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STAKEHOLDERS' UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN AN
URBAN SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A DISSERTATION
(submitted by)

LORETTE MCWILLIAMS

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LESLEY UNIVERSITY
2017

Stakeholders' Understanding of Family Engagement in an Urban School:
A Qualitative Study

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Graduate School of Education

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Ph.D. Educational Studies

Individually Designed Specialization

Approvals

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards
that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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SIGNED: _____

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* my daughters, who breathe life and light into my days. May you know your own power and worth. I hope I make you proud;

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Here is where I admit I often mentally compile playlists or soundtracks. I believe in the power of musical numbers! I present my personal dissertation soundtrack, a mix tape of sorts, for your reading and listening pleasure. These songs often played in my head while I wrote about family and community engagement in education, while sitting in my car thinking about family engagement, and during my runs around the local park, over and over and over.

1. Little Boxes, by Walk Off The Earth
2. Allentown, by Billy Joel
3. Making Plans For Nigel, by XTC
4. Changes, by Tupac Shakur (The Way It Is, by Bruce Hornsby and the Range version works too)
5. Gee, Officer Krumpe, by Original Broadway Cast of West Side Story
6. Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down), by Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton
7. America, by Simon and Garfunkel
8. American Idiot, by Green Day

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ABSTRACT

Family involvement and engagement in children's education has been a part of the educational landscape in the US for several decades. Research indicates *family engagement*, broadly defined as activities carried out by an adult in support of a child's educational development, has many benefits such as individual student achievement, as well as less traditional outcomes such as behavioral and mental health benefits, better school attendance, high school graduation rates, and secondary school enrollment. Family engagement has been included in federal education policy since the 1960s and continues in today's policies. However, teachers and parents often maintain different perspectives and report differing experiences with family engagement. If research and policy position family engagement as critically important in education, what then accounts for the discrepancy between the policies and how family engagement is carried out in practice?

This qualitative inquiry uses an adapted grounded theory approach to co-construct an understanding of how families and school personnel understand and enact family engagement in education in one urban school. Findings suggest there is little to no awareness of formal federal policy, and formal state and district policies have only slightly more influence. Teachers' choices about family engagement practices appear to be more individualized, based instead on their personal experiences and informal policy, the practices and attitudes of colleagues, and the principal's expectations. This research suggests the lack of knowledge about family engagement policy, coupled with a teacher culture that is ambivalent about family involvement, results in individualized approaches—inconsistent and varied from year to year, teacher to teacher, and family to

family. Resources at the school appear inadequate to meet the school's needs, which also affects family engagement efforts. Conclusions from this inquiry are situated in a proposed working theory, and considerations for future practice are offered.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This job of keeping our children safe, and teaching them well, is something we can only do together, with the help of friends and neighbors, the help of a community, and the help of a nation. And in that way, we come to realize that we bear a responsibility for every child because we're counting on everybody else to help look after ours; that we're all parents; that they're all our children. (Obama, 2012)

President Obama's (2012) quote emphasizes the criticality of family engagement. Although research and policy have positioned family engagement as crucially important in education, its implementation has been uneven. Family involvement and engagement in children's education has been a part of the educational landscape for several decades. Research studies and meta-analyses support the idea that *family engagement*, broadly defined as activities carried out by an adult in support of a child's educational development, has many benefits, including individual student academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007, 2012; Wilder, 2014). Academic outcomes are positively associated with family engagement (Ferguson, 2008; Wilder, 2014), as well as behavioral and mental health benefits, improved attendance, high school graduation, and secondary school enrollment (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack, 2007; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Additionally, family engagement is associated with positive effects for the school (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Mediratta et al., 2008) and community (Annenberg Institute for School

Reform, 2016; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Henderson, 2010; Hong, 2012; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Moreover, family engagement has been positioned as a lever for school reform (Bryk et al., 2010). Given the many potential benefits of family engagement in education, studies that clarify the different experiences of stakeholders to identify effective or best practices are merited.

Policy, informed by research, is a significant method for influencing practices. Family engagement has been included in federal education policy since the 1960s and continues today in policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title I; the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Family engagement is also present in state policy. For example, in Massachusetts, newly adopted professional educator standards include family engagement indicators (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013). Massachusetts and other states such as California also incorporated frameworks to guide and document effective family and community engagement practices in educational settings (California Department of Education, 2014; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Additionally, individual districts and schools often have their own policies. There is seemingly no lack of family engagement in formal policy.

Policy alone, however, does not engender the family engagement practices and behaviors it seeks to support. The national and state policies levels lack monitoring and, overall, have been inconsistent support for family engagement policy and practices (Mapp, 2012; Thompson, 2006). States are largely left on their own to implement and monitor family engagement with little infrastructure, direction, or funding to do so

(Weiss & Stephen, 2010). Moreover, the lack of alignment among the policies resulting in fractured, piecemeal approaches and "random acts" of family engagement (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010, p. 3).

Family characteristics, such as language, culture, literacy, and school system knowledge, are often reported as barriers to family engagement (Kim, 2009; Park & McHugh, 2014). Historically, policy has focused more on what families need to do on behalf of schools and less on what schools as organizations can do to enhance, support, and improve relationships with all families (Kim, 2009).

Organizational capacity and conditions play a role in how family engagement is realized. How schools invite, welcome, and offer opportunities to families makes a difference in whether and how families get involved, or not (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). For example, organizational practices, such as having a common area and time for drop-off and pick-up, contribute to how families engage with other families and staff, affecting families' access to other resources, social connections, and ultimately family well-being (Small, 2009; Small, Jacobs, & Peebles, 2008). School culture and norms influence teacher beliefs about family engagement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Even school scheduling, such as of holidays, parent-teacher conferences, professional development days, and summer breaks, can hamper access to some family engagement in schools (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Interestingly, stakeholders—families, teachers, and students— often can have disparate experiences and levels of satisfaction with family engagement efforts (Hill et al., 2004; Hill & Taylor, 2004; MetLife, 2012; Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2015). Parent satisfaction with school communication can vary along race and class and tends to

decrease as children age. Teachers also report decreasing levels of family participation as children age (MetLife, 2012; Noel et al., 2015).

Research and policy position family engagement as critically important in education, but raise significant questions: What accounts for the discrepancy between the policies and how they are carried out in practice? Where is the message of the benefits of family engagement lost or distorted? Do stakeholders have a consistent understanding of what family engagement looks like and why it is important, and how do they arrive at their understandings? How do stakeholders—educators, administrators, and families—understand family engagement in education? What source or sources influence stakeholders' understandings? What organizational conditions do stakeholders regard as supporting optimal family engagement? How do emerging state policies affect family engagement beliefs and practices?

For this project, the main research question (RQ) is:

RQ 1. What accounts for the discrepancy between how family engagement is prescribed and described in policy and how it is carried out in practice? To answer this, my specific research subquestions are:

RQ 1a. How do the various stakeholders—teachers, administrators, and families—understand family engagement, and how do they influence choices of action?

RQ 1b. How do federal, state, and district policies affect family engagement beliefs and practices, if at all?

RQ 1c. What organizational practices do stakeholders experience as encouraging or impeding optimal family engagement?

Qualitative research about stakeholder beliefs is needed to address why family engagement practice is inconsistent and uneven at the school level. Although research has demonstrated common and even recommended practices, little of it describes why and how understandings and practices are discrepant. For policymakers, it is important to know which messages and practices have translated and transferred to the public, and which have not, for subsequent policy, research, resource allocation, and effort. For those responsible for funding, measuring and monitoring, messaging, designing, and implementing programming such as professional development for educators or family training programs, knowing where the discrepancies in understandings lie can lead to targeted improvement. For those involved in administrative decisions that affect family engagement practices, such as scheduling of school-sponsored events, knowing which organizational practices hinder or support family engagement can lead to meaningful changes in practice.

Although family engagement has been found an essential component for school reform (Bryk et al., 2010), "engaging the entire community—including students and their families—may be among the most challenging evidence-based school improvement practices for urban schools to implement" (Poulos, Chalmers, Culbertson, Fried, & d'Entremont, 2015, p. 18). Identifying organizational barriers is essential for schools because this is where schools can make impactful adjustments—trying to change or ameliorate family characteristics, often understood as deficiencies, such as poverty status or language, is not the most efficient, effective, or realistic goal for schools. This perspective often casts a large shadow over marginalized populations without taking into

account the policies, practices, and institutions (Kim, 2009; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Mapp & Hong, 2010).

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this current study seeks to inform the practitioners on the ground who design, adopt, adapt, and execute family engagement programming and strategies in their daily practice. For some, their professional competency is at stake because often practitioners, such as administrators and teachers in Massachusetts, are evaluated on their family-engagement skills and practices.

Key terms are defined here to minimize ambiguity about their use and meaning in this study:

Family. Using a combination of definitions by the Merriam-Webster's dictionary (Family, n.d.), Silverstein and Auerbach (2005), and Howe (2012), family is defined as a group of individuals who self-identify as caregivers for children, related by blood, marriage, or choice.

Family engagement, which in past research has been called *parent involvement* and *parent engagement,* reflects an expanded definition as any activity intentionally enacted by a family member in support of children's learning and development, such that family engagement is a shared responsibility that is continuous, occurs over the course of childhood, and across settings (National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, 2009; Ulrich, 2014; Weiss & Lopez, 2009; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014).

Formal policy. For this project, I define *formal policy* as the laws, rules, and regulations that guide behavior—federal, state, district, or school-based—or a "set of guidelines or rules that determine a course of action" (Policy, n.d.).

Informal policy. Conversely, I define *informal policy* as casual, agreed-upon practices and expectations that are generally accepted and not necessarily written down for reference.

Family engagement in schools and education. Finally, I use the terms *family engagement in schools* and *family engagement in education* interchangeably. That is, I am interested in family involvement in children's learning and development, regardless of the setting. Although schools tend to be the location we most associate with formal education, I recognize learning takes place in a variety of settings—not just schools—and includes more than academic achievement.

To help understand family engagement in education, I draw on several theoretical frameworks that undergird this research. Most foundational, the ecological model of human development created by Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that humans develop and interact with their environments at five ecological levels (Figure 1):

1. Microsystem—institutions and people that directly interact with the person or family.
2. Mesosystem—connections between elements in the microsystem. For example, a parent-child relationship can influence a parent-school relationship.
3. Exosystem—institutions, people, and elements that indirectly affect the person or family. For example, a parent's work environment can influence how that parent interacts with the child.
4. Macrosystem—large contexts within which a person or family exists and develops, including nationality and culture.

5. Chronosystem—point in time when a person or family exists in development.

This can mean the actual period (e.g., the 1970s) or the interpretation of significant family events (e.g., marriage, death, divorce, birth) over time.

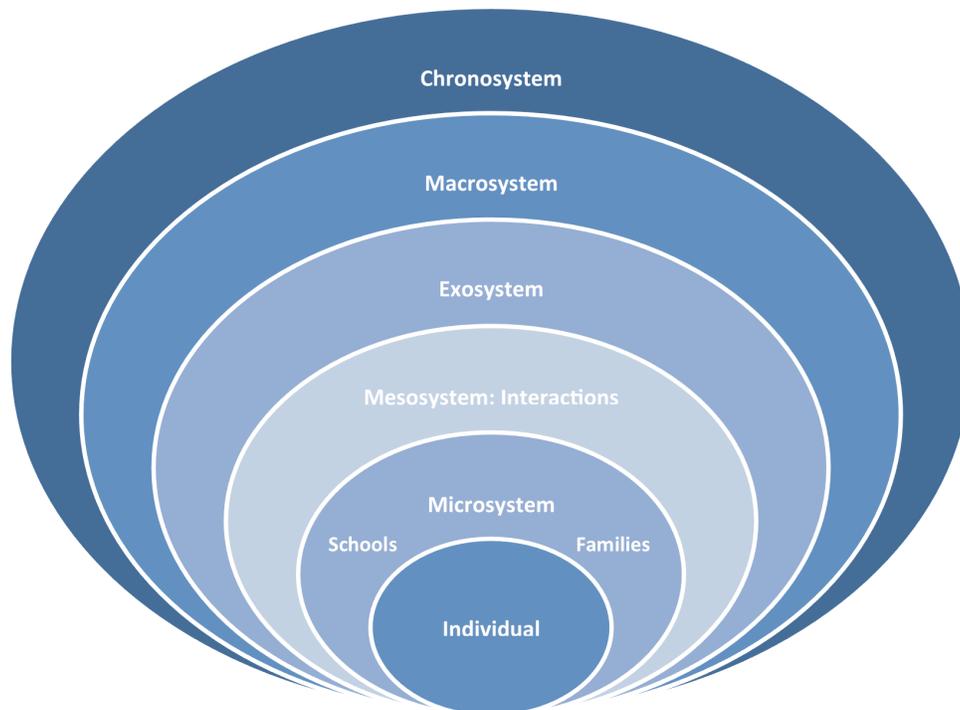


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. Interactions between and among elements in each system are represented by the mesosystem nest. School and family are both in the microsystem. Author's figure.

Significantly, the ecological model is dynamic, wherein personal and environmental contexts interact; a change in one area or relationship can reverberate across the system as a whole. Humans develop not in a vacuum but among the many

contexts of variables, seen and unseen, that influence how children grow, learn, and develop.

Two theoretical frameworks specific to family engagement further frame an understanding of family engagement in education: Epstein's (1985, 2010) classic framework of parent-school-community partnerships and the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of parent motivation.

Epstein's (2010) model denotes "overlapping spheres of influence" (p. 25), realizing children are under the care of families, communities, and schools in interdependent partnerships. It draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, again realizing the interplay and interaction of the various systems that influence a child. (See Figure 2 for a representation of Epstein's model.)

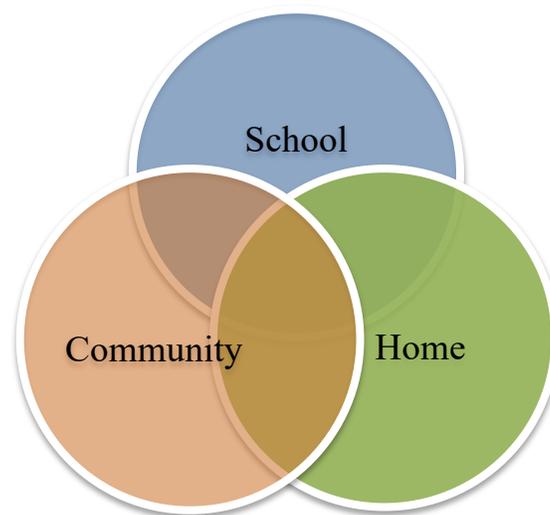


Figure 2. Three overlapping spheres of influence in Epstein's (1985, 2010) model of family-school-community partnerships denote shared responsibility. Author's figure.

Epstein (2010) posits six types of involvement, or actions, of families and communities in support of schools, briefly described here:

Parenting. Help families establish a student-supportive learning environment in the home. Activities help parents understand child development and improve parenting skills. Parents communicate about their family, culture, goals, and dreams for their particular child to the school and teachers.

Communicating. Two-way communications between home and school to keep each informed about school programs and a child's progress. This could include newsletters or conferences.

Volunteering. Recruiting and organizing opportunities for parents and community members to come to school and facilitate learning experiences, such as reading to a class at a specified time or making copies for a class as requested by the teacher.

Learning at home. Activities at home in support of the school curricula. This could include homework or going to a museum.

Decision-making. Using parents in key decisions such as participating in principal search committees, active parent-teacher organizations (PTO), or School Improvement Committees.

Collaborating with the community. Using the resources of the community to connect all members in school learning. For example, businesses, senior centers, universities and civic groups can participate and contribute to activities such as mentoring, tutoring, service learning and the like.

Epstein (2010) recognized particular challenges at each of the six levels. Programs can and should look different at various schools because the schools have

different needs, resources, and populations vary. Whereas parent participation tends to decline over the course of a child's schooling, students generally benefit from involved and informed parent support at all levels of schooling, including middle and high school (Epstein, 2010). The Epstein model is school-centric; activities are in support of the schools.

The Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of parental motivation, modified from the original Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model, is based on parental motivation—why a parent is involved in a child's development. How parents views their role, such as advocate, supporter, or teacher, and their personal beliefs in their capacity to fill such a role (termed *intrinsic beliefs*), as well as opportunities offered from the outside (*extrinsic invitations*), make up the current Hoover-Dempsey model. Notably, the new model incorporates the parents' life contexts—a parent's perceived availability of time and energy from home and work responsibilities—in parental motivation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Socioeconomic status (SES) is also considered in the parent's life context, though the authors pointed out that SES status and parental participation is perhaps best understood in relation to restricted resources (e.g., less formal education).

The Hoover-Dempsey model incorporates:

1. Parental motivational beliefs—role construction and sense of efficacy;
2. Invitation from others—for example, from schools, teachers, students; and
3. Parent life context—knowledge, skills, time, energy, and SES status.

As described above, several theoretical frameworks ground this inquiry.

Additionally, my experiences and positionality, as well as the sociopolitical context

during which this project was conducted, inform this project. The following anecdote illustrates my personal involvement.

"So. She is, you know, . . ." begins the teacher, Ms. Hart. She and the other adults are folded into colorful, child-sized chairs at a rhombus-shaped table in a classroom. Work samples with wobbly pencil markings and splashes of bright artwork cover the classroom walls; number lines and alphabet charts adorn each table. This is a place of child-centered learning, a place I know.

As a school psychologist, I have been involved in numerous parent-teacher meetings and conferences over the years. I know about Conference Day, the annual rite in which teachers and parents meet for impossibly tiny slices of time to discuss students' strengths, weaknesses, and action items.

Most teachers I know report that Conference Day is exhausting, meeting adult caregivers for each student in their class within the allotted 20 minutes. I have been around schools long enough to know the unstated "rule" of Conference Day: *Do not expect more than your 20 minutes—only entitled, demanding parents do that.*

This conference, however, is different. This time, I am on the other side of the desk, in the role of "Mom" to discuss my daughter, a second-grader. As such, I have no read on what will happen at the conference. *I didn't make this agenda.*

"So. She is, you know, . . ."

What? What? She is what? *I don't know.*

In that pause, I mentally supply all possible answers to what "she is . . ." A chatterbox? Learning-challenged? A sweetheart? Too silly? Loud? An ADHD

candidate? Underfed? Overbearing? Joyous? All these things and then some? *How do I not know?*

I prepare to bear judgments: her lunch isn't healthy enough, she doesn't read enough, she talks too much, she doesn't talk enough, she behaves like a dog entirely too often. She forgot her library book last week, and you know that means you didn't check the backpack.

Or I will hear questions: Why doesn't she do the extra credit? Do you read to her every night for 20 minutes? Do you read the weekly newsletter?

I intuit that in this moment, I am at the mercy of this teacher. She alone will tell me what my child "is" and, by association, who I am as a parent. I will bear judgment, I know, because this adventure called "parenting" is by far my most important job—a great equalizer of sorts—and judgment abounds: online, in the grocery, with relatives, and yes, in schools. And somehow, my daughter's father seems not to share in this bearing of judgment.

I argue internally with myself. I know this space, my professional domain, and I like this teacher who has given me every reason to believe she values my daughter. I recognize these halls, this ritual, right down to this tiny, plastic, navy-blue chair. And, of course, I know well the subject we are here to discuss—my daughter. *So why do I feel so defensive and vulnerable?*

Instinctually, my inner Momma Bear alerts and starts to growl.

" . . . a student," finishes Ms. Hart.

My daughter is a student. *That* is the answer here today, as delivered by this teacher, and I breathe a sigh of relief. I'd like to think I knew it all along.

On this particular Conference Day, my daughter was declared a "student," and I got a pass from judgment. She was deemed a child who behaved and performed according to expectations and, her teacher's assumption seemed to be, therefore, so was I—for this time, this conference, this year, with this teacher, this is true—until the next Conference Day. The accumulation of experiences, as both a parent and an educator, inform much of what I regard as truth about how home and schools interact. However, my experiences are only mine. How I experience the world is by no means representative of how others do. I turn now to positionality for a closer inspection of how identity, power, and privilege influence my perspective.

To better understand and describe my positionality, I rely on Luttrell's (2010) "Memo on Researcher Identity" structure, which asks the researcher to state plainly their identities and assumptions. For this statement, I also consider the chronosystem described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in his ecological systems theory—the outer ring of systems that influence me in ways bidden and unbidden. They are historical, social, and biographical events that occurred in my life and in the lives of those with whom I interacted during this inquiry.

By virtue of the way I was born, I have often lived a life of privilege: White, middle class, heterosexual, typically able in body and learning style, a middle-aged mother of two school-aged children. According to the *2008-2009 Schools and Staffing Survey*, the typical teacher in the United States is white, female, and around 42 years of age (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). I fit neatly in the demographic slot of "average educator" in the US.

By contrast, the families and children who make up U.S. classrooms and schools are more diverse. Currently, about 53% of all school-aged children in the US are White, 24% Hispanic, 14% Black, and 5% Asian (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Minority populations, especially Hispanic and immigrant populations, are expected to grow significantly in the near future (Crouch, 2012). Twenty-two percent of children in the US—15.7 million—live in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016a), and one in four come from a family that immigrated to the US (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Thus, although I am often an "in group" member among educators demographically, among students and families, this is less often the case. This is all the more significant because as researchers Lareau and Horvat (1999) contended, teachers and families with similar cultural backgrounds develop easier working relationships compared with families and teachers who do not share similar backgrounds. I imagine this magnifies when another role—that of researcher—is introduced.

I have worked in schools as a school psychologist for more than 10 years. As I grew more confident and competent in my job, I challenged the conventional but quiet belief that although parents have a place in schools, they must be strictly managed and instructed. Then I became a parent myself. Much as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) describes in *The Essential Conversation*, my educator-mother roles are both separate and intertwined, fluid and complex.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) wrote that teachers reported three changes occurred when they added the role of mother: a recognition that parenting is humbling, hard work; a new appreciation for the continuum of human development; and a newfound compassion in assessing both parents and children. However, the dynamics in teacher-

parent relations can remain fraught, and the role of parent does not make working with families easier. One teacher-mother interviewee said, "I wish I could not carry my teacher-self with me when I go to parent conferences for my daughter, that would make it so much easier" (p. 193).

I place myself squarely in the mother-educator-researcher mix. I cannot divorce myself of any of those roles or identities. Specific to this research project, I am an insider in some ways, as a parent of two school-aged children with a professional background in education. In many ways, however, I am an outsider. I am not a community member of the district or school in which this research project took place (I have never worked or lived there, nor do my children attend school there). The teachers and families know me only as a visiting student researcher.

The families I interviewed came from different cultures, races, languages, and SES. Seidman (2006) wrote, "Although interviewers may try to ignore these social forces, they tend to affect their relationships with participants nonetheless" (p. 95). As recommended, I did not ignore these social forces. Consistent with Seidman's suggestions, I tried to be mindful of issues that could trigger mistrust by expressing respect and taking a genuine interest in the people with whom I spoke, honoring a full telling to give context to their choices.

To put this research in a historical context, data for this study were collected over the fall and winter of 2016-2017, during the presidential campaign between Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton (the first female to be nominated by a major political party for presidential candidacy) and the eventual president-elect, Donald J. Trump, the Republican candidate. Much rhetoric associated with the campaign was bombastic and

derisive of immigrants, Muslims, women, the disabled, and others. The campaign was often rancorous and divisive, and the election result caught many by surprise.

The election made its way overtly into my conversations with the families. For this liberal-leaning, life-long East coaster, the views expressed by the participants were sometimes surprising, contradictory, or contrary to my own views. I wasn't sure when, or if, to counter or argue.

The day after the election, one parent's remarks hinted of how the election would reveal itself:

He [her son] was talking about the election yesterday. He was like, "Oh well, everybody votes for Hillary, so I have to." I'm like, "No, you don't.

You don't have to vote because everybody else votes for her. You be your own person.

A few weeks later, I had a deeper, longer discussion with a father from Puerto Rico about what Mr. Trump represented to him: success in the United States. The father stated,

Everybody got an opportunity, like Donald Trump says. He got everything he wants. He's rich. Obama say, you are never coming to the White House. Never. Maybe you can come here and work in the kitchen. Its 2017, Donald Trump is the President of the United States. Some people say dumb, but I say, yes. The money is everything.

History and time will place this election and subsequent administration in its proper place. At the time of this writing, it is difficult to position it accurately other than to say the campaign, the president-elect, and the periods immediately before and after the

inauguration in January were largely unconventional. The country seemed divided. As I write this, class, race, gender, nationality, national security, fake news, alt-right, travel ban, and "alternative facts" trend in the media daily. In the days since the election, hate crimes and harassment spiked (Okeowo, 2016; Reilly, 2016). Some attributed the jump in crime to an administration and agenda that claimed to "Make America Great Again," putting some Americans and interests in front of others, namely minority groups, Muslims, immigrants, those who identify as transgender, women, and the poor. Some argued, as in a recent *New York Times* article, that Trump's policies and politics prey on the fears and resentment of the White working class population, often less educated and underemployed, and pit them against the plight of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Hochschild, 2016; Porter, 2017).

Immigrants in particular appear to have come under increased, and somewhat sanctioned, scrutiny, suspicion, and hostility. Naturally, these issues were in the backdrop during this research. In fact, safety and security emerged as one finding in the studied school, with its large population of minority and immigrant families. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the political climate was present throughout this project and hung in the air for me and, I suspect, those with whom I spoke. The general discourse of the day, in the media particularly, felt angry, accusatory, hostile, and aggressive. One may reason, then, that similar sentiments and emotions might appear in this project.

In this chapter, I introduced and described the benefits of, and challenges with, family engagement in schools. Specifically, although a broad base of research and policy supported family engagement in education, its implementation has been uneven, with

families and teachers reporting differing and often less than satisfying experiences. The main research question is: What accounts for this discrepancy between policy and practice with regard to family engagement in education? To help me understand family engagement in education, I relied on several theoretical frameworks, but primarily Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development. Epstein's (1995, 2010) seminal work on family-school-community partnerships and Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2005) model of parental motivation, including parental role construction, were also theoretical foundations upon which this inquiry rests. Additionally, my experiences and positionality informed this project, as well as the sociopolitical context during which I conducted the project.

CHAPTER 2

Literature and Policy Review

This chapter is presented in three sections. The first section is a literature review of family and community engagement in education. The second section briefly reviews federal and state policies that include family engagement in education and describes two national organizational frameworks from the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA) and the Office of Head Start. The third section is a brief literature review of policy implementation in schools—how policy is put into practice.

Family and Community Engagement

Family Engagement

As noted in the first chapter, *family engagement*, broadly defined, has been found important for individual student achievement, as evidenced by a number of studies and meta-analyses (Fan & Chen, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2012; Wilder, 2014). Fan and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis of 25 research studies found a moderate effect of parent involvement and family engagement, particularly for general achievement measures such as grade point average, and that some forms of family engagement were associated with greater effects than were others. For example, parental aspirations and expectations had the strongest relationship with academic achievement, whereas parental supervision in the home, such as over homework, had the weakest relationship with academic achievement.

A widely cited research synthesis by Henderson and Mapp (2002), published and disseminated by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), summarized 51 studies on family engagement. Several key findings emerged. Among them, family

engagement in supporting children's learning in the home was linked to higher student achievement, and family and community engagement that is focused on student learning (developing specific knowledge and skills) had a greater impact on student achievement compared with other kinds of involvement. The authors noted that at the time of their publication, many studies had small samples and few were experimental or quasi-experimental studies.

