholarly endeavors, rather than describing or explaining phenomena, must call attention to injustice and seek pathways to build a more equitable society. In conducting this study, it was important that I not allow my internal drive for social justice to silence the voices of participants.

Understanding equitable family engagement, particularly in low-income school settings, is very important to me. I worked for ten years in an urban, low-income school district as a teacher and instructional coach. Forming relationships with students' families was always a focus for me—I feel families are *most* important in helping children achieve positive school outcomes, but it was sometimes a challenge for me, as a middle-class, White woman to engage families who had different cultural norms and expectations than I did.

Race and social class are inherent constructs in my study that deserved careful consideration. In my case, I was fortunate to have had opportunities to learn about generational poverty, systemic inequality, and structural racism. Because not all educators are sensitive to issues surrounding race and socioeconomic status, I believe low-income and minoritized families are sometimes not invited to be partners in children's education in ways that are meaningful. I believe family engagement often suffers because of cultural biases and deficit

mindsets towards families. My lens for framing interactions has been sensitized by years of learning and working with people of color. However, I recognize that as a White person I have largely avoided racialized interactions and stereotypes, so I may fail to notice racist microaggressions in my daily life as well as in this study.

I think my sensitivity to this topic was a definite strength in conducting this study, but it also introduced the potential for bias—my own perceptions on parent-school relationships are influenced by my experiences working with parents as a classroom teacher. I believe educators have a duty to work diligently at forming relationships with students' parents, even those who may be resistant to engage in dialogue with educators or enter the school building. I also feel harboring prejudice towards parents for any reason is unacceptable among teachers. Undoubtedly, this could have affected my study, but I made my best effort not to let my biases influence any aspect of my research.

My own positionality as a researcher was a necessary consideration throughout this study. As an exercise of critical inquiry, this study was grounded in the assumption that power relations based on race, social class, gender, language, and citizenship status envelop all interactions and the generation of knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, an acknowledgement of power and privilege was an essential component in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research presents ethical dilemmas related to the researcher-participant relationship (Merriam, 1998). Because qualitative researchers engage in fieldwork and often have direct contact with participants, it is imperative researchers consider potential ethical issues that may arise both during and after a study.

Data collection ethics. Several ethical considerations may arise during data collection.

For example, interviews may significantly affect participants (Merriam, 1998). Participants may feel pressured to partake in an interview or divulge information that could be embarrassing or emotionally-significant, which may have long-term effects for them. In this study, I minimized potentially harmful effects by fully explaining the rationale behind the informed consent process and explaining that participants may choose not to answer a question or to end the interview at any time they feel discomfort.

Observations and document collection also present ethical issues. Observation requires the ethical researcher to consider the level of privacy participants likely perceive and to consider whether or not to inform participants that they are being observed (Merriam, 1998). Divulging to participants that they are being observed is tricky because it may influence participants to behave differently. On the other hand, withholding one's status as an observer may result in participants engaging in behaviors that they would not feel comfortable with others knowing about. It is therefore a continual process of weighing the pros and cons of informing participants about observation. During my study, I felt it was ethical to explain to participants what I was studying and that I was observing them. Similarly, in collecting documents and artifacts, I considered the content and whether or not it could identify participants or affect them if information was shared.

Prior to data collection, I submitted an application to the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which required me to ponder how best to safeguard participants' confidentiality and minimize potentially harmful effects of study participation. I also created an informed consent document, which was provided for and explained to each participant prior to interviews. I also sought permission to engage in this study from school and district leaders.

Data analysis and reporting ethics. Ethical issues related to data analysis include researcher bias and participant confidentiality (Merriam, 1998). As mentioned previously, my own biases may have influenced what information I deemed important or how I interpreted my findings. Therefore, it was important for me to remain reflexive and consider how my own perspectives present themselves in the course of analyzing findings. Additionally, I carefully considered how best to guard against participants being identified. To prevent this, I assigned participants pseudonyms and stored data securely. Data security techniques were outlined in detail in Table 3.2. The following section presents the limitations of this study.

Limitations

This case study faced certain methodological limitations. First, as mentioned previously, though I certainly attempted to remain open-minded and reflexive, my own biases may have unknowingly limited how I collected and analyzed data. Further, as a novice researcher, my skill and sensitivity are developing; though this was not my first qualitative study, I recognize that I am not a seasoned researcher. Additionally, limitations related to reliability and trustworthiness are inherent in every study. Finally, Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that case study narratives may exaggerate or oversimplify a situation and cause readers to draw unjustified conclusions. Though I attempted, through thick description, to fully portray the case to readers, the possibility remains that my reporting does not capture the complexity of the case.

Summary of the Study

The preceding chapter outlined the methodology that will guide this qualitative case study. First, the role of the researcher and ethical issues were considered. Next, research design was discussed, including sampling techniques, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Then, trustworthiness techniques were overviewed. Finally, potential limitations were outlined.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter four presents findings from this qualitative case study. The purpose of this study is to is to explore how a grassroots family leadership initiative (PLC) influences family engagement perspectives and practices within the context of a high-poverty, predominately Hispanic elementary school. Research questions included the following:

1. How do faculty and families describe their perspectives on family engagement?

    a. What perspectives on family engagement exist within the school?

    b. What family engagement practices are used within the school?

    c. How do power relations and cultural factors explain these perspectives and practices?

2. From the perspectives of educators, families, and community members, how does this grassroots family leadership initiative (PLC) influence family engagement practices and perspectives within the school?

    a. What power relations exist within the school and how do they impact the family leadership initiative?

    b. How has this leadership structure facilitated engagement and

overcome barriers?

3. How does the theory of community cultural wealth explain the data?

The aim of chapter four is to present themes that emerged from data analysis and directly address each research question. First, in order to provide context for the reader, this chapter begins with a thick, rich description of the case—its setting, demographics, and history, beginning with a description of the district that houses the case study site, and then moving into a detailed description of the school itself. Next, so that readers may better understand the unique individuals included in the sample, a profile of each interview participant is given. Pseudonyms for places and participants are used throughout to protect participants' confidentiality. This is followed by a brief discussion of methods used in analyzing data to generate findings. Then, I present themes that emerged during analysis. Finally, I directly answer research questions using findings related to each question.

Presentation of Data

This section presents data relevant to understanding this study's context. First, the school district is described, followed by an explanation of the school and PLC, and finally biographical summaries of interviewees are included.

District Context: Green Public Schools

Green Public Schools (GPS) is an urban school district located in a large city in the Midwest. It serves approximately 40,000 students. According to the district website, 78% of its students are classified as economically disadvantaged. Table 4.1, below, presents a summary of student demographics.

Table 4.1

Green Public Schools Student Demographics

Descriptor	Percentage
Multi-lingual learners	21%
Students with disabilities	19%
Gifted and talented	12%
Hispanic/Latinx	34%
African American	24%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
White	24%
Multi-racial	10%
Native American or Alaska Native	5%

Fifteen percent of GPS' students met academic proficiency targets on state tests, which is far lower than the state average of 45%. GPS student proficiency scores are consistently lower than those of neighboring districts. Though the city that houses GPS has grown, annual enrollment in the district has declined over the years because many homeowners with young children choose to live within other districts that outperform GPS academically. In 2011, the district undertook a substantial restructuring project in which 11 schools were closed and grade-level configurations were changed in order for school buildings to be closer to capacity. In less than ten years, the district is again in a similar position, struggling to spread resources across school sites and classrooms as enrollment continually declines. Due to falling enrollment's effect on funding, GPS has found itself in the position of having to consider how to take on a $20 million budget shortfall in the 2019-2020 school year. The district has scheduled several community forums to seek input from community members on how best to address the shortfall, leaving many in the community wondering if school consolidation is once again looming in the near future.

GPS faces other challenges as well. A large percentage of the student population live at or below the poverty level, which means that sometimes students deal with food insecurity, lack

reliable transportation to get to and from school, and/or lack stable, safe housing. Further, research has shown when students face poverty-related struggles, they are less likely to meet grade-level academic expectations and they are more likely to display negative behaviors at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996), which makes teaching in GPS schools challenging. Therefore, teacher turnover is high. In summary, GPS faces challenges that are common to urban districts across the United States.

School Context: Central Elementary School

This section provides a thick description of CES, including its history, mission, demographics, surrounding neighborhood, and community partnerships.

History and mission. CES opened its doors to students in 1998. Two main factors were instrumental to its creation: (a) two closely located elementary buildings were deemed too dilapidated for refurbishment, therefore district leaders decided to close them and open one new, larger school; and (b) the community school reform movement was gaining traction locally. In response to these factors, the district laid plans to open a new community school, which in this case meant the school's model would intentionally address the needs present in its high-poverty neighborhood by providing on-site services to students and families. CES was intended to serve as a model community school, and the building itself was planned to include spaces that could be utilized by families and nonprofit agencies. For example, because safe and affordable childcare was difficult to find near CES, the school featured an on-site daycare that could be utilized by parents and teachers. Additionally, the school housed an early literacy and adult education program called Even Start, which served children aged six weeks to three years and their parents. Classrooms were also built to facilitate a community feel; half of the school's classrooms did not have interior walls and were fully open to hallways, while the other half had walls and accordion-style doors that could be opened between neighboring classrooms. Many

teachers teamed together and taught multi-age classes so that stronger connections could be formed between teachers, students, and families.

The founding principal was selected because she had a proven track record of successfully leading low-income schools, and she was charged with creating the school's vision and hiring all staff. Teachers displaced with the closing of the two nearby schools were not simply transferred to CES; each teacher hired at CES was vetted to determine if they lacked the disposition required of teaching in a school whose motto was to serve as "a lighthouse to the community." Teachers were told that if they wanted to work at CES, they would be expected to work harder on tasks that are not typically part of teachers' workloads. For example, teachers were required to visit the homes of their students in order to build strong relationships with families. Teachers also worked in tandem with local nonprofits to create a clothing closet for students, host many informal family events, and engage in fundraising efforts that paid for students to go on numerous field trips. Teachers were also trained extensively in strategies for working with students living in poverty, namely the work of Ruby K. Payne. Dr. Payne's book, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," was published in 1995, and it was espoused as a guide for educators to understand the culture of poverty. Dr. Payne also published many practitioner-focused training materials, which were used extensively at CES. In recent years, Dr. Payne's work has been subject to much scholarly criticism for relying on stereotypes, failing to directly address systemic causes of poverty, and focusing on weaknesses (Gorski, 2008; Van der Valk, 2016). Hence, CES' culture was one in which teachers took pride in going beyond requirements to work with families, but also somewhat subscribed to a deficit paradigm about students and their families.

Demographic and priority shifts. CES held true to its poverty-informed, "lighthouse" model for many years. During that time, demographics shifted in such a way that first-

generation, Latinx students became the majority group. This demographic shift made certain initiatives, such as home visits, difficult for the staff, which was primarily composed of individuals who only spoke English. Additionally, the state and district began to increase pressure on the school to improve student performance on state tests. CES had historically focused on serving the community, and student academic achievement was certainly a part of that. However, as improving student test scores became the primary driving force in state and district-level reform, family and community outreach efforts at CES began to be less of a priority.

The school went through another significant change in 2011 when the founding principal retired and was replaced by the current principal, Rebecca. Rebecca's vision for the school focused primarily on improving academic outcomes and the use of data to inform instruction. Though family and community outreach were not abandoned, the focus of teacher and support staff labor was shifted even more to teaching and learning. Rebecca began to implement practices that many teachers resisted, such as professional learning communities, frequent progress monitoring, and the use of student data notebooks. In the first few years of Rebecca's leadership, many of CES' founding teachers retired or moved schools. Therefore, over the course of a few years, CES' focus, school culture, and teaching staff shifted considerably. Many of the hallmarks of the school's former mission on longer exist; there is no longer a clothing closet and home visits are done on an as-needed basis rather than universally. However, the school has retained many partnerships with local nonprofits, which have allowed it to continue to offer services such as on-site student and family counseling, extensive afterschool enrichment opportunities, and parent education classes.

Currently, CES serves a population of over 800 students. Approximately 65% of students are Hispanic/Latinx, 18% are White, 8% are Black, and the remaining 9% are Asian,

Native American, or Multiracial. 55% of students are English Learners (ELs). A sufficient number of students qualify for free or reduced lunches that the school provides all students are provided with free breakfast in the classroom as well as lunch each day.

Though poverty still presents the school with many challenges, the focus of professional development and teacher labor no longer hinge on understanding and directly addressing these challenges. The labor teachers and school staff once spent on home visits and community engagement events, which were thought to bridge gaps between educators and students' families, has lessened. Instead, most professional development and school-based initiatives focus on student academic outcomes.

Neighborhood. Since this study focuses on relational dynamics between educators and families, it is important to provide a detailed description of the school community. CES is located near the urban center of a large city. The city's downtown skyscrapers are visible to the west from the school's parking lot, and it takes less than five minutes to drive to them from the school. Directly to the school's east is a small, private university. A city park bounds CES to the north, and it is frequently used by CES students. Houses and apartments lie directly to the south and west of the school.

Like many other cities across the United States, as schools became integrated during the 1950s and 1960s, middle-class families living near this urban center began to move to suburbs. Property values declined and neighborhood demographics changed considerably. Therefore, when CES was founded in 1998, it served a population that was racially diverse, but mostly low-income. The school served students who primarily lived north and west of it. These areas had a mixture of apartments, single-family homes, and swaths of industrial complexes. Most apartments accepted housing assistance vouchers, and most single-family homes were rentals, many of them in disrepair. The area was also known to be the center for

71

adult entertainment; there was a movie theatre, video rental establishment, and several clubs that featured adult entertainment. The area was also known to be one of the city's hotbeds of prostitution and drug activity.

When the GPS district underwent school consolidation in 2011, CES' boundaries were moved. After CES' boundary lines were redrawn, the school's boundaries included larger areas south and east of the school, which featured fewer apartments and more single-family homes with higher property values. Therefore, the boundaries of the school now include a greater population of middle-class families. However, CES has consistently had the highest numbers of transfers of any elementary in the district. Many of the newly-included middle-class families transferred their children to other schools, while families historically served by CES continued to transfer into the school.

Another interesting factor in CES' neighborhood is the construction of new homes and apartments. Neighbors United (NU), the school's partnering nonprofit that helped to create the PLC, has been instrumental in redefining the neighborhood to include households of varying income levels. For example, the dilapidated houses and apartments that once stood directly south and west of the school building, were razed and replaced by single-family homes and mixed-income apartments (meaning some residents pay rent independently and some receive government housing assistance). The revitalization of the city's downtown has also helped to raise property values as more and more people are drawn to live near restaurants, clubs, and music venues. Because of these factors, the neighborhood surrounding CES has become more desirable to middle-class individuals. Many of the blocks that once featured adult entertainment, drugs, and prostitution, have now been replaced by small businesses, new homes, and well-kept apartment buildings. Despite the influx of more White, middle, class families, the neighborhood has retained its Hispanic influence. Many small

businesses in the area are owned by Latinx individuals, and the neighborhood hosts a monthly

market that is infused with Mexican and Central American foods and handmade goods. This

market is held in a historic square that was once surrounded by dive bars and adult

entertainment establishments. Now, the square is surrounded by a panaderia (Mexican

bakery), a library, a Mexican restaurant, a coffee shop, a few shops and boutiques, and

buildings used for office space. There is also nearby new construction that houses clinics and

other small businesses and nonprofits. NU has included neighborhood residents in much of

the planning of these neighborhood changes, which has resulted in urban renewal that has not

completely displaced former residents and the creation of a community that feels vibrant and

multi-cultural.

 Community partnerships. As CES' priorities have shifted over time to focus more

exclusively on classroom instruction, family engagement has become a specialized focus for

school social workers and partnering agencies. Strategies for engaging families are certainly

discussed among teaching faculty at times, but most teacher labor is focused on lesson

planning, analyzing student performance, and instructional strategizing. Fortunately, CES'

community partnerships that have allowed the school to offer services and resources that

extend beyond classroom instruction.

 CES has many partnering organizations, some of which have office space located in

the school and others who work in other spaces in the neighborhood. The following table,

table 4.2, outlines several community partners and any work they do directly with families.

Table 4.2

Community Partners and Services

Organization	Location (on or off campus)	Primary Duties in CES neighborhood	Services Provided for CES Families
City Year	on campus	provide small group support for students identified as needing Tier II interventions	• chronic absenteeism outreach • "walking school bus" (supervision of children to and from school)
Reading Partners	on campus	provide volunteers to offer one-on-one literacy tutoring for students	• provide parents with students' reading assessments • host 1-2 family events to celebrate student participants
Communities in Schools	on campus	connect students and families with needed services	• ESL classes for parents • Parent University • maintain communication with parents of all students on caseload
Brighter Tomorrows*	on campus	provide counseling services to students	• family counseling (in some cases) • referrals to other needed services and resources
City University*	on/off campus	provide the school with college-age student volunteers	• secure grants and partnerships that have created an afterschool program, provided family support, and helped families access and use computers at home
Mission Music*	on/off campus	provide afterschool music program for students	• host winter and spring concert/celebration
Hope Project*	on/off campus	provide afterschool service-learning program for students	• regular communication with parents over students' projects
Church of the Hills*	off campus	provide food pantry and volunteers	• co-host annual winter festival

| Downtown Church* | off campus | provide food pantry, community events, and volunteers | • host free family-focused holiday events |
| Neighbors United* | off campus | improve neighborhood conditions | • host monthly "Coffee with Parents"
 • helped to create Parent Leadership Council |

*Locally-based organizations have been assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

These community partners provide much-needed support to CES students and families. Without these partnerships, it is likely that fewer CES students would have access to a safe, supervised environment after school, adequate food, and enrichment opportunities. Parents also benefit from these partnerships. For example, the "Parent University" offered by Communities in Schools was a program designed to help families understand their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. The Communities in School site coordinator also conducted a parent survey and used it to incorporate other topics that parents deemed important. "Coffee with Parents" is a bilingual, monthly meeting in which parents learn about local programs and school events, and they can make connections with other parents in the neighborhood. Finally, since many of the organizations listed above provide free afterschool enrichment programming, parents do not have to shoulder the cost of childcare. Further, as these afterschool programs take place in the school building, parents have more interactions with school and agency personnel, which opens up new possibilities for the formation of relationships between parents and educators.

PLC. The PLC was founded in the summer of 2018 via a partnership between CES and NU. The PLC's purpose was to leverage parent leaders to strengthen family-school collaboration at CES. NU staff worked in tandem with CES leaders to plan the PLC's structure, select and recruit members, and facilitate the PLC's work. The key member of the PLC was the parent captain, Selena, who served as the primary parent leader and worked

most closely with CES and NU staff. PLC meetings were held monthly (though cancellations did occur) in the parent engagement room at CES. The group's membership was flexible, but typically between 10-12 parent leaders attended. Additionally, at least one representative from both NU and CES attended all PLC meetings. Because the structure and work of the PLC are key considerations in this study, much more detail about the PLC is also included within the shared leadership sub-section of my thematic findings.

