

ABSTRACT

Stephanie R. Raiford, TRANSFORMING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BY DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler).
Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2021.

This qualitative study was guided by the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) to explore how elementary principals led family engagement; provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools; and developed professional learning to increase the capacity of elementary leaders to able to lead the efforts in their schools. School leaders were essential in developing effective family engagement efforts, especially at the time of this study, as the context of family engagement changed due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19. It became more evident that families were vital partners in their children's education as their roles required them to provide additional supports for learning at home. However, research indicated that school leaders might not have been trained historically on effectively partnering with families (Epstein, 2011), leading to this crisis.

This study examined building the school leaders' capacity by examining how they led versus just strategies to engage families. There were limited recent studies focused on leadership for engagement. Common themes that emerged in this study included how principals led their school family engagement efforts by being intentional in their expectations for school staff by creating a shared responsibility; fostered welcoming environments by developing cultures that supported engagement; worked to challenge beliefs and prioritized clear and constant communication. These insights were used to create professional learning for other elementary school leaders within the same school district using The Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) as a guide. Findings revealed that professional

learning within a local context about family engagement improved the efficacy and knowledge of how to lead family engagement efforts. Future study recommendations include more professional learning centered on culturally responsive practices that mitigate the new barriers caused by the pandemic COVID-19.

TRANSFORMING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BY DEVELOPING
THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Stephanie R. Raiford

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DEDICATION

For my husband, Brooks, our daughter, Lauren, and our son Will. Your ongoing support and love have allowed me to complete this life-long goal. I could not have done this without your encouragement and allowing me to do this even though it placed a hardship on our family. To my parents, thank you for always believing in me and instilling the confidence not to give up even when things were challenging. You taught me that you could do anything with perseverance and hard work.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this inquiry was to explore how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provide insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools, and create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals through professional learning to be able to lead the efforts in their schools. There have been limited studies in recent years that examined leadership for family engagement. Ultimately, the study outcomes were to enhance school leaders' capacity to lead engagement efforts in their schools and know how to implement the organizational structures. The lessons learned as well as actions translate into actionable steps for future study. The remainder of this chapter addresses the Background of the Focus of Practice, Context of the Study, Naming and Framing the Problem of Practice, Focus of Practice Guiding Questions, Conceptual Framework, Study Design, Definition of terms, Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, Limitations, Significance of the study, and Advancing Social Justice and Equity.

Background of the Focus of Practice

School buildings closed abruptly on March 14, 2020, in North Carolina (Hui et al., 2020) because of COVID-19, resulting in a shift in the learning environments for the remainder of the school year. Families assumed a larger role in their child's education and were supporting learning at home. As school reopened in the fall, school leaders continued to need to reach out to families and create strong relationships that fostered engagement to support learning at home. The district opened in remote instruction, but families were provided with a choice on their preferred learning environment. They could choose to attend school under a Cohort model in rotations for in-person instruction or register for Virtual Academy. Families could enroll their

students in Virtual Academy for the semester or the entire year. Approximately 56% of the district's elementary students were enrolled in Virtual Academy for the first semester (Hui, 2020).

Due to the pandemic, family engagement and the need to move toward partnership have been highlighted (Mahmood, 2020; Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, 2020; Seale, 2020). It became a more visible priority for schools as families had to carry a more significant burden of supporting learning at home.

We must recognize that all families care about their children's education and that engagement can vary based on many factors, including caregivers' cultures and beliefs, their own educational experiences, their types of employment, responsibilities to others and more (Mahmood, 2020).

Families were always their child's first teacher, and no one knew that their support would be more vital when education shifted to remote and online learning. School buildings were closed, but teachers continued teaching. For many schools and districts, it was necessary to re-think family engagement based on the current circumstances. Mahmood (2020) found that families needed to be drawn in to support remote learning to help students engage in their learning. She also emphasized that it was a good time for educators to check their assumptions about family engagement and families' capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some of the inequities that existed in schools and the burden on families. Seale (2020) underscored the importance of families and that schools needed to provide supports.

During this time, the use of social media and other mechanisms were being utilized for communicating with families. Phone calls were made to check on students and families. Emails

were used to make sure that there was a sense of connection. The role of teachers, counselors, administrators, and families has changed significantly due to COVID-19.

Principals were challenged with supporting teachers in the switch to remote learning as well as their families. However, principals may not have been prepared for the challenges or how to partner with families before this crisis (Auerbach, 2012; Dunn, 2020; Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007). Principals were tasked with ensuring that technology was in the hands of every student and their staff. For students that did not have access to Wi-Fi, school staff tried to provide hot spots. While these were concrete barriers that were readily solved, other challenges were exacerbated, such as attendance or engagement in online classes. Families wrestled with how to supervise their children during remote instruction while contending with the need to work during a pandemic.

Schools continued to struggle with the best way to engage families in partnerships to improve student achievement. Over time there has been an evolution from the term parent involvement to family engagement leading to partnership. The term family is more inclusive and reflective of the adults that support students at home. Families could include grandparents, single-family homes, blended families, same-sex parents, or other caregivers (Grant & Ray, 2019). Parent involvement typically referenced how often parents showed up to school events versus a more partnership role where families and schools work together to support students' learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). However, the movement away from in-person events because of the pandemic merely emphasized that events symbolized involvement as schools sought new ways to engage families. Constantino (2020) stated that “disengagement was never about “attending” events or meetings. Believing that relationships are essential is the first step.”

According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), the development of family partnerships does not come easy. It requires an investment in time and energy on behalf of school staff, especially the leader, to be strategic in fostering relationships with families. Partnerships are developed with effort and intentionality (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). School leaders create the conditions to build trust by increasing communication between staff and families as it is vital to the development of partnerships. Schools develop effective communication with families by leveraging the power of positive communication. Communication was often cited as a challenge to engagement due to timing, format, and language barriers (Henderson et al., 2007). By building the bridge to communication, families are more inclined to engage in school.