Previous researches found many positive student outcomes associated with family engagement in education. Family involvement positively affected traditional student outcomes such as achievement, attendance, and behavior, as well as nontraditional outcomes such as improved mental health and behaviors, feelings of self-efficacy, and planning for the future (Fan & Chen, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Family engagement in school directly and indirectly influenced the behavioral and emotional functioning of children (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Students whose families were engaged in their student's schooling were more likely to attain better grades and test scores; enroll in higher-level courses; earn credits and progress through the grades; have better attendance, behavior, and social skills; graduate and enroll in secondary education; and adapt and transition better at school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Researcher William Jeynes conducted a number of meta-analyses involving family engagement over the years. Jeynes's (2005) meta-analysis examined 41 studies that analyzed student achievement and family involvement and found a significant and positive relationship between family engagement and student achievement. This relationship was found for both minority and nonminority children, as well as all genders.

Parent-child dynamics had the strongest relationship to student achievement, specifically, parenting style, parent expectations, and parent-child communication.

Another meta-analysis by Jeynes (2012) associated both voluntary expressions of parental involvement—actions family members enacted on their own outside of formal programs such as attending a school event or expressing high expectations—and involvement in formal school-based parent engagement programs with higher student achievement, as measured by grades and standardized test scores. Jeynes categorized six types of parental engagement programs: shared reading programs, emphasized partnership programs, checking homework programs, communications between home and school programs, Head Start programs, and English as a Second Language programs. Four of the six program types showed statistically significant positive student effects. Establishing strong partnerships between home and school was identified as a common element among all six programs. Together, results suggested that although both kinds of family engagement—program-based and independent, voluntary actions—were efficacious; coordination between the two were likely the most effective.

Family engagement has been found to be important across the grades from early education through secondary school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Wang, 2015; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Wang et al., 2014; Wilder, 2014). Parent involvement programs were significantly correlated with higher academic achievement for younger and older students (Jeynes, 2005, 2007). The type of parent support in education typically changes over the course of the child's schooling, becoming more home based as the child ages and less visible in the school setting, such as having conversations about future aspirations and communicating high expectations (Jeynes,

2014). Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich's (1999) study of 1,200 urban students found family engagement in the home more consistent compared to involvement in the school over time. Izzo et al. proposed that perhaps this consistency accounted for the stronger influence of home-based involvement as children age.

Family-supported learning activities in the home and home-school communication were two areas consistently identified as positively associated with student achievement (California Department of Education, 2014; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007). Parental aspirations and expectations, both home-based activities, had the strongest relationship to academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). Activities that were not directly connected to student learning, such as volunteering, serving on a committee, or fundraising, were least associated with student outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, & Malone, 2009). Homework support and supervision in the home was found to be the home-based activity least associated with academic achievement and, in some studies, negatively associated with achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014).

School and Community Benefits

Beyond the student and child effects, school benefits were also associated with family and community engagement. Collective family engagement affects school capacity, climate, policy, and resource distribution (Mediratta et al., 2008). Schools with low engagement tend to have certain characteristics. Specifically, teachers in low engagement schools were more likely than those in high engagement schools to teach at

schools in identified urban versus suburban areas (37% and 25%, respectively), with higher numbers of low-income and minority students (MetLife, 2012).

Family engagement has been shown to be vital to school reform efforts. In a large longitudinal study by Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) involving over 200 schools in Chicago, family and community ties were found essential to school reform—one of five critical elements to school improvement. Those five essential supports were: strong strategic leadership focused on instruction; a welcoming attitude towards families and strong connections to community organizations; professional capacity of faculty; a safe, welcoming, stimulating student-centered learning environment; and strong, coherent instructional guidance. Schools with the five essential supports were far more likely to improve academically in math and English, compared with schools that did not have the supports. Importantly, when one element was missing or weak over several years, school improvement rarely occurred, despite the efforts. Thus, reform efforts in isolation, without strong family and community connections, are unlikely to result in improvement. Moreover, the relationships within and around the school, among families, students, educators, and administrators, built on mutual, relational trust, and developed over time, were also critical to education reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

A literature review by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation identified several key components to family-school partnerships that supported education reform in recent research (Wood & Bauman, 2017). The research identified the common elements and strategies, such as leveraging the social networks of families, providing leadership

opportunities in the school setting, and reaching out to families to build partnerships (Wood & Bauman, 2017).

Family engagement affects more than the academic achievement of the individual child. Whole communities potentially benefit from family engagement in education, though this has been more difficult to measure and scale up. Family engagement initiatives that encourage and support parent leadership (i.e., build adult capacity such that family members train, organize, and recruit other adults and families) and the community organizing of families can effectively catalyze education reform and community improvement, particularly for schools and communities with high numbers of low-income, low SES families (Henderson, 2010; Hong, 2012; Warren & Mapp, 2011). It has also been hypothesized that by building parent leadership capacity, family engagement at the school level could energize and ignite other school and community reform—a "ripple effect" that can potentially invigorate democratic participation and action (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2016).

Criticisms of the family engagement research echoed those of educational research in general. That is, operational definitions used in research, as well as the findings, have not been consistent, with a lack of longitudinal, experimental, and quasi-experimental research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). At best, most studies could draw only correlational conclusions. Research tended to be narrow in measuring student achievement, focusing on test scores (Ferlazzo, 2014). Additionally, family engagement research tended to rely on survey results, prone to reporter subjectivity (Wood & Bauman, 2017).

Stakeholder Perspectives

Parent and family perspectives. Family engagement has been shown to be important for student outcomes, as well as communities and school reform efforts, and is present in several federal and state policies. However, the execution of family engagement in schools and districts to date has been uneven. The National Center for Educational Statistics findings from the National Household Education Survey Program of 2012: Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, illuminated the gap between what was officially recommended and what was being done "on the ground" in schools and communities. The nationally representative sample of 17, 563 completed surveys revealed that about half (52%) of all families surveyed reported being "very satisfied" with their child's school's interactions with parents and families (Noel et al., 2015). The results implied, then, that half of the families were less than very satisfied with their school interactions. Overall, more private school families reported they were very satisfied (72% to 78%), compared with public school families (56% to 63%). Fewer families with students in a large school (i.e., 1,000 or more students) reported they were very satisfied (40%) compared to those with students in smaller schools.

As described by Noel, Stark, and Redford (2015), parent-reported family satisfaction with school interactions varied with student grade level. Specifically, satisfaction decreased with student grade progression. For example, 66% of families with a student in Kindergarten through Grade 2 reported they were very satisfied, compared with 39% of families with a student in Grades 9 through 12. Satisfaction also varied with parent or guardian education level and student race and ethnicity. More families with at least a Bachelor's degree reported high satisfaction (57%) than did those with high school

graduates (48%). Further, 54% of families of a White student were highly satisfied, compared to 47% of families of a Black student.

Although 87% of parents reported receiving general communications from their child's school (e.g., newsletters, email, or notices), more individualized information was less common, with 57% receiving specific email or notes and 47% receiving a phone call during the academic year. Despite the efforts to communicate, only 52% of families report being very satisfied with the way their child's school interacted with the family (Noel et al., 2015).

Teacher perspectives. Teachers and educators, also important stakeholders, had perspectives on family engagement. According to a MetLife (2012) survey of teachers ($N = 1,001$), although family engagement reportedly increased since 1987, 48% of teachers reported many or most parents took too little interest in their children's education, and 53% reported many or most parents failed to motivate their child in school. Similar to what the parents reported, teacher satisfaction with family engagement decreased as children moved through the grades.

Family engagement has implications for teachers' job satisfaction. In the MetLife (2012) survey, teachers who reported high job satisfaction were more likely to report they had "good" or "excellent" teacher preparation, professional development, and support in engaging families. Further, 95% of teachers with high job satisfaction reported their school did all it could to help parents support their child at home, and 93% reported their school had a plan for family and community engagement linked to specific learning and development goals. As expected, decreases in family and community engagement were associated with less job satisfaction.

Although teacher preparation around family engagement was positively associated with work satisfaction for teachers (MetLife, 2012), several research studies suggested teacher preparation programs generally did not adequately prepare their graduates to work with diverse populations of families and students (Abel, 2014; Levine, 2006, as cited in Epstein, 2010). A roundtable of educators and teacher trainers found that teacher preparation programs were not attracting a diverse work force to reflect the increasing diversity of the student population, nor were teacher programs adequately training teachers to work with diverse students (Mader, 2015).

Trends

The field of family engagement has been moving towards embracing an expanded definition of family engagement. By using common language, this expanded definition could unify and ground the field. It includes earlier work and research, which often used the terms *family involvement* and *parent involvement*. Engagement suggests that families are actively and intentionally involved and participating (Ferlazzo, 2011). The expanded definition de-emphasizes *who* is meant by "family," understanding that any adult responsible for nurturing and developing a child—including a mother, father, grandparent, foster parent, adoptive parent, extended family, guardian, mentor, or caregiver—is family.

Expanded Definition

In 2009, the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group was formed, comprised of leaders in the family engagement field, with the stated intention to inform federal policy about family, school, and community engagement in education (Weiss & Lopez, 2009). The group authored a memorandum to the White

House. In July 2014, the White House Symposium on Transformative Family Engagement was held at the White House, in partnership with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (2014), which invested \$13.7 million dollars in grants to 30 organizations to boost family engagement work (Ulrich, 2014). A wide selection of notable thinkers, policymakers, and researchers in the field took part. Both the memorandum and symposium described an expanded definition of family engagement, now widely embraced in the field. The expanded definition posits a shared responsibility that extends over time and across settings (National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, 2009; Weiss & Lopez, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014), as described below.

Shared responsibility. Alone, schools, families, or community organizations cannot completely educate and support children's development. Raising and supporting children's learning and development requires shared commitment, investment, and communication among school personnel, family members, and community members (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein, 2010; Weiss et al., 2010). In this way, families are considered full partners and not bystanders or observers (Weiss et al., 2010).

Over time. Family engagement occurs throughout childhood. Family engagement has been found to be important from preschool through secondary school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hill & Wang, 2015; Jeynes, 2007; Wang et al., 2014; Wilder, 2014). These results highlight a move away from "random acts" of family engagement, because piecemeal, one-time events do not result in strengthened relationships or engagement. Rather, family engagement must be integrated and sustained systemically (Weiss et al., 2010).

Across settings. Family engagement can occur wherever and whenever children learn (National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, 2009; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014). This tenet pulls on the various community spaces and locations of support and learning—schools, libraries, museums, afterschool and enrichment activities, or cyber spaces—for what is referred to as *anywhere, anytime learning* (Lopez & Caspe, 2014; Weiss & Lopez, 2015). Said another way, family engagement must be supported systemically, across the ecologies of children's learning and development.

Barriers

Family engagement practices have been found to vary along the age of the student, disability status, race or ethnicity, and economic class (Frew, 2012; Jeynes, 2007; Kim, 2009; MetLife, 2012; Noel et al., 2015). Some organizational practices that can hinder family engagement have also been identified (Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Panorama Education, 2017), including student age and grade level, special education needs, minority status, class, and organizational barriers.

Student age and grade level. Parental participation is more likely when the children are younger, in elementary school (Frew, 2012; Jeynes, 2007). Both parents and teachers reported less satisfaction with, and a decline in, family engagement at school as children age and move from elementary to middle and high school (MetLife, 2012; Noel et al., 2015). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), parental participation tended to decline as students moved through the grades, a trend thought to reflect parents' beliefs that they are less able to teach their child effectively as the material gets harder. Developmentally, students in middle and secondary school often become more

independent from their parents, which likely affects parental participation and motivation.

Although parent participation tended to decline over the course of a child's schooling, students continued to benefit from involved and informed parent support at all levels of schooling (Epstein, 2010; Jeynes, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Organizational factors, that is, fewer opportunities, invitations, and less encouragement, are also likely at play. That is, schools and personnel in the upper grades tended not to encourage family engagement as much as they did in the younger grades.

Special education. Using data from the National Longitudinal Transitional Study 2 (NLTS2) commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, researchers found significant predictors of family involvement in school-based activities for special education students aged 13 years to 16 years (Frew, 2012; Newman, 2005). According to the NTL2 data, the effects were small. Ethnic minority families reported lower rates of family participation with special education students, and two-parent families reported more involvement in school—as did families of younger children and with presence of a disability other than emotionally disturbed (Frew, 2012).

Burke (2013) discussed some differences in family engagement between regular and special education. Parents of regular education students tended to seek improvement in academics, whereas parents of special education students tended to seek services. Parental participation in special education is mandated and required as a part of school outreach. Thus, special education research leans towards measuring effective parental partnerships as those that result in fewer due-process proceedings—formal hearings in which schools and families present their cases to an independent third party arbiter,

generally to resolve a conflict—that are costly, time-consuming, psychologically draining, and damaging to home-school relationships. Therefore, it is in a school or school system's best interest to minimize the number of due process procedures. Regular education does not have a comparable internal, relatively easy-access process for dispute resolution, accountability mechanism, or a financial incentive to ensure family involvement.

Race and ethnicity. Although family engagement was found to be positively associated with academic achievement across race (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005), barriers exist, particularly for families of color and minority status. Noel et al. (2015) identified that family-reported satisfaction with school communications varied by student race and ethnicity. Specifically, 54% of White parents reported being very satisfied with the way school staff interacted with parents, and 47% of Black parents reported being very satisfied. Family engagement practices also varied by race and ethnicity. As far as schools replicate society, discriminatory beliefs and practices in areas such as classroom management, discipline, suspension and expulsion, and sorting students into tiers persisted with long-lasting and inequitable outcomes (Milner, 2015). The marginalization of families of color is similarly systemic, longstanding, and discriminatory in school settings (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Torres, 2010; Milner, 2015; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Kim (2009) wrote that ethnic minority status may be the largest barrier to parental participation in schools, larger than SES. The barriers for minority families are related to both family demographics and the school, though school-based barriers have been less studied. Jung (2011) reported a frequent disconnect between culturally and linguistically

diverse families' participation in special education and school personnel expectations. Barriers Jung mentioned included parental cultural beliefs about schools, school staff attitudes towards cultural differences, differences in communication styles, and language. Although these barriers and expectations existed in areas outside of special education, ethnic minority families reported lower rates of family participation with special education students than did nonminority families with a student receiving special education services (Frew, 2012).

Latino and Hispanic families. Barriers cited for families from Latino backgrounds, both first-generation immigrants and subsequent generations, included language, relational, and cultural differences between home and school. Incongruences between home and school, particularly around the roles of teachers and parents and the comprehensive nature of *educación* (academic, moral, character, and behavior development), influence family-school relationships. Many immigrant Latino families feel undervalued, unwelcomed, mystified, and discriminated against by teachers, schools, school culture, politics, and policies in the US (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Teachers cited school policies, ineffective communication, and family behaviors such not attending school functions as the main barriers for immigrant families (Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, & Navia, 2016). Hill and Torres (2010) pointed out that the Latino population is not monolithic. It encompasses a wide variety of nationalities and cultures, and the extant body of research is not yet deep enough to conclude whether current family-school frameworks and theories apply to the large and varied peoples who make up the Latino population in the US. Often cited in the family engagement field, schools do not always recognize that *all* families—including those for whom English is

not a first or primary language and those from another culture or country—instill in their children values and skills (Hill & Torres, 2010; Lopez, 2001; Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez's (1992) qualitative study that involved Mexican working-class families in Arizona first highlighted the concept of "funds of knowledge" (p. 134), the accumulation and teaching of cultural knowledge and skills vital to functioning and wellbeing. Using teachers as qualitative researchers to analyze household dynamics, study classroom practices, and conduct study groups, Moll et al.'s study found families had broad and diverse funds of knowledge that spanned many fields, including agriculture, mining, repair, medicine, and economics. By recognizing and appreciating the families' funds of knowledge, educators looked beyond stereotypes and could weave the funds into their lessons at school. But to do so, the educators needed reciprocal, trusting relationships with family members to learn about the families and about the child from the families.

Lopez's (2001) qualitative research with immigrant and migrant families in the Texas Rio Grande Valley, also focused on unrecognized funds of knowledge for minority-status families, highlighted some discrepancies between home and school perspectives of what constituted family engagement. The study included five families identified as having highly successful children (i.e., excelling both in academics and out of school). The author found that while a family appeared to be "uninvolved" per the traditional school-centric perspective—in that family members were rarely on school grounds doing a prescribed activity—at home, the family members strategically and

intentionally inculcated their children with values that fostered achievement, such as the value of hard work at school and in the fields. Lopez wrote:

Instead of trying to get marginalized parents involved in specific ways, schools should begin to identify the unique ways that marginalized parents are already involved in their children's education and search for creative ways to capitalize on these and other subjugated forms of involvement.

(p. 434)

Class. Building on the work of Bourdieu (1977), Lareau (1987, 2003), Lareau and Shumar (1996), and Lareau and Horvat (1999) contended that school policies and practices tend to privilege the already privileged and exclude or oppress the already marginalized in class-stratified ways. The social and cultural resources families bring to home-school interactions on behalf of their children—a type of capital—is unequally regarded and rewarded, mostly according to class. How families negotiate with school staff also differed by class. For example, low-income families were far less likely to request a specific teacher, whereas students considered high achievers came from families who were more likely to make a teacher request (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007).

Lareau and Shumar (1996) contended that resources as a whole were not likely to be influenced by school policies. Their research found group differences between lower- or working-class and middle- or upper-class families existed but were largely unacknowledged in school policies. These significant and long-standing differences in resources included education levels, academic skills, flexibility of work demands, social networks, and economic resources.

A significant theme in the field of family engagement is equity. Students with the most disadvantages, such as those who live in poverty with multiple risk factors, perhaps reaped the biggest results from family engagement. The benefits were especially true when using a complementary web of support that pulls together in- and out-of-school learning (Ferguson, 2008; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009; Weiss, Little et al., 2009).

Families have very different abilities and means to engage and support education. Depending on income and wealth, there are vast differences in access to schools (Rothstein, 2004; Shapiro, 2004), what happens inside schools (Kozol, 1991), and outside of school with those in poverty having far less access and opportunity to learn and participate in enriching activities (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). Family involvement was positioned as one way to bridge this divide. Although not eradicating the gap, it could possibly lessen it, improving outcomes for students, schools, and communities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Milner, 2015; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Weiss, Little et al., 2009).

Organizational barriers. What organizations do, offer, and support matters for families. Organizational practices, such as having a common area and time for drop off and pick up, contributed to how families engaged with other families and staff, affecting families' access to other resources, social connections, and ultimately family wellbeing (Small, 2009; Small et al., 2008). Organizational elements described as barriers to family engagement included insufficient communication from the school; parental perceptions about staff, such as seeming too busy; and concern staff will treat a child differently (Panorama Education, 2017).

Lareau and Shumar (1996) wrote that district and school scheduling (such as of holidays, parent-teacher conferences, professional development days, summer breaks, and schools hours) can hamper access to some forms of family engagement in schools. Although school events were difficult for most families to schedule, according to the researchers' observations, middle-class parents had to change out-of-town travel plans, conference calls, and other job-related issues. However, middle-class parents were able to change their schedules easier than could working- and lower-class parents, who more likely worked waged jobs with limited flexibility and more challenges with transportation, childcare, limited income, and resources. The researchers wrote, "These differences in social resources were generally invisible to the educators who, using an individualist model, interpreted the parents' efforts to attend school functions as an index of their level of concern" (p. 26). Mapp and Hong (2010) argued the "hard to reach" parent is a myth (p. 345), a label more likely attached to those who did not fall within culture-normed parameters, such as families of color, poverty, recent immigration, or with limited formal education or English language. Rather, they wrote, "It is our institutions and the programs, practices, and policies that school personnel design that are 'hard to reach,' not the families" (p. 346).

Microprocesses among the actors also affect engagement. School culture and norms, in addition to personal experiences, influence teacher beliefs about family engagement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Bryk and Schneider (2002) posited that relational trust is a substantial yet varied element in schools, and one that can affect the schools' effectiveness. Premised on Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital wherein ongoing, sustained social relationships confer resources, these relationships among

teachers, parents, administrators, and students are often psychologically intimate (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). What constitutes relational trust? Beliefs and observations, along four pillars: respect, competency, personal regard, and integrity. Although families and parents depend on one another, powerful asymmetries such as race and class affect relational trust in schools. Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote, "Further complicating parent-professional relations are the class, race, and ethnic differences that frequently exist between families and professional staff in urban contexts" (p. 33).

Family Engagement Policy

Several federal policies with family engagement components intersect with education. This section briefly reviews the main formal federal policy that includes family engagement provisions and regulations—the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA (2015), Title I. It also describes more recent action on behalf of the federal government with regard to family engagement, specifically, the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is also briefly detailed as a dominant federal policy with family engagement provisions. The section also briefly discusses state policies with regard to family engagement. Finally, to bring together policy and practice, the literature with respect to policy implementation in organizations is summarized.

Federal

Title I. The most prominent and far-reaching federal policy regarding family engagement is commonly referred to as Title I, part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) first authorized in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson in his "War on Poverty." Title I was intended to distribute funds to schools that educate a high

number of children from low-income families. Through Title I, federal funds are distributed to states, which in turn distribute funds to school districts or local education agencies.

The primary goal of Title I was to assist schools in helping students from low-income circumstances reach rigorous state academic standards. Eligibility is assessed using census data, free- and reduced-lunch enrollment, Temporary Assistance Needy Families enrollment, and other data to assess the number of low-income children coupled with the state's average per-pupil expenditure. Title I funds are flexible in that local education agencies decide how to use most of the funds. Schools in which eligible students account for more than 40% of the population may use Title I funds for school-wide programming—programs that benefit the whole school. In school year 2009-2010, Title I served more than 21 million children; 59% were in Kindergarten through Grade 5 at more than 56,000 public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

ESEA to ESSA. The ESEA is now the ESSA, most recently reauthorized in December 2015, 14 years after its last authorization. According to the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (2015), changes included the use of the term *parent and family engagement*, instead of *parental involvement*, throughout the law. Another change stipulated that school districts must include one of the following in their efforts to engage with families: provide professional development (for staff, and may include families), include home-based programs, provide information, and collaborate with community organizations. Further, the bill required districts to state expectations and objectives to engage families effectively, and schools can opt for a parent advisory board to contribute to developing and evaluating the school-based family

engagement policy. Establishment of statewide family engagement centers, replacing parental information resource centers is included in the ESSA reauthorization, with \$10 million allocated to fund the centers.

Currently in ESSA, as was in ESEA, Title I schools must co-develop with families a written policy detailing how the school will implement family engagement activities. The act requires an annual meeting to explain the Title I program and development of a school-parent compact detailing how families, schools, and students will share responsibility for improving student achievement and how the parties will communicate (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2015). Ujifusa and Tully (2016) suggested there was little difference between the ESEA and the ESSA, with the exception that school quality measures (which could include student engagement and school climate) are now emphasized under school accountability, which could broaden parent and community influence.

Title I "set-aside" funds. First authorized in 1994 under President Clinton, districts that receive at least \$500,000 in Title I funding were required to set aside no less than 1% for parental engagement initiatives and programming, such as family literacy, parenting skills, or other family-based activities. Schools and districts could opt to set aside more than 1%. At the time of its initial enactment, at least 95% of the set-aside funds had to be distributed to Title I schools. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education proposed the ESEA reauthorization increase the required set-aside amount to 2% of Title I funds for family engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This proposed increase did not pass. Although the 2015 reauthorization of ESSA stipulated that at least

1% of the funding be reserved to fund parent and family engagement activities and that families be involved in deciding how funds are used, only 90% of this funding would go directly to schools (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Dual capacity-building framework. Of late, the U.S. Department of Education has signaled that family engagement is an area of interest and attention. Notably, in 2016, Frances Frost was named as the first Family Ambassador at the U.S. Department of Education.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education (2013) released the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. The framework, meant to guide Kindergarten through Grade 12, illustrated a two-pronged approach to building the capacity of families and school staff alike. It is research based and embeds relational and organizational supports to engage families and staff in the support of student achievement and school improvement. (See Figure 3 for an adapted version of the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships.)

The framework recognized educator capacity to work with families has been limited (Epstein, 2010). It was meant as a guide and not a prescriptive step-by-step approach for districts to improve relationships between families and educators by building their capacity to engage with each other (Harvard Family Research Project, 2015). No formal accountability or monitoring mechanisms were associated with the framework.

In March 2015, the U.S. Department of Education (2015) released a set of rights for families as a complement to the dual capacity-building framework. The rights read:

To help prepare every student for success in life, families have the right to:

- 1) Free, quality preschool; 2) High, challenging standards and engaging teaching and leadership in a safe, supportive, well-resourced school; and
- 3) An affordable, quality college degree.

As of March 2017, this set of family rights were archived on the U.S. Department of Education website.

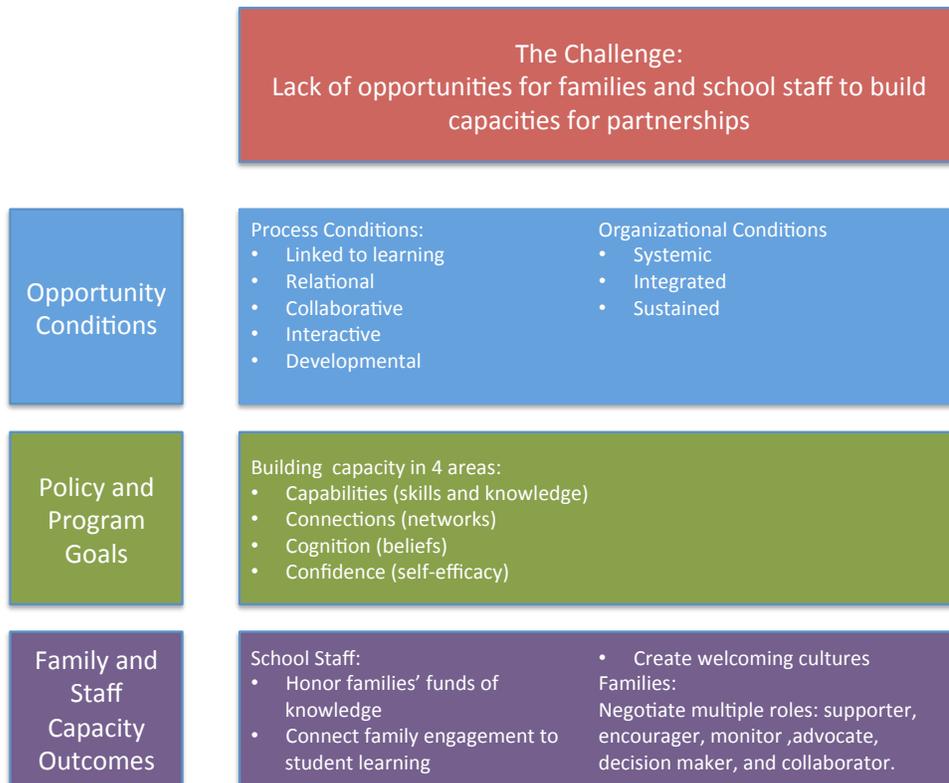


Figure 3. Adapted U.S. Department of Education's (2013) dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships, which describes the conditions, goals, and outcomes in building school and families' capacities for partnering in schools. Author's figure.

Individuals with Disabilities Act. The IDEA, most recently amended in 2004, is the preeminent law that guarantees students with an identified disability and documented need for specialized instruction their right to access a free and appropriate education. Initially called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), it was signed into law in 1975 and was later renamed IDEA. Within IDEA, significant provisions address parental consent, notification, participation in special education decisions and processes, and clearly defined processes regarding dispute resolution.