Participant Profiles

This section offers profiles of each interview participant. Table 4.3 provides a snapshot of each participant's demographic characteristics and is followed by a more detailed description of each participant. It is important to note that several participants speak English as a second language, and therefore grammatical errors are sometimes present within their quotes. I recognize that this may sometimes create a challenge for the reader, but in keeping with efforts to authentically represent participants' perspectives, I have not edited or annotated quotes to fit standard English conventions.

Table 4.3

Participant Demographics

Participant*	Role	Ethnicity	Language(s) Spoken
Selena	Parent leader	Hispanic	Bilingual, native Spanish
Estefany	Parent leader	Hispanic	Bilingual, native Spanish
Marisol	Parent	Hispanic	Bilingual, native Spanish
Olivia	Parent	Hispanic	Bilingual, native Spanish
Bea	Parent	Hispanic and White	English, some Spanish
Jeff	Teacher	White	English

Charlotte	Teacher	White	English
Rebecca	School leader	White	English
Gabrielle	School leader	White	Bilingual, native English
Kelly	Employee of Neighbors United	White	Bilingual, native English
Margaret	Employee of Neighbors United	Asian	English, some Spanish

*Pseudonyms have been assigned to protect participants' confidentiality.

School leaders. Two school leaders participated in this study. The descriptions below provide background information for each school leader.

Rebecca. Rebecca has been the principal at CES since 2011. Rebecca is White, in her fifties, and has four adult children. Prior to coming to CES, she was a special education teacher, a special education director for the district, and served as a principal for two years at another school. Rebecca does not speak Spanish, but she has been very intentional about hiring Spanish-speaking staff members, so she typically can rely on an interpreter when she needs to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents. Rebecca did not work directly with the Parent Leadership Council, but she was instrumental in its formation.

Gabrielle. Gabrielle serves as CES' "Learning Director," a role that is similar to an assistant principal. Prior to working in this role, Gabrielle taught early childhood grades at CES for 13 years and served as a site-based instructional coach. Gabrielle is a national board certified teacher and has worked a great deal as an advocate via a local teachers' professional organization. Gabrielle is in her late thirties, White, and she is a native English speaker but speaks Spanish fluently as well. Though Gabrielle was not the point person to represent school administration at the Parent Leadership Council during the 2018-2019 school year, she often dropped into meetings and helped the group when asked. Gabrielle took over as the group's administrative representative during the 2019-2020 school year.

Teachers. Two teachers participated in this study. Their demographic and background information are presented in the sections below.

Charlotte. Charlotte teaches second grade at CES. It is her second year at CES. Charlotte is a married White female in her early thirties, a mother of one son, and was pregnant with her second child at the time of our interview. Prior to becoming a teacher, Charlotte studied received a business degree and worked for a large corporation in a managerial capacity. She told me that she did not enjoy her work, and had always wanted a teacher, but had been dissuaded from it by her mother and other family members who are teachers. After deciding that work in the corporate world did not fulfill her, Charlotte began working as a teaching assistant in New York while earning her M.Ed. in childhood teaching.

Jeff. Jeff is a sixth-grade English Language Arts teacher who has taught for 11 years at CES. He is also father of six children who are current and former CES students. Until recently, he also lived within a few blocks of CES, which is unusual for CES teachers. Jeff is in his forties, and prior to becoming a teacher, had a career in construction. Jeff has a representation among school staff as someone who is very direct when talking about issues in the school, but he is also recognized as a teacher who has great relationships with students and is particularly skilled at engaging students with literature, even reluctant readers.

PLC members/parent leaders. Two PLC members participated in this study. Background information on these two parent leaders is presented below.

Selena. Selena served as the Parent Captain of the PLC during the 2018-2019 school year. Selena is a mother of six children, who range in age from four to 21 years old. Selena is Hispanic and emigrated from Mexico at age 16. She was undocumented for a number of years after she moved to the United States, so she has first-hand knowledge of the struggles faced by other CES parents who are undocumented immigrants. Over the past several years, Selena has

become a leader in the neighborhood, serving on multiple advisory boards at local nonprofits. Selena speaks English and Spanish fluently.

Estefany. Estefany was born in Mexico and is the mother of three children, who range in age from ten to 18 years old. Estefany came to the United States at age fourteen and had her first child when she was fifteen years old. She did not continue a formal education after becoming a mother. Like Selena, Estefany was undocumented when she first came to the U.S. Estefany was first recognized as a parent leader in the community when she helped to organize an event recognizing and celebrating teachers. Estefany is bilingual, and has used her language skills and experiences to serve as an advocate and advisor for several local nonprofit initiatives.

Other parents. Three parents who were not part of the PLC participated in this study. Their background information is presented below.

Marisol. Marisol is a mother of two children, a first-grader and a third-grader, who attend CES. Marisol is Latina and was born in Mexico. She graduated high school I Mexico and emigrated to the United States when she was 23 years old. Marisol's native language is Spanish, but she speaks English fluently. She works as a sous chef, and this requires her to work many hours since her restaurant is open for both lunch and dinner. Marisol was invited by the parent captain to join the PLC, but due to her demanding work schedule, was not able to attend meetings. Marisol also mentioned that she had pulled her children out of CES the previous year and enrolled them in a charter school because she did not feel they were being academically challenged, but she moved them back to CES because she felt they were happier there.

Olivia. Olivia is Latina; she emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico City when she was ten years old. She has five children, whose ages range from 3-15. Olivia's native language is Spanish, but she speaks English fluently, and received much of her formal education in the United States, and was even a student at CES for one of her elementary school years. Olivia

completed three years of high school, but did not graduate because she became pregnant with her oldest daughter during her senior year. Olivia's children have been attending CES since 2011. One of Olivia's daughters has received special education services since 2013, and one of her sons has had an individualized behavior plan since he first began attending CES. Therefore, Olivia has had a great deal of interaction with school administrators and counselors. On one occasion, Olivia was referred to by school staff members as a parent who can be difficult to deal with. However, in my observations and interactions with Olivia, I observed her to be warm and friendly to school staff.

Bea. Bea has two children, ages seven and nine, who attend CES. Bea was born in the United States to a Latino father and White mother. Growing up, Bea spoke English in her home despite having a father whose native language was Spanish. Though she is not fluent in Spanish, she can hold simple conversations in the language. Bea and her husband both have bachelors' degrees. Bea regularly volunteered at CES in her children's classrooms over multiple school years and began to volunteer with afterschool programs as well. Bea was known by many school staff members and because she had a reputation for being both regularly present and reliable, she was sometimes asked to volunteer in other capacities as well.

Neighbors United staff. Two NU staff members participated in this study. Their background information is presented below.

Margaret. Margaret works as the Director of Operations for NU. Though education-related initiatives and parent engagement are part of her job at NU, she is mostly focused on facilitating neighborhood development projects, especially the creation of mixed-income apartment complexes that have been built near CES. Prior to working at NU, Margaret worked as an office manager at a local magnet school that boasts a very active parent group, which gave Margaret first-hand experience working alongside families in schools. Margaret served as the

temporary NU representative to the PLC at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, but because her job requires much focus outside of parent engagement, an additional staff member, Kelly, was hired in November 2018.

Kelly. Kelly was hired as a Parent Mobilization Specialist for NU during November of the 2018-2019 school year. Prior to that, she taught in another elementary school that partners with NU and is located near CES. Kelly is also a mother of two young children. Kelly is White, but speaks Spanish fluently. Her husband was born in Mexico, but emigrated to the United States as a child and was undocumented until 2017, therefore Kelly has witnessed some of the immigration-related struggles he and his family have faced.

Data Analysis

Data for this study were collected through interviews, observations, and artifact collection. The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used to analyze data, meaning that as each new piece of data was collected, I coded it and created reflective memos. Therefore, analysis was an iterative process that allowed me to continually consider how each piece of data related to the study's purpose and research questions. This method also allowed me to pursue new and interesting leads, and to continually refine my study. For example, a participant's responses to interview questions sometimes pointed me toward a new line of questioning that could be used in subsequent interviews.

After all data was collected, I began a more in-depth analysis. I engaged in an additional round of open coding; I reread all pieces of data and continued to code significant units of information. I then began to consider how the codes I had developed aligned to the overall purpose of the study, and I began to condense codes into categories, and finally into overarching themes. This process was aided by the use of NVivo software, which allowed me to create a coded database for my study, in which all units of data related to a particular category or theme

could be quickly and easily retrieved.

The following sections present findings surrounding family engagement at CES. Findings are presented thematically. In keeping with transformative case study methods, I have included direct quotes from participants to illuminate the voices of individuals (parents, educators, and nonprofit workers) who are working at creating opportunities for equitable family engagement at CES.

Thematic Findings

While analyzing data, I began to see that barriers to equitable family engagement existed in terms of participants' perspectives as well as school-based practices. Conversely, I also found many instances of what I have termed *bridges*, which are perspectives and practices that promote equitable family engagement. In other words, bridges are both mental models and intentional actions that allow for *all* families, regardless of race, language, or socioeconomic status, to be engaged in their child's education. Because barriers and bridges emerged as overarching themes, I have organized findings to reflect these themes, and in the following sections, I present how barriers and bridges manifested at CES.

Barriers to Equitable Family Engagement

Barriers to equitable family engagement were present at CES, and they included deficit paradigms, mistrust, contrasting role definitions, lack of cultural awareness, ineffective communication, and difficulties surrounding navigating the school as an institution. Each of these will be explored in the following sub-sections.

Deficit paradigms. Deficit paradigms, in which families are thought to be inept at or incapable of supporting students' school success, were present at CES, but to a limited degree. Charlotte, a second-grade teacher who had worked in the school for two years, said,

I was told it was going to be difficult to get buy-in from parents and families. I heard

some of the stories from different teachers, and it had me feeling like 'oh no, I'm

going to struggle and be on my own with these kids with no family support,' but that

has absolutely not been the case at all. I've had great parent support here.

This quote suggests two important findings: (a) Deficit paradigms about parents were present

among the teaching staff, and (b) this novice teacher had a top-down conceptualization of

family engagement. Though she acknowledged the importance of collaboration among

parents and teachers, she used the term "buy-in," which suggests that the role of the family is

to passively accept and support the initiatives of the school.

Evidence of deficit paradigms among school staff was present in parent interviews as

well. Three parent participants discussed instances in which they felt they had been prejudged

by staff members due to their children's misbehavior. For example, one mother shared an

anecdote about how she was treated by a school staff member after her daughter had gotten in

trouble for fighting:

When I went there…the lady say, 'I thought you were not going to come in.' I mean

why? Because she thought [my daughter] misbehaves so the mom don't care about

her, I mean why? I care for my daughter. I want to listen. I'm here, but I felt like bad

because they thought I wasn't even going to come. (Estefany)

In interviews with other parents, they discussed feeling similarly when called in to address

their child's misbehavior; they did not feel as though they were treated as someone who could

help solve the child's behavior problem, but as the person who was responsible for creating it.

Mistrust. There was some evidence of mistrust between the school and the families it

serves. Two mothers who volunteered in the school frequently explained that this was

necessary to build trust. "When I first start going, [school staff members] look at me like,

'why are you here?' But then, when they start to know me, they see that I am doing good for

the school" (Selena). Estefany had experienced similar scrutiny when she first began volunteering during the school day. She discussed how this might affect other parents: "It took me a long time to feel comfortable there. Imagine people that they don't go [into the school], they feel so scared, it's very scary, I don't blame them" (Estefany). Trust between educators and parents was not inherent, rather it was something built over time.

Similarly, there was discussion among school staff about the need to ensure parents who visited the building during the day went directly to and from their intended destination; school staff members did not want parents "roaming" through the building. Parent presence in the building was scrutinized by the staff. Bea, who was an active parent volunteer explained, "my husband and I like to greet our kids' whole classes in the morning, but as soon as the bell rings, we feel like they give us weird looks for still being there." However, the principal offered an anecdote that helps to understand how parent presence during the school day could be problematic:

> I had to ban a parent last year that would come in [through an entry] that they weren't
>
> supposed to and they had four kids in the building and they would go from class to
>
> class to class, interrupt the teacher, pull the kid out of class, and just be very
>
> disruptive, and he would be obviously high on drugs some of the time. (Rebecca)

Rebecca also explained that domestic violence and parental conflicts over custody issues impact safety considerations. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the mistrust parents' perceived was rooted in educators' concern for student safety or a general wariness toward parents.

Contrasting role definitions and responsibilities. How parental roles and responsibilities were conceptualized differed between staff and parents. Parents framed their role primarily as providing emotional support and teaching their children to respect others in

the school. School personnel focused more on parents' responsibilities to uphold student academic performance by monitoring homework and ensuring students are accountable. For example, a sixth-grade teacher explained,

> Sometimes parents don't hold kids accountable. They will come to conferences and they act surprised their kid has a low grade and has turned in no homework. I think parents in general have to get better at keeping on top of it. (Jeff)

In contrast, when I asked parents about their roles in interviews, none mentioned academics unless I posed a follow-up question that specifically asked about how they support their child's learning and academic growth.

In today's world, being able to support students academically requires that parents use technology. Educator participants did recognize that parents may not have consistent and reliable access to technology, however there did not appear to be a deep consideration of just how limiting the lack of access to technology is to parents. Consistent monitoring of students' school and homework requires both reliable internet access to check the online gradebook. Additionally, supporting students with homework also requires the ability to read in English and the ability to help children when they do not understand the concept. Parent participants expressed frustration surrounding homework. One mother explained that she relies on family members for help and will often go to her sister's home to ask her older nieces and nephews to help her children. Another participant discussed how an afterschool program provided homework assistance, but since the program closed at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, she has struggled to help her children in upper elementary grades with homework, stating, "sometimes it's hard because I don't even understand some of their homework, and they come and ask me to help, but it's hard for us, I don't even remember that, I don't know how to do that" (Olivia). Homework, then, is a definite equity issue in the school; some parents simply

do not have the required skills or technological resources to help their children, yet most teachers in the school send academically rigorous homework nightly.

Cultural factors. As mentioned previously, the majority of students and families served by CES are Hispanic/Latinx. However, the majority of educators are White. Therefore, it takes work on the part of educators to develop a rich understanding of families' cultures. At CES, there is regular discussion among faculty about Hispanic culture. However, there was some evidence that if cultural awareness was more fully developed among the faculty, it could benefit family engagement. During one PLC meeting I observed, there was discussion about how few CES school staff members seem to be aware of common Hispanic cultural mores. For example, it is common in the United States for people to issue collective greetings, such as thanking everyone for attending. In many Latin American cultures, however, it is considered rude not to greet people individually, which involves physical contact and standing in closer proximity than is typical in the U.S. Selena spoke about this in her interview:

> I came…and I would say hi and [a school leader] would look at me and act like she
> didn't see me even though I was right there by her. But [another school leader], she
> always greets me, "how you doing?"

In one PLC meeting, a school leader walked into the room to ask a question, and then immediately walked out. The group then began to discuss how it felt badly for them not to have been acknowledged. To them, this interaction was disrespectful, but to a White, middle-class, American school leader whose every working day presents more tasks than can possibly be completed, missing an opportunity to greet parents may not seem important. Thus, differing cultural expectations and relational practices can potentially create barriers in forming shared understandings and partnerships between educators and parents.

86

Cultural factors were also part of the reason for the PLC's formation. Prior to the this, the school had made an unsuccessful attempt to have a PTA. Rebecca, the school principal explained,

> When I came there was a PTA that was basically nonexistent, in name only, so I tried to resurrect that. I actually got two or three parents who were on the PTA board…I actually had PTA people come and try to tell us how to do it, tried to recruit, got teachers to sign up. I got teachers, but for the life of me could not get parents, so we ran it…but, basically it came down to about four people that were doing everything, regarding organizing events, fundraisers, etc.

Though the group did help with fundraising efforts and teacher appreciation, it did not create a sense of community among parents or contribute meaningfully to family engagement in the school. Rebecca also explained how she came to realize the PTA was not necessarily culturally-relevant for Latinx families:

> When I talked with [the site coordinator for Communities in Schools], she told me that PTA is a White, middle-class thing, and, so that was not understood, and there's not a desire to understand it from what she has told me from the Latino culture, and so now we are really becoming more culturally sensitive about what our families want and need, like just asking questions, how do you guys want to build a relationship?

Therefore, cultural divides were a key impetus in the formation of the PLC.

Another surprising finding relating to culture had to do with the school's dual language program. About half the schools EL students participate in this program, in which children are instructed in both English and Spanish. Many of the school's dual language teachers are from Spain and have temporary work visas. There were multiple instances of cultural differences between Spanish teachers and CES families. Some parents discussed their

feelings that some of the teachers from Spain were overly strict, which resulted in their children coming home from school upset with how a teacher had spoken to them. One parent offered the following anecdote:

> I was talking with my kids, and we have to learn about these new teachers the school is bringing from Spain. Well, this is really weird because you know how they talk, it's not the same language as Mexicans, they're from Spain and they talk a lot of…well for us it's bad words, but for them it's normal. And our kids got confused because the teacher, whenever they told them this word, I was like 'oh my god, you can't say this word.' And…the kids got confused. (Olivia)

When she felt her concerns were not appropriately addressed, Olivia decided to pull her children out of the bilingual program. This anecdote points to the fact that culture and language are nuanced; even when individuals share a common language, their interpretations of words and phrases may still be varied due to culture.

Communication. In terms of communication, there were a few instances of ineffective and inauthentic communication. A frequently-cited barrier among participants was the language barrier between English-speaking school staff and Spanish-speaking families. However, the school consistently provided written translation of documents and interpreters were typically available to facilitate verbal communication. Parent participants appreciated the school's efforts to consistently provide interpreters, yet both teachers and parents noted that interpreters were not always effective. One mother explained her frustration about attending a parent-teacher conference with her neighbor in order to provide interpretation: "I go there to interpret for her, but they tell me I cannot because I am not certified. But then the certified interpreter they had, he only told [my neighbor] a small part of what the teacher said" (Estefany). A teacher also noted that relying on interpreters does not completely

eradicate the language barrier:

> Even when there's an interpreter in the room, stuff gets lost in translation, but being
>
> unable to communicate directly with parents keeps, and I'm not faulting the other
>
> side...keeps the relationship from being as productive as it could be. (Jeff)

In addition to noted deficiencies in language translation, there were instances of inauthentic communication, in which a rich discussion of important issues could not take place. For example, because it is a Title I school, CES is required to hold a meeting to share information with parents about student performance and opportunities for engagement. However, I observed that this information session was done at parent-teacher conferences by displaying an automated PowerPoint presentation that parents could choose to view in the school library, which did not allow for an authentic exchange between school personnel and parents. One school leader acknowledged the need to "get parents here or figure out a way to communicate with them in a two-way manner at the school level" (Gabrielle). Therefore, a desire for authentic and effective communication was present among school staff, but putting this into practice was a challenge at CES.