Much like teachers, families were driven by the desire to help their children improve their learning outcomes. Barriers, factors, challenges, or obstacles to engagement appeared throughout the literature for both families and school staff (Epstein, 2011; Grant & Ray, 2019). These barriers interfered with communication and working collaboratively to build meaningful relationships (Grant & Ray, 2019). For school staff, the barriers included fear, lack of knowledge of the families' culture, beliefs, and policies that did not intentionally involve all families. Sample family barriers include childcare, negative experiences at school, lack of translation, time, and distance to the school (Grant & Ray, 2019). What staff may perceive as challenges may not line up with what parents perceive as challenges (Baker et al., 2016), resulting in a disconnect which could impact the ability to develop authentic partnerships. These barriers provide entry points into developing more effective practices to support families (Clark-Louque et al., 2020).

In large urban districts, the way schools partner with families depends on each school's needs. Urban schools are known for serving large numbers of students in poverty and English

Language Learners (ELL) (Grant & Ray, 2019). These school leaders face many issues that plague their schools, such as high poverty levels, low attendance rates, and discipline concerns. Successful leaders in high-poverty, high-performing schools create a sense of urgency within their schools to support families (Parrett & Budge, 2020). They effectively contend with their communities' social challenges and adapt to the changing dynamics of PK-12 schools (McCarthy, 2015). These leaders focus on diversity and equity in their pursuit of partnering with families to drive the organization's direction by leading with vision and purpose (Riehl, 2012).

The challenge was that not all school leaders were equipped to lead schools that serve diverse populations. Lack of principal preparation was often cited as the reason why school leaders struggled in their communities (Epstein, 2005; Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The national standards for school leaders were revised in 2015 to address this problem and to reflect the current landscape of school leadership as the dynamics of children, families, and demographics have changed (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The revisions created an opportunity for school leaders to integrate different leadership aspects to maintain their focus on all students' success. While school districts could not impact pre-service programs, they can support leaders in leading schools.

Meeting the needs of all students required an emphasis on all school leadership facets, including engaging families. Henderson and Mapp (2002) provided strong evidence that students were more successful in school, have higher attendance rates, and less likely to drop out when their families were engaged at school. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) emphasized family and community engagement. Standard Eight spoke explicitly to meet families' needs: Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually

beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). There was an expectation that school leaders created positive relationships with families, maintained a presence in the community, and understood a community's culture.

In 2015, the federal law changed with adopting the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reinforcing school leadership's importance (Herman et al., 2016). In addition to school leaders' changes, the language associated with Title I and parent involvement changed to family engagement (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The shift from parent involvement to family engagement signified the change in families' dynamics and a move towards partnerships. School leaders were expected to maintain two-way communication.

Context of the Study

This study took place in a large urban district in North Carolina with approximately 160,000 students and 190 schools with over 100 elementary schools. The district was committed to building partnerships with families to improve student achievement as part of their Strategic Plan. Approximately 50 schools in the district received Title I funds to address the school community's income and achievement gaps. Schools that were eligible to receive Title I funds, Free & Reduced Lunch Population was 45% or greater, operated using a school-wide model. Schools that received Title I funds were required to set aside 1% of their funds for family engagement as part of ESSA. The Free & Reduced lunch percentage ranged at the time of the study for elementary schools in the district was between 2.8% to 82.3%. Geographically, the district was divided into regions that reflected dramatically different demographics. The district profile comprises 45.3% White, 22.3% Black 18.4%, Hispanic, 9.8% Asian, Multiple Races 3.8%, Pacific Islander 0.1%, and 0.2% American Indian.

As part of the Strategic Plan, Vision 2020, the Community Engagement Objective Team examined the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) to accomplish the family engagement sub-strategy beginning in 2016. Partnering with families, especially at the elementary level, was vital to minimize achievement gaps, improve student attendance, and build relationships with families.

The district's adoption of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) illustrated its commitment to providing equitable support to all schools and their families. The district embraced the framework adopted by the U.S. Department of Education, The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), as a means to guide school improvement efforts. At the heart of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships were the four Cs: Capabilities (skills and knowledge), Connections (networks and relationships), Cognition (beliefs and values), and Confidence (self-efficacy) (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The framework provided direction for schools to assess their status and create a vision using the desired results. A key element within the framework was capacity building. Capacity building was not limited to increasing the knowledge of staff but also of the families. The district's pivotal moment with principals occurred in 2018 when Dr. Karen Mapp presented at a principal meeting.

It was an intentional decision to include family engagement as an expected outcome within every School Improvement Plan (SIP). It would ensure that it was a priority, driven by the annual Panorama survey data and Dr. Karen Mapp's research. The district began administering the Panorama survey to families in Title I schools during the 2016-2017 school year. All families within the district were surveyed in 2017-2018 and again in 2018-2019. The survey was not administered to all schools during the Spring of 2020 due to the school closures except for Title I

schools that administered a modified version of the survey. The lowest area of the survey was Family Engagement.

Each school was tasked with integrating a family engagement goal into their practices using the NCStar Indicator E1:06: The school regularly communicates with parents about its expectations of them and the importance of the curriculum of the home (what parents can do at home to support their children's learning) (American Development Institute, 2016). As part of the School Improvement Planning process, schools were required to develop an initial assessment including relevant data, describe what it would look like at full implementation, and establish actions to accomplish those goals.

Schools were responsible for creating the pathway for this to occur regardless of their level of background knowledge. The district's goal assumed that school leaders knew how to partner with families and how to support capacity building in teachers to collaborate effectively. A challenge that also occurred was that schools had five indicators to focus on, not just one. Schools prioritized their plans based on the highest needs when the plans were created in 2018. Plans were designed for two years with annual updates.

Additionally, the district launched a Family Engagement grant process where schools could apply for funds to kick-start their family engagement efforts during the 2018-2019 school year. The application process was quite extensive, and the rubric used to assess the applications was aligned to the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). During the first year, 32 schools applied that also had SIP Indicators to support their work. Ten schools were selected. The researcher's elementary school was one of the initial grant recipients. The feedback from the Family Engagement Committee, who reviewed all the applications, was that schools did not understand how to align their efforts. It was not surprising

that eight of the ten schools were Title I. The Title I department had invested time, resources, and professional learning opportunities for their schools and their principals in family engagement. Title I schools were also required to complete Compacts or agreements co-constructed with families that outlined their family-school partnership roles.