These parental rights provisions in special education are referred to as *procedural safeguards*. Federal and state laws regulate special education and, thus, family involvement and parental rights in special education can vary from state to state. However, procedural safeguards are consistent across the states. Respective state departments of education are required to provide to families whose children qualify for special education services a copy of their parental rights annually. Procedural safeguards are to be provided in a language the family understands. The rights are also available upon request and at key junctures in the special education process.

An example of a procedural safeguard is that parents must consent for specialized tests or services. Consent is voluntary and can be revoked at any time. Parental consent is required to initiate special education services, approve initial services, and change or revise a special education plan, including placement or reevaluation. Parents are also asked to provide input into their child's special education plan, including strengths and a vision statement. This input is neither required nor binding. The IDEA and parental safeguards do not ensure or mandate parental participation—parents may opt not to participate.

Other policies also address family engagement in education, most notably the Promise Neighborhoods Program, the Race-to-the-Top Early Learning Challenge, the McKinney-Vento Act, Title X, which addresses enrollment of children experiencing homelessness, and Title III, which addresses family participation for students who are English Language Learners (ELL) or Limited English Proficient. Although those federal policies are not described here, they are understood to include family engagement components.

State

State policy is also a lever to influence policy, practice, and behaviors. Among the states, "no single approach to family engagement exists" (Weyer, 2015, p. 4). The National Conference of State Legislatures (Weyer, 2017) published family engagement legislation proposed and enacted by individual states and elucidated the variability among the states, as well as areas of shared focus. For example, in 2016, four states (Maryland, New York, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) introduced or enacted bills related to family engagement in pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3. Each bill had a different focus—creation, governance, and funding of community schools; comprehensive services for families; and home visitation. In other years, legislation included family engagement with other foci, such as two-generation strategies, worker leave policy, and accountability and reporting. Some states (such as New York and Massachusetts) also included family engagement indicators on their standards by which educators are evaluated professionally (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013).

California has a particularly robust framework intended to guide districts in the planning, implementing, and evaluating their family engagement practices, including the

federal and state policies. The California Department of Education's (2014) parent, family, and community engagement framework, originally published in 2011 and updated in 2014 with a Spanish language translation, synthesized research, best practices, and state and federal program requirements, such as those found in Title I, Title III, and the IDEA (McWilliams, 2016). The framework provides an overview of federal and state parent involvement codes and regulations and delineates legal requirements on family engagement across education programs. The framework specifies 18 district principles within five action areas: capacity, leadership, fiscal and other resources, progress, and access and equity. Each indicator is rated according to a matrix as meeting basic, progressive, or innovative implementation descriptors. This framework is more policy-related than the other frameworks and encourages programs to go beyond compliance. It is used in both parent and educator trainings in the state.

Organizational Frameworks

In addition to state and federal frameworks, organization-sponsored frameworks help managers and practitioners organize and focus on particular elements with respect to family engagement. Frameworks communicate priority areas to the public, including funders. They can assist in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. Two organizational frameworks frequently referred to in the family engagement field are the National PTA's (n.d.) national standards for family-school partnerships and the Office of Head Start's (2011) parent, family, and community engagement framework.

The National PTA's (n.d.) six national standards for family-school partnerships were designed for school use: 1) welcoming all families into the school community, 2) communicating effectively, 3) supporting student success, 4) speaking up for every

child, 5) sharing power, and 6) collaborating with community. The standards specify how families and schools should work together, emphasizing inclusion of all students and families. They can be used to assess current practices, plan future programming, and monitor progress. The State of Colorado adopted the national standards as the state framework for family engagement. (Refer to Figure 4 for this author's representation of the National PTA standards.)

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Welcoming all families | Communicating effectively | Supporting student success |
| Speaking up for every child | Sharing power | Collaborating with the community |

Figure 4. Adapted National PTA (n.d.) national standards for family-school partnerships.

Author's figure.

Although designed for Head Start and Early Head Start programs, the Office of Head Start's (2011) parent, family, and community engagement research-based framework is applicable for other educational settings and age groups. It centers on

building positive and goal-oriented relationships between home and school, with outcomes for the child and family. (See Figure 5 for a representation of the framework.)

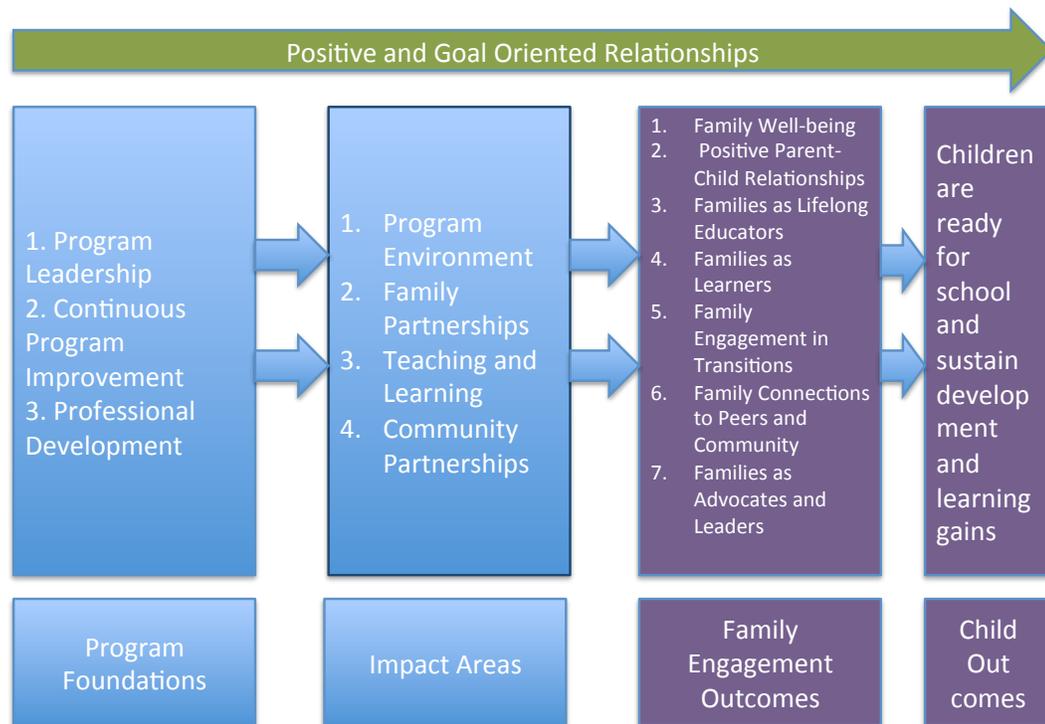


Figure 5. Adapted Office of Head Start's (2011) parent, family, and community engagement framework. Author's figure.

The National PTA and Office of Head Start frameworks highlight the importance of creating welcoming environments for families and collaborating with communities, in addition to partnering with families to support children's learning.

Policy to Practice

As shown above, there was no paucity of actual policy to guide behavior in engaging families in education. However, policy presence alone does not translate to action. Stakeholders must understand, adopt, and internalize expectations and rationale for family engagement. As Weiss, Bouffard, Bridgall, and Gordon (2009) and Weiss et al. (2010) suggested, family engagement in practice has yet to be fully realized. The next phase for family engagement and family engagement policy is to build the capacity of teachers and families while also building integrated and sustained systems of family engagement, over time and across communities.

Although literature on adoption of family engagement policy is sparse, we can look to other policy implementation research. Educational research, which informs policy and, in turn, informs educator practices, is often disconnected or uncoupled from those who do the work—the teachers and educators—and from the very institutions it ought to influence (Hess, 2008). In addition to academic journals, which can be difficult to access and comprehend, professional organizations have been found to be important in disseminating research findings to practitioners. Teachers are vital in reshaping professional norms required for reform, predicated on professional legitimacy (Kim, cited in Hess, 2008). Policies can set expectations for practices and drive resource allotment, but teachers' social interactions with their colleagues mediate their responses and adoption of new norms and practices. Social dynamics, even in small subgroups, shape policy implementation (Penuel, Frank, Min, Kim, & Singleton, 2013).

Grappling with peers has been found to be important in curriculum-based policy implementation in schools (Coburn, 2001; Colburn & Russell, 2008). Practitioners often

turn to their colleagues and peers to evaluate problems of practice (Coburn, 2001). Common understanding among the actors and stakeholders is crucial for organizational change (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016). Professional learning communities, or peer learning in collective communities of practice where actors can exchange ideas with a wide variety of others, across groups, and in social spaces, has been shown to be important to organizational change (Kellogg, 2009). Additionally, reform or changes in behaviors, norms, and understandings are often socially mediated, with peer-learning and peer-comparison components (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016). For organizational change to take root and sustain, there must be a cohesive community with moderate diversity that introduces and reinforces new norms and practices. Disconnected, separated communities have weaker social pressure, and change is less likely to take hold. Thus, the organizational status quo continues (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016), a phenomenon known as *cultural persistence* (Zucker, 1977). It follows, then, that we can expect family engagement policy to require ample social mediation among teachers and school leaders to translate into daily practice.

Summary

Years of research strongly supported family involvement in children's education (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007, 2012; Wilder, 2014), with positive outcomes in academics, behavior, school attendance, and mental health (Fan & Chen, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Wilder, 2014), as well as school and community benefits (Bryk et al., 2010; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Henderson, 2010; Hong, 2012; Mediratta et al., 2008; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Although family engagement is publically vaunted and present in numerous federal, state, and local policies, many families are unsatisfied with interactions with their child's school (Noel et al., 2015). Teachers, too, reported less than optimal support from families and satisfaction with family engagement (MetLife, 2012). Stakeholders—teachers, parents, and students—tended to report disparate amounts and types of family engagement (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Satisfaction with, and participation in, family engagement can vary, most notably among class, ethnicity, and race, but there are other variations, such as with educational program and student age (Frew, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010; MetLife, 2012; Noel et al., 2015). Organizational conditions and barriers can impede family engagement in the school setting: language and cultural differences, discriminatory and constricted beliefs about families, and limited and prescribed opportunities, to name a few (Kim, 2009; Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Family engagement has been a component of federal education policy since the late 1960s. The most prominent and far-reaching federal policy regarding family engagement is Title I, part of the ESEA (now ESSA), meant to distribute funds to schools that educate a high number of children from low-income families. Other policies also address family engagement in education, most notably the IDEA, the McKinney-Vento Act or Title X, and Title III. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education released the dual capacity-building framework, which recognizes that, in addition to relational and organizational conditions, families and educators require training and competencies to engage meaningfully. States also passed various legislation that drive and guide family engagement in education, though states vary widely in foci and respective policies

(Weyer, 2017). Several organizations also forwarded frameworks that communicate to the public and as guide practitioners (National PTA, n.d.; Office of Head Start, 2011).

Despite the robust research supporting family engagement and its long-standing presence in federal and state policy, actual implementation of family engagement in schools remains uneven and inconsistent and, according to teacher and family reports, often less than satisfactory. Although speculative, research on policy implementation suggested a substantial social context and mediation to policy adoption and organizational change, and gave rise to the nexus of questions driving this research project. **What accounts for the discrepancy between how family engagement is prescribed and described in policy and how it is carried out in practice?**

CHAPTER 3

Method

In this qualitative research, I seek to understand stories and perspectives of school staff and families, as they construct them, by getting as close as possible to the meaning-making process (Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2005) and answer the overarching question—What accounts for the discrepancy between how family engagement is prescribed and described in policy and how it is carried out in practice?—and specific subquestions:

- a. How do the various stakeholders—teachers, administrators, and families—understand family engagement, and how do those understandings influence choices of action?
- b. How do federal, state, and district policies influence family engagement beliefs and practices, if at all?
- c. What organizational practices do stakeholders experience as encouraging or impeding optimal family engagement?

The following sections describe the methods and procedures used in this inquiry, including the participants and site where this inquiry took place and how the data were collected and analyzed. It presents issues of trustworthiness and how some of those issues were addressed in this project.

Methodological Framing

Qualitative Interview: A Constructivist Method

The primary method of data collection for this project was qualitative interviewing, a semistructured interview process that included strategies and formats recommended by Patton (2001) and Seidman (2006). Interviewing, a conversation

between at least two people intended to get "words to fly" (Glesne, 2011, p. 102), is a particularly useful data-gathering tool in qualitative research where the underlying theoretical assumption is constructivism or interpretivism. That is, the researcher is also a narrator explicating a prior narration (Chase, 2010). Knowledge is thus co-constructed in an ongoing way throughout the interview process and after. In qualitative research, the researcher is the research tool; what their eyes, ears, and senses perceive represent the evidence and data (Patton, 2001). Barring the inadmissible, all information and data collected by the qualitative researcher is then collated, analyzed, and reported in rich, "thick description," as described by Geertz (1973). Such descriptions include the surrounding context, including home and school cultures.

The purpose of an interview is to gather information and data about what cannot be directly observed and measured: unwitnessed behaviors, thoughts, understandings, feelings, and intentions that "allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2001, p. 341). Observations, artifact and document collections, and other methods assist the researcher to make sense of all collected data. This information supports, supplements, or contradicts what emerges through interviews.

The underlying assumption in qualitative interviewing is that the participants' perspectives are vital; their stories are known only to them and can be wholly told only by them. Crucial to the process is that the story is accurately heard, interpreted, and relayed, and then perceived, interpreted, and reported again in an iterative interpretation process. Given the number of interpretations, possible filters and lenses include, but are not restricted to, race, class, gender, language, and culture. It is thus impossible to regard whatever is received and reported as the only "truth." It depicts but one version, with

multiple contributing interpretations. Like the children's game "Operator," another round brings yet another iteration. In this way, the researcher is also a narrator, albeit less important, of a prior narration (Chase, 2010). It is ultimately a constructivist enterprise in which the knowledge is the accumulation of human constructions. What is learned comes about from the interaction between the inquirer, or researcher, and the inquired. The process embraces relativism; that is, there is no one absolute truth, but rather, "multiple realities rather than multiple conceptions of one reality" (C. G. Lee, 2012, p. 406). Moreover, what is learned changes over time and is co-constructed.

By interviewing families, school staff, and school administrators, I hoped to understand areas of congruence and incongruence within, between, and among the stakeholders. Glesne (2011) suggested that by exploring the interpretations of several members of the same group, patterns of thought and beliefs, and cultural beliefs, may emerge.

The purpose of this inquiry was not to compare the research-site school to other schools or to position it as reflective of all or even any other school. Through exploring family, staff, and administrator perspectives of one school, this study acknowledges the school's uniqueness and importance in and of itself, as were the unique stories and perspectives offered by each participant. As Stake (1997) wrote, "For the time being, the search is for an understanding of the particular case, in its idiosyncrasy, in its complexity, the case" (p. 405). There is no assertion that the results presented in the next chapter are generalizable to any other school, district, or individual.

Grounded Theory

I used an adapted grounded theory approach to analyze and interpret the data gathered in this research. Grounded theory is a data-collection method and analytic tool, as well as an approach on how to understand the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although grounded theory proposes analyzing data in an inductive and organic way, Charmaz (2011) cautioned that researchers would be foolhardy to reject prior theories entirely.

Few researchers, including grounded theorists, can avoid earlier theories and empirical studies in their areas of research interests. Grounded theorists increasingly concur with Henwood and Pidgeon's (2003) proposal of adopting a stance of theoretical agnosticism rather than aiming to enter their research as a *tabula rasa* untouched by earlier ideas. (p. 166)

I chose a grounded theory to fully capture the robust, lived experience of family engagement, taking into account the families, teachers, and school staff's perspectives, as well as the organizational conditions and contexts. Thus, I expected some data and findings would fall outside of the frameworks and theories described in Chapter 2. The challenge of analysis is in how to understand these findings and integrate, or assemble, them into a new theory or framework.

A constructivist undertaking, the grounded approach allowed a flexible evolution of data collection and analysis. Questions could be modified and participant recruitment intentional—focused to test what is evidencing in an on-going way. Data were read, reread, and reread again or listened to repeatedly, to find and identify variations or alternative interpretations. Statements were coded and organized thematically. Codes were then grouped into categories. Categories were compared, subsumed, combined, and

split to define and redefine categories. Memo writing, the step between coding and analysis, narrated and defined current thinking while refining categories, a kind of process notation.

Consistent with the grounded theory approach, in this project data coding was ongoing throughout the data-gathering phase (Charmaz, 2010). I relied primarily on qualitative interviews and included memo writing, observations, artifact collection, and triangulation methods to verify and validate the emerging themes and categories (Charmaz, 2010; Maxwell, 2005). Supplemental data such as observations, artifact collection, and texts were reviewed to flesh out more completely how families and the Brendan River School interacted. A substantive theory was formulated to explain and identify relationships between categories, as a process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and described in Chapter 5.

Procedures

Materials

After institutional review board (IRB) approval from Lesley University (Appendix A), and in accordance with the school district policy, research materials were forwarded to the district Chief Research and Accountability Officer. These materials, submitted for approval in the summer of 2016, included interview protocols for families, teachers, and administrators (Appendix B), recruitment materials (Appendix C), and a summary of the research project. Interview protocols and recruitment materials were subsequently translated into Spanish and forwarded to the Chief Research and Accountability Officer for approval prior to their use and dissemination (Appendix D).

Site: Brendan River School

Brendan River School is located in a mid-sized city in New England, the second largest city in the state. About 40 square miles in size, the city has a population between 100,000 and 199,999 people. Over 20% of the city's population lives below the poverty level. Like many cities in New England, it was once a major manufacturing center but today the main industries are biotechnology, healthcare, and higher education.

The district's public school system is the third largest in the state. It educates almost 25,000 students in over 40 schools, with over 4,000 employees. As reported in Table 1, 76% of the students are high needs and 57% are economically disadvantaged. Thirty-four percent are ELL and 19% receive special education services. Families in the school district represent over 85 different languages and dialects. The district recognizes seven main languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Nepali, Twi, Arabic, and Albanian) and offers some limited materials, such as the school calendar and student handbooks, and reportedly translation services, in these languages. About 70% of the city's public school students and 12% of teachers in the district identify as from an ethnic or racial minority group.

The district is headed by a superintendent. The school committee, which consists of the city mayor and six other elected members, sets district and school policies, votes on the district budget, and hires and removes the superintendent.

Table 1. *Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-2017, School, District, and State*

| Race/Ethnicity | % of School | % of District | % of State |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|
| African American | 14% | 15% | 9% |
| Asian | 10% | 7% | 7% |
| Hispanic | 49% | 42% | 19% |
| Native American | | | |
| White | 24% | 31% | 61% |
| Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander | | | |
| Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic | 3% | 4% | 3% |

The district has several formal supports and initiatives intended to reach out to and assist families. The school department oversees the district's parent information centers, open year-round. These parent information centers are the main repository of information for students and families entering district public schools. There is an online catalog with local resources, such as afterschool and community organizations, in addition to school-based information such as the district school calendar, on the district's *For Families* webpage. The school department hosts monthly parent council meetings at a central location, where parents from across the district meet to advise the district administration and school committee. These council meetings have formal structures, procedures, and agendas and meeting minutes are maintained and reported. Additionally, the school district, in partnership with several community organizations, publishes and distributes a catalog with a variety of free courses, workshops, and events offered by

partner organizations. Courses are available online in a variety of languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and Vietnamese.

Family engagement has received attention at the district level as of late. In 2015, both the district and school identified family and community engagement as a goal on their respective improvement plans. Brendan River's stated goal was to increase the number of stakeholders participating in school-wide initiatives to increase student achievement. Additionally, the district conducts a yearly parent survey; due to a low response rate, the results of that survey are not released publicly (personal communication, March, 2017).

The district was in the process of rolling out a new family engagement curriculum directed at improving family capacity (personal communication, December, 2016). The curriculum is a nine-week training course for families with the goal of supporting students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to apply to and attend college. To date, the district has implemented the program in one school, with plans to introduce it to two other schools in the near future (personal communication, December, 2016). Ultimately, the district hopes to make the program available at all its schools (personal communication, meeting, December, 2016). At the time of the research, it had not been introduced at Brendan River School, nor did those interviewed seem aware of the initiative. In spring 2017, I observed a session of this offering held in a local school with Spanish and English sessions. Families were asked to commit to the full nine-week session. Meeting times were available in the morning and evenings.

Brendan River School is located in a mid-sized city in New England. It is a public elementary school for Kindergarten through Grade 6, enrolls roughly 475 students.

About 90% of Brendan River students were considered *high needs*, meaning they currently or in the past had identified as being from economically disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds or received ELL or special education services.

At the time of the research, Brendan River School listed 70% of its student population as economically disadvantaged, meaning they participated in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; the Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children; the Department of Children and Families foster care program; or Medicaid. It was a Title I school, receiving funding to educate the significant numbers of economically disadvantaged students. About 63% of the students identified a language other than English as their first language (Spanish was the most predominant first language) and 46% were ELLs. Twenty percent of the student body was identified as requiring special education services. Table 2 lists other student demographics and compare to district and state levels.

Table 2. *Student Enrollment by Select Population, 2016-2017, School, District, and State*

| Select Population | % of School | % of District | % of State |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|
| First language not English | 63% | 54% | 20% |
| ELL | 46% | 34% | 10% |
| Student with disabilities | 20% | 19% | 17% |
| High needs | 90% | 76% | 45% |
| Economically disadvantaged | 70% | 57% | 30% |

Participants

Participants were solicited and selected using purposive and snowball techniques (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2001). Recruitment materials, including a summary of the project, were posted at the school, circulated in the school, and sent to school staff through email. Additionally, the principal referred some staff and families, who in turn referred other participants (snowball technique). All participants received a copy of the consent form with contact information of the researcher and supervisors (Appendix E). When feasible, such as when an email address was provided, participants received a copy of the interview questions, a summary of the research project, and the consent form prior to the interview. All participants received a \$25 gift certificate in appreciation of their time and as an incentive to participate. Participants were informed of their rights verbally and in writing on the form, which contained the eight main conditions of consent (Seidman, 2006) and were notified they were under no obligation to participate and could opt out or choose to stop the interview at any time; no participant did so. I verbally asked participants for permission to record the interview for note-taking purposes; all agreed. Further, I offered all participants copies of their transcripts to check for accuracy, and invited some participants to review portions of the dissertation for accuracy (Seidman, 2006).

In attempts to attract a more representative sample of Brendan River families, I attended several days of school dismissal to meet families and dispense recruitment information. I also directed my efforts towards sampling families who speak Spanish, a large population of the school not initially represented among those scheduled to be interviewed. Teachers with unique access and relationships with families were also

asked to distribute recruitment materials. When available, I personally reached out to families and teachers to request their participation, with limited success.

Table 3 provides a snapshot of the family member participants ($N = 9$), over eight interviews included in this study. One interview was with a couple (Oscar and Mari). All others were individual interviews. Four family participants spoke Spanish as their primary language. Of these four, one requested a translator not be present; the other three agreed to have a translator present. The translator, Anya, a native Spanish speaker originally from the Dominican Republic, was a school employee familiar to families and staff and

Family configuration and professional and educational background were included to describe the family member's level of support (e.g., with a partner, employed, level of education). All names and identifying information have been changed to protect the identities and provide anonymity for the individuals; pseudonyms are used in all cases.

Different school roles can have different expectations and training with regard to interacting with families. Table 4 provides information on the school and district participants included in this study. Again, all names and identifying information have been changed to protect the identities and provide anonymity for the individuals; pseudonyms are used in all cases.

Table 3. *Family Participants: Background*

| Name | Family configuration | Professional/educational background |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Michele Waters (JW) | Mother of two sons, Marcus (6) and Matthew (7); recently separated from her partner and father of her sons. Oldest son receives special education services. | Master's degree; works locally in human services; identifies as White. |
| Janice Smith (JS) | Single mother of one daughter, Claire (8); her daughter's father lives locally. | Some college completion; military background; currently employed in the technology field. Was home- schooled for some of her elementary years. |
| Julianne Peters (LP) | Mother of one son, James Jr. (9); married. | Works as home healthcare aide and, until recently, a bus monitor. President of the PTO for much of the school year. |
| May Thomas (MT) | Mother of two children, daughter Sunny (7) and son Teddy (5). Divorced from her children's father, who lives locally. Both children receive special education services. | Works for the local transit authority as a bus driver on the second shift daily, a bus monitor for the school, and PTO vice president. Identifies as White—her mother is White and her father is from Puerto Rico. |
| MaryBeth Morris (AM) | Married mother of three children: son Dale (10), daughter Aimee (8), and son Grant (6). | Currently does not work outside of the home. |
| Fernando Garcia (FI) | Married father of two children: Anna (10) and Sammy (6). The children receive ELL services at school. He is also the parent of adult children. | Born in Puerto Rico and moved to New York City as a child. Identifies as of mixed racial background—his mother is White and his father is Black. Works as a car mechanic. |
| Isis Diaz (I) | From Puerto Rico and lives in the US with her young son, Joseph (6). | Came to the US from Puerto Rico several years ago. Identifies as Black Latino. Son is in second grade. He is a special education student with behavioral needs. |
| Oscar and Mari Sotomayor (OS, MS) | Oscar and his wife Mari are from Ecuador. They have one son, Javier, in fifth grade at Brendan River School. | Own and run a small storefront business specializing in international sportswear. Oscar came to the US as a young adult; Mari came as a young adolescent. Some of Mari's educational experience has been in the US while Oscar was educated entirely in Ecuador. |

Table 4. *School Staff Participants: Position and Background*

| Name | Position | Background |
|------|----------|------------|
|------|----------|------------|

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Maureen Murphy (MM) | Assistant Superintendent (Administration) | Parent of adult children; has worked in the district for 30 years in various positions including kindergarten and high school teacher, assistant principal, and principal. First year as a district administrator. |
| Denise Cummings (SD) | Principal (Administration) | Parent of school-aged children; principal at Brendan River for three years. She was principal and assistant principal in another district for 5 years, an adjunct professor, and elementary class teacher in another district. |
| Kelly Marshall (KM) | Assistant Principal (Administration) | Parent of adult children. Has extensive experience in the school district in roles such as the learning disabilities specialist. |
| Laura Curtis (LC) | Instructional Coach (Teacher/administration) | Parent to adult children. Second year as instructional coach, but third year at Brendan River (classroom teacher her first year in the district). Elementary classroom teacher for over 15 years in other districts. |
| Jerry Lustig (JL) | Special Education/Behavior Classroom Teacher, Grades 4, 5, and 6 (Staff) | First year at Brendan River. Has been a classroom teacher for several years in the district. Was a teaching assistant for about 10 years in special ed settings at middle- and high-school levels and worked at a charter school. Some working experience outside of education. |
| Kara Grover (KG) | Grade 5 Classroom Inclusion Teacher (Staff) | Teacher at Brendan River for the last 10 years; was a staff member at another school in the district for 3 years prior. |
| Deliah Long (DL) | Grade 1 Classroom Teacher (Staff) | Parent of school-aged children. At Brendan River school for 2.5 years; was a teacher for 10 years in another school district; 10 years of experience as an education consultant. |
| Joy Cusamano (JC) | ELL Teacher (Staff) | Parent of school-aged children. ELL teacher at Brendan River for 3 years; ELL teacher in the district for 25 years. |
| Andy Blair (AB) | Grade 1 Classroom Teacher (Staff) | First grade classroom teacher for four years at Brendan River School. Completed student teaching at Brendan River, and was an instructional and 1:1 Aide at Brendan River. |

Data

Primary data: Interviews. Interview protocols were piloted with two participants prior to the data collection period. The duration of the interviews was generally between 35 minutes and 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with explicit verbal and written permission from each participant. All took place at Brendan River School in a private space with a closed door such as a classroom or office, though interruptions (e.g., persons coming into the office or announcements over the loudspeaker) occasionally occurred. Most (13) recordings were then transcribed by a third party, with timestamps. The researcher transcribed the other four recordings. Audio recordings were retained as backup and referred to for verification. Transcriptions were coded during data collection and memo writing took place throughout, consistent with a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2010). NVivo software was used to organize and manage the data.