      Systemic constraints. For the most part, CES was very intentional in addressing systemic constraints faced by its families. However, in addition to issues surrounding homework that were previously discussed, one major limitation in equitable practices was the use of the online gradebook. Teachers were required to update grades weekly at CES, but according to survey data, very few parents accessed the online gradebook. When I asked one mother about this, she said, "yes, I know they use [gradebook program], but I don't know how to see it. I think there's an app, but I never learned it" (Olivia). In over one year of observations at the school, I never observed a planned, school-wide effort to help parents access and navigate the online gradebook. Though the school did send home paper progress

reports midway through each academic quarter, for students struggling academically, this may not provide parents with timely information that would allow them to intervene.

Another systemic constraint faced by families was lack of consistent access to a cell phone. Several educators discussed how difficult it was to communicate with parents whose phone numbers changed frequently. The school principal explained, "another barrier on the parent end, phone numbers change, so keeping those up-to-date within our system, or their messages are full, or they just don't respond, or don't have current emergency contacts" (Rebecca). In attempting to contact parents for interviews, I experienced this. One parent that I attempted to contact for an interview had five phone numbers listed in the school's database. I called all five numbers, but none of them allowed me to reach the parent. (In two cases, the number was being used by an entirely different person, and in the other cases I received an error message.) Obviously, if parents cannot be contacted by phone, this presents challenges to school staff attempting to engage families.

Navigating the school system. Perhaps the most significant barrier to equitable engagement practices concerns parents' abilities to navigate the school as an institution. For parents to be able to make informed decisions about children's education or to advocate for their children's needs at school, parents must have an awareness of the school's organizational structure and procedures. One parent leader noted that "many parents have been there for two years or three and they don't know who is the principal" (Selena). Two other mothers described their frustration when they attempted to advocate for their children; both felt school staff members were not easily accessible to them. Olivia explained,

> My daughter came to me saying this boy was saying rude stuff to her, like sex stuff, and I try to talk to them, but they tell me they are busy, that I need to make appointment, but they don't have one available for three days. What am I supposed to

do? Keep her home? I can't let this happen to her, but I just did not know what to do. Similarly, Marisol explained that when she was concerned her child's teacher was being overly abrasive to him, she attempted to talk to the teacher after school, but was told she had to make an appointment first. "I didn't understand it. I came there when I knew the students were not in class, but I learned the policy is to first call and they will make the appointment" (Marisol). Both parents expressed a sense of urgency to help their children, but did not know what to do when their attempts to advocate for their children did not conform to school protocols.

School leaders also noted that navigating the system is sometimes a barrier. In both CES and its district, parents must sometimes make decisions for their children. For example, deciding which school in which to enroll children, whether or not to place a child in special education, and how to intervene when a child is struggling are decisions parents must make at times. One administrator explained,

> [A] barrier that we sometimes see is families understanding how the public school system works and really taking ownership of their rights as a parent, and understanding that they do have a lot of say, and you know, and understanding that here at CES we respect their opinions and we want to hear from them. (Gabrielle)

In order to access these rights, parents have to be able to navigate the system, which requires knowing who key personnel are, how to go about speaking to those individuals when necessary, how to understand the often-specialized jargon used by educators, and how to articulate concerns in a way that aligns to school protocols.

In summary, barriers to equitable family engagement included deficit paradigms, mistrust, lack of cultural awareness, communication, systemic constraints, and parents' lack of awareness of how to navigate the school system. These barriers presented challenges to

both educators and parents at CES as they attempted to collaborate on behalf of children. However, in many cases, CES' leaders and teachers were cognizant of these barriers and strategically attempted to traverse them. Parents, too, had developed strategies for overcoming barriers. The following section explores how bridges to equitable engagement were forged within the context of CES.

Bridges to Equitable Family Engagement

The term *bridges* refers to family engagement perspectives and practices that help to make it possible for all families to be engaged. Bridges at CES included shared role definitions, paradigms that recognize families' strengths, addressing systemic constraints, effective communication, sharing navigational capital, and shared decision making. Each of these are discussed in the following sections.

Shared role definitions. As mentioned previously, there were some discrepancies between how educators and parents described parental role, however there was a great deal of overlap as well. All parent interviewees discussed the importance of knowing what is happening in their children's school and being actively involved. Olivia described her role as a parent: "Be in school with them, volunteering. Our job is talk to [our children], teach them to be respectful with the teachers, and be at the teachers' conferences and work with teachers together." Charlotte, a second grade teacher, shared a similar description of the importance of parents in education:

> I think if every single parent was active in their child's classroom that, or you know, was on the same page as the teacher, you know, communicating was really easy, I think that kids would be able to succeed so much more.

Olivia's description of her parental responsibilities is remarkably similar to Charlotte's and the other educators' descriptions of parental duties. This is particularly important because

Olivia was a parent who was perceived as being difficult to interact with, and two of her children got in trouble regularly at school. However, when Olivia spoke about working with CES staff, she described positive interactions: "They've been really good with me about their behavior plans. They call me not to complain about my kids, but to choose some program or to see if *we* can have a solution that we can help them." Olivia's description of her interactions demonstrates that CES school personnel were not dismissive of her when her interaction style did not align to their expectations, rather they continued to make her feel like her input was valued in determining a solution that would work for her children. All educators I interviewed acknowledged parents as a valuable resource in children's lives. For example, Jeff, a sixth grade teacher, said, "I think we value parents' input and their contribution. Well, I can speak for myself, I value the parent role in education because it's the most important role of anybody."

There was another area of commonality among educators and parents' conception of the parent role: the importance of advocacy. All parents shared anecdotes about at least one instance in which they felt compelled to come to the school to advocate for their child. Educators also discussed their wish that all parents would feel comfortable to directly bring their concerns to the school's attention. For example, one educator stated,

> There were lots of times that when I brought something up to a parent, they would be like, "oh yeah, I've been really worried about that." Well, then why didn't you say something…then they say, "oh but you're the teacher, you know." And I'm like yes, but it's your child, *you're* the expert. (Gabrielle)

The ability for parents to serve as their children's advocates was identified by participants as being important, but Gabrielle and other educators recognized that some parents did not bring their concerns to the attention of educators. Margaret, the director of operations at Neighbors

United has worked in the neighborhood with Hispanic people for several years. She explained, "I think especially in the Hispanic community, in their culture, it's much more respectful to leave [the kids at school] and create that separation because you're respecting the profession of an educator." This culturally-defined respect for educators' professional status helps to explain potential reasons for Gabrielle's experience with parents who did not disclose their concerns. To parent leaders, advocacy had become part of their daily lives, both within the PLC and other leadership initiatives in the community. For Estefany in particular, advocacy and engagement were essentially the same concept: "We need a place for parents to sit and talk because that is how engagement starts. We share concerns and we talk about how we can help." To summarize, both educator and parent participants defined key parental responsibilities as being aware of what is happening at school, communicating, and advocating for children.

Strength paradigms. Similarly, there was a great deal of evidence that deficit paradigms about parents were not prevailing. Instead, educators often acknowledged CES families as assets to their children; I describe this as a strength paradigm. Further, since the majority of students were Hispanic, there was a great deal of discussion about the cultural contribution of Hispanic parents. For example, the school actively sought to preserve Spanish as students' home language. During a teacher meeting I observed, a veteran CES teacher explained to her team of newer teachers how, because the school had been consistently telling Spanish-speaking parents that their children were underperforming, many started using only English at home, which resulted in kids losing their native language, and in some cases being unable to communicate with extended family. She went on to explain how important it was for teachers to encourage families to speak their native language at home and how wonderful it is for families to become bilingual together. Additionally, the school became part of a dual-

language initiative, in which students receive instruction in both English and Spanish. The school also regularly recruited family members to read to children in Spanish in early childhood classrooms. Thus, the preservation of language and culture was a valued endeavor at CES.

Other efforts to promote strength paradigms among faculty were evident as well. For example, after I shared some of my observations with the administrative team, I was asked to deliver a professional development workshop on equitable family engagement strategies for teachers to help ensure some of the newer faculty developed strength paradigms about families and had strategies to engage families who were culturally or linguistically different from them. Additionally, the school recruited the city's first Latinx school board member to speak to the entire staff about immigration trauma and the politics surrounding immigration. Her presentation focused on the resiliency of undocumented immigrant families, and the staff seemed to respond very well. The follow-up discussion included teachers sharing anecdotes of their own experiences with students and parents who had undergone extreme hardships to come to the United States, and in many cases how they were now thriving in the community. During this professional development, I felt a definite sense that CES staff members valued the school's families and generally did not subscribe to a deficit perspective that views families as obstacles to students' success.

Rebecca, the school principal, and other administrators were instrumental in helping to build strength paradigms among school staff, particularly among newly hired teachers. One teacher explained,

> I feel like this is one of the best schools I've ever been in where, um, I mean, the way
> that I've seen administrators speak to parents where it's like 'help us help your child.'
> It's like, we're going to talk to you with respect and we're going to ask the same in

return, and this is an equal conversation because we're both here for the same reasons.

(Charlotte)

Approaching parents as equal partners who can help ensure children thrive at school requires the mindset that parents are not only capable of helping, but believing they can add insights and solutions educators could not fathom on their own. Rebecca described her perspective on CES families:

Parents want more for their kids than they've had themselves typically, and that's why they're working two and three jobs, trying to make it happen, especially our dads, but then that creates an absent parent scenario. It's such a hard thing, poverty's hard, you know, so I don't know...parents are everything, they are the first educator, and the kids you know families are where they're loyal to, so having that communication and that really positive relationship and just accepting them where they're at and listening, and being willing to find out how can we support them. I'm trying to be safe, like emotionally safe for them, and then you know, then there's the hard part of sometimes calling DHS because the kids aren't safe, but that's few and far between, you know.

In this quote, Rebecca notes some of the extremely difficult situations some CES families face, but she frames these challenges systemically. Rather than taking a deficit perspective toward families, she identifies families' strength and resiliency.

Addressing systemic constraints. Addressing systemic constraints faced by families living in poverty was a major component of the work being done at CES. For example, prior to the first day of school each year, the school hosts "Preview Night," which is an opportunity for families to meet children's teachers, but is also a community resource fair in which parents can get connected to local nonprofits that offer healthcare, family counseling, legal services, etc. As mentioned previously, the school's partnering nonprofits bring a range of

resources into the school and surrounding neighborhood that helps alleviate poverty-related constraints faced by CES families.

Planning how to meet an array of student and family needs was a regular part of school operations. School leaders met weekly with the school counselors and social worker to discuss students' physical and social/emotional needs, which sometimes extended into discussion of how to support entire families. For example, if a teacher noticed that a child was consistently asking for more food at breakfast or lunch, they would notify the social worker, who would then work with school leaders to connect that child to the school's backpack program, which provides a bag of food each Friday afternoon, or they would refer the family to the nearby food pantry. Additionally, if a student presented behavioral or emotional challenges at school, the counseling staff would refer the child (and sometimes the entire family) to the on-site counseling services provided by Brighter Tomorrows. The school, in collaboration with partnering nonprofits, also assisted families during holidays by providing food and/or gifts. In addition, through the site-based Communities in Schools representative, parents could get connected not only to material resources but educational opportunities as well. Finally, the school also had robust afterschool programming, which aside from providing students with enrichment, allowed families extended time each day to earn wages without having to worry about childcare expenses. To summarize, CES maintained an active network between school leaders, counseling staff, and partnering agencies, that allowed families to quickly access resources and support when needed.

Communication and relationships. There were also many examples of how the school communicates effectively with families and builds relationships with them. Each parent interviewed mentioned that they had a relationship with one of the two bilingual office staff. One mother said, "they know me. They ask about my kids. They make me feel good to

come in the school" (Marisol). The school provides nearly all information in both English and Spanish; schoolwide announcements, newsletters, and automated phone calls are always offered in both languages. Additionally, parent meetings are conducted in both languages (alternating back and forth between the two). One parent participant described her perception of the school's efforts to communicate in multiple languages:

Some of the Spanish-speaking parents I know have told me that they transfer their kids to [CES] because at other schools there is little to no communication in Spanish. I've volunteered at other schools, and it's shocking how little effort they put into communicating with parents that don't speak English. Here, everything is always in English and Spanish, and the parents really appreciate that. (Bea)

The school also hosts several family-friendly events each year, such as carnivals and dances. Many CES staff members attend or volunteer at these events, and it gives families and educators an opportunity to interact informally. One mother said of school events, "I like those kinds of things, not too formal, you know, informal. We get together...and we talk about each of our kids' experiences" (Marisol). In observing these events, I was consistently awed by how many people would attend, and students, families, and staff members appeared to be having fun.

Sharing navigational capital. As mentioned previously, a major barrier to family engagement was that many families had little understanding of the organizational structure of both CES and the district. Therefore, CES used several strategies to help families learn how to navigate the school system. One strategy used at CES is the parent university, which are parent education classes facilitated on-site at CES by the Communities in Schools coordinator, who is bilingual and creates her curriculum based on parent surveys.

Another important way CES helps parents navigate the school system is by providing

a lot of support with school transitions. For example, in the winter of 2018, CES undertook a concerted effort to assist families of sixth-graders with the transition to junior high school. CES students are automatically accepted in a nearby college prep, magnet junior high, but because many families had difficulty using the district's online enrollment system, students who wanted to enroll there were not. CES staff volunteered multiple evenings to assist families with the enrollment process, which resulted in an increased percentage of its sixth graders attending the magnet school.

> Rebecca explained how the school systematically addresses navigational barriers:
>
> We try to also do as many things here on campus like enrollment, tours, and just so that people don't have to...we're trying to remove barriers for them to have to go to the enrollment center or education service center, and so those are some very intentional efforts that we've put out to make it as easy as possible for our families.

These efforts were not only appreciated by parents, but they served as a catalyst for parents to help others in the neighborhood. Olivia said, "they helped me figure out how to get my daughter enrolled at the junior high. Then I could help my friend and my neighbor." School leaders again aided parents through the enrollment process in the fall and winter of 2019.

NU also made regular efforts to help families understand the organizations present in the community. Each month, NU hosted an event called "Coffee with Parents," in which representatives from neighborhood schools and nonprofit agencies could inform parents what initiatives they were undertaking, how they could support families, and how families could become involved. Coffee with Parents was held monthly at a Mexican bakery located near CES. I attended several of these events, and each time, a CES representative would inform parents about upcoming events or important news. Other topics discussed were based on the community's needs and concerns. For example, in the summer and fall of 2019, there was a

surge in raids and detention of undocumented individuals by immigration and customs enforcement (ICE), which created fear and anxiety in the community. In response, at the September 2019 Coffee with Parents, attorneys from a local immigration law clinic spoke to attendees about their rights and what they should do if they encountered ICE agents. Additionally, representatives from the neighborhood's schools and parent leaders assured parents that they did not need to worry about ICE agents being on school campuses. They also explained to parents that the schools would not ask about documentation status, and that the schools would continue to be safe places for children and families. Other topics discussed with families at Coffee with Parents included bilingual education, adult education, early childhood intervention, wellness resources, and community development. Coffee with Parents, then, was an opportunity for parents to learn about both the school system and other organizations present in the community.

Shared decision making. The school also made an effort to include diverse parent voices in school leadership and decision making processes. At times, involving parents in decision-making processes involved a focus on an individual parent's child. For example, I observed several meetings between parents and school staff to discuss the potential retention of students who were working significantly below grade level. In each of these meetings, staff members explained the student's academic performance level relative to grade-level expectations, explained the potential benefits and risks of retention, and then asked for parent input. In each case, the parent's decision to retain or promote the child was respected, even when teachers and school leaders did not agree with the parent's choice. There were other instances in which school personnel sought out parent input in decisions. For example, a parent participant shared the following anecdote:

When my son first started here, he was behind in reading. It just wasn't his strength. So

after his assessments were done, we had a meeting with his teacher, and she was so

wonderful about explaining it all. She told us what kind of support she could offer in the

classroom, and then she told us about other programs he could be in. She asked us for

our input, and it really felt like we made the decisions together. It put me at ease about

the school because I could see this was a place we could collaborate. (Bea)

CES educators wanted to expand parent input beyond decisions about their own biological

children. In hopes of including parents in school-wide decisions, school leaders formed the

PLC. The following sections discuss how the PLC was planned and how it facilitated shared

decision making at CES.

Planning of the PLC. Planning for the PLC began in the summer prior to the 2018-

2019 school year. Planning meetings included CES school leaders, NU staff, and in some

meetings representatives from other nonprofits were present. Since the PLC was a

collaborative effort between CES and NU, each group's roles and responsibilities were

defined in the initial planning stages. NU's responsibilities in the effort were to "drive

organization and collaboration with parents, build a foundation of feeling welcome, and

increase parent leadership capacity" (photo artifact). CES' responsibilities were to assign one

of the "site leaders to be the group's key point person, provide a physical space and a seat at

[the] table for parents" (photo artifact). There was a lot of discussion at these planning

meetings about how families sometimes did not feel comfortable in the school, therefore a

major prerequisite goal was to ensure families felt welcome. Part of making families feel

welcome involved the designation of a space for parents. School leaders cleared out a room

that had previously served as technology storage, and called it the "parent engagement room."

They asked volunteers to repaint the walls and furnished the room with a rug, tables, and

chairs. Little was done to decorate the room because school leaders wanted parents to feel

ownership of the space, and they wanted PLC members to have the opportunity to define how the space would be used and what it would look like.

NU began forming the PLC by identifying a parent captain who would be responsible for identifying other parent leaders and facilitating the work of the PLC. NU selected Selena, a CES mother, as its parent captain. Selena was selected for several reasons: she is bilingual, she had lived in the neighborhood for many years (her older children who are now high school graduates attended CES), she is very socially connected to other parents in the neighborhood, she had worked on several neighborhood development projects, and she already helped other families in the community regularly in any way she could. Selena was paid a small stipend for her work with the PLC.

Initially, the PLC was supposed to have fifteen members, which was thought to be an ideal number because it would allow for a diverse representation of parents but not be too large to facilitate small group discussions. Bethany, an assistant principal, was chosen to be the group's administrative representative because her professional goal for the year was to improve her ability to engage parents. Selena selected ten of the other PLC members, and Bethany selected three other members. Selena's selections included ten Hispanic women, some mothers and some grandmothers of CES students. All of them had served as volunteers in some capacity at CES or had been members of the school community for many years. Bethany's selections included three mothers from diverse cultural backgrounds (African American, White, East Indian). Other individuals who regularly attended PLC meetings included the school's parent facilitator, the site Communities in Schools coordinator, and myself. Margaret, NU's director of operations, explained how the parent captain and PLC members would work with school personnel:

> [The] parent captain position should be kind of the mini-organizer for their

community. From us to a parent captain to PLC members, really sharing those

resources down, so that community can start to spread even larger, and then it's just

bringing in multiple perspectives because again they're all parents, they're all parts of

the community, but their perspectives, their needs, their interests are all very different.

Then how do you start to be laser-focused on a smaller community that you can really

instill some skills in at the same time and really beginning to show them the value of

that relationship between each other and between schools was the idea.