During the 2019-2020 school year, 29 schools applied for the Family Engagement Award, including 18 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and two high schools. Thirteen schools met or exceeded the rubric criteria, including 12 elementary schools and one high school. While the grant award winners represented schools with well-developed practices and interests, it provided an opportunity for further study to examine the other elementary schools' school improvement plans within the district. Therefore, School Improvement Plans were used in the selection criteria to learn how elementary school principals led their family engagement efforts as plans provided an outline of expected outcomes. There was a need to know about the intentional decision-making of how schools partnered on behalf of the families they served.

School leadership is essential in establishing the conditions for partnership inclusive of the cultures of their families. To develop sustainable practices focused on partnership, school leaders share this responsibility by building their staff and their families' capacity. They break down barriers creatively to meet the needs of their families. An indicator that schools in the district would benefit from the study was highlighted by the in-depth review of School Improvement Plans by the Family Engagement Committee. Therefore, the focus of the study was centered on supporting school leaders. This study sought to explore how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts, provide insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools, and create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the

capacity of elementary principals through professional learning to able to lead the efforts in their schools.

Naming and Framing the Problem of Practice

The focus of this inquiry was to explore how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts, provide insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools, and create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals through professional learning in their ability to work with all families.

School leaders were charged with the challenge of establishing the conditions in which partnership could occur and setting the school priorities. The research suggested that teachers were not prepared to work with families (Auerbach, 2012; Epstein, 2011), nor were the administrators who led them. Levine (2005) was commonly cited for his study about the preparation of school administrators. This study highlighted that only 56% of school administrators studied had taken a Community/ Parent Relations course. While there had been intentional efforts to improve the quality of preparation since that time, schools continued to struggle with developing effective partnerships with families due to the lack of preparation.

There was limited research examining leadership in the context of family engagement (Auerbach, 2012; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Quezada, 2016; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Research pertaining to remote learning during a pandemic was limited as the context and circumstances evolved throughout the study. One of the core beliefs deemed foundational to working with families was “The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders” (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 39). The problem was that school leaders did not have the background knowledge to develop their family engagement efforts. Therefore, additional research needed to be conducted

to provide school leaders with the tools necessary to lead their schools. Educators' roles are complex, and teachers need to be prepared to examine their learners' academic needs and partner with their families effectively (Caspe et al., 2011) for their students' benefit. School leaders play an integral role in creating the conditions and climate in which family engagement occurred (Constantino, 2021).

Changing the mindset of school staff, parents, and administrators to be focused on engagement requires a shift in how each felt about their ability to help students succeed (Mapp et al., 2017). Breaking down these barriers requires schools to use asset-based thinking to dispel the negative stereotypes that urban low-income families were often assigned (Henderson et al., 2007). Focusing on the family's strengths and the funds of knowledge they bring creates a more inclusive learning environment. Schools that changed their perceptions provided more equitable access to the school by minimizing barriers for students and their families (Mapp et al., 2017).

There was a continued need to guide school leaders as they developed their family engagement efforts in conjunction with their School Improvement Plans. While the plans provided a structure, teams' development to support the work was a missing element in the planning as family engagement requires leadership across the organization. The study focused on building school leaders' capacity as there was limited research connecting leadership practices and family engagement efforts. More specifically, few studies used the conceptual framework of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) in the context of school leadership. The study results can impact systemic policies at the district level and the individual school level based on the participants' feedback. Additional supports could be replicated for other principals especially considering the changing context of engagement resulting from the pandemic. The purpose of this study was to explore how elementary principals

led their family engagement efforts; provide insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools, and create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals through professional learning to be able to lead the efforts in their schools.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provide insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools; create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals through professional learning to be able to lead the efforts in their schools. Family engagement efforts require strong leadership and guidance, as it is deeply rooted in equity for all students. Research was needed to learn how leaders create the conditions necessary to make the most significant impact for educators and families.

The study questions for the study were:

- How do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement efforts in their schools?
- How do school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?
- How does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?

Conceptual Framework

Many family engagement models and partnerships were explored in the research; no one model or framework fit every situation. For many years, researchers used Epstein's (1995) Model of Six Types of Involvement to guide their studies. The Six Types of Involvement include

Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decisions Making, and Collaborating with the Community (Epstein et al., 2019). While much of Epstein's work influenced different aspects of the study, the district used the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). It provided an opportunity to support school leaders in their capacity building to lead and connect to the district's direct learning opportunities.

Using a more inclusive perspective of family partnerships, the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) provided schools and districts with the opportunity to address all families and school staff in the partnership process (see Figure 1). It was designed to support school efforts in combating the challenges to engaging all families and is the conceptual framework for this study (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This framework was adopted by the U.S. Department of Education as well as school districts across the country in states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, and California.

The Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships examined the conditions that organizations must establish before launching engagement efforts which the school leader drove. The organizational conditions explored the systems across a school or organization and their ability to map out sustainable efforts (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The model recommended that resources were as well as internal processes to support engagement efforts. Once these conditions were in place, school staff could engage families in activities that addressed the process conditions. The process conditions that should be included when planning family partnership activities must be linked to learning, relational, developmental, collaborative, and interactive (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