Supplemental data: Observations, artifacts, and text collection. With the permission of the school principal, I attended a variety of family-school events and meetings such as the teachers' first day of school in early September, 2016. I attended each PTO meeting and Principal Chats throughout the six-month data collection period and continued to attend most meetings after data collection, for the remainder of the school year. In addition to the above meetings, I attended a citywide parent advisory council meeting, where parents from across the district met to advise the district administration and school committee. I maintained observation notes and collected artifacts such as meeting minutes. The memoranda I wrote throughout were organized in NVivo software.

Texts collected and reviewed included the district academic calendar, 2016-2017 (Spanish and English versions), PTO meeting agendas, materials disseminated at Parent Chat and PTO meetings (e.g., bus schedule, social service agency list of resources in Spanish and English, and Love and Logic handouts), citywide parent advisory meeting agenda and minutes, school newsletters, parent training materials and handouts, Save-the-Date reminder about parent conferences, copies of online parent satisfaction survey for 2016-2017, and a teachers' union newsletter.

Data Analysis

All 17 transcribed interviews were open coded by sentence or idea using NVivo data analysis program on a rolling basis (Charmaz, 2010, 2011). Field notes, observations, artifacts, and memos were also reviewed and coded accordingly. Initially, 63 categories were identified. Word and idea frequencies were analyzed to identify areas of commonality and refine categories.

A second cycle of coding, axial coding, was initiated and resulted in themes and categories (Charmaz, 2010, 2011) presented in Chapter 4. During this axial coding portion of the analysis, categories were collapsed and compared, defined, and separated (Charmaz, 2010; Charmaz, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The category dimensions of categories were also defined (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Adapted from Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch's (2003) voice-centered relational approach, teacher interviews were color coded to identify "I" and "we" statements and contrapuntal voices to explore further the individual and the collective. *I-poems* and *we-poems* were constructed after repeated listening and readings of transcripts to identify and explore voice and changes in voice, as described by Gilligan et al. I-poems are assembled from participants' I-verb-

phrase statements to illuminate how the teller talked about and understood self in relation to the research subject (Edwards & Weller, 2012; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2003). I used analogies, metaphors, and questions to refine and explicate categories and their dimensions (Charmaz, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Initially, I constructed two selective codes and then compared the two on specificity, robustness, and the number and quality of related categories, as well as other comparisons of two phenomena described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). A central, core category was designated after comparing the two phenomena and a storyline constructed, relating and ordering the pertinent themes (Charmaz, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A substantive theory was formulated to explain and identify relationships between categories, in a process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used mapping techniques and simple language to explore the substantive theory in relation to Brendan River and simple language to describe the unifying theory (Charmaz, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Appendix F contains tables of the axial, open, and selective code schemes.

Validity: Trustworthiness

"Validity," Maxwell (2005) wrote, "is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted" (p. 279). Validity, for the qualitative project, refers to "correctness" and trustworthiness: are you evaluating what you say you are evaluating (p. 284). Trustworthiness is the "quality of an inquiry—whether the findings and interpretations made are an outcome of a systematic process and whether the findings and interpretations can be trusted" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 103).

Trustworthiness requires the research be rigorous and reasonably free from bias and outside influence. Holloway and Jefferson (in Glesne, 2011) suggested researchers

ask themselves a guiding question: How can you know if your interpretation is the right one? Lincoln and Guba (2013) went further and posited five criteria for evaluating qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity, and offered techniques to address each criterion, many of which I employed to maximize the trustworthiness of this research. Although validity and trustworthiness concerns may be unavoidable in research, particularly with qualitative research, they are necessary multifaceted quality control goals and determine the integrity of the research. Several strategies were employed in this study to maintain a high level of validity and trustworthiness.

Similar to internal validity in quantitative research, credibility confers confidence in the accuracy and truth in the data and interpretations. The Hawthorne effect, the tendency for those who are being observed or studied to change, intentionally or unintentionally, in response to being studied, is a particular validity threat. Similarly, responding in a socially preferable way is an obvious concern. Is what the participant is reporting true and accurate? I used a number of techniques offered by Lincoln and Guba (2013) to address credibility: prolonged engagement (in this case, over the course of a school year, 8 to 10 months), persistent observations (continued participation in PTO and Parent Chats), triangulation, member checks, and debriefing with peers.

Triangulation, "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 280) is a particular intentionally employed check. Consistent with Maier and Monahan (2010), I crosschecked factual, reported data with other available records, such as newspapers, publicly available reports,

and meeting minutes. I also spoke with a number of individuals and asked for clarification.

Member checks refers to having participants review their data, checking for accuracy and offering corrections in the analysis. For this project, all participants were offered opportunities for a follow-up interview, but none requested one. Most participants were offered copies of their interview transcripts to review and the opportunity to clarify, correct, or change what was said in the interview. Additionally, I periodically provided selected participants and the interpreter selections of the dissertation for member checking purposes.

Similar to reliability in quantitative research, dependability considers whether the research can be replicated under similar conditions with similar participants. A review by outside researchers—in this case, by members of my committee—who reviewed the research processes and their results assisted in achieving dependability, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (2013) recommendations. Given that this inquiry is specific to Brendan River School, dependability is of lesser concern.

Confirmability asks the researcher to demonstrate that the data reflect the participants'—and not the researcher's—experiences and opinions, because researcher bias is an ongoing validity threat. Amply quoting participants can demonstrate confirmability (Cope, 2014).

Some strategies employed in this study occurred during the actual interviews. The tension between believing and disbelieving the participant is often present in research (Reinhartz, 1992). While believing participants' stories subjectively, there is an independent need to know objectively. Yeandle (as cited in Reinhartz, 1992, p. 25) asked

participants to review and restate the chronology of events as a "reliability check," something I often did. Researcher Marjorie DeVault (as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 40) suggested researchers listen for and respond honestly to phrases such as "you know," meant as a request for confirmation. Reinhartz (1992) wrote, "If we do not understand, we must say so; if we do understand, we must say *what* we understand" (p. 40). Asking for clarification, reflective listening, and restating what was heard are ways to make sure what is being heard is what the participant intends, strategies that I often used.

Seidman (2006) reviewed two criteria for assessing how many participants are enough in qualitative research: saturation and sufficiency. *Saturation* appears when themes and ideas are repeated and no new information is being heard. *Sufficiency* is reached when the numbers of participants reflect the range of the population such that others from outside the sample can connect to the experiences being expressed and revealed. Finally, Seidman recognized the time, money, resources, and logistical constraints in trying to meet the criteria and suggested researchers try to err on the side of having more participants over fewer. Based on Seidman's recommendations, there were sufficient participants in this project in some categories: Administrators, staff, and families; school staff included cuts across grades and specialties. It may appear that females are overrepresented in both the families and the school staff and administration. However, this was not happenstance; research suggested mothers most often do the work of supporting schools and childcare (Cole, 2007; Griffith & Smith, 2005), and the education field tends to be heavily populated by females—about 76% for the 2011-2012 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Notably, whereas men's involvement in childrearing has increased over the last few decades, their type of

involvement tended to be different qualitatively and quantitatively, and mothers tended to feel more stress and have their feelings about self impacted (Hochschild, 1989; Musick, Meier, & Flood, 2016).

Another aspect of trustworthiness and validity affects this inquiry—translation.

In Translation: Anya. "You need to reach out from the heart." At first, I think she is telling me how to best recruit families for an interview, a criticism of my approach. With time, I realize Anya, the school interpreter who accompanies me on several interviews, is telling me her personal advice for those doing interpretation work with families. "You need to reach out from the heart." This advice works, too.

I am soon to hear more from Anya during my time at Brendan River. In some ways, she acts as a validity check for me and for the process: Am I hearing things correctly? Do you agree? Is this something you see, too? She corrects some factual inaccuracies for me as well.

Anya has opinions of her own, which she shares when we are alone. Never do I doubt her affection for families and children.

As the school interpreter, Anya works in various classrooms with students who require Spanish-English translation. She also helps in the office when families need a translator. Anya has worked in the district public schools for the last several years, but this is her first year at Brendan River School.

Educated in the Dominican Republic, she has a wide range of professional experience: healthcare, news media, and libraries in addition to education. Anya moved to the US about 10 years ago, a transition she described as "hard." She took classes at the local college to improve her English. It important to her that she be seen as a good role

model—somebody who works hard, is honest, and does not look to the government for free handouts. "Common misperceptions of immigrants," she says.

Before we started the interviews together, Anya described Brendan River as a "special place." She attributed this to the principal, who works hard and has a positive, inclusive attitude about working with families. "If they have a parent don't [sic] speak English, they try. Here especially. Especially here, they try." Anya feels connected with many families at Brendan River who are also new to the country. She knows how hard it can be to learn the language while stepping into a new culture. Anya sees that families new to this country need support to learn the language and the culture; she also sees a need for many parents to improve their own education. Above all, Anya regards language as the single most difficult barrier and says, "The most important problem here is the language."

Anya has long dark hair and a small, slight frame; quick with a smile, she is especially warm towards children. In her interpretive style, she tries to let the others speak as much as possible without her and she waits for indication she is needed. She explains that interpretation is more than *words*—she tries to convey the feelings that go with the words. This, I think, is where her initial statement to me about reaching to their heart, is rooted.

While she interpreted with families, Anya also became a part of the interview process, as seen in the following exchanges with Mari and Oscar, both from Ecuador, and parents of a fifth grader at Brendan River.

Interviewer: So, in your opinion, what should it look like? How should families be working with schools, what should they be doing?

Mari (parent): To be honest, I think the language is the biggest problem.

Anya: I agree with you.

In another section, Anya supplied synonyms and restatements for the participants, for clarity:

Anya: They feel afraid.

Mari (parent): Exactly.

Anya: They feel shy.

Anya was an instrumental part of this project. She helped me communicate with those with whom I did not share a language and, thus, include their perspectives and stories that otherwise would be unknowable to me. She spoke directly about her experiences and countered some common misconceptions about immigrants. Finally, as a school employee, she also helped me understand and clarify some more nuanced or less obvious elements and dynamics within Brendan River School.

Summary

The primary method of data collection for this grounded theory approach was interviewing, a co-constructed endeavor meant to "get at" the participants' lived experiences. Eighteen participants were interviewed ($n = 9$ school staff; $n = 9$ family members of current students) at Brendan River School, an elementary school in a mid-sized, urban setting in New England. Supplemental data, such as observations from PTO and Parent Chat meetings, were also collected. Data were analyzed using NVivo software. To address some of the more pressing trustworthiness concerns in this project, I employed several recommended strategies, such as such as triangulation, member

checks, and peer debriefing. Anya, the school translator who accompanied me on several interviews, helped check for validity, while also interpreting.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This inquiry project asked: What accounts for the discrepancy between how family engagement is prescribed and described in policy and how it is carried out in practice? The findings of the interviews were organized to answer the main research question according to the subquestions:

RQ 1a. How do the various stakeholders—teachers, administrators, and families—understand family engagement, and how do they influence choices of action?

RQ 1b. How do federal, state, and district policies affect family engagement beliefs and practices, if at all?

RQ 1c. What organizational practices do stakeholders experience as encouraging or impeding optimal family engagement?

Findings about organizational practices, RQ1c, are included under questions.

When relevant, I cite existing frameworks, theories, and research to assist and support my understanding of the emergent themes. In addition to participants' words, I included data from field observations.

RQ1a: How do Various Stakeholders—Teachers, Administrators, and Families—Understand Family Engagement, and How do they Influence Choices of Action?

Successful policy implementation requires similar understandings to put into practice (Irvine & Price, 2014). Common understanding among the actors or stakeholders is crucial for organizational change (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016). That is, agreement among stakeholders—in this case, parents and teachers—suggests they are

working towards similar goals, despite their different reference places in the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010).

In this section, I describe the participants' definitions of family engagement. I discuss the main actions described by participants, relying on Epstein's (2010) definitions of partnership and types of family involvement: communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making. Additionally, I draw from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), and Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2010) model of parental motivation and role construction. The theme, Understandings of Family Engagement, emerged from analysis for RQ1a. The theme's related categories and example quotes are presented in Table 5 and described in detail in the following section.

Partnering Relationships

A majority of the school staff regarded partnerships, or cooperative relationships wherein educators and families share responsibility and work together to improve student outcomes (Epstein, 2010), as the essential element to successful family engagement in education. For example, Kelly, an administrator, said, "It's all about connections. It's all about relationships." Denise, the principal, stated relationships among all stakeholders are vital to success and run parallel to each other:

We know that relationships are critical to the work that we do with kids.

Kids don't work for teachers they don't like. I find that with parents, too.

We really try and build relationships with parents and try and try to engage them in ways that we are part of a team.

Table 5. *Theme: Understandings of Family Engagement (RQ1a), Categories and Example Quotes*

| Category | Example quote |
|--------------------------|---|
| Partnering relationships | <p><i>Teacher:</i> I guess the big thing is you think of those words as a true partnership, I believe, with the families. A relationship where the best interest is the child. Not only academic achievement, but social, and emotional, and all the other things that come up.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Let's see, family engagement. I just see that as being both the parents and the children being involved in things together, whether it's activities or school or what have you.</p> |
| Communication | <p><i>Teacher:</i> Any kind of way, whether it's informal, formal, a phone call, call back, any way that a teacher puts forth some type of communication, and a parent engages back. I feel like that's part of family engagement. . . . I think the overall definition is the communication between the parent and the teacher.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> I like to look at the teachers. I like to engage with them and speak to them and look in their eyes, so I know and they know that I'm very serious about what's going on with my children's education. Very, very important to me.</p> |
| Volunteering | <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you not have parents generally come on field trips?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> No.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> There are certain parents, that if they pass the background check and they still want to come in, we'll have them come help, even copy some homework or staple some homework, that kind of stuff, but as far as helping out like teaching groups or volunteering in that sense, we don't normally do it.</p> |
| Learning in the home | <p><i>Teacher:</i> I think really educating the parent that you need to be doing this, this, and this. We always give them, especially kindergarten, there are fun homework things, like they're looking for the letter P. They get a little bag, go around the house find things start with P, and like talk. We try to get the parents involved even in that homework.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> They always encourage us to help them with the homework, keep an eye on them, make sure the kids are learning or ask questions at home—how are they doing at school.</p> |
| Decision-making | <p><i>Teacher:</i> I don't think we've ever felt that safety of stepping back because they're very limited.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> I decided to get involved with the PTO because I want to know what's going on in school. I want to know what my children are learning. I want to know how to help. I want to know how to leave it better.</p> |
| Parent role of advocate | <p><i>Parent:</i> I am their only advocate, other than their dad. If you don't speak for your children, who will? Who will? . . . If I don't speak for them, I don't know of anybody who will.</p> |

These partnering relationships often require a sense of trust on the part of the family, as described by the school staff. Kelly, the assistant principal, suggested families who have a trusting relationship with the school are more likely to cooperate with the school. She said, "I go back to that whole relationship piece. I feel like if they trust you and know that you have their best interest of their child at hand, I think that they would do anything for you."

Teachers and administrators tended to regard family engagement as a function of partnerships that support the school and the students, with a heavy emphasis on in-school presence when invited. As one administrator said, "I feel like, if there was an umbrella of things that we would look for, it's the parents that are at arrival and dismissal. The parents that, if the kids forget their lunch, they come." Teachers voiced preferences when families come to the school for meetings and events when invited.

By contrast, families tended to define and understand family engagement in broader terms as far as location and goals. That is, families tended to view supporting learning and overall development outside of school as a part of family engagement in education. Many parents described their own ways of supporting their children: helping them participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, following their children's interests such as movie-making or music, and developing positive habits and characteristics such as confidence in learning, persistence, and curiosity. Michelle, a parent of two students at Brendan River, said, "They don't just go to school to learn. It's an all-day every-day thing, and the parent needs to be involved in that process."

Family engagement is, at its core, a relational endeavor (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). A partnering relationship between home and school was posited as the

crux of family engagement, where responsibility is shared (Epstein, 2010; National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014). This partnering recognizes that a child is influenced by and a part of multiple interacting systems: school, family, and communities, as proposed by the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2010). Brendan River School staff reported relationships as the vital element for family engagement to support children's learning.

School staff tended to define family engagement in education more narrowly than did families. That is, teachers reported school-centric goals such as helping with homework and responding to teachers' communications, whereas families were more likely to define family engagement as supporting the development of the whole child, including out-of-school interests and work habits. Family definitions thus were more consistent with the expanded definition of family engagement, in which it occurs across settings and throughout childhood.

Communication

Central to building relationships was communication between home and school. Communication was the primary action many stakeholders at Brendan River associated with family engagement, crucial to establishing a relationship for both families and teachers. That is, most participants cited bi-directional communication between schools and families about school and student progress (Epstein, 2010) as a fundamental activity to effective family engagement. Kelly, an administrator said:

Any kind of way, whether it's informal, formal, a phone call, call back, any way that a teacher puts forth some type of communication, and a

parent engages back. I feel like that's part of family engagement. . . .I

think the overall definition is the communication between the parent and
the teacher.

Deliah, a teacher, said she tells families at the yearly back-to-school night, "We
are partners and the best thing we can do is have lots of open communication."

Many teachers reported face-to-face exchanges such as conferences, meetings, or
even casual in-person conversations during parent pick-up are effective, reinforcing the
family-school connection or, more specifically, the parent-teacher relationship as well as
information communication. Deliah said, "The face-to-face is helpful." Andy, a teacher,
said she would go to parent pick-up to have conversations with families, explaining, "A
lot of our students are parent pick up, so I'll just walk right out with the student. Face-to-
face, best way to go about it." Teachers reported they often went out to talk with families
during dismissal time, and research observations support there was much interaction and
communication between school staff and families at the end of the day. The principal
was often outside talking with families, as was the school interpreter and teachers not
engaged in dismissal duties.

Families, too, reported in-person meetings with teachers as important and a
priority. Julianne, a parent, said, "It needs to be person-to-person, face-to-face. That
matters to these parents." Mari, another parent, affirmed this sentiment. She said, "I
always come to the meeting time, parents meeting." Families regarded attending school-
based meetings as essential for both the information imparted and the message it sends to
other adults involved. MaryBeth, a parent of three, said:

I like to look at the teachers. I like to engage with them and speak to them and look in their eyes, so I know and they know that I'm very serious about what's going on with my children's education. Very, very important to me.

Fernando, a father, stated he felt his physical presence at the school conveyed his commitment as well. He said, "The meeting is very important. The principal says, 'I see this guy every day, he brings the kid, he is communicating, he talk to everybody.' They are watching you, they know what you do."

Almost all families reported frequent and effective communication from Brendan River School staff. The most common modes of communication were newsletters, phone calls, written notes, and face-to-face conversations. The district also employed an automated phone call system for the principal with some language-translation capabilities. Families reported it was used occasionally for reminders of upcoming events, such as upcoming parent-teacher conferences. They judged the phone system's language translations as imperfect but understandable. One classroom teacher with a small number of students used an online software app, Dojo, to communicate with families and posted several times a week with classroom updates, including assignments.

All participating teachers realized language posed significant challenges to how some families and teachers communicate, which in turn affected family engagement. Dehlia, a teacher, compared the families in her class this year with those of last year and owed the difference in large part to their facility in English:

Last year, I felt that the parents were very uninvolved. Not necessarily because that was their choice, but there was this huge barrier. This year,

while I do have a lot of ELL students, I only have three students who I cannot communicate with their parents. But, I can communicate with everybody else, and it's been night and day.

Families also acknowledged that language affects family-school communications.

Mari, a parent from Ecuador whose first language is Spanish, said:

Some parents don't want to come because they don't speak English or they don't understand anything when they come to the meeting. "Why am I going? I don't understand anything. I don't like to go because I feel completely lost." . . .The language is the hardest part.

Bridging the language barrier takes extra effort. Finding and using interpretation and translation services can functionally look like a less-than-nimble response to families. Teachers reported they can send written communication to the central office, through the principal, for translation, or that older students will often translate for their parents when needed. Teachers also asked other staff for assistance. Additionally, parental literacy can also influence parent-teacher communications. Some families have only basic literacy skills; thus, reading communications from the school can be difficult and the information communicated difficult to understand, even inaccessible. Jerry, a teacher, said, "I was asking one of the kids if she wanted me to send home a message in Spanish, and she said, 'My mother, although she doesn't speak much English, she doesn't read well enough to read in Spanish.'"

According to school staff and families at Brendan River School, central to partnering relationships was communication. Research suggested that the home-school relationship depended heavily on teachers and school staff to impart information

(Deslandes, Barma, & Morin, 2015). Home-school communication, including in-person meetings, was associated with student achievement and academic success (Crosnoe, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; Sirvani, 2007). Family responsiveness to school-initiated communication can influence teachers' impressions about families (Soutullo et al., 2016). At Brendan River, both teachers and families reported a preference for face-to-face conversations when communicating. Bridging the many different languages represented at Brendan River was a challenge to home-school communication, consistent with research that often cited language as a significant barrier to family engagement in schools (Hill & Torres, 2010; Jung, 2011; Soutullo et al., 2016).

Volunteering

Some volunteering opportunities, in which parents donate their time to assist or act as audience members to support school and students (Epstein, 2010), were present at Brendan River. These volunteer opportunities tended to be specific to the several events during the school year where parents could come to the school to watch their children perform, such as the holiday performance in December, held during school hours. Teachers reported these parents-as-audience events were effective in that they were well attended. Other opportunities, such as the Halloween-themed event, also invited parents to come into the school to help escort children around.

Another volunteer opportunity offered at Brendan River School are the periodic workshops or make-and-take events. Parent workshops were included in the school improvement plan of 2015-2016 and specified as an action step for the school to help families assist their children with learning in the home. These events ask families to

come into the school setting and learn with their children. Families also learn how to support and extend learning at home. Recent make-and-take events were program-focused, such as the Foundations program (a structured, phonics-based reading and spelling program) or AVID (a college-preparation project for older students). A workshop specific for a small group of families from Somalia occurred last year, and Joy, a teacher, reported, "The parents were very open to it."

Both families and teachers regarded the workshops and make-and-take events as effective practices to engage families. Deliah, a teacher, reported, "I think doing those workshops, those make-and-takes, are really helpful." Explaining a make-and-take workshop from last year, Michelle, a parent, said, "We made like popsicle sticks with sight words. It was like a game. You could play it at home and make the games better. I really enjoyed that."

Families and staff estimated attendance at these events to be between 25% and 50%. In the year of the research, workshops and make-and-take events did not occur as frequently because staff did not have the time or ability to coordinate the logistics—responsibilities normally performed by staff members who had since left Brendan River School. This suggests not only that individual teachers were responsible for the events, but also that resources allocated to the school limited events the school could put in place. A teacher explained:

We haven't done that this year because we're just overwhelmed with numbers. We don't have the flexibility of cancelling classes to have the workshops. . . . The idea was to extend it to others, but the ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher and other adjustment counselor that

spearheaded it moved to different schools. Nobody really stepped in this year to fill in the blanks.

According to teacher reports, the understood school policy, or common practice, was that families did not volunteer in the classroom unless there was an event. One teacher said that occasionally, if families wanted to volunteer and passed the criminal background check, the school would ask them to do office duties, such as making copies, "but as far as helping out like teaching groups or volunteering in that sense, we don't normally do it."

According to the principal Denise, no consistent roster of parents routinely volunteer at the school. She said that this year, one parent volunteer new to the school community came in regularly to volunteer in Kindergarten; a few parents volunteered as a requirement for their housing or disability entitlements. Denise explained that volunteering in the school was an area of challenge at Brendan River School because parents often needed guidance around appropriate boundaries:

That's a definite tricky. . . .I need to, I feel, have clear rules and expectations of what we could use parents for so it's not muddying.

Because sometimes parents will come in and they'll just want to be in their kid's classroom. Then, in an inappropriate way, we had a parent that wanted to volunteer at recess because she thought her child was being picked on. I said, "We can't do that," and that's educating the parents issue.

Another general school practice regarding volunteering at Brendan River was that parents did not chaperone field trips. This practice has been in effect for years. Teachers

preferred that parents not come, reported a school staff member. One teacher said she had a parent come on a field trip, but the parent was unable to act appropriately around the students due to a personal phone call she received. The teacher has not had any parent chaperones since.

Although the literature did not strongly associate volunteering in the school with academic benefits (Fan & Chen, 2001), providing on-going volunteering opportunities in the classrooms is part of creating a welcoming environment (California Department of Education, 2014; National PTA, n.d.). How families understand invitations to engage is a significant element in how families ultimately get involved in schools (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Thus, the kinds of invitations and opportunities schools provide have consequences in how families engage with the school.

Brendan River School's practice regarding parent volunteers—limited, event-specific opportunities—communicated that families were welcome but in restricted, school-directed ways. This practice contrasted with staff-professed desires to make families feel comfortable coming to school and into the classroom. Although make-and-take events were regarded as helpful, they were offered only periodically and dependent on individuals who opted to facilitate them (and who no longer worked at the school). Further, inviting families according to specific events suggested a lack of systemic, integrated family engagement. That is, family engagement at Brendan River was more understood as a prescribed, discrete event and thus, according to Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenberg (2010), less likely to be sustainable.

Learning at Home: Homework Oversight

Teachers and families frequently cited homework and signing agenda books (in which students wrote their assignments) as part of the families' main responsibility to support their children in the home setting. Most teachers recognized families can have difficulty assisting with homework. Homework may be less of a priority for families with high needs, according to several teachers. Many teachers understood that homework content and processes may be unclear or unfamiliar for families. Michelle, a parent, said that despite her advanced education, she struggled to help her son with homework when he was in first grade.

Guidance comes in different forms. Mari, a mother from Ecuador, had her son teach her the steps to solving math problems first so that she could help him. Another mother, MaryBeth, expressed gratitude when her son's teacher sent home a note explaining how to do the homework, an example of how communication from the school assisted effective learning in the home. She explained:

If my son comes home and he has math homework that he doesn't get it, sometimes a teacher will leave me a note, "Well this is a diagram of how you do it." It's wicked, like, wow, not many schools, not many teachers have the time to write a note, especially for your child, if he is having a difficulty and saying, "This is how I would like it done."

In summary, at Brendan River School, teachers and families agreed families are primarily responsible to support learning in the home, particularly supervising homework assignment completion. Most stated that families may need support from the school to help the children with homework. Although learning in the home, such as

communicating academic aspirations and expectations, was strongly associated with academic achievement (Fan and Chen, 2001; Hill et al, 2004; Hill & Wang, 2015; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014), parental homework support was not consistently associated with academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Robinson & Harris, 2014; Wilder, 2014).

Decision-Making

Families can participate with schools in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through teams, committees, and parent organizations (Epstein, 2010). The PTO can be understood as not only a form of volunteering, but also a vehicle for parent voice and an opportunity for shared decision-making. At the time of the research, the Brendan River PTO had existed for about two years, started by the then newly appointed principal, Denise. Monthly meetings were held at 8:15 a.m., the first Monday of every month.