Margaret's quote touches on the value of including diverse voices, community-school

relationships, and helping PLC members develop leadership skills. Her quote also illuminates

the fact that the group's membership was not exclusive. Those individuals who were

identified to be PLC members in the beginning sometimes invited others to be involved. The

following image, which was constructed during a planning meeting, depicted the group's

structure:
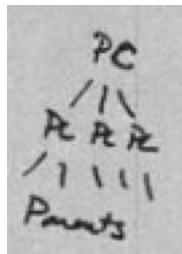
At the top is the parent captain, who was charged with recruiting other parent leaders

(members of the PLC), who would then engage other parents. It is also important to note that

the group had a nested structure. The figure above depicts how the PLC would engage with

the school community. However, there was also a smaller, nested group that planned PLC

meetings and discussed the group's activities. This group included Selena, the parent captain;

a representative from NU; Bethany, the assistant principal; myself; and sometimes the site

coordinator of Communities in Schools.

Traversing barriers: work of the PLC. After PLC members were recruited and a

meeting space was designated, the group began to hold meetings. The following sections

present a chronological narrative of the group's meetings.

September, 2018. The first meeting of the PLC was held in September 2018. It was

attended by 13 parent leaders (including the parent captain), Bethany, Margaret from NU,

CES' parent facilitator, the Communities in School representative, and myself. During the

meeting, everyone introduced themselves and explained why they had chosen to attend. Both

Spanish and English were used in the meeting; immediately after a person addressed the

group, their statement would be interpreted in the other language. The main activity of that

first meeting was a brainstorming session focusing on PLC members' vision for student

success. Using sticky notes and large pieces of chart paper, members listed wishes, strengths,

needs, and challenges (for parents, students, and the school). The following table presents the

group's responses.

Table 4.4

Parent Leaders' Perception of CES

	Parents	Students	School
Wishes	• ESL classes • Computer classes • Opportunities to connect with other parents • Opportunities to volunteer	• Be prepared for middle school • Better reading and writing skills • Increased afterschool programming	• Better communication with parents • More cultural and informal, fun activities for families
Strengths	• Skills teachers cannot teach • Willingness to volunteer • Help children with homework	• Willingness to learn	• Parenting classes (e.g. parent university) • Fun community activities • Bilingual office staff

Needs	• Role models for children • Connecting resources to the school via partnerships • Spanish classes for kids and parents • Teach values • To hear good things about their kids	• Goal-setting/Motivation • Activities/Sports • To see the family and school working together for them	• Smaller class sizes • Classes focused on motivation/goal-setting • Improved communication between teachers and parents
Challenges	• Language barriers • Communication from teachers • More information on student progress	• Academics: reading, math • Self-discipline, motivation, goal-setting	• Student behavior • Sharing information about student progress • Communicating with parents

PLC members recognized a major challenge/need in the school was communication between teachers and parents. Additionally, they appreciated the family activities the school currently offered, but wished these activities featured aspects of their cultures. Similarly, they appreciated past parent education offerings, but desired more classes focused on computer skills. They also desired ESL classes be hosted within the school, which had been done several years ago. Another commonality was members' focus on nonacademic student outcomes, such as motivation, values, self-discipline and goal-setting. There was discussion about how many students in the school had experienced bullying, and that many students simply did not seem to be motivated to do their best at school. In addition to these improved student outcomes, members also expressed a desire for more opportunities to volunteer.

October, 2018. The first PLC meeting had provided members with an opportunity to

offer their input on how to shape the school to better serve parents and students. When the group reconvened a month later in October, members received a typed list (similar to table 4.4) summarizing their brainstorming exercise. After looking over the summary, the group's discussion focused on the common themes of increased opportunities for students' enrichment and development of values, improved communication between school and home, and more opportunities for parents to volunteer. The group's discussion then focused primarily on volunteering; members shared their own experiences volunteering in the school, but a few explained they were frustrated because they had completed volunteer paperwork— the district required a background check in order to volunteer—but had never been contacted. The discussion of the group's brainstorming activity and volunteering was quite lengthy, especially since everything was stated in two languages. Following this discussion, there was a shift in the meeting's agenda. Margaret and Bethany then asked members to volunteer at the following events: Pre-K Thanksgiving feast, Christmas gift distribution, book fair, and junior high enrollment assistance. Finally, Margaret introduced a teacher appreciation book she had compiled, which listed teachers' names and their favorite treats. Selena also led the group in signing cards for school leaders, since October is principal appreciation month. In conclusion, the meeting started with a focus on the ideas of parent leaders, but then shifted to a discussion of volunteer opportunities and staff appreciation. Thus, the actions planned and taken at this meeting did not fully encompass the range of parent leaders' desired initiatives. They were provided with additional volunteer opportunities, but there were no defined action steps for bringing other ideas to fruition.

November-December, 2018. The PLC did not have a whole-group meeting during the months of November and December. Instead, in November, Bethany, Margaret, Selena, and I met and were introduced to Kelly, who had been hired as the parent mobilization specialist by

NU. Kelly was hired because Margaret had recognized that her other duties at NU prevented her from being fully engaged in the work of the PLC; additionally, Kelly was fully bilingual and had worked as a teacher in a nearby school. The November planning meeting focused on volunteering. Some of the PLC members who had previously agreed to volunteer did not show up, which frustrated school staff members. The group discussed the need for a better system to remind parents when they had signed up to volunteer for an event. It was noted that one of the PLC members had recruited several other parents to serve as volunteers in early childhood classrooms. Additionally, the difficulties surrounding the junior high transition was revisited, and Selena was asked to reach out to parents to remind them about the need to monitor their emails for updates on enrollment.

In December, the whole group convened in the school, but instead of having a meeting in the parent engagement room, the group divided up to decorate the three main school hallways for Christmas. This was Kelly's first time to meet the members of the PLC, and she split her time between the three groups and engaged them in small talk. She seemed to quickly develop a rapport with all the parent leaders. When I arrived at the school that morning, I had expected for the group to meet in order to discuss the ideas initially presented by parent leaders. It was a bit surprising to me that three months had passed and there had been no group discussion or plans for how to create an action agenda to address the needs and desires identified by parent leaders. I wondered at the time how PLC members were processing this.

January, 2019. There was another shift in focus when the PLC reconvened in January. Kelly led the group in discussion of leadership. Each member reflected and did a brief writing activity, defining leadership and noting someone who stands out as a leader. Leaders discussed included Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Additionally, some members named family members or even themselves. The group's discussion focused on how authentic leadership benefits others, and the idea that anyone can become a leader. The CES parent facilitator noted that PLC members were establishing themselves as leaders in the school because she had begun to hear parents talk about the group and because members had recruited others to volunteer in the school for several events. Again, the group discussion focused on volunteering as members discussed their experiences and their wish that more parents would join them.

Something rather significant happened at this meeting. A new mother attended, and she talked about how she had developed a friendship with one of the PLC members since their children were in the same kindergarten class. She explained that she was excited to be a part of the group because she wanted to be more involved in her children's school. However, she said that in the past she did not feel comfortable attending parent meetings when the invitation was issued from the school. She felt that because she did not complete her high school education, she felt intimidated to voice her opinions around "experts." Conversely, when the invitation came from a fellow parent, it made her feel that her participation was important and would be valued. Several other PLC members shared similar sentiments about how parents can make one another feel more comfortable in the school, particularly in cases where a parent does not speak English or have a higher education. This discussion highlighted the potential impact of a well-developed parent network.

February-March, 2019. The February PLC meeting was cancelled. Selena had begun working with some community-focused leadership initiatives, and this created a schedule conflict. Kelly, Bethany, and I met briefly to discuss how there was still a need to create a better system to organize parent volunteers. Kelly also brought up the idea of having parent leaders share personal narratives through some type of presentation, which could be used to

help staff members and parents better understand exactly what the PLC was and who were its members.

In March, the PLC did have a meeting. First, the group did an icebreaker game in which a member would share basic information about themselves and their reason for being a part of the PLC. Then, when another member shared similar characteristics or reasons, they would join arms with the previous speaker. This continued until everyone present had linked arms and formed a circle. Though how each member articulated their purpose was different, the overarching theme was a desire to become more well connected to the school and to help the community. Next, the group engaged in a brainstorming activity in which members described what improvements they wanted to see in themselves, the school, and the community. The listed ideas were essentially the same as those generated previously in September. There was discussion about how everyone had shared great ideas, but that the group would need to be in better communication in order to implement them. Previously, there had been no defined method for the entire group to communicate. Instead, Selena served as a conduit between parent leaders and school staff. Typically, she would call and/or text all PLC members individually to inform them of upcoming meetings or volunteer opportunities. Therefore, at this meeting the decision was made for the PLC to begin using the Group Me app to stay in contact. However, no one ever created the group within the app, so whole group communication continued to be confined to meetings. I did follow up two weeks later by asking Selena about Group Me, and she explained that some of the PLC members did not feel comfortable using a group chat forum in which school leadership was included. This was a bit surprising to me because I perceived that PLC members seemed to feel comfortable in their interactions with educators who attended PLC meetings.

April, 2019. When the PLC met in April, the group did an icebreaker activity in which

everyone shared something positive about the school year. Several members discussed how their children or grandchildren had experienced successful school years and were happy at CES. Some members discussed how they had enjoyed volunteering in the school, some of them daily, because it had allowed them to build relationships with children and teachers. This segued into what was the PLC's first critical conversation about the school. Some members stated that they or their friends had been frustrated because they had wanted to volunteer in their child's classroom, but an invitation had never been extended, or in some cases, they had been told that they could not volunteer in or visit their child's classroom. Then, one parent leader explained how some of the rules and protocols used in the school make parents feel that they are not wanted in the school. Essentially, these parent leaders, speaking in some cases for themselves and in other cases on behalf of friends, felt they were shut out from certain opportunities to be involved in their child's schooling. This was the first time the group had taken an openly critical stance about CES practices at a PLC meeting; they were voicing their opinions to everyone in the group, even Bethany, the assistant principal. (As mentioned previously, open communication with school leaders was something they were wary about.) Bethany listened to each parent leader speak without interrupting. Then, she explained that sometimes when parents spend time in their own child's classroom, it can be very distracting for that child as well as their peers. Bethany also took ownership of the fact that the school had not developed an effective, efficient way to continually match prospective volunteers to opportunities. Instead, CES was in a reactionary mode, in which volunteers were typically contacted when a pressing need arose. In other words, volunteerism was leveraged to the benefit of the school rather than to the benefit of parents.

The April meeting was the final one of the 2018-2019 school year. Bethany, Selena, and Kelly thanked all the parent leaders for taking their time throughout the year to attend

meetings, share their ideas, and volunteer in multiple capacities within the school. It is noteworthy to mention that after the critical conversation, there were warm exchanges between PLC members and Bethany. This suggests that an affective safe space for parents to question school practices had been created within the confines of the PLC.

May-November, 2019. At the end of the 2018-19 school year, both Selena and Kelly resigned their posts. Both felt a duty to devote more time to their own families, and Selena had begun working on several community leadership initiatives with other local nonprofits. Additionally, Bethany left CES to become the principal of another school. Hence, the entire core planning team of the PLC had left.

During the summer before the 2019-2020 school year, Rebecca, the CES principal wanted to resume planning how the PLC would be resumed in the upcoming school year, but had difficulty connecting to NU staff (possibly due to Kelly leaving and the resulting staff shortage). Therefore, Rebecca decided to proceed with forming the group without the direct support of NU. Gabrielle, another administrator, was tasked with leading the group. A new parent captain was not selected.

The first PLC meeting for the 2019-2020 school year was planned for September. I was invited by school leaders to share my notes and experiences from the previous year. These notes, along with school leaders' vision for the group, were used to establish the PLC's goals for the year: (a) increase parent involvement, particularly volunteerism and decision making; (b) increase diversity in parent involvement activities; and (c) create structures and systems for parent groups. There was not a concerted effort to contact the previous year's group members directly; instead, any parent could attend. Paper invitations to attend the meeting were distributed to parents in the office and at dismissal. The meeting was held twice, once in the morning and once in the evening, in hopes that a more diverse parent group

would be able to attend if an evening meeting was offered. Only one parent came to each session, which was disheartening to school leaders.

There was no attempt to reconvene the PLC in October, 2019 due to a week-long fall break. In November, Gabrielle worked with the parent facilitator to plan an evening meeting. They planned to discuss enrollment for prekindergarten and talk with parents about which methods of communication would be most effective. In hopes of generating better attendance, the meeting was advertised on the school's Facebook page and through the automated phone call/text messaging system. This meeting had much better turn out, with 23 parents in attendance. I was not able to attend this meeting, however, Gabrielle told me that parents seemed to be pleased to have an opportunity to discuss upcoming events and provide their input about the school's communication methods.

As I write up my findings in early December, 2019, the future of the PLC at CES seems uncertain. A desire remains among school leaders to include parent voices in decisions and to leverage parent leadership to increase schoolwide parent engagement. However, considering the year-long history of the PLC, forming authentic relationships and building the group's momentum does not happen quickly.

The next section provides results from an informal parent survey on family engagement, which helps to better illuminate the parent perspective on school-wide family engagement at CES.

Findings from Parent Survey

During my time spent in the field, I was asked by school leaders to survey parents about their perceptions of the school's family engagement practices. I created a short, informal survey and I recruited parents to complete the survey during parent teacher conferences during the fall of 2019. CES' parent facilitator also recruited parents to complete

the survey while they waited for their children's afterschool activities to end. Though a

survey was not a pre-planned part of this study's design, I have included survey results in my

report because they provide additional, relevant data. Seventy-four parents (of a parent

population that includes several hundred people) completed the survey, and results are

presented in the table below.

Table 4.5

Parent Survey Results

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am well informed about school events.	63.5%	25.7%	7.3%	5.4%	5.4%
I am informed about what is happening in my child's classroom.	50%	29.7%	13.5%	6.8%	0%
It is easy for me to contact my child's teacher if I have a concern.	56.2%	32.9%	8.2%	2.7%	0%
I feel welcome in the school.	68.5%	30.1%	1.4%	0%	0%
I know what to do if my child is having a problem at school.	58.1%	31.1%	9.5%	1.4%	0%
I feel that I have a voice in the school's decisions.	41.9%	28.4%	24.3%	5.4%	0%
The school makes it easy for me to be involved in my child's education.	56.8%	35.1%	6.8%	0%	1.4%

It is important to point out that though results from this survey do provide additional

data for this study, the purpose of the survey was to help CES school leaders have a basic understanding of parent perceptions. As an informal survey, included items were not validated, nor were rigorous quantitative research methods used to ensure statistically significant results. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret survey results in context and with an understanding of their limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small considering the school's large parent population (a specific number is unknown, but the school has approximately 800 students). Second, respondents were recruited at school events (57 respondents were recruited at parent-teacher conferences), which means parents who did not attend these events were not included. Third, 66.2% of responses were in English and 33.8% were in Spanish, which is not necessarily representative of the school's parent population in terms of language. (Fifty-five percent of students are classified as English Learners, but that does not necessarily mean their parents do not speak English. There was no available data identifying what percentage of the school's parents are literate in English.) Finally, some parents may have felt pressure to respond favorably since surveys were distributed and returned in person. Despite these limitations, it would seem that parents who completed surveys overwhelmingly felt the school was doing well in terms of communicating with parents and creating a welcoming environment. However, it is important to note that survey results do not include responses from parents who did not attend these school events. If all parents were included, it is possible that responses would be less favorable overall.

The survey also included questions about how parents receive information as well as an optional short response question in which parents could suggest potential ways to improve parent-school engagement; in all cases respondents wrote positively about the school. Therefore, though this survey has major limitations, it is safe to postulate that many parents in the school view CES' family engagement practices favorably. The survey results also

reinforce findings from other data sources—generally speaking, CES staff put forth a great deal of effort to engage all parents and overcome barriers to equitable engagement. The survey also points out that, even among parents who attended conferences (which necessitates time and a certain comfort-level speaking with educators), having a voice in school decisions had the lowest level of favorable responses. This speaks to the potential to have a structure in place that allows parents to become active leaders in the school, which was the purpose of the PLC.

<div align="center">

Research Questions Answered

</div>

This section presents an overview of findings related to each research question.

Research Question One

This section includes findings related to sub-question of research question one, which asked:

1. How do faculty and families describe their perspectives on family engagement?

   a. What perspectives on family engagement exist within the school?

   b. What family engagement practices are used within the school?

   c. How do power relations and cultural factors explain these perspectives and practices?

Question 1a: perspectives. There was a great deal of similarity in perspectives on family engagement among participants. All participants emphasized the importance of families and schools working collaboratively to support students. However, some differences in perspectives did exist. Educators placed emphasis on family support of academics, while parents emphasized factors such as behavior and citizenship. Educators included in the interview sample did not express deficit perspectives toward families, and they seemed to

value the contributions of students' families. There was also a common acknowledgement

that many families had faced adversity, particularly related to immigration, and therefore

families were perceived as resilient sources of strength for their children. Notably, there was a

common notion among all participants that parents must be advocates for their children's

education, which necessitates a sense of agency. Educator participants stated that parents

sometimes did not feel empowered to act as advocates. Therefore, these educators viewed it

as their duty to help parents develop this capacity. Parent participants acknowledged that

school staff were, overall, putting forth admirable effort to be inclusive of parents.

Considering data from all sources, families generally felt comfortable engaging with school

personnel, though a certain degree of mistrust was present for some. All parent participants

had developed trusting relationships with at least a few school staff members, but a

ubiquitous sense of comfort and togetherness among families and staff had not been achieved

at CES.

    Question 1b: practices. Family engagement practices at CES included a mix of

traditional and more innovative activities. Traditional practices included school newsletters,

parent-teacher conferences, and typical communication such as notes and phone calls to

parents as needed. Additionally, CES educators modified some approaches in order to be

more responsive to its families. For example, the school's annual preview night was both an

opportunity for parents and teachers to meet for the first time and a community resource fair.

In this way, families facing poverty-related constraints could have access to necessary

supports. CES was also the site for many fun, informal events that brought diverse families

and educators together. There was a common appreciation among participants for the sense of

community such events created. Additionally, school leaders leveraged partnerships with

several nonprofit organizations to develop a stronger neighborhood presence, address

poverty-related constraints, and increase family engagement. School leaders also strategically

hired bilingual and culturally-competent staff members.

Question 1c: power relations and cultural factors. Power relations and cultural

factors help to explain family engagement at CES. Cultural factors contributed to both

barriers and bridges to equitable family engagement. For example, differences in both verbal

and nonverbal communication patterns were a marked challenge at CES. Conversely, the

intentional hiring of bilingual staff and the school's sustained effort to communicate in two

languages helped to create a culturally-inclusive school environment. Because school leaders

began to recognize that a traditional PTA was not culturally-responsive to CES families, they

worked alongside NU and parent leaders to develop and implement the PLC. The PLC was a

culturally and linguistically diverse group that brought parents, school leaders, and

community organizers together. Overall, school staff made considerable effort to overcome

barriers created by cultural differences.