**U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S
Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships**

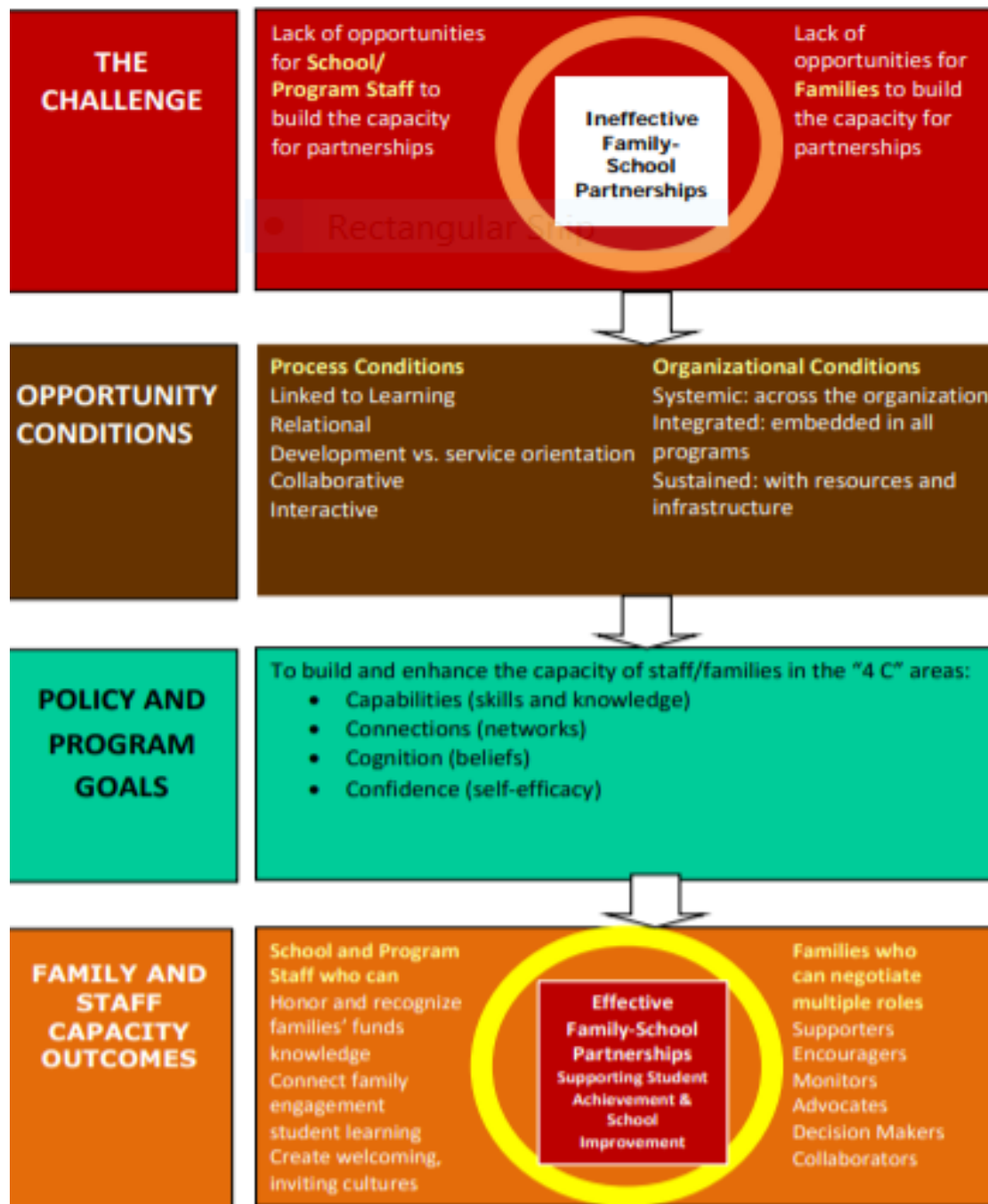


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Dual-capacity framework for family-school partnerships.

School leaders that effectively used the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships intertwined it into their leadership practices. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) relied on the Chicago Consortium's research on School Research and the Essential Supports for School Improvement (Sebring et al., 2006). The framework drew on research in family engagement centered on establishing meaningful relationships with families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

The Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships focused on building both families' and schools' knowledge and capacity. The research suggested that teacher preparation programs did not adequately prepare teachers to engage with all families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Ultimately, the goal for families was to experience a welcoming school environment; their funds of knowledge were honored; and activities were connected to learning (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Their roles were integral partners in the overall school community for families, moving beyond just the relationship with their child's teacher.

Study Design

To answer study guiding questions, the qualitative study was guided by the Model for Improvement (Langley et al., 2009). The Model for Improvement posed three fundamental questions that drove the improvement. According to Langley et al. (2009), those three fundamental questions were: (1) What are we trying to accomplish? (2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? (3) What changes can we make that will result in improvement? These three questions were at the core of this study utilizing three phases that framed this study.

To address the first study question: *How do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement efforts in their schools?* Qualitative data were collected in Phase I using semi-structured interviews from a sample of elementary school principals whose

schools had actions within their School Improvement Plans to drive their family engagement efforts in the urban school district. The interview questions were aligned to different elements within the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) that sought to understand better how leaders addressed challenges for both staff and families. The questions also inferred elements of the Process Conditions, which were relational.

To address the second study question, *How do school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?* Phase II of the triangulated findings from the interviews conducted in Phase I and a document analysis of School Improvement Plans submitted by principals to the school district's board of education. The findings from this data triangulation were utilized to develop professional development for school principals. The professional learning was developed in collaboration with district personnel, including the Office of Professional Learning, Area Assistant within the Area Superintendent's Office, and Director of Family and Community Engagement. The topics evolved using the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Phase I revealed leadership practices centered on working with families. However, not all the school leaders were versed in how to use the framework. Therefore, this was included in the professional learning to illustrate how the framework could support sustainable family engagement practices.

To address the third study question, *How does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?* The final phase, Phase III, involved implementing a Leadership Professional Development series for a group of elementary principals who volunteered to participate. Feedback was provided throughout the professional learning, but more specifically, an evaluation was completed through

Qualtrics after the final session. The questions were posed to incite action and reflection from the participants.

Definition of Key Terms

Capacity Building: Building skills, knowledge, and confidence for stakeholders (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships: Framework adopted by the United States Department of Education that addresses building the capacity of school staff and families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Family-School Partnership: Epstein (2011) defined partnership as “educators, families and community members working together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes” (p. 4).

Funds of Knowledge: Knowledge families have about their home and community (Moll et al., 1992).

School Leader: For the purposes of this study, school leaders may refer to someone who has completed a program in educational leadership.

Title I: Provides funds to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers of Free and Reduced Lunch populations (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Assumptions

There was an underlying assumption that school leaders in the same district were exposed to consistent family engagement messages. Since the district launched the Strategic Plan efforts, leaders in place starting in 2018 received consistent messaging from the district about family engagement and School Improvement. Elementary principals had limited training in family engagement in their college courses. Another assumption was that newer principals may have

taken more classes due to the changing nature of educational leadership programs and may be familiar with current trends and theories of partnership.