At the time of this writing, there were two officers: the president and vice president; the PTO was in need of a treasurer and secretary for most of the school year. The president was responsible for organizing PTO activities, namely, fundraisers. The president also constructed the PTO meeting agendas, previewed by the principal prior to each meeting, and handed out paper copies at the meetings. The president also administered the school's Facebook page, adding reminders about upcoming fundraising events, PTO meetings, and Parent Chat meetings. Later in the school year, in the spring, the PTO president resigned, leaving a vacancy.

Attendance at the PTO meetings was small, averaging three to five regular attendees, save for the first meeting of the school year, which saw about 10 attendees.

Either the principal or vice principal attended; the PTO president or PTO vice president also attended and ran the meetings. Several outside representatives also regularly attended in the year of the research, at the suggestion and support of the principal: representatives from the local transportation authority and local community center, a counselor from the school district central office, and this researcher.

Many families and teachers brought up the PTO during interviews. Both office holders—the president and vice president—were interviewed as part of this research. The office holders envisioned PTO involvement as a way of being involved in the school beyond the traditional fundraising functions associated with a PTO. One parent, May, regarded the PTO as a way to for parents and teachers to become more familiar with each other. "I see it as a funding problem, but I also see it as a way for the parents and the students and the teachers to get to know about each other." She said she saw the PTO as a means to improve the school and gain a better understanding of supporting her children's learning:

I decided to get involved with the PTO because I want to know what's going on in school. I want to know what my children are learning. I want to know how to help. I want to know how to leave it better.

The PTO president said her main motivation for being involved was so she had a better understanding of her son's daily experience in school, as well as to help improve the school.

Few parents were consistently involved in the PTO. May stated she felt parents' work responsibilities often kept them from participating. Another parent, Michelle, said she felt the language barrier kept some families from being involved, as well as time

availability. In February, 2017, the PTO posted on the school's Facebook page asking families to respond to preferred PTO meeting times. Several responses suggested an evening time would be better for those who worked from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Posted responses to the suggestions indicated the evening times might not be possible due to the hours the school building was open and the PTO officers' work schedules.

In 2017, the PTO hosted a few main fundraising events. A handful of families participated with one, in which a local restaurant donated a percentage of their proceeds to the school on a particular night. A second fundraiser, in which families ordered home goods such as candles over a two-week period, saw over 50 families participate.

No teachers were observed to participate in PTO meetings, a point of contention for the two officers. The PTO President, Julianne, said she felt the lack of teacher participation affected the home-school partnership and trust. "It's something that really frustrated us. . . .When there's no teacher involvement, it's not a full circle. It's a C. We need that full circle to be able to fully trust somebody."

Teachers and school staff generally criticized the organization, in that the PTO required oversight and supervision. Said one administrator, "I don't think we've ever felt that safety of stepping back, because they're very limited." She explained:

Even fliers that they've given us, I said, "We can't send this out. This is misspelled. This is inappropriate." That aspect of it is limited in the sense that it sort of has to be overseen by [the principal] because, otherwise, it wouldn't present so well to the public.

One classroom teacher stated she felt the new PTO allowed its members to expect special access to the building, teachers, or entitlements. She said:

It gives them this empowerment that they think they can go through the building or stop into classes or talk to teachers outside. That isn't the purpose. You're not being helpful. You're hindering what's trying to happen.

Another teacher at Brendan River did not know the specifics of the PTO. She said, "I wouldn't know who the PTO is exactly, when they meet, or that they want anybody," but she understood that school staff did not particularly support the PTO:

I've heard a lot of other teachers say a lot of negative things about the PTO. The PTO tried to put up a bulletin board, and people were criticizing it, that it wasn't done artfully enough. I just feel like there's a lot of us-versus-them mentality? . . . The other two [redacted] teachers would tell me, "You never want to go there [the PTO]. It's awful." They would tear it apart.

The principal, Denise, expressed some internal conflict about how to best support the PTO. On the one hand, it was a group she helped form because she felt it important for families to have a voice in school activities. On the other hand, she did not want to overextend her influence. She also said she felt they need her assistance. Denise provided an example from 2016, a PTO-organized potluck supper. The supper would not have happened had Denise not organized and arranged staff assistance. She said, "I'm trying to figure out how I fit in that, because you obviously want to support that, but you don't want to drive it. Their prerogatives maybe are different than I envisioned a PTO to be."

Research observations suggested the PTO operations relied on the principal. The PTO needed her approval and coordination to run activities, such as finding available space in the school to hold meetings and store materials, and scheduling to avoid conflict with other school activities. The principal also led the PTO in disseminating fundraising information to families and processing fundraising orders.

In summary, the Brendan River PTO was fairly new. It offered an opportunity for shared decision-making, wherein families and teachers could work as a collective. Current participation was low, with only two parents—the president and vice president—regularly attending meetings, although more families participated in fundraisers. No teachers were observed at any meetings. Staff generally did not support the PTO, regarding it as requiring oversight and supervision. Observations suggested the PTO required significant principal support to operate. In addition to reviewing the PTO agenda, the principal often guided the PTO leadership in how to conduct their activities.

A traditional perspective of family involvement can exclude families from expansive roles and activities, such as decision-making (Soutu-Manning & Swick, 2006). Research indicated that PTOs, a kind of collective family engagement, can conflict with the principal or school around differing priorities, authority, independence, and the nature of volunteer organizations, with high turnover, minimal training, and weak lines of communication (Lareau & Munoz, 2012). These conflicts are structural; that is, they are part of the system and not dependent on personalities. Although research about collective family engagement was limited (Alameda-Lawson, 2014), there was evidence that building the capacity for schools, families, and communities to collectively partner was crucial for family engagement (Mediratta et al., 2009). This evidence suggested schools

could focus efforts on building the skills of teachers and families, as well as organizational structures, working collectively to increase family engagement.

Parental Role of Advocate

The parental role of advocate (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), in which parents act to improve learning opportunities for their student, was a primary reason parents engaged with the school. Several families described situations when they advocated for their child: making a teacher request, moving the child out of a school that did not meeting their needs, explaining misbehavior to a school administrator, or disagreeing with school staff about retention. One parent said, "I am their only advocate, other than their dad. If you don't speak for your children, who will? Who will? . . .If I don't speak for them, I don't know of anybody who will."

Collective parental advocacy was also observed. For example, several families whose children rode on the bus to school came to a PTO meeting to express their concern about student supervision in the morning. The safety of students crossing in front of the school had been an ongoing discussion for parents and the school, particularly during arrival and dismissal times. This chronic concern for parents, said school staff, was broached at many collective parent meetings such as Parent Chat and PTO.

The parental role of advocate was among the multiple parental roles realized in family-school partnerships (Office of Head Start, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). At Brendan River School, parents described advocacy for one's child as a primary motivator for families to engage with the school. Collective advocacy—advocating as a group—was also observed at Brendan River School. This observation was consistent with research that found parental role construction a primary motivation and predictor of

family engagement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Associated student and community benefits when families are supported as advocates for their child include being regarded as a role model (National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, 2013).

In summary, families and teachers in this study both tended to see partnering relationships as the foundation of family engagement in education. This finding was consistent with research and public messaging about family engagement (National PTA, n.d.; Office of Head Start, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Families and educators regarded communication as essential to building partnering relationships, also consistent with recommended essential family engagement activities (National PTA, n.d.), and both preferred face-to-face communication. According to parents and teachers, and consistent with previous research, language differences were regarded as a challenge to family engagement (Hill & Torres, 2010; Jung, 2011; Soutullo et al., 2016).

Supporting learning in the home through homework supervision was widely regarded as a main parental responsibility. Although teachers often voiced a desire that families feel comfortable to come into school, school practices did not reflect ongoing opportunities to volunteer in the classroom or on field trips. Volunteer opportunities were limited and generally tied to a specific event such as make-and-take workshops. Families and teachers reported make-and-take workshops to be an effective organizational practice that fostered family engagement.

Observations and participant statements suggested the parental role of advocate strongly influenced and motivated families to connect with the school. This finding was consistent with Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010), Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997), and

Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2005) model of family involvement, which posited parental role construction was a primary motivator for family involvement. That is, the personal psychological construct of what a parent ought to be and do for their child, encompassing beliefs about parental responsibility and competency, was a driver and predictor of family involvement in education (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011).

Advocacy and collaboration were also involved when families and educators had opportunities to share power and work together to inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs (Epstein, 2010; National PTA, n.d.). A traditional view of family involvement could exclude families from expansive roles and activities such as decision-making (Soutu-Manning & Swick, 2006).

At Brendan River, the main way families could be shared decision-makers was through the PTO, which had not yet reached independence or a robust level of participation. The PTO required significant support from the principal to function. Families and teachers provided little overt support of, or direct participation in, the PTO, although some supported PTO-sponsored activities. Previous research suggested that PTOs, a kind of collective family engagement, could conflict with the principal or school around priorities, authority, and the nature of volunteer organizations, with high turnover, minimal training, and weak lines of communication (Lareau & Munoz, 2012). Building the capacity for all stakeholders was found essential to successful collective advocacy and leadership (Mediratta et al., 2008), suggesting schools can focus efforts on building the skills of teachers and families to work collectively to increase family engagement.

RQ1b: How does Policy—Federal, State, or District—Influence Beliefs and Practices?

This section addresses what participants labeled as the main influences on their family engagement choices. Two themes, Formal Policies and Nonpolicy Influences, emerged from analysis related to RQ1b. Categories and example quotes related to the themes are presented in Tables 6 (formal policies) and 7 (nonpolicy influences). The sections that follow describe the formal federal, state, and local policies reported by participants, and nonpolicies they reported as influencing their choices.

Table 6. *Theme: Formal Policies (RQ1b), Categories and Example Quotes*

| Category | Example quote |
|----------|---|
| Federal | <p><i>Parent:</i> It's more like an independent choice.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> There's no explicit policy that I'm aware of. There's no set policies. . . . It's at the discretion of the teacher whether they would like to. . . .It's never been official. It's on our personal times. It has to be left up to us whether we choose to do that.</p> |
| State | <p><i>Teacher:</i> That's the big thing for the new teacher evaluation. Family engagement is one of the core things that you're graded on, so you come and say who's coming, who's not, and how you get there.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> They need a [criminal background] check to enter the school, to be involved in any projects. That's the law. Then things come back on that they can be around kids. Those little things, like any arrest. A lot of them know that. That's why they don't want to be here.</p> |
| District | <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Does your district have any policies or rules around working with families?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> Not really. It's building to building.</p> |

Teacher: Anytime I've needed a translator, they've been here. Even our open house, there was [sic] two translators here just from the district who were paid for to come.

Teacher: Just this year, for example, things that we need to send home. We can get them to our principal. They can get them translated into certain languages and distributed. I think small steps, but moving in the right direction, especially with such a diverse population in the school and in the city.

Table 7. *Theme: Nonpolicy Influences (RQ1b), Categories and Example Quotes*

| Category | Example quote |
|-----------------|---|
| School climate | <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel welcome here at XX?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Yes</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel that your opinion is heard?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Yes.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Every time I see any of the teachers, they're always, "How are you?" They're always wanting to know how things are going. They have time to talk. They have time to engage and listen to you. . . .I enjoy coming here.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel welcome at this school as a parent?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Somewhat. . . .We're not even allowed to go up the stairs when we're picking up our kids from school events.</p> |
| Teacher culture | <p><i>Teacher:</i> For us, as educators here, to really be that nonjudgmental piece to them and let them have a say. Sometimes it can be very dysfunctional, to be honest with you, of some things they might do, and notices that they sent home, and not good grammar, those types of things.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It's really their place to be welcome at any time, but we do have to be cautious of who's walking around our building. We've had some stealing and things like that in the past. Safety because we have a lot of foster children and restraints, and you can't just walk around the building. They have to come in, check in.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> You still need to establish a positive relationship. You still need to talk to them, give them the benefit of the doubt that no matter what you may think of them right off the bat, they're probably trying their hardest.</p> |
| Leadership | <p><i>Principal:</i> One of the things I asked, and I've done it since I've been a principal, is asking my teachers, in the first two weeks of school, to make a positive phone call home, that they have to connect with the parent in a positive way.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> The principal, she is the best. I don't care about her as an employee. But she's the best. Anything happens, I talk to her, I don't talk to nobody. I talk to her, "OK, I'll take care of it!" – She do and fast!</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It was pretty mandated that you were supposed to contact every child in your class the first two weeks of school and make a positive phone call. Strongly recommended. I don't know if you'll get in trouble if you don't. Everybody pretty much did it.</p> |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Families' social networks | <p><i>Parent:</i> I guess my involvement came about because I was curious and just wanted to see and I happened to meet somebody that was already involved.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> It would be nice if we did have more social events for the parents to come together. I know the school is about the kids. I know that, but if the parents know each other, then the kids benefit. . . .We can help each other. We can help our kids. Some person might have this resource, some person might have this resource. Some person might know this language, and this person knows this language, but we don't know that because we don't talk to each other.</p> |
|---------------------------|---|

Policy

Federal policy. Almost all participants reported that formal family engagement policies exerted little to no influence over what they think and how they behave with regard to family engagement. Most families and staff said they were unaware of any kind of policy—federal, state, district, or school—in place. Instead, administrators, families, and teachers generally believed teachers and the school included families individually, meaning it could change from school to school, year to year, teacher to teacher, and, perhaps, family to family. One parent, Julianne, described, "It's more like an independent choice." A teacher, Andy, said, "It's building to building." Another teacher, Joy, explained, "There's no explicit policy that I'm aware of. There's no set policies. . . .It's at the discretion of the teacher whether they would like to. . . .It's never been official. It's on our personal times. It has to be left up to us whether we choose to do that."

A few staff and families agreed there were likely some district rules, but they were unaware of the specifics. Kara, a teacher, said, "I don't know about policies and procedures so much as much as I know that it's something that the school and the district really is working on and working to improve."

Even those with the immediate proximity to certain policies did not necessarily cite those policies as influential. For example, the two teachers with special education students in their classrooms did not specify special education as a guiding policy that influenced their behavior regarding families. Similarly, the ELL teacher did not specify ELL regulations about family involvement other than that a family can refuse ELL services. The teacher whose position was funded through Title I neither mentioned Title I regulations nor indicated she was aware of Title I regulations with regard to family participation. At the district administration level, there was seemingly no awareness of the family engagement components and requirements of Title I either.

One parent, Isis, a single mother from Puerto Rico, suggested her son's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the official document under special education, laid out for teachers how she was to be included in her son's education, a vehicle she was comfortable and satisfied with at Brendan River. Her experiences at another school in the district were not as positive and contributed to her decision to move her son to Brendan River School.

In sum, there was little to no overt awareness of federal policies that included or mandated family engagement among families or school staff at Brendan River School.

State policy: Teacher evaluations. Current educator standards for Massachusetts were relatively new and included family engagement as an element to be documented and rated on teacher evaluations. The family engagement standards upon which educators were evaluated appeared to exert little overt influence on how teachers engaged with families—most teachers did not mention the standards. Kara, a teacher with 13 years of experience at Brendan River School, mentioned the standards as a policy with a family engagement component but denied it had any impact on her behavior as a teacher. "I certainly don't do it because on my evaluation it says this is a section of . . . you know what I mean?"

Administrators seemed more cognizant of the teacher evaluation standards. Maureen, a district administrator with over 30 years of experience in the system, mentioned the teacher evaluation requirements as a way to measure a teacher's competency with family engagement, as did Denise, the principal and a school staff member with supervisory responsibilities.

State policy: Criminal background checks. According to state law, public and private schools are required to conduct criminal background checks on all employees, volunteers, transportation providers, or others who may have direct or unmonitored contact with children. In Brendan River's school district, the background check process was independent of the school; it was conducted at the district central office. A potential employee or volunteer would fill out a short form permitting the check and submit it to the central office with photo identification. Several weeks later, the principal received a list of those approved and passed; the names of those who did not pass were not forwarded, and no rationale would be provided.

The criminal background check is a state regulation teachers and parents mentioned as an influential family engagement policy; it connected to the safety of school dwellers—students, and staff—but however necessary and reasonable, also functioned as a means to keep families out of the school setting. One teacher noted that many family members in the school community could not pass a criminal background check. Another teacher explained the check discouraged families from being in the school:

They [parents] need a [background] check to enter the school, to be involved in any projects. That's the law. When things come back on that, then they can't be around kids. Those little things, like any arrest. A lot of them know that. That's why they don't want to be here, because they could have

Interviewer: So if you have a DUI from . . .

Teacher: Mmhmm. Anything. Fifteen years, and they won't be allowed in here.

Denise, the principal, conceded the criminal background check can be a barrier for families who want to volunteer in the school. There were some inconsistencies among what the participants stated might be disqualifying on the background check.

An article from the *New York Times*, (Lewin, 2004) described how many school districts and states implemented background checks in an effort to protect children. The desire is not without merit. Recent events such as school shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut, or news stories where teachers violate boundaries with students and engage in inappropriate or sexual activities with students contribute to a

sense that children in schools need protection. However, the background checks are not without concern and drawbacks, nor do they necessarily translate to safer schools. There are privacy worries, and some advocates express concern that the schools are intruding, more likely to unearth an old arrest that does not pertain to one's fitness to work with children. Background checks can also scare away families, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. In some districts, parents pay for their background checks (Molnar, 2012), conceivably further discouraging family participation. Moreover, undocumented immigrant families frequently cited background checks as a barrier to family engagement, according to a study by Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, and Navia (2016).

Over 60% of Brendan River students identified a language other than English as their first language, and the city's immigrant population was roughly 40,000—a substantial portion of the state's immigrant population. For Brendan River School, background checks likely kept some families from volunteering on school grounds regularly. The background check requirement possibly kept those with any kind of legal transgression in their past from feeling comfortable to submit an application and be present on school grounds in an ongoing way.

Many teachers shared an appreciation for families who are able to be present at school when requested or available for conversations at dismissal time. Family strengths, practices, and intentions may not be apparent to teachers when families were not present on school grounds, and they may be regarded as uninvolved (Lopez, 2001). Thus, it is particularly important to recognize that families who are not physically at the school may be unable to do so because of the requirements of the criminal background check. To the

degree the school can be thoughtful, intentional, and accommodating to families who are not on-site, communicating so that families can support their student's learning at home and outside of school is an organizational strategy that maximizes family engagement.

In summation, awareness of state policy that involves family engagement was slightly more present among educators than among families, particularly those educators with supervisory responsibilities. Aside from educator evaluation, the other formal policy participants most often mentioned was the state criminal background check. This policy may have affected how families were involved, because it limited family access to the school grounds. Background checks may be a particularly limiting policy for families from immigrant (Soutullo et al., 2016) or low-income backgrounds, or who had any kind of legal infraction in their personal history (Lewin, 2004).

District and school policy: Language translations. District and school policies seemed to have the most influence on teacher behavior, compared to federal and state policies. Many teachers were definitely aware the district stipulated that materials sent home should be translated into the parents' identified preferred language. This was a new policy for the district, one I was informed of and followed as a guest in the district. Families, too, seemed aware of the school's initiative to deliver communications in translation and the need for such.

The need for language translations to communicate effectively was an overarching theme that cut across all three research questions: definition of family engagement that included communication, policies that influenced family engagement, and organizational practices that affected family engagement. Language translations, as needed and required as they are, were not without logistical complications. Despite the

best of intentions, securing timely and efficient translations can be difficult for teachers. They must make arrangements and submit written materials in advance, through the principal who contacts the central office, to secure translators and translations. Kara, a teacher, described the process: "We would email it to [principal's name]. She works her magic. I think she emails it somewhere downtown. It comes back to her. She gets it back to us."

The system did not always work perfectly. In fall, 2016, the district had the report card standards translated into seven main languages. Classroom teachers were then responsible for getting the correct translation to the respective families. One teacher recounted how some translated versions arrived on time to send home, while others did not, and the possible ramifications for families:

Today report cards went home, and I called the office several times and said, "I need the Vietnamese. I need the Arabic. I need the Spanish." I got the Spanish, eventually, right before the bell, but I didn't get the Vietnamese and I didn't get the Arabic. . . .Are they supposed to sign something they don't even know what they're signing? As a parent, that doesn't feel respectful.

Certain district communications, such as the kindergarten registration announcement, were widely available and posted in several different languages. The Spanish translation of the district's academic calendar was available in the main office, as was the English version. Additionally, several district communications, such as the policy handbook, were available online with translated versions. The 2017 parent survey was posted on the district's website in the seven main languages.

In-person interpretations were in high demand at Brendan River School. Anya, the school's only translator, spoke English and Spanish. Brendan River had many languages represented; with extra time and planning, the district could supply translators in several languages, but low-incident languages would be much more difficult to have translated and interpreted.

Anya was often in classrooms with the children. When needed, she would be called to help with families, for example, making phone calls to families who speak Spanish. In one instance, she made a phone call, coached by the psychologist and secretary in the main office, to ask a mother to bring her daughter to the pediatrician. Anya translated during IEP meetings, conferences, and parent-teacher meetings; she was present and available at the end of the day during parent pick-up.

There were, at times, conflicts about how to best use Anya's services. When Anya was translating for a family, she was not in the classroom with students. One teacher reported concern when Anya translated an interview with me, with principal permission, rather than being present in the classroom with the students—one of whom had a history of running away from the school grounds. "A safety issue," said the teacher.

Anya reported that some teachers did not want the students to become too dependent on Anya because they needed to learn English. Anya also felt conflicted:

I would say some teachers don't want the children to have that kind of connection because they want the children to learn English. They think that they are going to lose the opportunity to learn. To some point, I agree with that. But you need to get the support.

Securing Anya's services took advocacy; that is, somebody—typically a person in a position of power such as the principal, vice principal, or a veteran teacher—needed to assert they needed her services. Additionally, because she was the only translator in the school, when she was at a meeting, she was not in the classroom, and vice versa. Someone would miss out on her services and, thus, access to communication and information, while another benefitted.

The ELL teacher, Joy, stated she would like to see every school in the district have a family liaison, somebody familiar with the languages and cultures dominant in that school community, but realized finances would likely preclude that. One of two ELL teachers for a school where roughly half of the students receive ELL services, she too, felt stretched thin to service students and translate for parents. Laura, a teacher, said, "That's the biggest obstacle of how we're communicating with them, because a lot of times we are not providing them things in their own language." Teachers wanting to talk to a parent more immediately, without time to get an interpreter, tended to make their own arrangements. Sometimes a student, another family member, or a friend would interpret. Other times, an available staff member, school translator, or ELL teacher would translate.

Most teachers agreed translation services were available at Brendan River with advance notice. As one teacher said, "Anytime I've needed a translator, they've been here. Even our open house, there was [sic] two translators here just from the district who were paid for to come." Another teacher suggested it was not as easy as policies stated:

In one case, one of the student's family was Vietnamese, so I would also need a translator at the meeting. I was told, "No, you just have a meeting

with the parent." I said, "But, I need a translator." "Well, we, we can't get a translator." Like, "Grab them in the hallway and have a conversation."

She explained that for some conversations with families who speak a language other than English or Spanish, she waits for parent-teacher conferences when translators are made available. "For just that quick, 'I'm concerned about this,' or, 'I have a question about that,' we have to wait," she explained.

An organizational practice that supported and bolstered family engagement was having on-site personnel available for translational services. Isis, a parent who spoke Spanish, said having Anya, the school translator, available was important to her and meant she could access the information she desired. Were Anya unavailable, Isis would need to find another interpreter. In fact, Isis brought a friend with her for our interview, to help translate. There is a recognized need for more than the single Spanish translator at the school, and when language translation needs are addressed, families are supported. Deliah, a teacher, said, "Last year, our School Adjustment Counselor did speak five different languages, which is amazing. Amazing. She would call a lot." This person no longer worked at Brendan River, something mentioned by a parent as a loss for the school as well.

Two specific PTO and Parent Chat meetings illuminated the pervasive need for translation services at Brendan River School and how it worked.

September PTO. Ten parents attended one of the first PTO meetings of the year. It became clear that several parents were Spanish speakers, and the principal summoned Anya, the translator. After some time, Anya appeared. The principal was called away, but the vice principal joined the meeting. Through Anya, the attendees were notified that some Spanish-speaking parents present were there to talk about a concern they had with the school bus drop-off at the beginning of the school day. Anya translated that one parent said that she did not feel comfortable with the available translation. The PTO president informed the parents that the PTO meeting was not the place to talk about their concerns. The vice principal suggested they could make an appointment to later speak with the principal or vice principal. After about eight minutes, those parents left. One stated she did not have the time to stay. Once the parents left, the vice principal asked Anya to explain their concerns. Anya stated that students were being dropped off from the bus in the morning without supervision. The vice principal took notes to give to the principal.

The remaining PTO members, English speakers, continued the meeting and discussed the diverse family population at Brendan River School. Should we have separate English- and Spanish-language PTO meetings, questioned one member, to alleviate the awkwardness of translation? Another member said the paper announcement of the PTO meeting was in English only, a last-minute notice. Translate the announcements, she advised, especially into Spanish, given the high numbers of Spanish speakers in the school. The PTO president responded that it took time to get translations, and the principal had to approve all communications, which already took time. Anya, the

translator, gave a personal example of a cultural event she had seen in another school as a way of welcoming and encouraging diverse families.

February Principal Chat. Denise, the principal, and Laura, the instructional coach, hosted a session for parents to learn about upcoming statewide testing. Eleven family members (six females, five males) attended, sitting in a row of chairs in the gymnasium. A PowerPoint presentation was given and paper handouts disseminated, all in English. When provided opportunities for questions, parents asked, When is the test? What accommodations are given for a student in special education? What happens if they don't do well? Is the testing all day?

No translations were provided, and Anya was not present during the presentation. At the end of the meeting, a parent approached Laura, the instructional coach, asking if he was required to be at the meeting.

The district policy regarding language translations was one that all educators who were interviewed were aware of and agreed was necessary. Many parents also recognized the importance of language translations to communicate with families. Prior research indicated that accommodating language diversity was a key way to increase family engagement in culturally and linguistically diverse, low-income communities (Resto & Alston, 2006) such as Brendan River. However, the school's capacity to meet the demands for language translations was limited, perhaps insufficient. The policy was new for the district, and in time, implementation might improve.

Nonpolicy Influences

The following sections describe nonpolicy elements cited by families and school staff as influential on their behaviors and family engagement practices.

Teacher culture and school climate. For this inquiry, *teacher culture*, a component of climate, describes the teachers' assumptions and beliefs as a collective, whereas *school climate* describes the experiences of teachers and families within the school setting.

Teachers' perceptions of teacher culture. Most educators at Brendan River School reported they did not have formal family engagement coursework during their teacher training or through professional development. Rather, observing and engaging with other staff members was one way staff picked up ideas and practices about how to engage with families. Andy, a teacher, said staff at Brendan River influenced how she engaged with families: "Yeah, I would definitely say it's staff that has been here. . . . I definitely think it's the exposure to other staff members that led me in the direction that I choose to go in." Jerry, a teacher, also revealed that engagement practices are not instructed; rather, staff at Brendan River influenced his choices: "It's been self-taught . . . by watching some of the interactions here." Kara, a teacher, shared she learned from a senior teacher when she first began teaching: "I was probably in the same boat when I first started here, but I had a great role model and, I think, learned from example that you can be fair and firm and have wonderful relationships."

Overwhelmingly, the overt, expressed school climate was one where all families were welcome. Many teachers expressed a desire that families feel comfortable and welcome. For example, Kara, a teacher, said, "I think the majority of staff go out of their way to make sure that families feel as best understood, respected, welcomed. I think it really is an effort that's made here."