Power differentials between educators and parents presented challenges to family

engagement at CES. As mentioned previously, all participants valued parental advocacy, but

family-educator interactions were guided by school-created protocols that parents sometimes

viewed as problematic. For example, parent participants remarked that school policies about

making appointments and/or visiting classrooms sometimes made them feel shut out. Such

policies were driven, at least in part, by safety concerns, but parent participants did not seem

to understand this rationale. In other words, educators had authority to create such policies at

CES, but data suggested some school policies resulted in a sense of disempowerment among

parents. However, school leaders expressed a desire to include parents in more collective

decision making. The formation of the PLC was an intentional effort on the part of CES and

partnering nonprofit organizations to create a space for sharing power and leadership with

families.

Research Question Two

This section includes findings related to research question two, which asked:

2. From the perspectives of educators, families, and community members, how does this grassroots family leadership initiative influence family engagement practices and perspectives within the school?

    a. What power relations exist within the school and how do they impact the family leadership initiative?

    b. How has this leadership structure facilitated engagement and overcome barriers?

The PLC represented a first attempt for CES to change their model of parent engagement. The PLC was formed with the idea that if a core group of parent leaders could become highly engaged within the school, engagement would spread throughout the parent population, resulting in more authentic partnerships between educators and parents.

Question 2a: impact of power relations on the PLC. Sharing power and decision-making between educators and parents proved to be challenging at CES. As mentioned previously, parent leaders who took part in the PLC were trepidatious about expressing criticism of the school or its practices. Some participants discussed how Hispanic cultural values typically revere educators as authority figures, which makes having truly open, honest conversations challenging. Additionally, in the current political climate, immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, have been vilified; there has also been an increase in deportation of undocumented individuals. Undoubtedly, factors such as this, which are outside the control of school leaders, impact how trusting relationships are formed.

Another aspect that proved to be challenging was the pressure put on educators from

118

school improvement mandates issued from the local, state, and federal level. Rebecca spoke about how challenging it can be for both teachers and school leaders to find time in their workdays to form relationships with parents. For example, teachers at CES were required to keep ongoing reports of student achievement data, document many aspects of student behavior, align lesson plans to district learning expectations as well as the needs of small groups and individual students, and much more. Administrators were required to keep similar documentation, deal with discipline issues, maintain up-to-date teacher evaluations, ensure teaching teams were reflecting on student data, and coach teachers in improving instructional strategies. Rebecca explained that the many requirements placed on educators' time definitely impacts parent engagement. She said, "it puts us in a reaction mode, so the planning comes in the evenings." In other words, parent engagement can get pushed to the end of an ever-lengthening to-do list.

Parent leaders Selena and Estefany both noted that school leaders seemed to be isolated from the parent community, even parent leaders who were regularly in the school. Selena explained,

> Last year I found out that [PLC members] thought Bethany was the principal, and some thought [the parent facilitator] was the principal, and I go, 'no, she's not either.' Then they say, 'well who is the principal?' So if people don't know the principal then they're not going to come back.

This quote illuminates that interactions between CES administrators and parents were limited, though both school leaders I interviewed discussed their views that parents were a crucial component in school success. Considering this alongside Rebecca's assertion that parent engagement was often secondary to other required tasks, suggests that if parent engagement is not elevated in importance at higher levels of school leadership (e.g. district, state, and

federal), it could be difficult to make it a top-tier priority at CES.

Another challenge faced by the PLC was the challenge of working across multiple organizations and stakeholder groups. Both CES and NU were positioned to share the responsibilities of shaping the PLC. Communication between the two organizations was sometimes limited. For example, Selena met weekly with Kelly, the parent mobilization specialist, to discuss the work of the PLC, but these meetings were held at NU's office space, and not until April of the 2018-2019 school year were these meetings moved to CES and inclusive of educators. Therefore, the division between the two organizations may have impacted how effectively the PLC could become an integral part of the school's planning and decision-making processes. In addition, it was challenging for Kelly to truly understand her own role in the PLC. She explained,

> I feel like I didn't have a good understanding of what they wanted from the PLC, and even to be able to understand how do I do this in between administrators and parents? What's the role that I need to be playing here?

She also spoke about how when some of the PLC members' children had challenges at school, she found herself grappling with how to remain helpful to both sides without compromising relationships and trust. Thus, the ability to span the boundaries between parents, community organizers, and educators presented unanticipated difficulties.

An additional barrier to the PLC's influence was that it was largely siloed. In both interviews and conversations that took place during my time in the field, parents and teachers commonly responded that they had never heard of the PLC or knew little about it. Bea, a parent who was regularly present at the school, said, "I don't know anything about the parent leadership council here. I've never even heard of it. It sounds like something I would like to be involved in, though."

CES teachers' awareness of the PLC was also limited. Selena was introduced as the parent captain to teachers during a staff meeting in the fall of 2018, but that was the only planned interaction between PLC members and staff. When I asked Charlotte, a second-grade teacher about the PLC, she said, "If I'm being completely honest, I haven't heard of it." Jeff, a teacher who had been teaching at the school for many years and knew Selena because he had been her children's teacher, said,

> [Selena] was the parent captain so she had a network of parents that she could
>
> contact and get the word out in the community for different things and I thought it
>
> was a fantastic idea, but I don't know how effectively it worked. (Jeff)

This, however, was the extent of his awareness of how the group functioned or what its goals were. Since many parents and teachers were unaware of the group's existence, this may have limited the group's ability to influence family engagement within the school.

Question 2b: PLC's impact on family engagement. Though the PLC's impact on school-wide parent engagement may have faced barriers, some changes were realized. For example, parent leaders themselves experienced increased confidence to act as advocates. Selena said,

> I was always quiet and shy at first, but now I have learned to advocate for myself. I
>
> used to see something I didn't like and I used to be quiet and be too shy to say it,
>
> but now if I see something I don't like, I say something.

Additionally, some school-wide family engagement practices did change as a result of the PLC. For example, in the fall of 2019, school leaders made intentional efforts to include Hispanic food and music at the school's dance and carnival, which was something PLC members had expressed was important to them. Additionally, the school resumed on-site ESL classes for parents after they had been on hiatus for several years. A couple of the

PLC members participated in these classes, which served as a catalyst to bring new attendees to PLC meetings and form new connections among CES parents and families. Therefore, not only were ESL classes meeting a need identified by parent leaders, but they provided an additional context for the school to be recognized as a safe place for non-English speaking parents, some of whom may have fears related to their documentation status. The principal explained,

> Some of the people have been fearful, for their livelihood basically, and so we had to have longevity and consistency in our messaging that we love you guys and your kids. And so part of that is that [we] got the ESL teacher back here, which was a real messaging thing that was important, and so it got people here in our parent room once a week. (Rebecca)

Therefore, despite the barriers presented in implementing the PLC, it did have some identifiable impact on parent engagement practices at CES.

It is uncertain what the future holds for parent leadership or engagement at CES. Selena summed up her thoughts on the PLC:

> Everybody had great ideas and we were getting there and getting the people and then…nothing. I feel like we can't depend on NU only or only the school. If they want parents, we need to do something different, because if someone else leaves and it's going to keep happening. I think the right people, the principal and the whole NU staff need to be involved, so when someone leaves everyone knows what's happening and we can keep going and not stop and start all over again. Because like I said, we have come out as parents, and you know, we came with great ideas, we did, and it was great, and now where are they?

Selena recognized that the PLC's impact was limited by staff turnover and the group's

separation from key CES stakeholders. Throughout my time in the field, I had many discussions with educators, nonprofit employees, and PLC members about how the group had many great ideas for improving the school and increasing parent engagement, but for the most part, these ideas were not followed up with actions. In examining all the data, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how or why the PLC did not have a more sweeping influence on parent engagement. For example, if key group members had stayed past the end of the 2018-2019 school year, would more substantive change have occurred within CES? Or, would the pressure for educators to focus on mandates issued by higher governing bodies have continued to impede the ability of school leaders to devote time to building up the PLC's influence within the school? Would the group's influence on parent engagement have been more impactful if their work was well known throughout the school community? These are remaining questions that cannot be definitively answered, but will be considered in more depth in chapter five. However, what *is* shown in these findings is that everyone involved in this grassroots family leadership initiative had positive intentions and a belief that leveraging the leadership of parents would lead to broader parent engagement in the school. Additionally, participants recognized that there were many unanticipated challenges and barriers to turning these hopes into realities.

Research Question Three

This section presents findings related to research question three, which asked:

3. How does the theory of community cultural wealth explain the data?

Community cultural wealth is a theory advanced by Dr. Tara Yosso in 2005. This theory drew from traditional theories of cultural capital as well as critical race theory. This theory postulates that the cultural capital of people of color is often deemed less valuable than that of whites using traditional lenses. Therefore, the theory was created with the idea that people of

capital have a great deal of unrecognized cultural capital, and this theory offers a framework to illuminate the cultural wealth of communities of color. There are six forms of cultural wealth, which include aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. (A detailed explanation of each component is included in chapter two.) In presenting findings related to research question three, I applied this theory's critical orientation, meaning I focused on what types of cultural wealth CES families and parent leaders demonstrated as well as how families' cultural wealth was received by those in recognized positions of power within the school.

Families activated their cultural wealth to navigate the systems and organizations in which CES is nested. PLC members recognized that they were assets to their children, noting their abilities to "teach values and other skills teachers cannot teach, be role models, and connect resources to the school through partnerships" (photo, PLC brainstorming session, 2018). The following table outlines evidence of cultural wealth present within the PLC as well as families in the broader school community. It is important to note that this table does not provide an exhaustive list of families' cultural wealth, rather this list focuses on cultural wealth that was related to families' engagement at CES.

Table 4.6

Examples of Community Cultural Wealth at CES

	PLC Members	CES Families
Aspirational capital	• Members desired the opportunity to develop as leaders in the community • Recognition that the school curriculum left out many important forms of knowledge	• Families expressed hope that their children would have an easier life and a strong educational foundation*

Familial capital	• Grandmothers serving as members • Push for more culturally-affirming/culturally-relevant school activities	• Grandparents attending alongside parents at parent-teacher conferences • Grandparents serving as volunteers
Social capital	• Parent-parent social networks quickly and effectively shared school news and recruited parents when needed*	• Social media closed groups used to share school-related news • Informal, unplanned parent meet-ups happened daily during and after school*
Linguistic capital	• Desire to increase opportunities for families to engage in bilingual language and literacy • Ability to assist others who only speak one language*	• Familial preservation of native language* • Ability to assist others who only speak one language*
Navigational capital	• Developing understanding of school organizational hierarchy • Developing awareness of how to advocate for children—knowing *who* to talk with and *how* to talk to them*	• Some families did not know how to navigate the organizational hierarchy at CES or in the school district***
Resistant capital	• Working outside of school procedures when advocating for children, particularly when the school was perceived to be handling an issue unfairly** • Moving children to a new program or school when unsatisfied with how a school handles an issue	

* Examples of cultural wealth valued by CES educators
** Examples of cultural wealth deemed problematic by CES educators
***Much data suggested that school-focused navigational capital among families was limited.

Some forms of cultural wealth were prized by school leaders and staff members,

particularly bilingualism, the parent social network, aspiration for children's educational growth, and certain forms of parental advocacy. Though this study did not include a social network analysis, some data indicated that bilingual parents were often hubs in the school's parent social network. For example, Selena was selected as the parent captain partially because she was bilingual. Additionally, bilingual parents often helped out with informal, day-to-day interpreting between teachers and Spanish-speaking parents. By virtue of serving as an intermediary between families and educators, bilingual parents sometimes made new connections to other families. A parent participant explained,

> Because I speak English, I can help my [Spanish-speaking] friends know what is happening in the school. Some of the moms who have been at the school for many years, we have a Facebook group together so we can make sure everyone knows what is happening. (Marisol)

In addition to social media-based groups, it was very common for mothers and grandmothers to congregate in the school's lobby area or right outside the main office, discussing events happening in their children's classrooms and in the school. Rebecca noted in her interview that she valued these parent interactions taking place on the school campus.

In addition to bilingualism and parent social networks, parental aspiration for student achievement and certain forms of advocacy were valued by educators. Educator participants placed importance on families talking regularly with their children about school and helping their children to understand the value and importance of an education. Parent participants also noted that this was important for them, but, as mentioned previously, they tended to focus on the citizenship aspects of schooling rather than academics. Additionally, both educator and parent participants valued parental ability to advocate for children. However, when parents did not follow organizational protocols when advocating on behalf of their children, educators

126

seemed to treat these situations as problematic. For example, I observed a father who was upset about how his children were disciplined attempt to address his concerns with a school leader. He approached her in the main office and explained his concerns. She listened to him speak for a few moments, explained to him that he would need to make an appointment to speak with her further so that the issue could be addressed, and then walked away. He then appeared to be frustrated and walked out of the office. This parent was later referred to as someone who was difficult to deal with; this was one of several unpleasant exchanges he had with school staff members. In considering this interaction through the lens of community cultural wealth, it begs the question of whether this father was activating resistant capital, attempting to resist institutional norms and procedures—which he may possibly have had no knowledge of or power in creating—he deemed as obstacles to his ability to advocate for his children.

Much data suggested that school-focused navigational capital was not broadly present among CES parents. It is important to note that I am not suggesting CES families lack navigational capital in general, but that their understanding of the school system, organizational policies, and procedures, was a recognized barrier. For example, PLC members shared the aspiration that students could have more opportunities to engage in non-academic learning or culturally-affirming activities at school. This was a frequent topic of discussion at PLC meetings, but it never resulted in action steps or change. This points to the possibility that it was difficult for the PLC, despite its members having the opportunity to regularly connect with leaders of CES and NU, to navigate the organizational hierarchy to enact change.

Perhaps the primary form of cultural wealth valued at CES was the ability of families to support students academically. Student academic achievement was certainly not

unimportant to parent participants, but data suggests they placed greater emphasis on nurturing other forms of cultural wealth, such as a connection to family, values, and culture. Thus, there was a mismatch between the cultural wealth esteemed by CES educators and the cultural wealth esteemed by CES parents.

Chapter Four Summary

Chapter four presented findings surrounding family engagement perspectives and practices at CES were discussed. There were significant barriers to equitable family engagement at CES, but there was also a great deal of evidence of perspectives and practices that created bridges for all families, regardless of culture, income, or language, to become engaged in the school. The PLC was created through a joint effort between CES and NU, a partnering nonprofit, in order to increase parent engagement and input in school decisions. The PLC did result in some changes to school practices, but some members did not feel their ideas were valued by school leadership. The theory of community cultural wealth pointed out several ways in which families, particularly PLC members, activated their cultural wealth in order support their children within the school. Some forms of families' cultural wealth were more aligned to supporting school goals than others. In the following chapter, these findings are discussed with further consideration of the theoretical framework and relative literature. Additionally, conclusions, limitations, implications, and recommendations for further research are included.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with a summary of findings. Next, in the discussion section, I consider potential explanations and interpretations of findings. Then, in the conclusion section, using the theoretical framework and relevant scholarly literature, I consider the broader meaning of findings. Finally, implications of this study are included, along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative case study aimed to explore how a grassroots parent leadership initiative influenced family engagement perspectives and practices within a school. Since research has demonstrated family engagement efforts are often less effective in schools serving populations of low-income and/or families of color (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yull et al., 2014), studying innovative family engagement structures and practices is an important academic and practical endeavor. This case study focused on schoolwide family engagement as well as the development of a parent leadership council (PLC) housed within Central Elementary School (CES), an elementary serving a predominately low-income, Hispanic population. This initiative was facilitated via a partnership between CES and a local nonprofit, Neighbors United (NU). Findings demonstrated that barriers to equitable family engagement existed, which included deficit paradigms about families, mistrust, contrasting conceptions of the parental role, cultural issues,

communication challenges, systemic constraints related to poverty, and parental difficulty navigating the school system. However, these barriers were most often recognized and strategically addressed by school leadership, staff, and community partners. Barriers to family engagement were minimized through the use of what I have called "bridges," which are intentional practices that make it possible for all families to be engaged in their children's schooling.

Overall, data from multiple sources suggested CES was an environment in which family engagement was culturally-sensitive and inclusive. Further, when school leaders recognized that parents did not have an effective means for sharing in schoolwide decisions, they implemented the PLC in hopes that it could provide parents with a stronger voice in the school as well as promote broader parent engagement. The purpose of the PLC was to develop parents' leadership capacity and create more authentic family-school partnerships. The PLC included a small group of parents who met several times throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Their work did lead to a few noteworthy changes, which included more inclusion of Hispanic culture at school events, the resurrection of on-site adult ESL classes, and an increased awareness among PLC members of how to advocate for students. However, the group's work was largely siloed and was not shared with the broader school community, which left some parent leaders feeling as though their efforts and ideas had not made a significant impact. An additional challenge encountered by the PLC was staff turnover both within CES and NU. As of the writing of this narrative, it remains uncertain whether the PLC will be continued and if obstacles the group encountered will be addressed. In the following section, I discuss findings related to each research question, and I explore possible explanations for findings.

Discussion of Findings

At CES, barriers that prevented equitable family engagement, such as a lack of

navigational capital among families and mistrust between families and educators, likely had to do with the population served by the school. A large majority of families are Hispanic, and many of them emigrated from Latin American countries. In some cases, they are undocumented. The topic of documentation status came up often in the data. Some participants shared their immigration stories with me, and their stories of the ordeals they experienced in their journey to the USA were, at times, shocking. Further, living in the U.S. without documented status limited their ability to live a normal life. One participant said, "it's like being a ghost." For undocumented immigrants, it is nearly impossible to get a job that pays fair wages and protects employees from workplace hazards and/or harassment. An undocumented immigrant risks deportation when they apply for a credit card, fill out a rental application, or attempts to get a driver's license. In fact, it is difficult to handle many essential tasks without proof of legal status. When undocumented individuals enroll their children in school, not only must they navigate an education system that is different from the one in their home country, they must also place their trust in school personnel and hope that these individuals will not report them to immigration officials. Considering how vulnerable undocumented immigrants are, it helps to understand why some parents might be trepidatious about attending school events or engaging in any activity that requires them to divulge identifying information. The current political climate, in which the President has been openly critical of undocumented Mexican immigrants, may exacerbate this fear. In a 2015 speech, President Trump stated,

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best…they're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

Many CES parents are undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Jeff, a CES teacher made a connection between family engagement and the political environment:

Because of immigration, and that's always been there, but it seems because…well, it's a

delicate issue, no matter what you believe on it, it should be treated delicately, and right

now in our political discourse it's not being treated delicately. It's as if these aren't people

and lives that we're talking about, it's something like wiping up a mess or something

[gestures as if wiping a spill off a table top], and I don't know if that's created any mistrust

within the Hispanic community, but being a rational human being, you would have to

believe that it probably is creeping in there.

Therefore, schools, as government institutions, may be perceived as unsafe, making family

engagement in schools like CES even more challenging.