A central tenet of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) was that it did not provide prescribed measures. The families themselves were supposed to drive the engagement efforts. Therefore, it was assumed that each school's actions might be different based on the community's needs. The district adopted this framework to support all schools, created opportunities for feedback from families in the form of the Panorama survey, and developed School Improvement Plan expectations.

Scope and Delimitations

The study took place in three phases. Phase I participants were initially selected from schools whose Free and Reduced lunch population ranged from 10% to 70% was chosen to avoid extremes. Still, the final participants represented a narrower range of schools due to participant acceptance in the study. In Phase I, school leaders were excluded who had a personal relationship with the researcher. It was not an intentional decision not to include a Title I school whose Free & Reduced lunch rate was higher in Phase I. Due to the delays caused by COVID-19, it became difficult to coordinate with the Title I school leader who had initially committed to participate in Phase I. Title I schools possessed more well-developed family engagement efforts due to the federal mandates that 1% of the budget be set aside for family engagement efforts.

The study engaged only elementary principals who provided me with their informed consent before the end of the fall semester and who had clearly defined actions within their School Improvement Plans. While this may result in a convenient sample, my study was unduly affected since I intended to work with a broader range of principals. The scope of Phase III

transpired during January 2020 over three consecutive Wednesdays after school. Furthermore, sessions were conducted virtually.

Limitations

After exploring the literature, the study's concerns were maintaining objectivity for those involved and anonymity for the subjects involved. In this study, the researcher's position and overfamiliarity with the schools and their subjects posed a possible limitation for objectivity and the ability to receive genuine responses from participants. When the schools were selected, the researcher did not choose any schools with an existing personal relationship with the school leader or where the researcher's children attended. The positionality as a researcher may have influenced participants' willingness to engage in the study. In the case of this study, the researcher was a veteran educator whose experience spanned high school, middle school, and elementary in a variety of roles. The researcher served as an elementary school principal for seven years before becoming a middle school principal.

When school sites were selected for Phase I, schools, where the researcher had worked were not included to avoid having undue influence by conducting research with former employees. Yin (2018) reinforced that to conduct ethical research. The researcher was careful not to use their knowledge of the issues to steer the study based on a preconceived position, thus eliminating possible researcher bias.

For the purposes of this study, the following limitations were made by the researcher:

1. The degree of honesty and veracity of the statements of the subjects was a limitation.
2. The schools and their leaders' sample size was relatively small and may not have provided sufficient data to discern leadership practices and trends.

3. Prior to the study's onset, the researcher did not know the principals' background other than the fact that family engagement was listed as a School Improvement priority within their plan.
4. The number of school principals who committed to participate in the Leadership Development Series in Family Engagement in Phase III.

Significance of the Study

Implementing sustainable change is an arduous task for any school leader, much less a school district. In the field of family engagement, the lack of training in teacher preparation programs appeared in the literature (Epstein, 2011), which impacted the effectiveness of school-wide reform efforts to partner with families. School leaders have not been provided adequate training on how to engage families in the partnership process. The lack of training posed a challenge for school leaders who must ensure that the culture supports an environment where families were integral partners in their child's education.

The study explored how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts, provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools, and created a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals in their ability to work with all families. There were limited studies in recent years that looked at the influence the school leader had on family engagement. A key element of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships was that all schools must have the essential conditions (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) in place within their organizations before developing programs to support families. Without these conditions, family engagement would be ineffective, resulting in initiatives that lacked the background to implement.

In a large urban school district, a no one-size-fits-all approach addresses how to partner with families. There are identifiable conditions available for schools to assess their situation, thus customizing to meet the needs of their schools' populations.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

School leadership is required to advance family engagement efforts in schools. Leaders must create a culture where regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic background, families are partners. These partnerships require intentional efforts centered on culturally responsive practices and strategic leadership to craft plans reflective of their communities.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study of Transforming Family Engagement by Building the Capacity of School Leaders. The chapter consisted of Background of the Problem, Context of the Study, Naming and Framing the Problem of Practice, Focus of Practice Guiding Questions, Conceptual Framework, Study Design, Definition of terms, Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, Limitations, Significance of the study, and Advancing Social Justice and Equity.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literature review was divided into seven sections: conceptual framework; moving from parent involvement to partnerships; teacher and principal preparation programs; professional learning for partnerships; culture and engagement; challenges to engagement; and the role of the leader. The Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships served as the conceptual framework to guide the study.

Conceptual Framework

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships was developed by integrating research on family engagement and home-school partnerships, adult learning and motivation, and leadership development (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Unlike other models, it was not a checklist of activities but a set of conditions needed to connect families with their child's goals surrounding student achievement and school improvement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The framework was designed to build the capacity of the teachers, administrators, and parents as partners in supporting student learning.

Terry (2016) examined how the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships assisted with implementing a family literacy program. She found family engagement efforts were dependent on a thorough examination of the school's beliefs and culture. The results were consistent with the alignment for the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships. Wilkins and Terlitsky (2016) also approached partnership building through literacy activities. An emphasis on capacity building for both school staff and families used the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships to develop family literacy activities.

Improving student outcomes is a shared responsibility between schools and their families. Through this shared responsibility, a relationship of mutual trust and respect is developed (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Collective capacity building was described by Fullen and Quinn (2016) as increasing the ability of educators at all levels to make instructional changes to help all students. In the case of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, families were considered an integral part of their child's learning. Much research over the past 50 years reflects that families engaged in their child's education achieved higher grades in school, scored better on tests, and were less likely to drop out of school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) described challenges to the creation of effective family-school partnerships. The research findings reflected that school staff demonstrated a strong desire to partner with families but lacked the knowledge on how to work with families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). From families' perspective, barriers stemmed from a lack of social and cultural capital needed to navigate schools.