However, the underlying teacher culture, the beliefs and assumptions shared by the teachers, revealed that not all teachers agreed about a welcoming climate. According to teacher statements, they did not all had positive ideas about families at Brendan River. A teacher shared her opinion that the teacher culture was not welcoming to parents coming into the school:

Here, at this school, the school culture is very much against parents, I feel, where they talk about, "Oh, you don't want people coming in, 'cause they're going start fits fights," or "Oh, you don't want to do parents coming in, 'cause they're going judge other people's children, and that's not OK." It's been very much, "Don't do that." I guess that's the way, that negative piece of it.

She believed some teachers did not have positive regard for families:

Some of these same teachers are like, "Don't even bother sending home the book orders." . . . They're like, "People are going either just not send in money," or, "They're going send not enough money," or, "You'll get cockroaches sent back in the envelopes." Just inappropriate stuff.

No parent interviewed specified an awareness of this undercurrent, and I never spoke to anybody who personally espoused these views.

A particular area of ambivalence in the teacher culture at Brendan River was access to the school. Although teachers almost always professed they wanted families to feel welcome, many also believed families should not have open access to the school; school staff generally agreed that unfettered access was ill advised, disruptive, and threatened the professional climate. One teacher said:

Some schools have tried to have an open door policy where parents can come in anytime. That is not actually very effective, because it's disruptive. You don't know when a parent will show up at your door and want to talk to you.

Another teacher echoed the notion that open access was potentially disruptive to the learning environment and indicated it was potentially disruptive to the professional environment for the teacher:

Out of respect for the teacher, it's disruptive [when a family comes to the classroom], but they're welcome. Yeah, I don't think there's a policy, but I know that it's really a give and take of when you can be roaming around our building or welcome in the classroom.

Several school staff mentioned the potential "inappropriateness" of family members as rationale for why families were generally not asked to volunteer or chaperone school field trips, and why the PTO had been slow to get off the ground. Said one teacher, "Sometimes it can be very dysfunctional, to be honest with you, of some things they [families] might do, and notices that they sent home, and not good grammar, those types of things." Another teacher expressed concern about family behavior, dress, and speech around students:

They're not very appropriate, as far as the way they're dressed, the way they talk. All that kind of stuff. So you have to take that into consideration. I've had certain ones [families] in the past that have come in, but definitely you have to use your own discretion as far as who you believe is going to actually show up, be on time, and be appropriate while

here. It's the way they handle themselves. They need to be able to do it appropriately around students.

The same teacher described a situation when PTO parents volunteering at the school were accompanied by their partners, some of whom who had criminal records. The school ultimately halted their access. She stated she felt the family volunteers misjudged and misused their access to the school:

To me, those people shouldn't be in the building with free reign of the building. I get wanting to encourage parent involvement and wanting to have a PTO, but when . . . PTO members are not really appropriate, then I don't really see the reason to include them in what's going inside the building.

A few teachers also voiced subtle concern about physical safety in the school, which affects school-family relations. One teacher commented that free access to the school opened loopholes for those with criminal backgrounds and should not have access. Student safety was cited as one reason the school monitored access. As one school staff member said,

We do have to be cautious of who's walking around our building. We've had some stealing and things like that in the past. Safety for foster children and restraints, and you can't just walk around the building. They [families] have to come in, check-in.

For one teacher, safety concerns were why she no longer gave her cell number to families:

I guess, just going back as a younger teacher at [another school district], I used to give my phone number out to parents. I don't really do that anymore, for safety, but I think they know that they can call me.

The principal concurred that staff at times have expressed concern about their safety. Infrequent past occurrences, such as having the school go into lockdown status and the calling the police because of an angry parent on the premises or a fistfight at a school event, had a long-lasting impact on staff memories and feelings of safety. Although the principal said she did not feel unsafe at the school ("I know these parents. They know who I am"), she conceded the neighborhood and the homes where some children and families come from could be unstable and, at times, unsafe with risks such as substance abuse and domestic violence:

In the past, teachers had gotten burnt maybe before. Things were stolen. . . . There was a sense of fear a little bit. . . . Our experience, and those luckily are few, but I think you have one or two of those, and it scares you in a way.

The school was working to change the perception, Denise said, and change was slowly taking place. She said make-and-take workshops were successful examples in which teachers, families, and children partnered together—one of many incremental changes at Brendan River over the last few years.

Another facet of teacher culture was teachers' compassion and empathy with families, which was often evident while discussing barriers. One teacher said:

You still need to establish a positive relationship. You still need to talk to them, give them the benefit of the doubt that no matter what you may think of them right off the bat, they're probably trying their hardest.

Another teacher said that while poverty was present, most parents wanted the same things for their child: to be happy, safe, and learning. She explained:

I find this school is more of an urban type of school, which means, to me, that there's low income, where the families struggle a lot outside of their day here. However, their first main priority, 96% of their kids, they want them to be happy and safe, and they get them here.

In sum, nonpolicy influences were much more influential on family engagement practices, according to teacher reports during interviews, compared with policy influences. Consistent with prior research (Epstein, 2010; Epstein & Sanders, 2006), most educators at Brendan River School reported they did not have formal family engagement coursework during their teacher training or through professional development. Rather, teachers tended to pull from their own experiences, also consistent with prior research (Powell, 1998 in Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Specifically, teachers drew on their experiences from their youth, as parents, or other staff members. Said one teacher, Deliah, "A lot of it's probably my background, my own personal background." Another teacher said, "I guess, it just probably comes down to probably my own experiences, when I was in school, I saw my parents involved. . . .I would say appropriately averagely involved in my education and my sister's education."

Although teachers at Brendan River almost always reported they wanted families to feel welcome, trust, and compassion for them, an undercurrent, or teacher culture,

suggested many families at Brendan River School had deficits and needed "supervision." The research reflected their ambivalence about families, in which teachers reported preferring families not be involved in the classroom or question their capacity to partner effectively (McGrath, 2007).

Research suggested stakeholders can have misconceptions about the other's motivations and practices with regard to family engagement (Baker, Denessen, & Brus-Laven, 2007; Ferguson, 2008). Moreover, misconceptions can inhibit feelings of trust among the stakeholders (Ferguson, 2008; McGrath, 2007). Although relational trust is an essential component to school effectiveness and reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), issues around trust and control can affect parent-teacher relationships (Deslandes et al., 2015). School culture influences teacher beliefs about families, and a few negative experiences can reinforce teachers' negative perceptions about families (Suoto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Families perceptions of school climate. Importantly, almost all families reported they felt welcome at Brendan River and their opinions heard and valued. That is, it appeared almost all families individually felt welcomed and validated. Janice, a parent, said, "I do [feel welcome]. I really like this school. Pretty much, from the day that we walked in and met everyone on the first day, I was impressed. It felt calm and welcoming and very kid friendly." Another parent, Michelle, shared she felt she was listened to when she had a concern. "I've always felt like when I've had concerns, I was able to voice them, for the most part, in a way that made me feel like it mattered or people were concerned." Additionally, all families interviewed revealed there was a

person in the school to whom they could turn should they need information or assistance: the principal, classroom teacher, main office staff, or Anya, the school translator.

There were a few indications from families that the climate was not always welcoming of parents. Two families noted organizational practices that keep families out of the physical school or at a distance hindered family engagement and involvement. One parent described how a school rule discouraged parents from coming into the school in the morning affected her feelings of welcome:

I would like to walk him into the building, into the cafeteria in the morning. There was one point last year where I think something was stolen. They had said parents aren't allowed in the building. At that point, I felt like that was a little bit unwelcoming, but I knew there was a reason for it.

Another parent was conflicted about families being welcome. When asked if she felt welcome at the school, she said, "Somewhat." She explained:

What doesn't work is when there's a school dance. From my experience or from other people's experience, the parents are allowed to see their kids dance. This school does not allow that. We're not even allowed to accompany on field trips. . . .Other schools allow parents to come.

In summary, families who participated in this research generally reported feeling welcome at Brendan River School. They had somebody they could trust to get information from and hear their opinions. Two parents observed that school practices that kept families at a distance, such as not being allowed in the building or going on field trips, can feel unwelcoming.

Leadership. Another influence often cited by both teachers and families was the school principal, who held a unique position of power and high visibility in the school community. Families highly valued Brendan River's principal, Denise. They were almost uniform in their appreciation of the current principal, her availability to families, and her responsiveness to their concerns. Fernando, a parent of two Brendan River School students, shared how he relies on the principal: "She's the best. Anything happens, I talk to her, I don't talk to nobody. I talk to her. 'OK, I'll take care of it!' She do and fast!" MaryBeth, another parent, stated she felt Denise took her concerns seriously:

[She] is the best principal. If I have any issues, I can always depend on her. I can call her, and she addresses that issue on hand, and right to the point. She doesn't play. I respect that as a principal.

Many families reiterated that direct connection to the principal and how she responded to their concerns. Janice, a parent, said, "From what I've seen—especially the principal—she's always willing to listen and take things into consideration."

Prior to Denise's arrival at Brendan River school three years ago, the general feeling was that teachers did the educational work at the school and the parents did the work with children at home. "The two don't mix," Denise recounted the then-prevailing sentiment. Over the last few years, she tried to change that perception, such as implementing the monthly Principal Chats and PTO meetings intended to bring families to the school to be heard, and a regular parent volunteer in a Kindergarten classroom.

In 2016, the school held a book study on poverty. Denise explained that change in the school culture can take time, a matter of years. "First year, you always watch and

then the second year you kind of do small, and then the third year we're like, 'OK' and they got on board with it."

The school staff expressed great awareness that the principal had expectations of how they should work with families. For example, she expected classroom teachers to reach out to every family within the first few weeks of school with a positive message. All teachers interviewed reported they were aware of this expectation and abided by it. Joy, a teacher, said:

It was pretty mandated that you were supposed to contact every child in your class the first two weeks of school and make a positive phone call.

Strongly recommended. I don't know if you'll get in trouble if you don't.

Everybody pretty much did it.

Staff noted more of the principal's expectations, to include communicating with families in positive ways as much as possible and trying to arrange translations in advance. Jerry, a newer teacher at Brendan River, said the principal advised him to make an exerted effort to reach out to families when there was a need.

The principal also communicated expectations to the Brendan River families and parents. Mari, a parent, specified she knew prompt school attendance was an expectation. When asked if she knew of any policies that influenced home and school relations, she said, "Not really. Not that I know of, but only all the time they need to be on time. . . .They can't miss the school many days."

One particularly effective method for Denise was connecting with families during pick-up and drop-off times. Denise was outside the school building, greeting and talking with parents almost every day at these times. She remarked, "I do a ton of training on the

sidewalk and on the street, because I'm out every morning, every afternoon. That's the place that I build relationships with parents."

One teacher noted a conflict with the principal's expectation and the teacher's union official position on family engagement and referred to a newsletter dated November 16, 2016, given to all staff from the teacher's union president. The newsletter stated, "Please be advised if your principal is requiring staff to participate in Parent Involvement (sic) after your school day and including it in your evaluation; this should not be happening. This is a violation of Chapter XX" ([redacted] district Public Schools, teachers' union newsletter, 2016). The teacher said, "I just got this from our union saying that parent involvement is . . . You don't have to be required to do it."

An example of formalized communication between home and the principal is the monthly Principal Chats, a practice the principal imported from her previous school in a suburban district. Held the first Friday of the month at 8:15 a.m., Principal Chats were offered as a way for families to speak directly with the principal about any concern they might have. Most months featured planned speakers based on family input from the beginning of the year. Meetings started promptly and finished by 9:15 a.m. Families were reminded of the Parent Chat meetings through the school newsletter, the school Facebook page, and a sign in the front of the school.

Principal Chats were held in the teacher's lounge, in the school basement. The large, dark room, bordered by wooden cabinets and counters, housed several sinks, a microwave, and refrigerator. A small staff bathroom was accessed in the back of the room, as was a physical therapy room.

School was in session during the Principal Chats, and ambient sounds suggested such: noise from the adjoining kitchen as the staff made lunches; physical education classes held in the nearby gymnasium; a line of first graders walking through the hallway; an announcement over the loudspeaker, "Mrs. B, can you please call the office? Mrs. B," and "Would the owner of a silver Ford Explorer, plate number ABC123, please move your car. You are blocking traffic." Staff and children came through the room occasionally.

As people arrived and waited for the meeting to begin, there was generally small chatter. Attendees sat in chairs around a large rectangular table. Most had fit this meeting into their already busy schedules. Both PTO officers, regular attendees of Parent Chats, had morning work duties and generally arrived right at 8:15 a.m. The principal entered with a walkie-talkie turned low and occasionally would use the phone to call the office or excuse herself to attend an urgent matter. The principal generally facilitated the meetings.

At the first Principal Chat of the school year, six parents (two males, four females), one staff member (in addition to the principal), and the school translator, Anya attended. To begin, the principal reiterated the school's focus on improving student attendance to "be here on time, every day." The PTO president made an overture for families to attend monthly PTO meetings. The principal reviewed the topics covered the prior year and asked what topics parents would like to have addressed this year. A few parents took the opportunity to compliment the principal, saying, "You treat the people very nice" and "I'm proud you my principal."

Subsequent Principal Chats saw fewer attendees, with generally three to four parents, of which one to two were regular. Several outside representatives routinely attended, at the suggestion and support of the principal: a representative from the local transportation authority, a representative from the local community center, a counselor from the central office, and this researcher. Sometimes, the PTO president's partner joined the meeting. The Principal Chat in February was a presentation about upcoming testing, with about 11 attendees (described earlier).

Over the school year, other Principal Chats included: a staff member from central office presented a parenting curriculum, Love and Logic; a representative from the local social services agency updated about parent initiatives at the center, such as the need for afterschool care and day care according to a survey; a representative from the local transportation agency gave an overview about available public transportation services such as bus rates, translations, and special services; this researcher compiled a short list of available local resources intended for families to visit during out of school hours, at the request of a parent; and the transportation authority contributed to that compilation and added bus routes and bus numbers.

In sum, these findings are consistent with research that suggested principals play an essential part in how family engagement is understood and enacted by school personnel (Auerbach, 2009; Quezada, 2016). Principals likewise required support from district leadership in how they embraced, supported, and implemented reform centered on family and community engagement in schools (Sanders, 2014).

Also consistent with research, the leader set the tone for family engagement within the organization (Auerbach, 2010; Lopez, Caspe, & McWilliams, 2016; Weiss,

Lopez, Caspe, & McWilliams, 2017). At Brendan River School, the principal demonstrated that she was open to and actively promoted bi-directional communication with families. She encouraged family participation and parent voice, as seen in her solicitation of topics, and she responded to the families. In return, the families that attended seem to feel positively about the principal. Additionally, the principal encouraged collaboration within the community, asking community organizations to join and work together to assist families' needs.

Parent participation at Parent Chats, however, was small; the reasons for the low attendance are unknown. Surveying all parents at Brendan River about what they hope to get out of Parent Chats, why they do not attend, and what could be done to improve attendance could be part of the district assessment on family engagement already conducted (the results of which were not made public). Additionally, similar to PTO meetings, the principal or other administrators were the only school-based personnel present. Most teachers and families are did collaborate collectively through the Principal Chats. A reimagined and progressive model of family engagement encourages an environment of authentic collaboration, with opportunities for families and school staff, including the principal, to listen to each other, dialogue, and contribute equitably on behalf of students and the community (Auerbach, 2010).

Families' social networks. Other families also influence how families engage and interact with the school. Other parents and their involvement with the school figured into conversations with families, sometimes in judgment and other times in solidarity. Fernando, a parent, saw other parents as reluctant to come into the school and meet with teachers, saying, "Some people bring the kid to school, they are outside and then they are

gone. They don't come to the meeting." May, too, said she felt some families were not as involved with the school as they should be. "I really don't feel that enough parents are concerned about what their kids are doing when they're at school. They are just concerned that they get them to school."

Still, families described other parents as sometimes helpful sources of information and support in engaging with school. MaryBeth shared she learned from other parents how to transfer her daughters from one school to another. "Well, I had asked a couple of other parents about that. They said, 'Well, you know, just go compare information, explain what's going on, bring her paperwork, and if they agree . . .'" Mari, another parent, explained how parents informed each other of upcoming school events: "I have some friends that come to the same school. They say, 'Do you know that we have this meeting? Oh really, when did they tell you? Well, they sent a letter.' 'Oh, OK, I haven't read it.'" Janice, a parent who is relatively new to the city and the school, said meeting another family who was involved with the school facilitated her involvement with the school. "I guess my involvement came about because I was curious and just wanted to see and I happened to meet somebody that was already involved."

Families reported family social circles within Brendan River tended to be small. May, a parent, implicated the frantic pace and demands of work and family responsibilities as a reason many families in the community did not interact with each other, even when their children attended the same school. "Because everybody's gone so fast. They come, they drop off, they leave. They come, they drop off, they leave. They come, they pick up, they leave. There's really no standing around and talking to other parents. It's so fast."

Both a teacher and a parent recognized events that had brought the school and community together in the past, such as a community barbeque and a "fun run," as ways to bring families together as a community. May, a parent, wished there were more community events because families can help each other such that everybody benefits:

It would be nice if we did have more social events for the parents to come together. I know the school is about the kids. I know that, but if the parents know each other, then the kids benefit. . . . We can help each other. We can help our kids. Some person might have this resource; some person might have this resource. Some person might know this language, and this person knows this language, but we don't know that because we don't talk to each other.

Research supported that parents influence other parents. For example, why and how families got involved in their children's schooling were largely socially constructed and mediated, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model of family engagement. Role construction was defined by parental beliefs about what they should do as a parent; it was influenced by parental beliefs about child development and parenting, as well as social influences—others whose opinions were important, such as other parents, family members, and those in the community. Additionally, *self-efficacy*, the belief in one's abilities and capabilities and part of what impacts role construction, was also largely socially mediated by personal experience and watching others (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Parents' social networks with other parents, although often limited within the school, influenced parents' feelings of responsibility (Curry, 2011). Social ties, both

strong and weak, were important for families because those ties could help with emotional support, information gathering, and resource access (Small, 2009). Situating the school as a hub of the community and encouraging families' social connections both across the community and with other families, were associated with positive, long-lasting effects on parent attendance at their children's schools (McDonald, Miller, & Sandler, 2015).

In summation, formal federal family engagement policies exerted little to no influence over how families and school staff thought and behaved with regard to family engagement. Most families and staff said they were unaware of any kind of policy—federal, state, district, or school—in place. Instead, administrators, families, and teachers generally believed teachers and the school included families on individual bases, meaning it could change from school to school, year to year, teacher to teacher, and perhaps, family to family. Educators, particularly those with supervisory responsibilities, were more aware that professional educator standards upon which educators were evaluated include family engagement. Every sampled educator cited the district's policy around language translations and acknowledged it as important and necessary. Enacting this policy was at times difficult for teachers, because the school's translation capacity was limited and required time and planning. Participants cited the state policy that mandated background criminal checks for those working in schools and limiting family access to school grounds as an influential family engagement policy.

In contrast to the low influence of policy on practices, teachers often cited nonpolicy elements as influential, specifically, their personal experiences and other

school staff. They also regarded the principal's expectations as influential for teachers, consistent with research (Auerbach, 2009, 2010; Quezada, 2016).

Participating families mostly regarded the school climate as welcoming. Almost all families stated they felt the school heard their concerns, and they had a person in the school whom they could rely on for information. Families identified the principal as particularly available and responsive.

Similar to some research, the culture among teachers was at times conflicted and ambivalent about families. Although all teachers I spoke with said they wanted families to feel welcome and valued, some school staff suggested they or their colleagues did not necessarily want families in the school based on concerns families could be inappropriate or require supervision. Some staff further suggested other school staff's negative views about families fed into the teacher culture. There were subtle concerns about staff and student safety within the school. This ambivalence was most apparent when participants talked contrapuntally. For example, one teacher said, "I don't really do that anymore [give phone number out] for safety, but I think they know that they can call me."

Ambivalent trust between parents and teachers, in which teachers reported preferring families not be involved in the classroom and questioned their capacity to effectively partner, has been described in the research (McGrath, 2007). Although relational trust was an essential component to school effectiveness and reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), issues around trust and control affected parent-teacher relationships and communications (Deslandes et al., 2015). School climate has been shown important to academic achievement for children, as well as an improvement strategy (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

For families, other parents figured into their conversations about family engagement in school. Some regarded other families as less than fully engaged with the school. However, parents also reported other parents as sources of information and support. Families can positively affect other families resource access, mental health, (Small, 2009), sense of responsibility (Curry, 2011), and attendance at their children's school. Indeed, family social connections to other families was highlighted in several public messaging publications, such as the dual capacity-building framework (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework (Office of Head Start, 2011), and the Global Family Research Project (Lopez et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2017).

Summary

Primary themes that emerged from the analysis were understandings of family engagement, formal policy, and nonpolicy influences. Families and school staff reported the crucial element in family engagement was creating relationships between home and school. Communication was reported as the main action required to build those relationships. Compared to teachers, families tended to have more expansive views about family engagement; specifically, families voiced they supported learning, academic and nonacademic, outside of school, whereas teachers tended to privilege on-site presence at the school. Face-to-face, on-site meetings were considered particularly helpful for parent-teacher communications. Supervising homework was something both families and school staff felt was primary a family responsibility.

Formal policy, especially federal, appeared minimally influential on how families and schools engaged, according to participant self-reports. Indeed, teachers and families

hardly mentioned formal policy, although administration expressed more awareness, particularly of policy around teacher evaluation. A state policy cited was the state criminal background check, a policy that, while trying to safeguard students and staff, could also limit relations and restrict families.

A district policy well known by families and staff emphasized the need to translate material for families into their preferred language. Although almost everybody agreed this was important, it could be difficult in practice. Translations and interpreters were not uniformly available to teachers at the school, making timely and responsive family engagement efforts inconsistent.

Teachers' choices about family engagement practices appeared to be individual, based on personal experiences, informal policy, practices and attitudes of colleagues, and the principal's expectations, rather than guided by formal policy.

The *teacher culture* appeared ambivalent with regard to families. Although most teachers professed they wanted families involved and welcomed, not all supported family presence. There was a consensus that families required guidance and supervision for multi-fold concerns: families would broach professional boundaries, disrupt the classroom, be inappropriate in front of students or in public, or be dangerous. Additionally, there were limited instances of collaboration and shared-decision making in which families and teachers worked collectively.

Conversely, parents reported the *school climate* or environment to be welcoming. Families felt valued and knew they could find information from a trusted person in the school. Some school practices, such as limited volunteer opportunities, no parents on field trips, and limited parental access to the school grounds, could feel unwelcoming and

keep families at a distance. The interplay between teacher culture and school climate was all the more interesting, given that a positive school climate has been associated with safety, healthy relationships, engaged learning and teaching, and school improvement efforts (Thapa et al., 2013), although how teachers and families related to each other was not well-documented in school climate research. Relational trust, however, was essential, among all the stakeholders (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Participants' many references to the principal in the interviews highlighted the importance of the principal in setting the stage for family engagement in school through expectations she set for staff and families. At Brendan River, families particularly appreciated Denise's responsiveness to their needs and how she related to them. The staff was aware of her expectations and aimed to meet them.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This qualitative inquiry seeks to determine what accounts for the discrepancy between what is prescribed in family engagement policies and how family engagement is enacted in education. I draw three main conclusions, incorporating the data and emergent themes detailed in the findings in Chapter 4. Each conclusion corresponds with a selective code, combining axial codes and categories (Appendix D), in addition to other data such as observations.

In this chapter, I describe the conclusions and the implications and considerations for future practice of each conclusion. A fourth consideration for future practice, spanning all three conclusions, is also offered. In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1990), I then propose a working substantive theory, wherein the conclusions are situated in a process sequence of condition-action-consequence. All conclusions and the substantive theory are specific to this study; that is, they are not generalizable to situational contexts other than Brendan River School during the months this study was conducted. Finally, study limitations and recommendations for future research are described, and a final reflection presented.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Content Knowledge

Content knowledge about family engagement, although generally consistent among families and educators, is incomplete and represents an opportunity to increase the knowledge and capacities for families and school staff.

Among the educators and families at Brendan River School, understandings about family engagement are largely similar. The families and teachers in this study tend to see partnering relationships as the foundation of family engagement in education, consistent with the research and public messaging about family engagement (National PTA, n.d.; Office of Head Start, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Educators and families regard communication as essential to building partnering relationships, also consistent with recommended essential family engagement activities (National PTA, n.d.), and prefer face-to-face communication. Supporting learning in the home through homework supervision is widely regarded as a main parental responsibility. Families and teachers also report the school's make-and-take workshops to be an effective organizational practice that fosters family engagement. Families see family engagement in education in a more expanded way than do educators, who tend to frame family engagement in school-centric ways: occurring on school grounds, with school-directed objectives and goals.

Overall, families and school staff at Brendan River School have traditional understandings of family engagement, in which the activities of communicating, volunteering, supporting learning at home, and decision-making contribute to trusting, partnering relationships that support school-centric goals. At Brendan River School, the methods and practices to include families are typically employed when the family comes to the school and participates in prescribed ways to support the school's goals. It appears the expanded definition of family engagement—a shared responsibility across settings and over time—as embraced and forwarded in the field, has yet to make its way fully into the public at Brendan River School.

Most families and school staff who participated have little information about, or awareness of, national and state policies and mandates that include family engagement in education. This is true even among administrators and teachers who have more direct contact with special populations under family engagement regulations, such as special education and Title I. Among educators, there was limited mention of the state educator standards that include family engagement.

Implications and Considerations for Future Practice: Content Knowledge

In light of incomplete knowledge about family engagement, what it is, why it is important, and what responsibilities educators may have as mandated by policies that include family engagement, teachers tend to draw from their own experiences—their backgrounds, the principal's expectations, and the practices of other staff. Teachers employ individualized approaches to families, with little integrated, systemic approaches or methods. Thus, practices vary from teacher to teacher and family to family, year to year. They are driven by events and tend to be on school grounds. This finding is consistent with the idea of "random acts" of family engagement, which are not integrated or systemic and, thus, are difficult to sustain (Weiss et al., 2010).

Jointly improving the capacities of families and school staff is the basic premise of the U.S. Department of Education's (2013) dual capacity-building framework. Improving capacities, in part, means improving the comprehensive understanding and content knowledge of family engagement, including what family engagement is, why it is important in child development and education, how it can be enacted, and the federal, state, and local policies that include and mandate family engagement in addition to skill development. The district's new family training program currently being introduced may

be a good beginning to improving the comprehensive understanding and content knowledge about family engagement for families. However, this program focuses solely on families. It is important that *both* school staff and families improve their capacities—skills, knowledge, and confidence—to partner with each other.

Leadership skills are a part of building capacity for families. Parent leadership skills improve not only family engagement at the student level, but also potentially schools, communities, and individual families' wellbeing (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2016; Catone, Freidman, McAlister, Potochnick, & Thompson, 2014; Ishimaru et al., 2014; Office of Head Start, 2011; Raimondo, 2009). Furthermore, research suggests extending decision-making opportunities and authority to many stakeholders could potentially influence student achievement (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Wood & Bauman, 2017). At Brendan River School, building parent capacity could be focused through the PTO to improve families' knowledge and skills, thus increasing the PTO's independence from the principal. However, given the low family participation in the PTO, building family capacity and leadership might focus outside of the PTO as well. By building family capacity, families can employ skills to partner with the school and support their children's learning, countering some deficit assumptions reported at Brendan River School.