Another barrier at CES were deficit mindsets among teaching staff. Though educators

included in the interview sample did not express such mindsets themselves, they were cognizant

of deficit mindsets among other staff members. The idea that parents are detrimental to students'

learning or are not capable of partnering in their child's education process may be rooted in CES'

history. As mentioned in chapter four, in the early years of the school, much professional

development focused on the work of Ruby Payne, who has been criticized for stereotyping people

living in poverty. Though Dr. Payne's work was intended to help educators understand how to

work with impoverished children and families, it is possible that some of the generalizations she

espoused contributed to the formation of deficit mindsets. Such stereotypes could contribute to

the development of educator mindsets in which low income parents are stripped down to

caricatures of poor people rather than individuals with unique personalities, strengths, and

histories.

Another potential reason for deficit mindsets among CES educators could be the

emotional toll of working with families experiencing drug use, abuse, and neglect. During

observations at CES, it was common for me to hear about families living on the brink of crisis or

families in which children were mistreated. Though such families likely compose only a small percentage of the school's population, when educators encounter them, it can be incredibly stressful. For example, two CES students and their families were frequently discussed among educators because the children reported not having food in the home, had chronic head lice, and had witnessed multiple instances of domestic violence. Educators who were attempting to help these students, understandably, had emotional responses. Such experiences may be particularly memorable, making them seem more commonplace than they actually are, resulting in further overgeneralization about the school's parent population. In other words, to be an educator at CES who develops partnerships with families, one has to continually remind oneself that traumatic family situations are not the norm.

Some of the observed barriers to family engagement, such as systemic constraints and cultural differences have rather obvious explanations. Serving a large number of families living in poverty means that CES educators are likely to encounter parents who struggle to make ends meet and have lower levels of education. For parents who must focus all or most of their labor on providing basic necessities for their children, it may be quite challenging to find the time or energy to be fully engaged in children's education.

Cultural differences, which often intersect with language barriers, also created challenges in family engagement at CES. Most CES educators are White and most families are Hispanic. Further, some families are new to the United States and are, therefore, still developing an understanding of differences in cultural mores and customs. To form meaningful relationships across cultural differences may require more effort because both parties have to learn the nuances of each other's cultures. Finding time for this to happen can be a major hurdle.

Perhaps the most significant barrier to family engagement was the fact that many families

lacked knowledge of how the school system operates or lacked the required skills and resources to effectively navigate the school system. As discussed earlier, the fact that the school serves a large number of immigrants is part of this challenge, but an additional component is the increased use of technology. At CES and other schools in the district, many operations were handled using computer software and automated systems. Teachers entered grades and student information into electronic databases. Parents could, theoretically, log into the system any time and see how their child was performing. However, few parents actually did this, likely due to the fact that they were not highly computer-literate; aside from using mobile devices, many parents simply did not engage in the digital world. In addition to online gradebooks, families also had to use technology in order to enroll their child in school. During my time at CES, I helped assist parents in the enrollment process, and it was quite common for parents not to have an email account. This was particularly significant because the district required parents to access email in order to complete a child's transfer or enrollment. Thus, even when parents had assistance from school personnel in completing online enrollment forms, they would still be required to check an email account regularly for communication from the district, a process many parents had never undertaken before. Many teachers also used online classroom management software, which has the potential for parents to view a daily report of their child's behavior at school, but again, without requisite skills to access this information, it meant that many parents did not have access to important information about their children's education.

Though barriers existed to equitable family engagement at CES, school staff had devoted considerable efforts to minimizing them. In considering how and why CES operated with a focus on addressing these barriers, several possible explanations arise: its history as a community school, the input and shared labor of community partner organizations, and the vision and strategic hiring practices of both the current and former principals.

As mentioned in chapter four, CES was originally opened as a community school and had operated for years as such, meaning that strategic efforts were made to embed community resources and make the school feel like the hub of the community. Though the district's push for community schools had subsided several years prior to this study, CES continued to work strategically with community partners, thus facilitating many family and community-oriented services and initiatives. The idea that the school was an important actor for the welfare of the community rather than just a place where students go to learn each day continued to drive many aspects of the school's vision and operations. The school's outward, community-focused orientation resulted in ongoing conversations with nonprofit organizations about how the school could better meet the needs of its families.

A second potential explanation for the engagement bridges created at CES is the influence of school leadership. The school's former principal, who hired all original staff members, espoused the idea that a school must serve the range of a community's needs and interests. Teachers who interviewed to work at the school were told that they would be expected to go beyond their contractual requirements by engaging in activities such as visits to students' homes. Though CES' current principal focused more on classroom-based practices and outcomes than her predecessor, she continued to work alongside nonprofit organizations to offer programs and resources that benefitted students' families. Additionally, she was selective in hiring staff members who were bilingual and/or were sensitive to the challenges of working in a school serving a large population of low-income students and English Learners. Such individuals likely played a key role in helping families, particularly non-English speaking ones, engage with the school.

The formation of the PLC itself also demonstrates that CES' school principal was willing to try new and innovative strategies to promote family engagement. It was intended to

be an opportunity for parents to strategize with school leaders on how to improve student outcomes. Collaboration between families and educators was recognized as beneficial to students, and educators and parent leaders felt the PLC was an important effort. The PLC could have potentially helped address some of the barriers to family engagement by providing parent leaders, particularly those from nondominant cultural backgrounds, with a stronger voice in school decisions. Feedback from parent leaders could improve school operations and communications. Further, parent leaders are much more tied to the school community than most school staff members, who mostly live in other parts of the city and do not typically interact with CES families outside of the school day. Because they share neighborhoods, churches, and other community hubs with other parents, parent leaders may be more effective at soliciting the school-based involvement of parents through activities such as volunteering or attending school functions. In fact, during one PLC meeting, several members agreed that parent-to-parent invitations to attend school events are more well-received than when invitations come directly from the school. Members discussed the fact that they feel more comfortable interacting with other parents due to the fact that they share similar roles and backgrounds. Additionally, a parent-initiated invitation communicates a level of value for an activity because one parent is communicating to another parent that an activity is important and beneficial for children. Therefore, having a core group of parent leaders that can communicate the importance of being an engaged member of the school community, either through volunteering or simply being present at more school activities, is a promising avenue for increasing school-based parent involvement.

Despite educators and parent leaders' acknowledgement that the PLC had great potential, it had limited effect in terms of observable changes to school operations or parent engagement. There were multiple contextual factors that limited the continued development of

the PLC. Certainly staff turnover at CES and NU played a role. As mentioned in chapter four, three key individuals, the parent captain, NU's parent mobilization specialist, and CES' administrative representative to the group, left their roles at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, the group's momentum was thwarted because the key players who recruited other members, facilitated discussions, and drove the group's development all chose not to continue in their roles.

Another potential explanation for the limited impact of the PLC has to do with organizational dynamics. CES is housed within an urban district that has been criticized in local media for being overly top-heavy and highly prescriptive in terms of curriculum and assessment. In my time observing at CES, most meetings and conversations between educators focused on analyzing student achievement data, curriculum units, accommodating special education students and English Learners, and complying with school safety and discipline protocols. (It is also important to note that educators were required to spend much of their time documenting their work related to these topics.) It was much less common for me to witness conversations about how to engage family and community. Based on my observations at CES, it seemed that the district focus for improvement and reform was largely centered around specific, measurable outcomes on standardized achievement tests, discipline statistics, etc. In other words, the theory of change was almost entirely based around improving classroom-based practices by ensuring teachers were using curriculum correctly and were maximizing instructional time. Family and community-focused efforts did not seem to take a top-tier priority. That is not to say school leaders did not value family and community, they were simply kept very busy with other tasks. Consequently, when site-based leaders and teachers must spend much of their labor complying to district mandates, this may limit their ability to support a grassroots, community-based effort such as the PLC.

Another possibility behind the limitations encountered by the PLC has to do with how the group was planned and structured. In the beginning phases of planning with school leaders and NU leaders, there was much discussion about how PLC members would be given full control over the group's space and activities. For example, when getting the parent engagement room ready for the PLC to use for meetings, school leaders explained that they were just going to have the room repainted white and then let PLC members decide how to furnish and decorate the room. This was communicated to the parent captain, but the room was left completely bare until immediately before the first meeting, when an assistant principal scrambled to have tables and chairs brought in. Parent leaders did not know what kind of furniture they could request or who to ask for help moving it. Also, they were not present in the school prior to their first meeting together to plan the space or to even consider all the possibilities around how the space could be utilized. This lack of coordination exemplifies how PLC members did not necessarily feel a sense of ownership or agency in the school. Though they were invited to be in charge of a space and an initiative, there was not a clear understanding of *how* to make change happen at CES.

The PLC offered many ideas about their vision of school improvement, but transforming those ideas into plans and actions simply did not happen. Findings suggest several possibilities for why this occurred: (a) PLC members were operating within an organization they did not understand how to influence or feel comfortable doing so, (b) the group's meetings were not frequent enough, and/or (c) a challenge existed for coordinating across the organizational divide between NU and CES. Aside from Selena and two other members, most PLC members had not served in organizational advisory capacities prior to joining the PLC; therefore, they lacked experience that might have made it possible for them to quickly implement their ideas. Due to some of the cultural factors and immigration-related

issues discussed earlier, some of the members may have felt particularly out of their comfort zones. Additionally, because meetings were separated by time spans of a month or more, some members did not have a great deal of time to form intra-group relationships that may have facilitated working collaboratively. The length of time between meetings also may have also contributed to the lack of continuity between meeting discussions. Additionally, most of the training and support offered to the parent captain was facilitated by NU. There were frequent meetings between the parent captain and NU staff at the NU office space, but other than PLC meetings, there was not a great deal of communication between CES leaders and NU leaders in regard to the PLC. In other words, a potential PLC action agenda was limited by the challenge of working across organizations and by the fact that many members had never operated in a recognized leadership capacity before. Simply put, sharing decision-making authority and implementing change driven by multiple stakeholders came with unanticipated challenges.

It is also possible that because CES did engage in many equitable family engagement practices and many parents were satisfied with these efforts, there was not a sense of urgency to make changes. For example, the school is only required to hold an annual Title I budget parent meeting and biannual parent teacher conferences. Yet, at CES, there were frequent school concerts, carnivals, dances, afterschool enrichment activities, and open library time for families. Each of these provide a space and time for families and educators to interact and for parents to become more enmeshed with the school. Perhaps because these components were in place, parent leaders did not feel a strong sense of urgency to make changes at CES.

Perhaps the most significant limitation to the PLC was how isolated its work was. As mentioned previously, some parents and teachers in the school did not even know of its existence, and those who did only had only a vague understanding of what the group's purpose

139

was. Perhaps if more parents had known about the group and its purpose, it would have generated greater interest among the parent community, thus making it more sustainable when the parent leader chose to relinquish her role. Perhaps if teachers had been more well-informed about the PLC, they could have referred parents who had shown interest in serving as leaders, or perhaps teachers would have been able to garner more support for enacting PLC members' ideas. Additionally, it is possible that if PLC members had received a more notable level of appreciation from the school community, this would have led to a stronger desire to continue the group and/or take action on suggested ideas.

Conclusions based on Findings

In this section, I draw broader conclusions about this study's findings may apply to the field of family-school collaboration. First, I consider findings through the theoretical framework and then through relevant literature.

Discussion Through the Lens of Community Cultural Wealth

The theory of community cultural wealth asserts that there are multiple forms of cultural capital within communities of color that often go unrecognized through traditional lenses (Yosso, 2005). Yosso identified six forms of cultural capital: (a) aspirational capital (hope for a better future), (b) familial capital (extended family and non-kinship ties that yield mutual benefit), (c) linguistic capital (bilingualism and the preservation of linguistic traditions such as storytelling), (d) social capital (social connections), (e) navigational capital (the ability to navigate institutions, particularly those that may have historically mistreated people of color), and (f) resistant capital (resisting oppressive institutional forces).

This study's findings, when framed through the theory of community cultural wealth, yield several important conclusions. First, PLC members activated their aspirational capital by

advocating for a greater emphasis on citizenship and affective student outcomes. They had

aspirations for their children to be respectful, motivated people with strong morals. Further,

parents recognized their important role in their own children's lives, but also their potential to

influence the school environment to be more nurturing of these valued traits. They recognized this

as a meaningful goal in school improvement. This finding is particularly interesting when one

considers that CES' goals and efforts were mostly focused on student academic outcomes, which

was necessitated by the fact that the state's evaluation and accountability measurements were all

based on high-stakes achievement test data (aside from one attendance measure). Yet, considering

the adult world that students are being prepared for, one's ability to read well and solve math

equations are only a fraction of the skills needed to be successful. Thus, PLC members recognized

that CES simply did not offer students enough opportunity to develop some of the most important

skills they will require as adults, such as being able to work collectively in a group or withstand

negative influence from peers. Had the PLC been able to enact some kind of schoolwide

character-building enrichment, it would have been very interesting to see what kind of impact

parents could have had on the student body. Additionally, it begs questions currently being

pondered by other critical scholars (e.g. Duncan-Andrade, 2019), such as how graduates from top-

tier U.S. universities were responsible for the immoral tactics that led to the 2008 Wall Street

bailout and recession, then perhaps this suggests our school system is not doing an adequate job

helping students develop a moral compass. Further, if we are going to invest in a public school

system that removes children from their homes for a substantial portion of their formative years,

then perhaps we should value character and citizenship as equally important to academic

measures of success. In other words, this study demonstrated that parent leaders had recognized

an important gap in children's knowledge that has also been recognized by scholars. This speaks

to the fact that school reform, in general, may suffer from a school-centric mentality. Goals and

objectives are based on school-centered outcomes rather than life outcomes. Perhaps if parents had more opportunities to lead schools, their aspirational capital might lead to school reform agendas that are more considerate of whole-child outcomes rather than the hyper focus on high-stakes testing that we now see in school systems across the United States.

Other forms of cultural wealth were also demonstrated by parent leaders and other CES families. Familial capital, which goes beyond the nuclear family to extended family and even non-kinship ties, was markedly present at CES. It was very typical to see grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors sharing responsibility for children's care and upbringing. For example, one PLC member, Gloria, who had a grandson at CES, learned at a PLC meeting that pre-K students were having difficulty eating their lunch in the allotted 25 minutes. In response, she volunteered in the school's cafeteria each day to help two classes of pre-K children. Not only did she help them learn basic but necessary skills like how to open a milk carton, she also developed relationships with them. Gloria was someone who visited them daily; she would inquire about their families, and she could offer a child a hug if they were having a hard day. For these children, she was an additional champion in their corner, another trusted adult who made school feel more comfortable. After serving in this capacity for several months, Gloria also recruited another friend who had grandchildren at CES to volunteer in the cafeteria. It is also important to note that both women were taking ESL classes, which meant that this volunteer activity also offered them the chance to practice their English-speaking skills. This example demonstrates the powerful effect *familia* can have: not only do family volunteers help students, volunteering can also be beneficial to family members themselves. Therefore, again, one must consider how if the PLC initiative had been more widely known among the school community, more family members may have become involved and familial capital may have enriched the school in other ways as well. Further, this exemplifies what a beneficial resource familial capital is for schools.

The PLC also offered members a context for activating and extending their linguistic capital. Because meeting discussions were always translated back and forth between Spanish and English, they offered a context for members to extend their language skills. For several PLC members, becoming more fluent in English was an important goal; therefore, the meetings themselves were an informal learning opportunity. The PLC also offered an opportunity for individuals of different cultures to learn more about one another's nonverbal communication patterns; English-speaking educators were also learning new communication skills that would help them interact more effectively with culturally-diverse families. These findings lead to an important conclusion: bilingual parent leadership groups offer a context for mutually-beneficial language learning. As educators and families practice novel communication skills together, or simply become exposed to the communication patterns of a new language, they become more equipped to build equitable engagement practices.

In terms of navigational capital, the PLC was an excellent context for building members' abilities to understand and navigate the school system. Members collectively learned about school employees' roles, the CES feeder system, and the school district as a whole. Those members who had more experience dealing with various aspects of the school system, such as special education processes, could share their knowledge with others. Further, as members gained greater navigational capital, they could then pass that capital along to others in the community. This was exemplified when parent leaders volunteered at enrollment open houses to assist other families. It is important to note that navigational capital accessed during PLC meetings included other institutions as well, such as legal and social services. The PLC, therefore, offered members a context for broadening their understanding not only of the school system, but other institutions that are not always friendly to non-English speakers or undocumented individuals. Therefore, family leadership initiatives that include diverse individuals offer the benefit of increasing

navigational capital, which has been shown to be an important component in family engagement.

Resistant capital was also activated within the PLC. Though members were initially hesitant to be critical of school practices, near the end of the school year they began to discuss certain aspects of school operations with which they were displeased. Without such parent feedback, CES leaders might not even have realized a problem existed; therefore, the PLC provided an opportunity for members to resist institutional practices they deemed problematic. Though this feedback may not have resulted in immediate change, it at least provided school leaders with an understanding that parents perceived a problem. If the PLC had continued, perhaps members who had begun to be more vocally critical could have helped school leadership conceive of solutions.

Social capital is woven throughout all other forms of capital within social contexts. For example, navigational capital was a major barrier to family engagement at CES, but PLC members were able to share their knowledge among their social networks, thus facilitating the development of other parents' navigational capital. When members were trained in how to use the district's enrollment system, they could pass that navigational capital along. Additionally, members broadened their social networks by becoming more well acquainted with school personnel who attended PLC meetings. School staff often commented about how quickly parents could pass news through their social networks. Thus, social capital among parents was activated regularly. Parent social networks, then, are important in creating equitable family engagement at schools like CES because they facilitate opportunities that might not be realized otherwise. For example, for parents who are illiterate, they may rely on word-of-mouth to learn important school news items. For parents who frequently change phone numbers and, therefore, do not receive automated phone calls, the parent social network may be their primary means of knowing what is happening at school.

In considering how community cultural wealth was activated by PLC members, it is important to remember "these various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2015, p. 77). It is also important to remember that PLC members' work was not confined to isolated incidents that could be observed, such as their group meetings. Rather, the group was one of many contexts in which members activated multiple aspects of their cultural capital and shared cultural capital with one another. Essentially, cultural capital is not something that is confined to a specific set of tasks or circumstances, rather, it is continuously called upon to traverse multiple contexts and experiences. Therefore, an observable example of cultural wealth likely predicts innumerable other examples. In other words, when an individual says or acts in a way that demonstrates a particular aspect of cultural knowledge, it suggests that individual has operated within their community as someone who has (a) acquired that piece of cultural knowledge, (b) will continue to refine that cultural knowledge, and (c) will pass that cultural knowledge to others in the community. Therefore, it is important for parents to have time and opportunity to form relationships with one another and with educators—they can share, exchange, and build cultural wealth collaboratively. Further, it allows parents have a better understanding of the types of cultural capital required of the school environment, and educators can better understand the types of cultural wealth required of the home and community environments. This helps parents and educators to support the development of students' cultural capital in such a way that allows them to traverse through multiple (and sometimes markedly different) environments.