Moving from the challenges into developing sustainable practices centered on family-school partnerships relies on schools and districts to establish the conditions necessary to build its stakeholders' capacity, especially school personnel (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The framework outlined opportunity conditions that should be included when developing family partnerships based on the organization's context. Both process and organizational conditions were described as elements in capacity building. The process conditions deemed to be essential in capacity building were that initiatives possessed a link to learning; initiatives focused on relationship building; developed the intellectual, social, and human capital of the stakeholders; and initiatives

focus on bringing families and staff together to build their collective learning (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

According to the research conducted by Mapp and Kuttner (2013), partnership efforts that yielded fidelity and sustainability possessed organizational conditions. Organizational conditions were systemic and evident in goals for student achievement, integrated into all programs, including professional development, and sustainable through the allocation of resources and infrastructure support (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

District policies and practices assumed that families and school staff had the knowledge and skills to partner effectively. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships contended that policies and programs centered on family engagement must focus on building staff and families' capacity. Capacity building was broken down into: (1) Capabilities: human capital, skills, and knowledge; (2) Connections: important relationships and networks; (3) Confidence: individual self-efficacy; and (4) Cognition: assumptions, beliefs, and worldview.

Effective family-school partnerships focused on building capacity support student achievement and school improvement. Staff whose capacity was strengthened were more able to honor and recognize families' "funds of knowledge"; made connections between engagement and student learning; and created environments welcome to all cultures (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Families were better prepared to engage in partnerships in various roles to support their child's learning.

Moving from Parent Involvement to Partnerships

Today's education landscape moved from parents as guests to parents as leaders in their schools and community. Parent involvement and home-school partnerships were researched at all

levels. Despite the depth and breadth of the research on family engagement, schools continued to struggle with addressing all students and their families' needs.

Family dynamics were more complex than schools' challenges when they attempted to partner with diverse students and families. Caspe et al. (2011) asserted that there were benefits for teachers who engage in family partnerships. Benefits included a positive impact on school climate by valuing families' roles (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Their studies have shown that schools that engaged families in partnerships possessed higher grades and increased attendance.

The field of family engagement has been supported by federal, state, and local policies. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed to provide more equitable access to students from lower-income families. The federal funds provided schools with the ability to address student learning for the neediest students. Since its initial authorization, ESSA has been revised several times. With each rendition, changes were made in the policies and procedures impacting schools. Accountability measures coincided with the funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Title I of ESSA requires schools to spend 1% of their Title I funds on parent involvement. The mandates on Title I funded schools ensured that parent involvement was a priority (Weiss et al., 2010). Included within the directives were provisions regarding the assessment of the involvement activities and parent input on developing a school's practices. With the increased accountability, Title I schools was positioned with additional funding, guidelines, and priorities associated with family engagement. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was in place from 2002-2015. The law defined parent involvement in Section 1118 (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

With the adoption of the most recent version in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) served as a driver of the importance of family engagement at the national level.

Understanding that the term parent may be inclusive of other people in a child's life, the language of Section 1010 changed to be Parent and Family Engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

The policy changes at the federal level emphasized the inclusion of families in the school's decision-making process. The supportive stance in the policy provided opportunities for families to be genuinely engaged with school personnel. Support to schools included professional development regarding family engagement strategies for all school personnel and families (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Resources were intentional and proactive in bridging the gap between home and school. Due to the intentionality of the laws surrounding Title I, Parent and Family Engagement became an integral part of school reform efforts funneling down to the school level.

While federal and state policy supported the nation's neediest schools, many schools that did not qualify or fell out of the range received no funding or guidance on partnering with families (Henderson et al., 2007). Hence the need to include all parents, families, and community members in a schools' efforts to improve student learning. "The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).

Changing from parent involvement to engagement was outlined by Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009). Engagement sought to build on the community's needs to develop their social capital and bring families together to help solve problems (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). The efficacy and academic achievement of that community improved over time as a result. Creating

the conditions where students all students could achieve at high levels meant that a shift in how schools addressed family engagement must occur.

Bringing families together and providing meaningful opportunities to partner was not new. Family engagement efforts, firmly grounded in partnerships between the home and school, yielded positive results for students. It became an integral part of school reform efforts changing the roles for schools in working with families. Weiss et al. (2010) contended that family engagement was a powerful tool to prepare students for the twenty-first century.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) presented a model of the progression from parental involvement to engagement. Schools moved along the continuum at different points through the evolution of the relationships between home and school. How do researchers distinguish between involvement versus engagement? Engagement moved beyond participation in school activities to an investment connected to student learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). There was no magic bullet to engage families effectively.

Reframing family engagement to move beyond traditional forms of involvement requires a shift in how school staff approaches families. The change should move away from a deficit lens and preconceived notions about families moving toward a cohesive collaboration (Henderson et al., 2007). Partnerships make a difference by connecting families and schools to make an impact on student learning. It does not occur in isolation and requires a change in all stakeholders' actions and language (Weiss et al., 2010).

Epstein (2011) found that partnership was a better approach than involvement because it brought together educators, families, and the community with shared responsibility for learning. Weiss et al. (2010) referred to this shared responsibility as a continuum from birth to young

adulthood. Partnerships led the many benefits, including the improvement of school climate and the development of a caring school (Epstein, 1995).

Moving from the term parent involvement to partnership was instrumental in the evolution of how families were to be included in the process. Historically, showing up for events constituted involvement. Engagement implied a deeper connection and relationship. As families moved to a more collaborative relationship, engagement became more reciprocal (Henderson et al., 2007). Henderson et al. (2007) examined the different types of partnerships schools have with their families in *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*.

Henderson et al. (2007) outlined four versions of partnerships: Partnership School, Open-Door School, Come-if-We-Call School, and a Fortress School. For each partnership level, criteria were established within a rubric to determine where a school was in the partnership process. The criteria examined the extent to which schools had the following in place: Building Relationships, Linking to Learning, Addressing Differences, Supporting Advocacy, and Sharing Power (Henderson et al., 2007).

In a Partnership school, families were true partners in the teaching and learning process. They developed relationships with their families, connected to what students were learning; translated materials inclusive of other cultures; supported families to work together; and families were involved in decisions at the school (Henderson et al., 2007). At the opposite end, Fortress schools operated as if families belonged at home, not school. Advocacy and power-sharing were not evident (Henderson et al., 2007).