Teachers also need training on family engagement so they can partner effectively with families and make intentional choices in their practices that reflect research-based training and knowledge. In the state where this study was conducted, teachers are expected to demonstrate proficiency in family engagement skills as a part of their yearly evaluation. However, most of those interviewed said that they did not have training in

family engagement as a part of their professional preparation or professional development.

Finally, given that family engagement practices and ideas are socially mediated, as reported by families and school staff and documented in sociological institutional research (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016; Kellogg, 2009; Penuel et al., 2013), educational policy (Kim, cited in Hess, 2008), education policy research (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Russell, 2008), and parent motivation research (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), it is important to allow space, time, and opportunity for families and school staff to interact and engage with each other. Said another way, top-down issuing of family engagement policy and directives will not likely change behaviors or norms at Brendan River School. Rather, giving all stakeholders—school staff, families, and community organizations—the time and opportunity to work together is more likely to result in change.

Conclusion 2: School Climate

The school climate at Brendan River reflects ambivalence about families.

The school climate, in the experiences reported by families and school staff at Brendan River School, is ambivalent about family engagement: in some ways, it strongly supports family engagement; in other ways, it is less supportive or even resistant. From the families' perspectives, the school environment appears and feels inviting and welcoming to them. Almost all families report they are pleased and satisfied with their experiences at Brendan River—they feel welcomed, valued, and supported by a responsive principal. Most families say they have a person in the school to whom they can turn for information and help. In addition, most teachers espouse and support the idea that families should feel welcome at Brendan River. School staff is knowledgeable

about the principal's expectations for how teachers should work with families. These findings are consistent with the research that suggests a warm, welcoming environment (California Department of Education, 2014; Office of Head Start, 2011; Weiss et al., 2017) and strong leadership are foundational to how family engagement is enacted (Auerbach, 2009, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; California Department of Education, 2014; Francis et al., 2016; Office of Head Start, 2011; Quezada, 2016; Weiss et al., 2017). Additionally, school staff often spoke with great compassion about the families at Brendan River School and their day-to-day challenges.

On the other hand, the teacher culture, or general staff beliefs—a component of school climate—often reflects an undercurrent that families are in need of guidance and oversight. For some teachers at Brendan River School, families are not trusted as a collective. Some teachers believe family members should not accompany children as volunteers or on field trips, or be in the school building without clear supervision and boundaries. Other teachers doubt families' capacities to run decision-sharing groups and activities, such as the PTO, independently. Some worry families will be unbounded, threaten or disrupt the professional environment, or be inappropriate in manner, dress, or language in front of students or in public. Instances in which families were inappropriate rarely occurred. However, organizational memory is long lasting. These instances persist in the minds of school staff and are communicated to colleagues. The concerns about families at Brendan River are not person-specific; more than one educator reported these concerns, and they were not linked to a particular person. That is, in the teacher culture, there is *systemic* ambivalence about families.

This expressed concern about families—that they will act inappropriately, make poor decisions, or could be dangerous—counters the idea of trust and relationship building so many teachers embrace. Although they sense parents should, and do, trust the teachers, the teachers do not seem to trust the general parent population entirely. As Bryk and Schneider (2003) posit, relational trust requires fulfillment in four areas: respect, personal regard, competence in core responsibilities, and personal integrity. I suggest teachers are concerned that the general parent population cannot consistently fulfill the relational trust requirements of core competency and personal integrity.

The common practices and policies at Brendan River School likewise reflect and reinforce this ambivalence. Although teachers almost always voice a wish for families to feel comfortable in school and a desire to form respectful partnerships, school practices are uneven. Teachers and families express a preference for face-to-face interactions. Many teachers and families interact on the sidewalk after the school day, when families are on school grounds to pick up their children—a common school practice in which educators reach out and communicate with families beyond the classroom. Other practices also encouraged families to come into the school for specific events, such as parent-teacher conferences, the December concert, and make-and-take events. However, some practices are not welcoming or inviting. Teachers report they do not expect or fully desire families to volunteer in the classroom or on field trips, and invitations to volunteer are rarely offered outside of events. The PTO has little support from the educators. Although families almost always report feeling welcome at school, several parents suggest that some practices separate families from school and school staff can feel unwelcoming and uninviting. Several participants point to the need for the state-

mandated criminal background check to maintain safety as an example. Although they also recognize the purpose of the background check, it may pose a barrier to family engagement on-site.

Ambivalence in the teacher culture is hard to define, hard to identify, and somewhat nebulous. For example, not all teachers report feeling vulnerable about safety; in fact, few did expressly, although the principal acknowledges she has heard this concern. Rather, some teachers stated that *other* teachers reported past unsafe behavior by parents as the rationale for current practices, or that *other* teachers hold negative views of families.

Implications and Considerations for Future Practice: School Climate

School norms influence teachers' beliefs about families and their involvement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The ambivalence expressed by some teachers is reinforced by the school practices and policies at Brendan River School, which are also ambivalent—that is, both welcoming and unwelcoming—and likely exclude some families from being on-site consistently. Teacher ambivalence about families is reflected by previous research, in which teachers report preferring families not be involved in the classroom and question their capacity to effectively partner (McGrath, 2007).

Likely, many families are not present in the school because they are hesitant or prevented to do so, such as by the requirement for a criminal background check. Thus, the degree to which the school can reach out to those families and work with them to support their child at home and in the community supports and fosters family engagement. Reaching out to families and getting to know them intimately—their hopes, aspirations, culture, and funds of knowledge—may be of particular importance for

families from diverse cultures (Lopez, 2001; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Supporting families in their engagement with their child's learning and development outside of school is also a way for schools to support family engagement. Face-to-face interactions on school grounds alone cannot be understood as an identifier for the de facto "engaged parent."

For example, prior parental incarceration likely affects some families and children at Brendan Park School. Nationwide, about five million students will have a parent incarcerated during their childhood (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016b). Incarceration rates for Black and Latino or Hispanic men are disproportional to the general population (Alexander, 2012); in 2015, 10% of Black children had a parent incarcerated, compared with 3.6% of Hispanic children and 1.7% of White children (Pettit & Sykes, 2017). It follows, then, that many men of color are unable to be involved personally in school events for their children during a period of incarceration or afterwards, due to the criminal background check requirements. Moreover, there is inconsistent knowledge among participants as to what is disqualifying on the criminal background check. It follows, then, that the population at Brendan River School is also unclear about the nature of the background check and how it is carried out.

The expressed ambivalence might be understood as a breakdown in trust. How can families and teachers improve their relational trust with each other? One strategy is to have families and school staff engage in repeated interactions over time. "To create trusty links between teachers and parents, schools and teachers must promote repeated contacts as during meetings, face-to-face interviews, discussions, telephone conversations, written comments, participation in educational activities, social or other"

(Deslandes et al., 2015, p. 141). Fostering ongoing relationships through joint work on shared projects such as the PTO might be one way to promote school-family relationships and let families and school staff get to know each other in a collective way, apart from the individualized relationships between classroom teacher and parent. Additionally, providing training for families interested in volunteering might be considered, thus improving family capacities in and out of school. As families demonstrate reliable volunteering competencies in the school, teachers will have experiences that counter the existing teacher culture, thus building trust.

School staff might consider going outside of the school setting to get to know parents and families. Home visits, in which educators meet with families in the home or at another agreed-upon location such as a local coffee shop, is one approach with demonstrated results in family engagement and associated student outcomes such as increased attendance, improved behavior, and academic gains, particularly by students from low-income backgrounds (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, & Nix, 2012). Families and teacher report improved relationships and feelings of connections with home visits (Stetson et al., 2012), for which teachers are trained prior to the home visits and are compensated for their time (H. M. Lee, 2014). Two organizations that work with school systems to incorporate home visiting programs are the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project (in California) and 1647 (in Massachusetts).

Additionally, Brendan River School and the district might reconsider their policies and practices. This may be an opportunity for educators and family members to come together and consider practices and policies jointly, addressing who is being included and who is not. Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies (2007) note fear for

physical safety is a barrier for staff to partner with families. Although student safety is of the utmost importance, the very school policies and practices with the overt intent of safety can also keep families and teachers apart.

Conclusion 3: Capacities and Resources

Current capacities and resources at Brendan River School are insufficient, given the needs and demands that affect family engagement.

Resources for family engagement at Brendan River School appear insufficient. Almost all parents and teachers at Brendan River see the high demand and need for additional language translations. Furthermore, almost all teachers acknowledge the district policy of communicating with families in their preferred languages. For Brendan River School, where over half of the student body is designated as requiring ELL services, the need is substantial. Written translation requires advance planning and coordination through the district office. Translation or interpretation in any language other than Spanish likely takes extra effort, time, and coordination through the main office. Assuring timely translation in all needed languages at peak times—given one translator and two ELL teachers with respective classroom duties—is impossible with the current resource allocation. The district policy is relatively new and, perhaps with time, the school will be able to implement it more effectively. Certainly, as a whole, the school staff demonstrates commitment to meeting those mandates. Teachers function as best as they can with what they have—face-to-face meetings where they muddle through verbally or with interpretations by available colleagues, students, or friends—yet sometimes English versions are all that is available. Additionally, some staff mention staff capacity is insufficient. For example, make-and-take workshops are no longer

offered because the staff who had organized them left the school, and translational services depend on the inconsistent presence of one person. For example, the availability of translation at PTO meetings and Principal Chat meetings was inconsistent during the research period. One staff member mentioned a desire for staff that can address Brendan River School's high demands: a family liaison, bi-lingual school staff, and staff to carry out make-and-take events. These are essentially resource issues—there is simply high demand and insufficient capacity to meet the needs.

Implications and Considerations for Future Practice: Capacities and Resources

Effective school-home communication has been identified as positively associated with student achievement and success (Crosnoe, 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2007), and widely recommended as a best practice (California Department of Education, 2014; National PTA, n.d.). When families and schools are unable to communicate successfully, the relationship between the two is naturally compromised despite best intentions. Due to lack of this capacity at Brendan River, the staff has difficulty meeting the demands to partner with all families. However, research suggests translation availability alone is unlikely to increase family engagement substantially among immigrant families:

Despite these efforts, findings showed that immigrant families' participation in traditional forms of family engagement was rare, perhaps due to a focus on providing newcomers with the opportunity to engage in current practices instead of redefining those practices to reflect changing demographics. (Lowenhaupt, 2012, Discussion, first para.)

Thus, only increasing resources is probably not enough.

Pairing increased translation and interpretation capacities with innovative approaches that might address Brendan River school's specific populations might help. For example, the academic parent-teacher team approach (O'Brien, 2012; WestEd, 2016) has had success improving family capacity. This approach replaces individual parent-teacher conferences with several whole-group parent meetings several times during the year. Families receive data on their child and create an academic plan with goals for the year. Data about the class are also presented and analyzed. The school facilitates as a team: classroom teachers, special educators, liaisons, and translators are available and present.

Other considerations that align with research suggest accommodating various times for meetings (Resto & Alston, 2006), different modes and programs (Jeynes, 2012), and language needs are ways to improve family engagement, particularly for low-income and language-diverse schools (Resto & Alston, 2006) such as Brendan River. For example, consider how families unable to attend PTO or Principal Chat meetings at 8:15 a.m. might otherwise participate. Perhaps alternating morning meetings with afternoon or evening times might increase awareness and participation. Sending out translated meeting minutes and agenda items prior to PTO meetings is another way to inform families unable to attend the meeting in person.

Additional Consideration for Future Practice

Collect data to inform and continually improve efforts.

All three considerations proffered above seek to increase family and teacher capacity to partner. To that end, as part of purposely planning capacity-building activities and family engagement, the district might consider how to collect and use data

to inform and continually improve their efforts, consistent with research-based family engagement frameworks and best practices (California Department of Education, 2014; Office of Head Start, 2011; Weiss et al., 2017). District officials report that although they collected family engagement data, the response rate was too low and results are not publicly available (personal communication, March, 2017). It is unclear how the district used these data. Research-based frameworks suggest on-going, continuous improvement is a necessary component of effective family engagement (California Department of Education, 2014; Office of Head Start, 2011; Weiss et al., 2017). Gathering data from a rich representative sample of families is important to gain a full picture about families throughout the district—not a select few—and understand their desires and current practices, to plan and thoughtfully implement family engagement in systemic, integrated, and sustained ways (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Doing so means providing accessible data collection instruments in multiple languages and modalities, such as paper and pencil versions as well as online versions. Furthermore, families and district staff could take the opportunity to work together to analyze the data and collaborate how to use the data for planning. That is, recognizing and raising family voice in program planning could result in improved buy-in and support from families and the community (Weiss et al., 2017).

Working Substantive Theory

I propose the limited content knowledge about family engagement and policies, coupled with a teacher culture ambivalent about family involvement due to a fissure in relational trust, results in individualized approaches—inconsistent and varied from year to year, teacher to teacher, school to school, and family to family, as most participants in

this project reported. This condition represents "random acts" of family engagement, rather than the recommended systemic, integrated, and sustained system of family engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013; Weiss et al, 2010). As reported in a recent article in *The Boston Globe*, when teachers are unclear about policy, their individualized approaches can be inconsistent within the school, with repercussions for both teachers and students (Lazar, 2017). Furthermore, gaps in policy knowledge and lack of policy understanding limit the effectiveness of reform (Meyer, Cancian, & Nam, 2007). At a systems level, this inconsistency likely means there are those who are not included, who cannot or do not fall in the category of being actively encouraged and supported by those at Brendan River School; perhaps the parents who are "inappropriate," unavailable at parent-drop off, with an arrest in their history, or who speak a language other than English and do not or cannot make their needs known to a person in power to enact and enforce translation services. Figure 6 offers a graphic representation of how those factors work together at Brendan River School.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest the condition-action-consequence sequence as the essential elements in a process model. In Figure 6, the element in green denotes the condition that is well supported and strongly present by the data collected: strong leadership. Process elements in yellow are still developing: resources, school climate, school policies and practices, capacity for timely translations and interpretations, and content knowledge. Although this model denotes a process, it is bi-directional. That is, as conditions lead to the actions and consequences, so too consequences and actions influence conditions, as denoted by the two-way arrow. Specifically, school policies and

practices and limited capacity for on-site translations are both actions and conditions that influence actions.

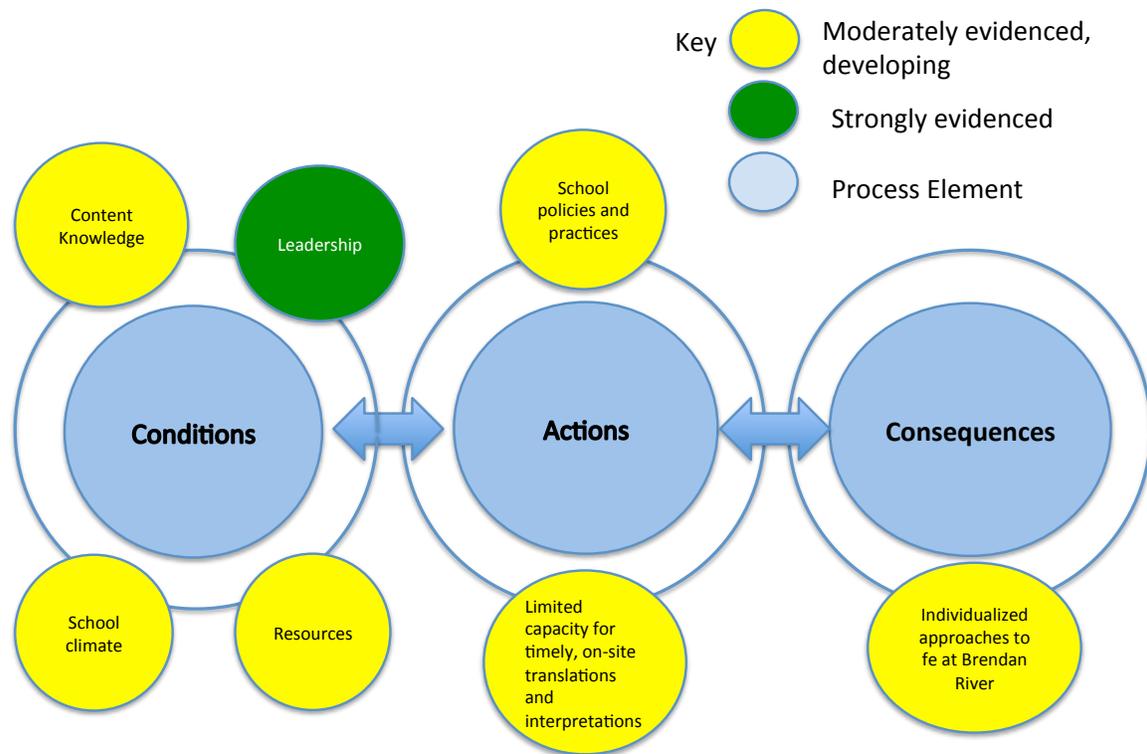


Figure 6. Proposed purposive working theory of family engagement as a process at Brendan River School.

Increasing available resources, improving the capacities among families and staff, and closely examining and reconsidering policies and practices, as well as collecting data to better plan, implement, and evaluate family engagement activities are suggested

considerations for future practice. I propose by doing so, more yellow circles will turn green; that is, that will move from moderately present to strongly present.

Limitations

The sampling for this study does not include all families represented at Brendan River School. Families who were not physically present at the school to drop off or pick up their child or attend a PTO meeting or teacher conference, for example, were far less likely to know about this research project or be approached to participate. Families reticent to engage with the school are also likely to be reticent to engage with a researcher at the school. Thus, the families represented in this research are those most likely to be considered "engaged" already and present at the school site; the "harder-to-reach" families were likewise harder for *me* to reach. The nature of self-selection is that families who elect to participate are more likely to feel comfortable with a researcher or educator. Families uncomfortable in the school setting or with an educator are less likely to be represented in this inquiry, as are their perspectives.

Additionally, for this inquiry, I include only families who speak either English or Spanish, which reflects the majority of parents at Brendan River School. However, a number of families at Brendan River speak other languages. In this way, the family participants do not fully represent Brendan River School's very diverse family population.

Recommendations for Future Research

Trust and its effect on family engagement is an area that merits further study, as well as how to build trust among teachers and families. Specifically, there is a need to

understand better how relational trust *on the part of teachers* affects family engagement practices.

Safety and security is a primary need, according to Maslow (1954). Thus, further research about teacher perceptions of safety is merited. The field would benefit from a frank acknowledgement of teacher ambivalence about families and research on how to address those concerns. Additionally, future research is needed in the area of how safety concerns and safety-oriented practices influence teacher-family relationships.

Finally, future research might also focus on how schools and districts can leverage social networks among teachers and families to encourage common understandings and buy-in specific to family engagement and building trust. Although we know policy implementation often requires significant social interaction, research specific to teacher culture and family engagement policy is an area that merits further study. Further, research is needed on the specifics of stakeholder collaboration—families and teachers—and school policy and family engagement in particular.

Final Reflection

I propose the answer to my overarching question—What accounts for the discrepancy between policy and practice in family engagement?—is partially explained by unawareness of much of the policy and content knowledge among stakeholders. Incomplete knowledge leads personally and socially mediated understandings; at Brendan River School, the result is individualistic, case-by-case approaches, in which some families are included while others are excluded. Although parents and teachers individually connect well, and most families feel welcomed and valued, there is a general ambivalence about the family population among the teachers. Additionally, the current

capacity of the school to complete translations according to the high needs at Brendan River is inadequate. Together, these conditions result in inconsistent, not yet fully realized, family engagement.

How can Brendan River School foster feelings of community; security; and mutual, reciprocal trust and safety for children, families, and staff such that family inclusion and engagement are better supported consistently? In sum, by moving from the traditional family engagement model, in which families come to school and participate in school-directed, limited activities such as PTO and PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences, towards "family engagement 2.0" strategies that improve the capacities of *both* families and school staff, the basic premise of the U.S. Department of Education's (2013) dual capacity-building framework (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2017).

Improving the comprehensive understanding and content knowledge of family engagement and skills is warranted, as is collecting and using data in ongoing evaluation of family engagement efforts, in keeping with best practices proffered by research-based frameworks (California Department of Education, 2014; Office of Head Start, 2011). Other family engagement 2.0 strategies to consider for future practice are home visits and academic parent-teacher teams, in addition to improving the capacities to address translation and language needs at Brendan River. Improving family and school staff capacity will likely lead to improved skills and practices. The hope is that the partnering relationships and school climate, including teacher culture, will be enhanced so family engagement will be fully realized at Brendan River School, supporting all children in their learning and development.

APPENDIX A

LESLEY UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL



29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA
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Tel 617 349 8234
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Institutional Review

DATE: May 26, 2016

To: Lorette MacWilliams

From: Robyn Cruz and Terrence Keeney, Co-chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: **IRB Number: 16-016**

The application for the research project, "Stakeholders' Understandings of Family Engagement in an Urban School: A Qualitative Study" provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

Date of approval of application: May 26, 2016

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (FAMILIES, TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS)

Pre-interview consent and intro script

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

As you know, I am a PhD candidate at Lesley University. I am doing my dissertation on family engagement in education. This interview is a part of my dissertation study.

[I'm going to review some of what is in the consent form here.]

During and after this interview, I will take all appropriate steps to preserve your privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Neither your name, nor your children's names will be used. You will be given a pseudonym and other identifying characteristics, such as your place of work, the school your child attends, and your location of residence will not be written down or shared with anyone. After transcription, the tape recording of today's interview will be destroyed and copy of the transcript will be stored in my password-protected computer. Only my doctoral study committee chair/faculty supervisor, Dr. Gene Diaz (contact information is on consent form), will have access to the recordings. You are welcome to receive a copy of the transcript as well, if you chose to do so.

I will analyze the interview data and identify any emergent themes within or across data. Your words and excerpts of your data (not your name or other identifying information) may be reported as a part of my dissertation. If the findings and ideas generated are to be utilized within the context of a larger study, at a future date, I will contact you for additional consent.

If you were to reveal something which Federal or state laws requires me to report, then I will be obligated to do so, i.e., someone was being harmed, a child was being neglected, etc. Applicable federal and state laws take precedence over confidentiality.

Our relationship is important to me. Please let me know if you feel uncomfortable or wish to end the interview, for any reason. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are absolutely free to withdraw from the study at any time without question. You can also ask that I stop taking notes or that I shut off the tape recorder at any time.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

I would like to tape this interview for purposes of note taking. Do I have your permission to do this?

TURN ON RECORDER

For Families

1. Please tell me your name and the names and ages/grades of your children.

To confirm, your child X goes to X school.

Additional introductory questions:

Does your child receive Special Education services?

Does your child participate in Title I?

Does your child receive English Language Learning services?

2. What does the term *family engagement* in education mean to you?

Prompt if necessary: Other terms might be parent involvement or parent

engagement. What does family engagement look like? That is, what are the

activities that families intentionally do to support their child's learning and development?

3. In what ways do you choose to participate or support your child's education?
4. Why do you choose to do activity X mentioned above?
5. Do you feel welcome at your child's school?
6. Do you feel that your opinion or experiences are valued and heard at school X?
7. In what ways does school X encourage or support you in participating with your child's education? What are things that could be done differently that would support you or other parents in their involvement with their child's education?
8. If a new family were to start here at school X tomorrow, what might you tell him or her about how school X regards and works with families? What advice would you give?
9. When you need help or information about your child and school, to what or whom do you turn for information or help?
10. Have you experienced other schools or districts? What are some practices that you have seen that are most effective – or least effective - in supporting families? They can be teacher practices, school practices, or organizational/district practices?
Follow-up: how do you learn about school policies, rules, or practices with families?
11. Does your school have policies, rules, or practices about families in education? What are those policies, rules, or practices? If so, how does that influence your actions or choices, if at all?
12. Does your district have policies or rules about families in education? What are those policies? If so, how does that influence your actions or choices, if at all?

13. Are there other policies, rules, or laws about families in education that you are aware of? What might those be? How do they influence your actions or choices, if at all?
14. In your opinion, what should family engagement in school look like? What gets in the way?

I'm mindful of the time and that our time together is about to wrap up. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today.

Last question: CLARIFY, or PROBE earlier response here.

Is there anything else that you think might be important for me to know about how families are involved in their children's education?

Are there any other families that you think I should talk to? Would you be comfortable sharing their name with me so that I can reach out to them?

Well, that brings out time together to a close. Thank you one last time for taking the time to meet with me today.

Teacher Version

1. Please tell me your current job title and how long you have been in this position.
2. How long have you been at school X? How long have you been in the field of education? Have you worked at another school or district?
3. What does the term *family engagement* mean to you?

Prompt if necessary: Other terms might be parent involvement or parent engagement. What does family engagement look like? That is, what are the activities that families intentionally do to support their child's learning and development?

4. What kinds of practices do you employ in your classroom in working with families?

5. Why do you choose to implement activity X described above in your classroom?
6. Thinking back over your time as a teacher, what do you see as the main influences on how you work with families?

Probe: personal or professional experience and history, mentor feedback, coursework, principle or administration influence and expectation, professional development, school culture, professional evaluations, other laws and policies: special education law, Title 1, district policy, school policy, other.

7. Does your school have policies or rules about families in education? What are those policies? If so, how does that influence how you work with families?
8. Does your district have policies or rules about families in education? What are those policies? If so, how does that influence how you work with families?
9. Are there other policies, rules, or laws about families in education that you are aware of? What might those be? How do they influence how you work with families?
10. How do you know about school/district/state/federal policies? How do they influence how you work with families?
11. If a new teacher were to start here at school X tomorrow, what might you tell him or her about how school X regards and works with families? What advice about families would you give?
12. Additional: If a new family were to start here at school X tomorrow, what might you tell them about family engagement here at school X?
13. Have you experienced other schools or districts? What are some practices that you have seen that are most effective – or least effective - in supporting families? They can be teacher practices, school practices, or organizational/district practices?

14. In your opinion, what should family engagement in school look like? What gets in the way?

I'm mindful of the time and that our time together is about to wrap up. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today.

Last question: CLARIFY, or PROBE earlier response here

Is there anything else that you think might be important for me to know about how families are involved in their children's education?

Are there any other families or teachers that you think I should talk to? Would you be comfortable sharing their name with me so that I can reach out to them?

Well, that brings out time together to a close. Thank you one last time for taking the time to meet with me today.

Administrator Version

1. Please tell me your current job title and how long you have been in this position.

How long have you been in the field of education? Have you worked in another school or district?

2. What does the term *family engagement* mean to you?

Prompt if necessary: Other terms might be parent involvement or parent engagement. What does family engagement look like? That is, what are the activities that families intentionally do to support their child's learning and development?

3. Tell me about some practices that you have seen that encourage or support families in education. What kinds of practices do you employ in your school or district?

4. Why do you choose to implement activity X in your school or district?
5. Thinking back over your time as an educator, what do you see as the main influences on how you work with families?
6. Does your school have policies, rules, about families in education? What are those policies? If so, how does that influence how you work with families?
7. Does your district have policies or rules about families in education? What are those policies? If so, how does that influence how you work with families?
8. Are there other policies, rules, or laws about families in education that you are aware of? What might those be?
9. How do you know about school/district/state/federal policies? How do they influence how you work with families?
10. If a new teacher were to start here at school X tomorrow, what might you tell him or her about how school X regards and works with families? What advice about families would you give?

Additional: If a new administrator were to start here tomorrow, what might you tell him or her?