Comparison of Findings to Literature

As noted in chapter two, there are notable differences between traditional parent involvement models and newer family engagement models. For example, Ishimaru and Bang (2016) asserted that traditional parent involvement models often attempt to train parents

conform to school-created expectations, while newer, more critically-driven models focus on engaging families in collectively addressing community or system-level barriers (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). My findings at CES suggest the school has a mixed model of family engagement, incorporating elements from both traditional models as well as components from community-focused models. For example, several components from Epstein's (2001) model were encouraged among the parent population: volunteerism, home-school communication, parent support of student academics at home, and shared school governance facilitated through parent organizations. However, as school leaders recognized that a traditional PTA did not lend itself to the needs or desires of the community, an alternative structure, the PLC, was envisioned in hopes that it could create more equitable and authentic family engagement. In fact, findings suggest the PLC was an exemplar of the tension between traditional, school-driven parent involvement and collective, community-focused family engagement. The PLC struggled to develop a clear purpose and plans for achieving it, often wavering between a school-focused agenda (e.g. leveraging parent volunteer support) and a family/community-focused agenda (e.g. tackling inequities perceived by parents). Therefore, the PLC is entirely emblematic of the challenges urban school leaders face as they attempt to abandon traditional parent involvement practices and implement structures that engages families in ways that are meaningful and valuable to them. The PLC, though not entirely member driven, included much discussion of ideas that members felt were valuable to themselves and their children. It is possible that had the PLC been sustained over a longer time period, it would have become even more member-driven. Even in the single school year in which it operated, PLC members were able to influence the school environment to a certain degree, which researchers have noted can mitigate some barriers to family engagement (Christanakis, 2011).

Sanders (2010) noted that power imbalance between educators and families stifle family

engagement, and therefore the PLC, which was envisioned to include families in school decision-making, had potential to create greater equity at CES. Though some CES educators discussed the need for parents to better support such expectations, the PLC was a context in which expectations could be discussed collaboratively among parents and educators. It created a space for compromise and the development of mutually-agreed upon expectations, which many researchers have noted is necessary in order to develop authentic and equitable family engagement (Haines et al., 2015; Laluvein, 2010).

Findings from this case study partially support similar findings in the literature that parent-school partnerships often follow a normative model in which families are expected to support the efforts of the school (Ishimaru, 2014). Additionally, the top-down leadership structure of the district made it difficult for even the most well-intentioned building-level leader to devote significant effort to bringing the parent vision to the forefront of the school's agenda. Further, similar to other findings, there was evidence of affective barriers, such as mistrust, between educators and families at CES, even among PLC members (Sanders, 2010). However, this case contrasts other researchers' findings that schools tend to operate with a Eurocentric, middle-class perspective (Yull et al., 2014) because CES educators seemed to be well-informed about and culturally-sensitive toward students' families. Further, CES was not perceived as a hostile school environment by most families, and educators made efforts to create bridges to equitably engage families. Nevertheless, some barriers did remain. The PLC could have potentially led to a breakdown of barriers, but only if given more sustained effort by those in positions of power. It is also important to recognize how historically-rooted injustice in the public school system cannot be easily or quickly changed; socially-just reforms take time because they hinge on the creation of new types of relationships, in which power and organizational control are shared between school leaders and community members

(Hong, 2011; Ishimaru, 2014).

One important finding about the PLC was that it operated as an afterthought to the school's improvement agenda. Though the PLC was intended to facilitate shared goal-setting and collective decision-making, the group's work was very much siloed. Group members' ideas were mostly confined to the group itself. This is not surprising considering that, in general, family engagement at CES did not seem to be one of the primary mechanisms leveraged in school improvement planning. Instead, improvement plans tended to focus on classroom-based practices. In other words, school improvement was framed without much consideration for family inputs. This finding supports research that has pointed to the fact that school improvement planning often takes a forward trajectory without considering the unique knowledges, desires, strengths, or needs of a school's families and community (Wronowski, 2019). In this way, family engagement is still tangential to primary goals at CES and is not interwoven with the planning or day-to-day work on school improvement efforts, which is similar to findings in other literature that schools' change agendas are often isolated (Ishimaru, 2013; Kladifko, 2013). Working with partnering organizations is a promising avenue for promoting community-minded family engagement, but CES and NU struggled to make this a streamlined, shared project; rather, CES' and NU's goals, objectives, and strategies seemed to be tangential to one another, focusing on discrete projects, rather than fully integrated collaboration.

Though the model for family-school collaboration in this case represents a single effort that did not achieve its intended aims, it nevertheless points out the potential for nondominant parents to be leaders in school improvement. Much may have been achieved had the PLC been given more time and sustained attention. Selena, the parent captain at CES, said it best: "Schools have to find ways to make parents feel more welcome, because I still think that if parents are involved somehow…the kids will be better, learn better, their behavior and how they treat each

other." In this quote, Selena makes a direct connection between student learning and behavior (the two key desired outcomes of the school) and equitable family engagement, in which all families feel closely tied to the school and recognize themselves as important contributors to student growth. Selena's quote illustrates that schools simply cannot achieve their goals without family support. And, CES, like many other schools, has struggled to fully include families in envisioning and creating a school environment in which the school, family, and community spheres truly overlap to focus on mutually-beneficial goals and objectives.

Though this case, due to the abrupt halt of the PLC's work, did not provide an ideal context for exploring how sharing school leadership with nondominant families can fully impact the engagement of the broader parent community, it does provide an excellent context for better understanding the challenges associated with intertwining school, family, and community. Research has suggested equitable family engagement hinges on the development of trusting educator-parent relationships and mutually-determined, mutually-beneficial goals (Haines et al., 2015; Hong, 2011; Laluvein, 2010; Stefanski et al., 2016). However, this case study demonstrated many barriers exist that make achieving such a school environment quite challenging. Moreover, in the current education reform era, which uses a lens that essentially amputates students from their family and community systems, leveraging families to decide upon and drive school goals becomes an even more remote possibility.

Limitations

Though much effort was taken to uphold high standards of trustworthiness, this study is not without limitations. Foremost, my limited Spanish meant that I only interviewed bilingual parents; if I had more time and resources, I would attempt to include the voices of parents who do not speak English, especially because language differences presented a

significant barrier in the context of this study. Including participants who exclusively speak Spanish may have illuminated new findings and would have certainly provided a richer array of perspectives for consideration.

Another limitation I encountered was the due to the fact that the PLC effectively ceased to exist at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. When I set out to undertake this study, I believed the PLC would continue for at least one more school year. Therefore, I had intended to observe how the group evolved in its second year. Unfortunately, however, this was not the case. Therefore, when I interviewed PLC members, I asked them to reflect on their experiences during the prior school year. Though only a few months had passed, it is quite likely that participants' memories had faded or even been altered over time. In hopes of minimizing the detrimental effects elapsed time may have on the authenticity of findings, I often made use of field notes during interviews to remind participants about specific events to aid their recall.

Additionally, my purpose in conducting this case study was to explore the influence of the PLC on family engagement practices at CES. Given that the PLC was only active for one school year, and staff turnover additionally limited its impact, it is impossible to know how findings might have been different with greater longevity and continuity. Therefore, my ability to address my second research question was somewhat limited.

Implications

This section discusses this study's implications for research, theory, and practice.

Implications for Research

A great deal of research has suggested shared leadership among educators and families is a promising avenue for promoting family engagement, particularly among historically-marginalized populations (Hong, 2011; Ishimaru, 2014; Stefanski et al., 2016). However, only a small body of literature has documented *how* schools and districts have taken action to implement such

initiatives. This study helps to fill that gap in the literature by providing a detailed explanation of a school's effort to implement a grassroots family leadership initiative, especially by pointing out the associated challenges. Perhaps most notably, this study has demonstrated that even in a school environment that has successfully implemented many bridges to equitable family engagement, creating a structure in which families authentically share leadership and decision making with educators is still quite difficult.

This study also contributes to family engagement research by including the voices of parents from nondominant backgrounds. Few studies have captured the perspectives of such individuals as they grapple to find their place within a school's organizational structure. In the case of this study, voices of immigrants helped to illuminate the unique set of challenges associated with becoming a leader in a school system quite different from one's home country.

Additionally, recent research has begun to demonstrate how typical it is for schools' accountability and reform agendas to lack any real consideration of family and community factors (Wronowski, 2019). This study helps to illuminate the tension educational leaders experience as they struggle to comply with top-down reform mandates while also attempting to be responsive and inclusive of their students' families and communities. In the case of this study, these two competing forces had quite different ideas about what constitutes successful student outcomes.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, this study has illuminated a barrier not commonly considered in family-school collaboration research: technology. Findings in this study demonstrated many challenges parents faced when using technology. This suggests that the increasing prevalence of computerized systems in schools may actually be limiting to equitable family engagement. As school districts continue to add more and more layers of software into their operational protocols, parents who lack the training or access to use technology are effectively

isolated from their children's school experience.

Implications for Theory

The theory of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) was used to frame how participants drew from their cultural capital to traverse new roles as parent leaders. This study illuminated how participants activated their cultural wealth in ways that were directly beneficial to students. Additionally, this study suggests that navigational capital, which is required to interact with school systems successfully, may be developed collectively through parent organizations. Parent participants in this study initially lacked an understanding of many aspects of the school's organizational structure and procedures, but through their participation in the PLC, their navigational capital increased markedly. In fact, several of them used their newfound knowledge to assist others. This suggests parents' social capital, which they have used extensively to establish important and vital social networks, facilitates the development of other forms of cultural wealth. In other words, this study has demonstrated that parent leaders, even those who on the surface may seem to have limited understanding of how to navigate the school system, are nevertheless a rich resource in developing parent populations that are aware of their parental rights and can serve as advocates for their children's education.

Implications for Practice

This study offers many implications for practitioners. As schools become increasingly diverse, it is crucial that school leaders and teachers broaden their understanding of students' cultures. This study demonstrated not only how important culturally-affirming practices were to these families, but also how culturally-defined mores and expectations caused unnecessary tension between educators and families. These findings suggest that educators in this school needed to be mindful of the fact that their own perspectives are derived from their own culture, and therefore,

how they interpreted situations differed markedly from parents who are from different cultural backgrounds. These findings suggest that these educators may need to consider investing time in developing their intercultural communication skills. Learning basic phrases and common nonverbal greeting patterns could yield great benefits in terms of making families feel welcome and valued in the school.

This study echoed findings of others that have emphasized just how critical relationships are to family engagement (Green et al., 2007; Hong, 2011). Trust is not inherent among parents, particularly those from historically-marginalized groups. This study documented a certain level of anxiety and fear among parents, even those who were very willing to support the school's agenda and/or volunteer. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of making sustained effort to develop trusting relationships with parents in this school. CES educators were somewhat isolated from their school community, and they may have missed opportunities to interact with families. Patronizing local businesses or attending religious services in the school community could potentially facilitate relationship-building; instead of working after school inside school offices and classrooms, CES educators could host office hours at neighborhood coffee shops or bakeries and invite families to visit with them. Additionally, this study demonstrated how valued informal, fun school events were to families, not only because they were enjoyable, but because they offered a comfortable, relaxed environment for families and educators to form relationships.

Finally, this study suggested that policy makers and school leaders at all levels of the system housing CES might consider becoming more family and community-minded. Family engagement was tangential to school improvement at CES; school improvement goals were based almost entirely on discrete academic performance measures. Other research has also documented how school improvement and reform often fails to consider the unique familial and community

153

contexts (Wronowski, 2019). Despite decades of data documenting racial and income-related achievement disparities, the accountability juggernaut continues to demand the same kinds of reforms that are not at all mindful of racial, cultural, or socioeconomic differences. These classroom and school-centric reforms by and large have not lessened achievement disparities (Freedberg, 2015), so perhaps educators should begin thinking about how students' families and communities can become pivotal in education reform. However, practitioners cannot frame these efforts with a deficit mindset that suggests families must be trained to conform to the school's expectations. Instead, expectations, goals, plans, and agendas must be developed mutually, with educators, families, and community members collaborating equitably. In other words, schools and school systems have to engage in more open and honest critical conversations about how parents can help drive school goals and expectations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study identified several barriers to equitable family engagement. New conceptual frameworks that examine and address these barriers would be beneficial. For example, parents' difficulty navigating the school system, which is compounded by the increasing presence of technology, was one salient barrier identified in this study. More research is needed to explore how this barrier may be mitigated.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a need for more practitioner-focused research in the field of family, school, and community collaboration. There are several models across the country that have been successful in developing strong partnerships between families from nondominant backgrounds and their children's schools (see, for example, Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Hong, 2011). Most often, these initiatives are facilitated via a partnership with a neighborhood organization or nonprofit. However, there is not a great deal of research that

documents *how* such initiatives were formed and *how* they addressed challenges in the process of creating a structure in which families and educators find mutual benefit. This study demonstrated that even with positive intentions, facilitating such an initiative is quite challenging. Further, most relevant literature documents outcomes rather than processes or systems utilized to build and sustain equitable family and school collaboration. Though each community is unique and therefore a universal how-to guide is unrealistic, practitioners and researchers could nevertheless benefit from future studies that document how school leaders can implement stronger partnerships within their communities.

Summary

Chapter V included a discussion of findings along with conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research. This study demonstrated how the cultural wealth of families of color is beneficial to schools in many ways, and that including families in leadership structures is a promising avenue for families to share their cultural wealth with one another and with educators. This study also added to family engagement literature by documenting the challenges associated with starting a family leadership initiative from the ground up. Though this study, like others before, identified benefits of including diverse families in school leadership, this can be particularly challenging to implement in the current reform era, which has adopted an almost entirely school-centric lens. This study helped to identify stumbling blocks that educators may face as they attempt to develop equitable family leadership within their schools, but more research is needed to develop guides and frameworks that can help practitioners engage families from diverse cultural backgrounds and varying socioeconomic statuses.

REFERENCES

Ackley, M.K., & Cullen, P.M. (2010). Strengthening families through community collaboration: Implementing the families and schools together (FAST) program. *Children & Schools, 32*(3), 183-186. doi: 10.1093/cs/32.3.183

Alameda-Lawson, T. (2014). A pilot study of collective parent engagement and children's academic achievement. *Children & Schools, 36*(4), 199-209. doi: 10.1093/cs/cdu019

Alameda-Lawson, T., & Lawson, M.A. (2016). Ecologies of collective parent engagement in urban education. *Urban Education, 33*(5), 1-36. doi: 0.1177/0042085916636654

Auerbach, S. (2010). Beyond coffee with the principal: Toward leadership for authentic school—community partnerships. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*, 728—757. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ916123

Auerbach, S. (2012). Conceptualizing leadership for authentic partnerships: A continuum to inspire practice. In S. Auerbach (Ed.), S*chool leadership for authentic family and community partnerships: Research perspectives for transforming practice* (pp. 29—51). New York: Routledge.

Baker, T.L, Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R.J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. *School Community Journal, 26*(2), 161-184. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx .

156

Bardhoshi, G., Duncan, K. & Schweinle, A. (2016). Predictors of parent involvement and their

impact on access of postsecondary education facilitators among White and American

Indian parents. *Journal of School Counseling, 14*(4). Retrieved from

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1092708

Billet, S., Ovens, C., Clemans, A., & Seddon, T. (2007). Collaborative working and contested

practices: Forming, developing and sustaining social partnerships in education. *Journal*

of Educational Policy, 22(6), 637-656. Retrieved from

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02680930701625288

Blackmore, J., & Hutchison, K. (2010). Ambivalent relations: The 'tricky footwork' of parental

involvement in school communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(5),

499-515. doi: 10.1080/13603110802657685

Bronson, C.E., & Dentith, A.M. (2014). Partner teaching: A promising model. *Education,*

134(4), 506-520. Retrieved from https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-

374694694/partner-teaching-a-promising-model

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (2000). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.,

R. Nice, Trans.). London, UK: Sage.

CADRE. (2004). *We interrupt this crisis—with our side of the story: Relationships between*

south Los Angeles parents and schools. Retrieved from http://www.cadre-la.org/core/wp-

content/uploads/2013/07/Weinterruptthiscrisis_CADRE_JMI-report_English.pdf

Cheung, C.S., & Pomerantz, E.M. (2012). Why does parents' involvement enhance children's

achievement? The role of parent-oriented motivation. *Journal of Educational*

Psychology, 104(3), 820-832. doi: 10.1037/a0027183

Christianakis, M. (2011). Parents as "help labor": Inner-city teachers' narratives of parent

involvement. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(4), 157-178. Retrieved from

http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ960623

Cooper, C. W., Riehl, C. J., & Hasan, A. L. (2010). Leading and learning with diverse families

in schools: Critical epistemology amid communities of practice. *Journal of School

Leadership, 20*, 758-788. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ916124

Crotty, M. (1998). The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research

process. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Cousins, L.H., Mickelson, R.A., Williams, B., & Velasco, A. (2008). Race and class challenges

in community collaboration for educational change. *School Community Journal, 18*(2),

29-52. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ818858

Curry-Stevens, A., Lopezrevoredo, A. & Peters, D. (2013). *Policies to eliminate racial

disparities in education: A literature review.* Retrieved from Center to Advance Racial

Equity, Portland State University: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu

Darder, A. (2017). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love.* New York, NY: Routledge.

DeNicolo, C.P., González, M., Morales, S., & Romaní, L. (2015). Teaching through testimonio:

Accessing community cultural wealth in school. *Journal of Latinos and Education,

14*(4), 228-243. doi: 10.1080/15348431.2014.1000541

Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.

Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-32).

Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Dyrness, A. (2009). Cultural exclusion and critique in the era of good intentions: Using

participatory research to transform parent roles in urban school reform. *Social Justice,

36*(4), 36-53. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768560

Duncan-Andrade, J. (2016, March). Equality or equity: Which one will we feed? *2019 Brock*

prize symposium. Symposium conducted at Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, OK.

Epstein, J.L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Epstein, J.L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 701-712. doi: 10.1177/003172171009200326

Epstein, J.L., Galindo, C.L., & Sheldon, S.B. (2011). Levels of leadership: Effects of district and school leaders on the quality of school programs of family and community involvement. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(3), 462-495. doi: 10.1177/0013161X10396929

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Frew, L. A., Zhou, Q., Duran, J., Kwok, O., & Benz, M. R. (2012). Effect of School-Initiated Parent Outreach Activities on Parent Involvement in School Events. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 24*(1), 27-35. doi:10.1177/1044207311427163

Gandhi, A.G., Slama, R., Park, S.J., Russo, P., Winner, K., Bzura, R., Jones, W., & Williamson, S. (2018). Focusing on the whole student: An evaluation of Massachusetts's Wraparound Zone Initiative. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 11*(2), 240-266. doi: 10.1080/19345747.2017.1413691

Gil, E. (2017). *Engaging the community cultural wealth of Latino immigrant families in a community-based program* (Doctoral dissertation.) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10622139)

Goldberg, J. (2016, July 30). It takes a village to determine the origins of an African proverb. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/30/487925796/it-takes-a-village-to-determine-the-origins-of-an-african-proverb

Gonzalez, R.L., & Jackson, C.L. (2013). Engaging with parents: the relationship between school

engagement efforts, social class, and learning. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 24*(3), 316-335. doi: 10.1080/09243453.2012.680893

Green, C.L., Walker, J.M.T., Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., & Sandler, H.M. (2007). Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education: An empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(3), 532-544. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.532

Greene, S. (2013). *Race, community, and urban schools: Partnering with African American families*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.