Family partnerships consisted of the development of a mindset of shared responsibility across all contexts. Whether a school receiving Title I funds or not, there was a need to develop effective family engagement, a priority for all schools (Epstein, 2011). Thoughtful and deliberate

efforts were grounded in relationships between the home, school, and community (Weiss et al., 2010).

Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs

Teacher education programs have long recognized the importance of family engagement as a critical component in student achievement. However, most schools of education offered few courses on this topic and how to do it effectively (Evans, 2013). In 2011, the National PTA, in conjunction with the Harvard Family Research Project, issued a brief exploring how different teacher education programs were able to create programs designed to support effective family engagement as well as recommendations for how professional development could be crafted to increase the capacity of teachers (Caspe et al., 2011).

Flanagan (2007) conducted a study of college education faculty members to delve into how well pre-service teachers were prepared to partner with families. Themes emerged from the study that revealed that pre-service teachers expressed judgmental attitudes about parents. Self-reported root causes were differences in culture. Evans (2013) explored the notion that pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills may be enhanced to gain confidence in their ability and belief in working with diverse families.

“Although most educators agree that family involvement is important, few enter their profession knowing how to develop excellent partnership programs” (Patte, 2011, p. 147). Patte (2011) conducted a study of 200 preservice teacher candidates in Pennsylvania, examining their understanding of how to establish family-school partnerships. The results suggested that preservice candidates posed a limited knowledge of partnerships. Epstein (2011) has long been a proponent of increasing preservice teachers' experiences to partner with all families.

Epstein (2013) identified the underlying problem: teachers lacked knowledge of how to engage families effectively. She emphasized that schools needed to communicate with families and be able to positively impact them to dispel stereotypes about “parents with low income, parents who speak languages other than English at home, and other marginalized groups” (Epstein, 2013). Furthermore, teachers and administrators were not adequately prepared to work with families due to a lack of understanding of their families' backgrounds, languages, religions, race, and social status (Epstein, 2011).

Warren et al. (2011) conducted a study that explored the impact of graduate coursework on urban teachers. The goal was to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions in family and community involvement as part of the teacher certification process. The course provided participants with different models of involvement and community building. A hallmark of the course was the belief that communities will improve by focusing on their assets versus their problems (Warren et al., 2011). The study's implications revealed the need for family and community involvement courses to focus on changing or transforming educator beliefs and practices.

More recently, D’Haem and Griswold (2017) examined teacher preparation to partner with families. The study involved teacher educators as well as pre-service teachers. Despite field experiences, pre-service teachers expressed their concerns about their ability to work with diverse families. This ambivalence translated into assumptions about families and focused on negative feelings about partnering with families (D’Haem & Griswold, 2017), reinforcing the importance of providing direct experiences focused on partnering with families.

Smith and Sheridan (2018) examined the historical context of teacher training programs and the increase in pre-service teachers' preparation compared to the past. The study examined

the impact of training programs and educators' ability to collaborate and promote family partnerships. A vast body of research supports the idea that when parents and teachers work together, it increased social-emotional competencies and increased academic achievement. Despite the increased efforts in improving teacher preparation, teachers continued to feel inadequately prepared to engage in partnership with families. School communities continued to be diverse, and effective partnerships were developed by understanding their families' backgrounds (Smith & Sheriden, 2018). A key to effective partnerships that came up through the research was that communication was essential.

It was imperative for all school staff, from teachers to administrators, to communicate with all students' families. Epstein and Sanders (2006) expressed the importance that schools monitor their progress with reaching all families, not just those easy to reach (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Due to the challenges that teacher training programs faced inadequately preparing future educators for family engagement, it was important for school leaders to consider it when working with their staff. Therefore, teachers in the field needed additional professional development to know better their families' goals, needs, and interests (Epstein, 2013).

Hindlin and Mueller (2016) examined suburban and urban teacher practices associated with family involvement practices and the challenges they faced involving their families. The study results indicate that suburban and urban teachers shared similarities in terms of practice and challenges. Several differences were evident from the research. Teachers were asked to identify ways they wished they had learned during their preparation programs to involve or engage parents.

Of the teachers that responded, 67% of suburban teachers and 70% of urban teachers identified professional development initiatives about parent involvement that they would be

interested in receiving. The study considered how to most effectively prepare future and current teachers to work collaboratively with families to help children's success in school (Hindlin & Mueller, 2016). Suburban teachers reported more than double the number of strategies used that were specific and detailed. Urban teachers experienced fewer successes that impacted their beliefs about families.

When teachers understood families and communicated, it built relationships that together supported students. By giving teachers the support, they needed to work with families, teacher education programs had a more significant impact on student achievement. Preparing teachers and offering them continual professional development on effective family engagement practices was vital to creating partnerships (Caspe et al., 2011).

Much like teacher education programs, school leaders must also be prepared to work with all families. Miller and Martin (2015) conducted a study examining the role of principal preparation programs for leading in demographically changing or urban settings as they too had to partner with families.

The historical issue associated with principal preparation programs arose from concerns regarding how well principals were prepared to lead diverse schools (Miller & Martin, 2015). The curriculum within educational leadership programs shifted over time towards meeting the demands of leaders today. University programs changed due to changing requirements for school leaders and preparation programs (McCarthy, 2015).

The standards for school leaders were created in 1996 and revised in 2008, which were taught in educational leadership programs. The curriculum within educational leadership programs evolved. While a shift appeared to be underway in how leaders were prepared, The Wallace Foundation (2016) study found that district leaders were largely dissatisfied by the

program quality in principal preparation programs resulting in leaders not fully aware of the role entailed. This report focused on Superintendents but provided a landscape for the perception amongst district leadership.

In 2015, the standards were revised to include a more robust expectation for school leaders in family and community engagement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The standards included language found in ESSA that emphasized two-way communication and a move toward partnerships. Anderson et al. (2018), through the Initiative for System Program Improvement through Research in Educational Leadership (INSPIRE) Preparation Program (PP) survey, found empirical evidence that institutions aligned their preparation to national standards. Within this study, it measured five content areas, including family and community relations. Of the respondents, 79% very much or extremely emphasized family and community relations within their programs (Anderson et al., 2018).