Additional: If a new family were to start here at school X tomorrow, what might you tell them about family engagement here at school X?

11. Have you experienced other schools or districts? What are some practices that you have seen that are most effective – or least effective - in supporting families? They can be teacher practices, school practices, or organizational/district practices.
12. In your opinion, what should family engagement in school look like? What gets in the way?

I'm mindful of the time and that our time together is about to wrap up. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today.

Last question: CLARIFY, or PROBE earlier response here.

Is there anything else that you think might be important for me to know about how families are involved in their children's education?

Are there any other families or teachers that you think I should talk to? Would you be comfortable sharing their name with me so that I can reach out to them?

Well, that brings out time together to a close. Thank you one last time for taking the time to meet with me today.

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Greetings!

My name is Lorette McWilliams and I am a graduate student at Lesley University. I am thrilled to be conducting my dissertation research at [Redacted] River Elementary this coming year. My area of interest is in family/school/community partnerships.

Over the next several weeks and months, I will be looking to interview **families** of current [Redacted] River students and current **teachers**. The interviews should last no more than an hour and will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for you.

All participants will receive a gift card (\$25) as a token of my appreciation.

No names or identifying information will be shared or reported – your anonymity and privacy is guaranteed. The interview is entirely voluntary and you can stop at any time.

If you are interested in sharing your experience and opinions about how families and [Redacted] River Elementary interact and partner, please let me know! I am eager to hear your story.

I look forward to meeting you and my time at [Redacted] River Elementary.

Lorette McWilliams

Ph.D. Candidate

Lesley University

lmcwilli@lesley.edu

APPENDIX D

SPANISH TRANSLATIONS OF RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEW MATERIALS

(FAMILIES)

Formulario de consentimiento

Estimado participante:

Actualmente, soy una candidata a realizar mi doctorado en la Universidad Lesley, situada en Cambridge, MA. En estos momentos estoy apunto de empezar mi tesis. Por favor, le pido que me ayude a examinar ciertos aspectos entre la asociación de la escuela, familia y participación en la educación. Todo esto forma parte de mí trabajo de investigación.

Para poder recabar información o datos acerca de su experiencia, le entrevistaré dónde y cuándo usted prefiera durante un periodo de 60 minutos. La entrevista consta de unas preguntas generales acerca de sus ideas sobre las prácticas que involucran la participación de las familias en la educación. No existe ningún daño físico o emocional inherente en esta investigación. Después de la entrevista transcribiré la grabación. Es posible que vuelva a contactarle por teléfono para aclarar mis notas acerca de lo que dijo o volver a hacerle algunas preguntas a modo de seguimiento.

Tomaré todas las medidas necesarias para preservar su privacidad, confidencialidad y anonimato. No se utilizará ni su nombre, ni el de su(s) hijo(s). Se le dará un seudónimo y otras características de identificación, tales como, su lugar de trabajo y la escuela a la que su(s) hijo(s) asiste(n). Su lugar de residencia no estará escrito ni será compartido.

Las leyes federales y estatales me obligan a informar de cualquier suceso contemplado en ellas, por ejemplo, un niño maltratado, desatendido, etc. En cualquier caso, tanto las leyes estatales como las federales tienen prioridad a la hora de preservar su confidencialidad.

Sus palabras y los fragmentos de sus datos (nunca su nombre ni otra información que le pueda identificar), podrían presentarse como una parte de mi tesis. Si en un futuro quisiera utilizar los resultados y las ideas recabadas para un estudio más amplio contactaría con usted para su consentimiento.

La participación en la investigación es totalmente voluntaria. Usted está en su derecho a negarse a participar en este estudio. Si usted decide participar en el estudio, pero cambia de opinión más adelante podrá abandonar el proceso en cualquier momento. Usted podrá omitir preguntas. Decida lo que decida, usted no perderá los beneficios a los que en estos momentos tiene derecho. Es absolutamente libre de retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. También podrá pedirme que deje de tomar notas o que apague la grabadora. Por favor, hágame saber si se siente incómodo o desea poner fin a la entrevista, sea cual sea la razón.

Consentimiento

Estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio de investigación descrito (recibirá una copia del formulario de consentimiento).

Tengo 18 años de edad o más. La naturaleza y el propósito de esta investigación han sido satisfactoriamente explicadas y estoy de acuerdo con participar en el estudio descrito anteriormente. Entiendo que soy libre de suspender mi participación en cualquier

momento si así lo deseo, y que la investigadora responderá con gusto ante cualquier duda que me surja durante el transcurso de la investigación.

| Fecha | Firma del entrevistado | Nombre |
|-------|------------------------|--------|
|-------|------------------------|--------|

| Fecha | Firma de la Investigadora | Nombre |
|-------|---------------------------|--------|
|-------|---------------------------|--------|

Información de contacto

Lorette McWilliams

Investigadora principal y candidata a doctora.

Universidad Lesley

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(774) 275-1425

Dr. Gene Diaz

Presidenta del comité supervisor de los estudios de doctorado de la facultad

Profesora de distinguidos logros

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Terry Keeney (tkeeney@lesley.edumailto:tkeeney@lesley.edu)

Copresidentes de la Junta de revisión interna

Universidad Lesley

Existe un comité permanente en materia de recursos humanos para la investigación de la Universidad Lesley. Ante dicho comité cualquier queja o problema que tenga que ver con cualquier proyecto de investigación puede y/o debe ser alegado. Por favor, en caso de que lo considere necesario usted podría ponerse en contacto con el Presidente del Comité en este email irb@lesley.edu.

Protocolo de la entrevista

Consentimiento previo e introducción del guion

Gracias por aprovechar su tiempo para entrevistarse conmigo hoy.

Como usted ya sabe, soy una candidata a doctora en la Universidad Lesley. Estoy haciendo mi tesis sobre la participación de las familias en la educación. Esta entrevista es parte del estudio de dicha tesis doctoral.

[Voy a revisar algunos de los datos que están en el formulario de consentimiento ahora]. Durante y después de esta entrevista, tomaré todas las medidas necesarias para preservar su privacidad, confidencialidad y anonimato. No se utilizará ni su nombre, ni el de su(s) hijo(s). Se le dará un seudónimo y otras características de identificación, tales como su lugar de trabajo y la escuela a la que su(s) hijo(s) asiste(n). Su lugar de residencia no estará escrito ni será compartido. Tras la transcripción, la grabación de la cinta sobre la entrevista de hoy será destruida y la copia de la transcripción se almacenará en mi ordenador, todo protegido con una contraseña. Solo la supervisora de mi tesis doctoral, Dr. Gene Díaz (véase la información de contacto en el formulario de consentimiento), tendrá acceso a las grabaciones. En todo momento usted será bienvenido a recibir una copia de la transcripción si lo considera oportuno.

Yo, analizaré los datos de la entrevista e identificaré cualquier tema emergente que destaque a través de estos. Sus palabras y los fragmentos de sus datos (nunca su nombre ni otra información que le pueda identificar) pueden presentarse como una parte de mi tesis. Si en un futuro quisiera utilizar los resultados y las ideas recabadas para un estudio más amplio, contactaría con usted para su consentimiento.

Las leyes federales y estatales me obligan a informar de cualquier suceso contemplado en ellas, por ejemplo, un niño maltratado, desatendido, etc. No obstante, tanto las leyes estatales como las federales tienen prioridad a la hora de mantener su confidencialidad. Nuestra relación es importante para mí. Por favor, háganme saber si se siente incómodo o desea poner fin a la entrevista, sea cual sea la razón. Su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. Es absolutamente libre de retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin necesidad de preguntar. También podrá pedirme que deje de tomar notas o que apague la grabadora en cualquier momento.

¿Tienen alguna pregunta para mí antes de comenzar la entrevista?

Me gustaría grabar esta entrevista con el propósito de tomar notas. ¿Por favor, me concede su permiso para hacerlo?

ENCIENDO LA GRABADORA

Para las familias:

1. Por favor, dígame su nombre, el/los nombre(s) y la(s) edad(es)/calificación(es) de su(s) hijo(s).

Procedo a confirmar, su(s) hijo(s) X va(n) a X la escuela.

Preguntas introductorias:

- ¿Su(s) hijo(s) recibe(n) servicios de educación especial?
¿Su(s) hijo(s) participa(n) en el título I?
¿Su(s) hijo(s) recibe(n) ayudas para aprender inglés?
2. ¿Qué significa el término **compromiso de las familias** en educación para usted? Apunte si fuera necesario: Otros términos pueden ser la participación o compromiso de los padres. ¿Qué aspecto tiene el compromiso de las familias? Es decir, ¿Cuáles son las actividades que las familias intencionalmente realizan para apoyar el aprendizaje y el desarrollo de su(s) hijo(s)?
 3. ¿De qué manera usted participa o apoya la educación de su(s) hijo(s)?
 4. ¿Por qué ha elegido la actividad X anteriormente mencionada?
 5. ¿Se siente bien recibido en la escuela de su(s) hijo(s)?
 6. ¿Sientes que su opinión o experiencias son valoradas y escuchadas en la escuela X?
 7. ¿De qué manera la escuela X fomenta o apoya su participación en la educación de su(s) hijo(s)? Cuáles son las cosas que se podrían hacer de otra manera para poder apoyarle a usted y a otros padres en la implicación con la educación de su(s) hijo(s).
 8. En el caso hipotético de que mañana una nueva familia fuera a empezar en la escuela X , que le diría a dicha familia sobre la consideración y el trabajo de la escuela X hacia las familias? ¿Qué consejo le daría?
 9. Cuando usted necesita ayuda o información sobre su hijo y la escuela: ¿Acude a alguna institución o persona para obtener dicha información? ¿Sí? ¿A qué institución o persona?
 10. ¿Tiene experiencia en alguna otra escuela o distrito? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las prácticas más eficaces que ha visto para apoyar a las familias? ¿Y las menos eficaces? Me refiero tanto a las prácticas docentes como a las prácticas escolares o prácticas de organización/distrito.
 11. ¿Su escuela tiene políticas, reglas o prácticas acerca de las familias en la educación? ¿Cuáles son las políticas, reglas o prácticas (en caso de que las haya)? En caso afirmativo, ¿Cómo influyen sus acciones o decisiones, (en caso de que lo hagan)?
 12. ¿Su distrito tiene políticas o reglas acerca de las familias en la educación? ¿Cuáles son esas políticas? En caso afirmativo, ¿Cómo influye en sus actos o decisiones (en caso de que lo hagan)?

13. ¿Hay **otras** políticas, reglas o leyes acerca de la participación de las familias en la educación de las que usted esté al tanto? ¿Cuáles podrían ser? ¿Cómo influye en sus actos o decisiones, (en caso de que lo hagan)?

Soy consciente de que el tiempo entre nosotros está apunto de concluir. Por lo tanto, gracias por la entrevista y por aprovechar su tiempo conmigo.

Última pregunta: ACLARAR o INVESTIGAR las respuestas previas en este paso.

¿Hay algo más que usted piense que podría ser importante para mí acerca de cómo las familias participan en la educación de sus hijos?

¿Hay alguna otra familia con la que usted cree que debería hablar? ¿Estaría dispuesto a compartir sus datos conmigo para que yo pudiera contactar con ellos?

Habiendo dicho todo esto, nuestro tiempo llega a su fin. Muchas gracias otra vez por haber aprovechado su tiempo hablando conmigo hoy.

¡Saludos!

Mi nombre es Lorette McWilliams y soy estudiante de postgrado en la Universidad Lesley. Estoy encantada de llevar a cabo la investigación para mi tesis doctoral en la escuela de primaria [Redacted] River a lo largo de este año. Mi área de interés es la asociación entre la familia, la escuela y la comunidad

A lo largo de las próximas semanas y meses, estaré entrevistando tanto a los maestros como las familias de los estudiantes actuales de la escuela [Redacted] River. Las entrevistas no durarán más de una hora y se llevarán a cabo en un lugar y a una hora conveniente para todos. **Todos los participantes recibirán una tarjeta de regalo (\$25) como muestra de mi agradecimiento.**

Ningún nombre o información de contacto será compartida o reportada, se garantiza preservar tanto su anonimato como su privacidad. La entrevista es completamente voluntaria y ustedes podrán detenerla en cualquier momento.

Si ustedes están interesados en compartir sus experiencias y opiniones sobre cómo las familias interactúan y se asocian en la escuela primaria de [Redacted] River, por favor hágamelo saber! Estoy ansiosa por escuchar sus historias.

Estoy deseando conocerles y aprovechar mi tiempo en la escuela primaria de [Redacted] River.

Lorette McWilliams
Candidata a doctora.
Universidad Lesley
<mailto:lmcwilli@lesley.edu>

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

I am currently a PhD candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA, about to start my dissertation work. I am asking you to participate in a dissertation research study examining certain aspects of family/school partnership and family engagement in education.

In order to gather information, or data, about your experience, I will interview you, at a place and time of your choosing, for 60 minutes and ask a few general questions about your ideas about practices that involve family engagement. There is no physical or emotional harm inherent in this research. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording. I may contact you one more time by telephone to clarify my understanding of what you said or ask a few follow-up questions.

I will take all appropriate steps to preserve your privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Neither your name, nor your children's names, will be used. You will be given a pseudonym and other identifying characteristics, such as your place of work, the school your child attends, and your location of residence will not be written down or shared with anyone.

If you were to reveal something which federal or state laws requires me to report, then I will be obligated to do so, i.e., someone was being harmed, a child was being neglected, etc. Applicable Federal and state laws take precedence over confidentiality.

Your words and excerpts of your data (not your name or other identifying information) may be reported as a part of my dissertation. If the findings and ideas generated are to be utilized within the context of a larger study, at a future date, I will contact you for additional consent.

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right drop out at any time. You may skip questions. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are absolutely free to withdraw from the study at any time without question. You can also ask that I stop taking notes or that I shut off the tape recorder. Please let me know if you feel uncomfortable or wish to end the interview, for any reason.

Consent

I agree to participate in the research study described (you will receive a copy of this consent form).

I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

| | | |
|------|---------------------|------------|
| Date | Subject's Signature | Print Name |
|------|---------------------|------------|

| | | |
|------|------------------------|------------|
| Date | Researcher's Signature | Print Name |
|------|------------------------|------------|

Contact Information

Lorette McWilliams

Principle Investigator and PhD Candidate

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Dr. Gene Diaz

Faculty Supervisor/Doctoral Study Committee Chair

Professor of Distinguished Achievement

Lesley University

Diaz.gene@gmail.com

(617) 823-3002

Robyn Cruz (rcruz@lesley.edu)

Terry Keeney (tkeeney@lesley.edu)

Internal Review Board co-chairs

Lesley University

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

APPENDIX F

AXIAL, OPEN, AND SELECTED CODE SCHEMES

Subquestion 1a: **How do the various stakeholders—teachers, administrators, and families—understand family engagement and how do they influence choices of action?**

Table F1. *Code scheme, Subquestion 1a*

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|--|---|---|--|
| Understanding family engagement, main understandings | Family engagement definition, partnerships, relationships, collaboration, school-based activities, supporting out of school learning, trust, social-emotional learning, supporting school | Trusting each other, collaborating together, partnering together, supporting child learning, supporting child development | <p><i>Teacher:</i> I feel like family engagement is a collaboration between the teacher and the parent in educating the child. I feel like, if there was an umbrella of things that we would look for, it's the parents that are at arrival and dismissal. The parents that, if the kids forget their lunch, they come. That they do follow through on communication books, or any kind of agenda.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I guess the big thing is you think of those words as a true partnership, I believe, with the families. A relationship where the best interest is the child. Not only academic achievement, but social, and emotional, and all the other things that come up.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Let's see, family engagement. I just see that as being a both the parents and the children being involved in things together, whether it's activities or school or what have you.</p> |

(continued)

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Communicating between home and school | Communication, translations | Communicating in written form, communicating in verbal form, meeting formally in person, meeting informally, using technology, accommodating language needs, Principal Chats | <p><i>Teacher:</i> At Parent Night, I do tell them that I want to be able to communicate, and I give them my email, and I ask if that's the best way or if they prefer texting or notes. Which is their most comfortable way communicating? Then they let me know. For some people it has been through email, which is what I prefer.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> That communication piece is key. I've seen huge difference with parent involvement and support from last year to this year and demographics of my class. That's been really different.</p> <p><i>Administrator:</i> People think family engagement is only when parents come to the school to participate in activities that are sponsored by the school. But for me, family engagement, it goes two ways. It doesn't have to be an event. It can be communication through a tool.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> To be honest, a lot of the children here, and the parents, are English language learners. I find that, if it's a parent that feels more comfortable with English, there might be a little more engagement in terms of as far as communication goes. Whether they're writing letters, even meetings at their request, things like that.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> If my son comes home and he has math homework that he doesn't get it, sometimes a teacher will leave me a note, "Well this is a diagram of how you do it." It's wicked like, wow not many schools, not many teachers have the time to write a note, especially for your child, if he is having a difficulty and saying, "This is how this is done. This is how I would like it, and just do it this way."</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I try to, twice a week, put in what we're doing in school. I can send messages to each parent individually -- or caretaker. A lot of these kids are not with parents--the caretaker, just letting them know how they're doing.</p> |

(continued)

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|---|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Volunteering on behalf of school | Volunteering, events attendance | Being in the school, being in the classroom, chaperoning field trips, helping during events, attending/acting as an audience member for performances/events | <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you not have parents generally come on field trips?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> No.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> There are certain parents, that if they pass the background check and they still want to come in, we'll have them come help even copy some homework or staple some homework, that kind of stuff, but as far as helping out like teaching groups or volunteering in that sense, we don't normally do it.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Whenever they have something that requires volunteers, I volunteer as much as I can if I'm not working that day or if I'm working later in the day, I will be at the school helping.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Anything from walking with the kids during the Spooky Walk, to getting the fundraiser ready, to handing out napkins and plates.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> One of the biggest things is having the kids perform or providing food to get them to come in.</p> |
| Volunteering on behalf of school and decision-making: PTO | PTO | PTO goals, parent voice, parent participation, teacher/staff participation, history, comparing to other PTO experiences | <p><i>Teacher:</i> They want to have a voice.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> This year we try to set up a PTO. To me, it's a flop, to be honest. I don't mean to be cruel in that sense. It gave parents an in to the building, and they didn't use it appropriately.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I don't think we've ever felt that safety of stepping back because...</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Their needs...</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> they're very limited.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> Right, whereas when I was at XX, it was a PTO of 57 people. They did their own fundraisers. Here, I think when we first got here there was no really working PTO. XX has established a group that comes together and just to be heard. It's very different from where I come from of what PTO looked like,</p> |

where there more fundraisers and things like that.

(continued)

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Supporting learning outside of school | Learning at home, homework supervision, agenda book, out of school learning, talk with child at home | Supervising homework, signing and reviewing agenda book, talking with child about school and learning | <p><i>Parent:</i> The PTO's goal is to have the parents and the teachers working together to get things for the students that they're not going to be able to afford with the funding they have. Again, it's not a complaint, it's an observation. I would like to see more teacher participation in the PTO as well as other parents.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Yeah, and that's pretty much what the PTO is about. It's a support system. When there's no teacher involvement, it's not a full circle. It's a C. We need that full circle to be able to fully trust somebody.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> I support my child, helping him to do homework. He is learning the ABC's – I am supporting him in the house, teach him the ABC letters.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Well, I always sit down and do homework together. Although, it's generally more of a...I have her sit next to me to do her homework, so I'm there if she has a question, or she wants to explain something.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I don't even mean that the parent necessarily has to sit there and do it with them. I mean just make sure it's getting done.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> They always encourage us to help them with the homework, keep an eye on them, make sure the kids are learning or ask questions at home – how are they doing at school.</p> |

Subquestion 1b: **How does policy—federal, state, district, or school—influence beliefs and practices?**

Table F2. *Code scheme, Subquestion 1b*

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| Formal policy influences | Policy, teacher evaluation, special education compliance, translations | Citing federal, state, district, and school policies as influential | <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Does your district have any policies or rules around working with families?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> Not really. It's building to building.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> That's the big thing for the new teacher evaluation. Family engagement is one of the core things that you're graded on, so you come and say who's coming, who's not, and how you get there.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> They need a [criminal background]check to enter the school, to be involved in any projects. That's the law. Then things come back on that they can be around kids. Those little things, like any arrest. A lot of them know that. That's why they don't want to be here.</p> |
| Non-policy influences | Education and training, professional expectations, professional development, other staff, principal, environment and culture, teacher attitude, staff, personal experiences, teacher role model/mentor, translations | Citing nonpolicy, i.e., teacher preparation, professional development, training, as influential | <p><i>Administrator:</i> A new teacher coming in the door, there isn't a class that you take in college, there isn't a TED Talk video that you can watch that will give you all the technical and adaptive knowledge that you're going to need to know.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> I'm wondering about since you're the more recent graduate if you had any training at XX around working with families?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> Not particularly, no. Not that I can recall. It's something you learn as you dive into it.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It's hasn't been a part of our training.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> A lot of it's probably my background, my own personal background.</p> |

(continued)

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non-policy influences: school climate and teacher culture | Environment and culture, parent "inappropriateness," safety, teacher core beliefs | Teacher beliefs about families, families' experiences with school, teacher perceptions about school culture, families' perceptions about school culture | <p><i>Parent:</i> Every time I see any of the teachers, they're always, "How are you?" They're always wanting to know how things are going. They have time to talk. They have time to engage and listen to you...I enjoy coming here.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel like your opinions are valued?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Absolutely, yes.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It's just important that the parents feel that they're welcome here and that they have a place.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel welcome here at XX?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Yes</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel that your opinion is heard?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Yes.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I just feel like there's a lot of us versus them mentality?</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> For us, as educators here, to really be that nonjudgmental piece to them and let them have a say. Sometimes it can be very dysfunctional, to be honest with you, of some things they might do, and notices that they sent home, and not good grammar, those types of things.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It's really their place to be welcome at any time, but we do have to be cautious of who's walking around our building. We've had some stealing and things like that in the past. Safety because we have a lot of foster children and retrainings, and you can't just walk around the building. They have to come in, check in.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I just think that the educational backgrounds of the parents—and I don't want to say that negatively—are just so limited that they don't...Even fliers that they've given us, I said, "We can't send this out. This is misspelled. This is inappropriate."</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> They're not very appropriate, as far as, the way they're dressed, the way they talk. All that kind of stuff, so you have to take that into consideration.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Do you feel welcome at this school as a parent?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Somewhat....We're not even allowed to go up the stairs when we're picking up our kids from school events.</p> |

(continued)

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Non-policy influences: the principal | Principal, expectations | Expectations for families, expectations for teachers | <p><i>Principal:</i> Moving forward in that lens, one of the things I asked, and I've done it since I've been a principal, is asking my teachers, in the first two weeks of school, to make a positive phone call home, that they have to connect with the parent in a positive way.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> The principal, she is the best. I don't care about her as an employee. But she's the best. Anything happens, I talk to her, I don't talk to nobody. I talk to her, "OK, I'll take care of it!" – She do and fast!</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> I always do that check and connect on the phone with them the first two weeks of school, which we do school-wide. XX, the principal, requires that but it's something that I would have done anyway.</p> <p><i>Interviewer:</i> Does this school have rules, to your knowledge, about how they should be working with families?</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Not really. Not that I know of but only all the time they need to be on time.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> They can't miss the school many days.</p> |
| Non-policy influences: parent influence on other parents | Community connections, other parents | Parents helping other parents, parents judging other parents | <p><i>Parent:</i> Well, I had asked a couple of other parents about that. They said, "Well, you know XX, just go compare information, explain what's going on, bring her paperwork, and if they agree..."</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Some people bring the kid to school, they are outside and then they are gone. They don't come to the meeting.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> I have some friends that come to the same school. They say, Do you know that we have this meeting? Oh really, when did they tell you? Well, they sent a letter. Oh, OK, I haven't read it.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> We can help each other. We can help our kids. Some person might have this resource. Some person might have this resource. Some person might know this language, and this person knows this language, but we don't know that because we don't talk to each other.</p> |

Subquestion 1c: **What organizational practices do stakeholders experience as encouraging or impeding optimal family engagement?**

Table 8. *Code scheme, Subquestion 1c*

| Axial code | Open code | Property | Quote example |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| Promising practices | Promising practices, conferences, events attendance | Meeting face to face, inviting families in to school, success from teachers' perspective, success from parents' perspective | <p><i>Parent:</i> I like to look at the teachers. I like to engage with them and speak to them and look in their eyes, so I know and they know that I'm very serious about what's going on with my children's education. Very, very important to me.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> They ask me to come over here for a meeting to let me know how my child is doing. We need to support the meeting, to come to the meeting and listen to the teachers.</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> I always come to the meeting time, parents meeting.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> One of the biggest things is having the kids perform or providing food to get them to come in.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> If we can kind of catch them right as they're dropping their kids off and encourage them to come in. We'll go into the cafeteria after the kids eat breakfast, and we've made sight-word flashcards or little math games and they generally seem to enjoy it</p> |
| Barriers | Barriers, nonpromising practices, culture, language, life challenges, staff work load, time or work schedule, safety | Language, culture, life challenges, resource-availability or access, time, | <p><i>Teacher:</i> Sometimes when parents are working, if the parent is working a job that they get paid hourly, and if you don't go in, you don't get paid. They can't afford to make your conference at whatever time.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> There are certain families that come and, depending on the background, religion background, what their beliefs are, they don't want to share anything, and we have to respect that. It's like a cultural thing. They just want their kids here to learn. They don't want to share with you. They don't want their kids to share with you.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> If the parent can't come to the meeting because they work two shifts, 7:00 to 3:00 and 3:00 to 11:00, it's only to put food on the table and paying the bills. They trust in us that we will be able to make up for that when they're not there. When they don't sign the agenda, it isn't purposeful. It's because they're very busy because sometimes, it's complicated.</p> <p><i>Teacher:</i> It's all during the day. A lot of these don't happen here at nighttime, and a lot of them,</p> |

safety-wise, they don't usually come, so we don't do nights. A lot of them mornings and during the school day.

Table F4. *Selective Code: Content Knowledge about Family Engagement*

| Open code | Axial code | Selective code |
|---|--|---|
| Family engagement definition, partnerships, relationships, collaboration, school-based activities, supporting out of school learning, trust, social-emotional learning, supporting school | Understandings, the foundation of family engagement in education | Content knowledge about family engagement |
| Policy, teacher evaluation, special education compliance, translations | Formal policy influences | |

Table F5. *Selective Code: School Climate: Ambivalence About Families in Teacher Culture*

| Open code | Axial code | Selective code |
|--|--|---|
| Volunteering, events attendance, PTO | Volunteering on behalf of school | School climate: Ambivalence about families in teacher culture |
| Education and training, professional expectations, professional development, other staff, principal, environment and culture, teacher attitude, staff, personal experiences, teacher role model/mentor | Non-policy influences | |
| Environment and culture, "inappropriateness" of parents, safety, teacher core beliefs | Experiencing and describing school culture | |
| Barriers, nonpromising practices, culture, language, life challenges, | Keeping families and schools apart; barriers | |

staff work load, time or work
 schedule, safety

Table F6. *Selective Code: Resources: Translations: Policy, Needs, and Capacity*

| Open code | Axial code | Selective code |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Communication, translations | Communicating between home and school | Resources: Translations: Policy, needs, and capacity |
| Policy | Formal policy influences | |
| Promising practices | Promising practices | |
| Barriers, nonpromising practices, language, staff work load | Barriers | |

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