Freedberg, L. (2015, September). Achievement gap points to ineffectiveness of decades of reform. *EdSource*. Retrieved from https://edsource.org/2015/achievement-gap-points-to-ineffectiveness-of-decades-of-reforms/86601

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1981). *Effective evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guzmán, B.L., Kouyoumdjian, C., Medrano, J.A., & Bernal, I. (2018). Community cultural wealth and immigrant Latino parents. *Journal of Latinos and Education*. doi: 10.1080/15348431.2018.1541801

Haines, S.J., Gross, J.M.S., Blue-Banning, M., Francis, G.L., & Turnbull, A.P. (2015). Fostering family-school and community-school partnerships in inclusive schools: Using practice as a guide. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 40*(3), 227-239. doi: 10.1177/1540796915594141

Henderson, A.T. (2016). *Quick brief on family engagement in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015*. Retrieved from https://ra.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/FCE-in-ESSA-in-Brief.pdf

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family,*

and community connections on student achievement. National Center for Family and

Community Connections with Schools Annual Synthesis. Retrieved from

https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2009). *Beyond the bake sale: The*

essential guide to family—school partnerships. New York: New Press.

Hirsto, L. (2010). Strategies in home and school collaboration among early education teachers.

Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 54(2), 99-108. doi:

10.1080/00313831003637857

Hong, S. (2011). *A cord of three strands: A new approach to family engagement in schools*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their

children's education? *Review of Educational Research, 67*, 3– 42. doi:

10.3102/00346543067001003

Howard, T. C. & Reynolds, R. (2008). Examining parent involvement in reversing the

underachievement of African American students in middle-class schools. *Educational*

Foundations, 22(1), 79-98. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ839499

Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships on

lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. *Journal of*

Educational Psychology, 99(1), 39-51. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.99.1.39

Ishimaru, A.M. (2013). From heroes to organizers: Principals and education organizing in urban

school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 49*(1), 3-51. doi:

10.1177/0013161X12448250

Ishimaru, A.M. (2014). Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district-

community collaboration. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*(2), 188-216. Retrieved from

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1034307

Ishimaru, A.M., & Bang, M. (2016). *Transformative research and practice agenda for racial equity in family engagement*. Family Leadership Design Collaborative White Paper. Retrieved from UW-FLDC Research Team University of Washington website: http://familydesigncollab.org/

Ishimaru, A. M., Lott, J., Fajardo, I., & Salvador, J. (2014). *Towards equitable parent-school collaboration: Developing common parent engagement indicators*. Retrieved from Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project, University of Washington website: https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/research/centers/UW

Ishimaru, A. M., Torres, K. E., Salvador, J. E., Lott, J., Cameron Williams, D. M., & Tran, C. (2016). Reinforcing deficit, Journeying toward equity: Cultural brokering in family engagement initiatives. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(4), 850–882. doi: 10.3102/0002831216657178

Jayakumar, Uma M., Vue, Rican, & Allen, Walter R. (2013). Pathways to college for young Black scholars: A community cultural wealth perspective. *Harvard Educational Review, 83*(4), 551-579. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?q=jayakumar&id=EJ1034264

Jeynes, W. (2012). A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students. *Urban Education, 47*(4), 706-742. doi: 10.1177/0042085912445643

Kim, E.M., Sheridan, S.M., Kwon, K., & Koziol, N. (2013). Parent beliefs and children's social-behavioral functioning: The mediating role of parent-teacher relationships. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*, 175-185. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2013.01.003

Kincheloe, J.L., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 303-342).

Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kladifko, R.E. (2013). Practical school community partnerships leading to successful

educational leaders. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program*

Development, 24, 54-61. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1013145.pdf

Kohl, G.O., Lengua, L.J., McMahon, R.J. (2000). Parent involvement in school conceptualizing

multiple dimensions and their relations with family and demographic risk factors.

Journal of School Psychology, 38(6), 501-523. Retrieved from

https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/citations/68.html

Laluvein, J. (2010). Parents, teachers and the "community of practice". *The Qualitative Report,*

15(1), 176-196. Retrieved from

http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1146&context=tqr

Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and

cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education, 72*(1), 37-53.

Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/2673185

Lareau, A., & Shumar, W. (1996). The problem of individualism in family-school

policies. *Sociology of Education, 69*, 24-39. doi:10.2307/3108454

Lasky, S. (2000). The cultural and emotional politics of teacher-parent interactions. *Teaching*

and Teacher Education, 16, 843-860. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ618966

Matthews, A., McPherson-Berg, S.L., Quinton, A., Rotunda, R.S., & Morote, E.S. (2017). The

school-parent relationship across different income levels. *Journal for Leadership and*

Instruction, 16(1), 15-12. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1159887.pdf

McConnell, B.M., & Kubina, R.M. (2014). Connecting with families to improve students'

school attendance: A review of the literature. *Preventing School Failure, 58*(4), 249-256.

doi: 10.1080/1045988X.2013.821649

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San

    Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and*

    implementation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D.M. (2008). *Transformative research and evaluation*. New York, NY: The Guilford

    Press.

Moore-Thomas, C., & Day-Vines, N. (2010). Culturally competent collaboration: School

    counselor collaboration with African American families and communities. *Professional*

    School Counseling, 14(1), 53-63. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ952172

National Geographic. (2013). First public school in America. Retrieved from

    https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/apr23/first-public-school-america/

National PTA. (2019). History: Over 120 years strong. Retrieved from

    https://www.pta.org/home/About-National-Parent-Teacher-Association/Mission-

    Values/National-PTA-History

Oberg De La Garza, T., & Moreno Kuri, L. (2014). Building strong community partnerships:

    Equal voice and mutual benefits. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 13*(2), 120-133. doi:

    10.1080/15348431.2013.821064.

Olivos, E.M. (2006). *The power of parents: A critical perspective of bicultural parent*

    involvement in public schools. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Olivos, E. M. (2012). Authentic engagement with bicultural parents and communities: The role

    of school leaders. In S. Auerbach (Ed.), *School leadership for authentic family and*

    community partnerships: Research perspectives for transforming practice (pp. 98-114).

    New York: Routledge.

Park, S., & Holloway, S. D. (2013, January). No Parent Left Behind: Predicting Parental

Involvement in Adolescents' Education Within a Sociodemographically Diverse

Population. *The Journal of Educational Research, 106*(2), 105-119.

doi:10.1080/00220671.2012.667012

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Pepe, A. & Addimando, L. (2014). Teacher-parent relationships: Influence of gender and

education on organizational parents' counterproductive behaviors. *European Journal of*

Psychology of Education, 29: 503-519. doi: 10.1007/s10212-014-0210-0

Reynolds, R. (2010). They think you're lazy and other messages black parents send their black

sons: An exploration of critical race theory in the examination of educational outcomes

for black males. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(2), 145-163.

Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45534844

Reynolds, A. J., Ou, S., & Topitzes, J. W. (2004). Paths of effects of early childhood

intervention on educational attainment and delinquency: A confirmatory analysis of the

Chicago Child-Parent Centers. *Child Development, 75*, 1299 –1328. Retrieved from

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c595/36ddc128f86e09f0b6192aba465abd5cb417.pdf

Rispoli, K.M., Hawley, L.R., & Clinton, M.C. (2018). Family background and parent-school

interactions in parent involvement for at-risk preschool children with disabilities. *Journal*

of Special Education, 52(1), 39-49. doi: 10.1177/0022466918757199

Sanders, M. (2016). Leadership, partnerships, and organizational development: Exploring

components of effectiveness in three full-service community schools. *School*

Effectiveness and School Improvement, 27(2), 157-177. doi:

10.1080/09243453.2015.1030432

Serpell, Z.N. & Mashburn, A.J. (2011). Family-school connectedness and children's early social

development. *Social Development, 21*(1), 21-46. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2011.00623.x

Sheldon, S.B. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community

    partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research, 100*(5), 267-275. doi:

    10.3200/JOER.100.5.267-275

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with

    family and community involvement. *Education and Urban Society, 35*(1), 4–26. doi:

    10.1177/001312402237212

Sheridan, S.M., Bovaird, J.A., Glover, T.A., Garbacz, S.A., & Witte, A. (2012). A randomized

    trial examining the effects of conjoint behavioral consultation and the mediating role of

    the parent teacher relationship. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 23-46. Retrieved from

    http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ977425

Smith, I.E. (2016, September). Minority vs. minoritized: Why the noun just doesn't cut it.

    Odyssey. Retrieved from https://www.theodysseyonline.com/minority-vs-minoritize

Smith, J.G. (2002). Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case

    study. *School Community Journal, 16*(1), 43-56. Retrieved from

    http://www.adi.org/journal/ss06/SmithSpring2006.pdf

Spradley, J.P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group.

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage

    Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 303-342). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Stefanski, A., Valli, L., & Jacobson, R. (2016). Beyond involvement and engagement: The role

    of the family in school-community partnerships. *School Community Journal, 26*(2).

    Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org

Thus, J., & Eilbracht, L. (2012). Teachers' perceptions of parent-teacher alliance and student-

    teacher relational conflict: Examining the role of ethnic differences and "disruptive"

    behavior. Psychology in the Schools, 49(8), 794-808. doi: 10.1002/pits.21635

U.S. Department of Education. (2004). Parental involvement: Title I, Part A Non-regulatory

    guidance. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/face.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2012). Programs: Family and community engagement (FACE).

    Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/face.html

Van Vugt, M. (2013). Five best stone age parenting practices. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved

    from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/naturally-selected/201303/5-best-stone-

    age-parenting-practices

Walker, D. (2016). *Parent and family engagement practices: A case study of a pre-collegiate*

    summer program. (Doctoral dissertation.) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and

    Theses database. (UMI No. 10119449)

Wanat, C.L. (2010). Challenges balancing collaboration and independence in home-school

    relationships: Analysis of parents' perceptions in one district. School Community

    Journal, 20, 159-186. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ891837.pdf

Wong, S.W., & Hughes, J.N. (2006). Ethnicity and language contributions to dimensions of

    parent involvement. School Psychology Review, 35(4), 645-662. Retrieved from

    https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2139999/

Wooley, S.F., Glimpse, S.R., & Johnson, S.D. (2010). Sharing the dream: Engaging families as

    partners in supporting student success. In Houston, P.D., Blankstein, A.M., & Cole, R.W.

    (Eds.), *Leadership for Family and Community Involvement,* (pp. 1-12). Thousand Oaks,

    CA: Corwin Press.

Wronowski, M.L. (2019, November). *Critical community focus in school improvement plans:*

    The absent imperative. Paper session presented at the 2019 University Council for

    Educational Administration Convention, New Orleans, LA.

Wyrick, A.J., & Rudasill, K.M. (2009). Parent involvement as a predictor of teacher-child

relationship quality in third grade. Early Education and Development, 20(5), 845-864.

doi: 10.1080/10409280802582803

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69–91. doi:

10.1080/1361332052000341006

Yull, D., Blitz, L.V., Thompson, T., & Murray, C. (2014). Can we talk? Using community-based

participatory action research to build family and school partnerships with families of

color. *School Community Journal, 24*(2), 9-32. Retrieved from

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1048538.pdf

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Summary of Study Submitted to School District RRB Office

Summary of Study:
Grassroots Family Leadership and Empowerment
Principal Investigator: Jessica Noonan

The purpose of my study is to explore how the Parent Leadership Council at Kendall-Whittier influences family engagement practices and perspectives within the school. Previously, a great deal of research has indicated that family engagement is critical for student success, but a disparity exists between the involvement of families from White, middle-class backgrounds and the involvement of families from minority or low-income backgrounds. Therefore, studying the Parent Leadership Council at Kendall-Whittier, which is strategically aimed at including minority families in school decision making, represents a unique opportunity to better understand how a school can partner with diverse families. I believe this study could potentially benefit the school community—and other schools that serve similar populations—by illuminating equitable practices that celebrate the strength and diversity of all families and allow for new pathways of collaboration, communication, and shared understanding between schools and families. I believe the work being done to engage families at Kendall-Whittier may also help other practitioners develop an understanding of how to overcome barriers related to cultural and linguistic differences between educators and families.

This study will be entirely qualitative. Data will be collected through observation, interviews, and artifact analysis. I plan to observe meetings of the Parent Leadership Council and other events that involve families, such as school literacy nights and parent teacher conferences. Additionally, I plan to interview individuals from the following groups: school leaders, teachers, and families. I anticipate conducting 12 individual interviews and one focus group interview with the Parent Leadership Council members. Finally, I will collect documents used to communicate with families, such as school newsletters. All observations and interviews will take place between September, 2019 and January, 2020. All interviews and observations would likely take place within the school, and interviews would last 30-60 minutes each. Interviews with teachers and school leaders would be scheduled so as not to interfere with instruction or other school operations. All potential interviewees will be contacted in a timely manner so that they may choose a time and location that is convenient and does not interfere with their work responsibilities.

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	**12/20/2018**
Application Number:	ED-18-180
Proposal Title:	Grassroots Family Leadership and Empowerment: A Qualitative Case Study
Principal Investigator:	Jessica
Noonan Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Kathy Curry
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-3377, irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB

Dear Ms. Noonan,

The Research Review Board (RRB) of █████ Public Schools has reviewed your application for research with students and/or staff of █████ Public Schools. We are happy to report your proposal ***"Grassroots Family Leadership and Empowerment: A Qualitative Case Study"*** has been approved.

Approval by the RRB constitutes approval to approach the requested sites and staff regarding the research. *Approval does not constitute an endorsement from the district that █████ Public Schools staff or families must consent to participate in the study*. The decision of all study participants must be granted voluntarily by the appropriate individuals before research may begin. All research conducted within █████ Public Schools is voluntary, and approached individuals may choose to opt out at any time.

Any questions about this approval may be directed to the Research and Review membership at _____ or ████████████, Director of Research and Evaluation at
_____

We would welcome the opportunity to receive a copy of your study-related publications or information briefs at appropriate intervals to better assist with our own instructional planning for █████ students. Your proposal and application **does** meet the requirements of ████ Board Policy 9102 and 9102R

Your project is **approved** from **September 19, 2020** and is subject to the following conditions:

1. The district's computer network and district's staff or logo will not be utilized to distribute requests for participation in this study.
2. Where and when applicable any documentation distributed to parents must include a Spanish Language translation.
3. The RRB reserves the right to suspend this and any project if the conditions of approval are violated.

Thank you,

████████████, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Evaluation
█████ Public Schools

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Aviation

CONSENT FORM
Grassroots Family Leadership and Empowerment: A Qualitative Case Study

Background Information
You are invited to be in a research study of family leadership in local schools. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. During the interview and/or focus group, you can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

This study is being conducted by: Jessica Noonan, Oklahoma State University, College of Education, Health, and Aviation, School of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Aviation.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in one 30-60 minute interview about your experiences relating to a family leadership initiative. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions, and you may consent to being audiotaped. You may also be invited to participate in one focus group session. The focus group session will last approximately 60 minutes. Up to ten research participants will be included in the focus group. Participants of the focus group may choose to consent to being audiotaped during the session.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: Participation in the interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Participation in the focus group will take approximately 60 minutes. If you choose to participate in both the interviews and the focus group, you will be asked to commit up to two hours of your time.

Compensation
You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. Your name will not be used in any report.

We will collect your information through interviews, focus groups, and audio recordings (if consent is given). Audio recordings will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected computer. Audio recordings will be transcribed, and you will be given a pseudonym in the transcription. This is expected to occur no later than October, 2019.

Contacts and Questions
The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 918-932-0551 or jnoonan@okstate.edu If you have

questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:
I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.
     ___Yes ___No

I give consent for my data to be used in future research studies:
     ___Yes ___No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:
     ___Yes ___No

Signature:_____   Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____   Date: _____

Documento de Consentimiento
Liderazgo Familiar: Un Proyecto de Investigación

Información sobre la Investigación
Usted está invitado a participar en un investigación sobre liderazgo familiar en escuelas locales. Le pedimos que lea este documento y haga cualquier pregunta que pueda tener antes de aceptar participar en la investigación. Su participación en esta investigación es voluntaria. No hay penalidad por negarse a participar, y usted es libre de retirar su consentimiento y participación en este proyecto en cualquier momento. Durante la entrevista y / o el grupo focal, puede omitir cualquier pregunta que lo haga sentir incómodo y puede detener la entrevista en cualquier momento

Esta investigación está siendo realizada por: Jessica Noonan, Oklahoma State University, College of Education, Health, and Aviation, School of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Aviation.

Procedimientos
Si acepta participar en esta investigación, le pediría que haga lo siguiente: Participe en una entrevista grupal de 30 a 60 minutos sobre sus experiencias relacionadas con una iniciativa de liderazgo familiar. Durante la entrevista, se le harán una serie de preguntas abiertas y podrá consentir que se le grabe en audio.

La participación en la investigación implica el siguiente compromiso de tiempo: La participación en la entrevista grupal tomará aproximadamente 30-60 minutos.

Compensación
No recibirá ningún pago por participar en este estudio.

Confidencialidad
La información que proporcione en la investigación se tratará de manera confidencial. A su información se le asignará un número de código / seudónimo. Su nombre no se utilizará en ningún informe.

Recopilaré su información a través de entrevistas y grabaciones de audio (si se da el consentimiento). Las grabaciones de audio se almacenarán en un archivo protegido con contraseña en una computadora protegida con contraseña. Las grabaciones de audio se transcribirán y se le dará un seudónimo en la transcripción. Se espera que esto ocurra a más tardar en octubre de 2019.

Contactos y preguntas
La Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por sus siglas en inglés) para la protección de los participantes en investigaciones humanas en la Universidad Estatal de Oklahoma ha revisado y aprobado este estudio. Si tiene preguntas sobre el estudio de investigación en sí mismo, comuníquese con el investigador principal al 918-932-0551 o jnoonan@okstate.edu. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como voluntario de investigación o simplemente desea hablar con alguien que no sea la investigación. equipo sobre inquietudes con respecto a este estudio, comuníquese con el IRB al (405) 744-3377 o irb@okstate.edu. Todos los informes o correspondencia se mantendrán confidenciales.

Declaración de consentimiento
Leyó la información anterior. Él tuvo la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y recibir respuestas a mis preguntas. Doy mi consentimiento para participar en la investigación.

Indique sí o no:

Doy mi consentimiento para que me graben durante esta investigacion:
     ___ sí   ___no

Doy mi consentimiento para que mis datos se utilicen en futuras investigaciones:
     ___ sí   ___no

Doy mi consentimiento para ser contactado para el seguimiento de esta investigación o investigación futura:
     ___ sí   ___no

Firma:_____ Fecha: _____

Firma del investigador:_____ Fecha: _____

VITA

Jessica Ann Noonan

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: GRASSROOTS FAMILY LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF EQUITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Reading at Northeastern State University, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma in 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education at University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2007.

Experience: Elementary teacher, reading specialist, instructional coach

Professional Memberships: University Council for Educational Administration, American Education Research Association