Professional Learning for Partnerships

For school staff, capacity building often took place in the form of professional development or learning. The rationale for additional professional learning for school staff was that teachers have often been cited as not feeling comfortable partnering with families whose backgrounds may be different from their own. The underlying assumption was that teachers wanted to change and examine their practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Unlike pre-service learning experiences, background knowledge and professional experiences fueled how teachers connected meaning to the new learning (Epstein, 2005). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) defined effective professional development characteristics that suggested it be grounded in concrete tasks, inquiry, be collaborative, connected to the work with students, and sustainable through modeling.

The National Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) changed how professional development was defined for those in the field of education with a shift from development to promoting a culture of learners. The Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning spanned across seven domains: Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes (Learning Forward, 2011). These standards emphasized that professional learning for educators led to improved learning in the classroom. Learning Forward (2011) implied an underlying prerequisite was that the educators possessed a commitment to all students and that educators arrived at the experience with a readiness to learn.

Within the scope of school leadership, the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) acknowledged school leadership's importance in holding high expectations for curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership practices, and support systems. “Leaders artfully combine a deep understanding of and cultural responsiveness to the community they serve with high expectations and support for results to achieve school and school system goals” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 28). The National Educators Association (NEA) and the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning so that educators developed the knowledge and skills to enhance student learning. These standards were meant to guide schools and their leaders in the design of their offerings.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) focused on structured professional learning, resulting in teacher practices and learning outcomes. Practitioners concentrating on impacting adult learning considered the seven professional development features when creating capacity-building activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional learning was content-focused, incorporated active learning; was collaborative; used models; included coaching and feedback;

encouraged reflection; and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A restrainer for any professional learning was time. Having adequate time to learn a new skill and become deeply embedded into practice was a challenge. Professional development surrounding family partnerships faced the same challenge, especially in urban schools where there were multiple competing factors for teacher time (Grant & Ray, 2019).

Weiss et al. (2010) deemed capacity building crucial in filling the knowledge gaps to implement effective family engagement practices. Capacity building in professional development either filled the gaps or added new skills for teachers. Professional learning and skills acquisition alone did not yield the results that translated into action without a shift in how teachers took responsibility for their learning (Patton et al., 2015). School leaders harnessed the energy that meaningful teacher professional development provided channeled their efforts into helping teachers “rethink” their practices (Patton et al., 2015).

Epstein (2005) described in-service education as double duty, requiring more theoretical and research backgrounds on partnerships. Epstein (2005) also found that the data revealed that professional development and support helped schools significantly in their ability to work with families. Professional development was typically limited to one workshop. Epstein (2005) described the knowledge about partnerships as a culmination of courses, workshops, application of information, and tools and guidelines. Epstein and Sanders (2006) explored the preparation of future teachers and administrators. Their study affirmed previous studies on the need for more of an emphasis on pre-training.

Capacity building focused on developing common knowledge and skills (Fullen & Quinn, 2016) at all levels. An underlying premise was that practices could change by establishing clear goals and engaging everyone within an organization. Much of this was

dependent on district and school priorities about family engagement and the development of partnerships (Epstein, 2011). Applying the learning cycle that Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) outlined about sustainable practices, professional development required setting aside the time to do the learning. Epstein (2005) recognized that solely relying on colleges to prepare teachers to partner with families was inadequate. Therefore, on-going professional development on partnerships was needed to help districts, leaders, and teachers to learn how to work with families and their communities (Epstein, 2005).

A recent paper by Stephanie Hirsh (2019) with Learning Forward in 4 Cornerstones of Professional Learning discussed the change in their mission to focus on equity and excellence. By doing so, their organization recognized the importance of leading by challenging their beliefs, assumptions, and biases about diversity. Leading this charge set the stage for leaders as they developed professional learning opportunities for their staff to effectively the needs of their communities where they may come from a variety of different backgrounds.

Culture and Engagement

Students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds increased significantly, as educators' demands to effectively work with families. Many of these students were categorized as English Language Learners (ELL). According to the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy (2015), 71% of ELL students spoke Spanish as their first language. In North Carolina, the number was 83.6%. As the demographics have changed, teachers need to meet all learners' academic and language needs, and their families changed as well.

Each culture was defined as the primary system of support for children in school (Lindsey et al., 2019). It was the variable that was symbolic of the traditions, ways of interacting, and customs. Schools engaged in culturally proficient practices devised authentic ways to partner

with families. According to Lindsey et al. (2019), partnerships were more meaningful and effective if school leaders were willing to learn the community's culture. Families today did not fit traditional models of two-parent households. Other configurations impacted the family dynamics or the definition of family (Henderson et al., 2007).

Traditional or mainstream engagement efforts often did not include nondominant families' cultural or social resources (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Involvement activities such as back-to-school nights typically did not engage families of color (Auerbach, 2009). In a study conducted by Ishimaru et al. (2016), nondominant referred to low-income, immigrant, or refugee communities and others of color. Their study explored culture brokering to engage families. Cultural brokering strategies were aimed at increasing family participation and involvement. The study's implications reflect an underlying desire for equitable and inclusive access for diverse families (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Their literature review indicated that cultural brokers were essential in bridging cultural, racial, and linguistic divides between schools.

Foote et al. (2013) studied pre-service math teachers' beliefs towards the children's families. In their study, pre-service teachers realized that part of their role was to serve as a culture broker between home and school practices. While the research supports the importance of understanding families' funds of knowledge, the study revealed that pre-service teachers needed more support. Moll et al. (1992) originally described funds of knowledge as the skills that exist at home. The family serves as a teacher bringing expertise and information.

Honoring families' funds of knowledge required understanding that families come with both social and cultural capital. Changing the mindsets of families and educators involved the collective need to build on family culture background. Tapping into these funds of knowledge required educators to build upon students' and families' strengths by gathering information about

their home countries of origin, language(s) spoken at home, and who lived in their home (Amaro-Jimenez & Semingson, 2011). Long-standing research suggested that parents and families directly correlate to improving student outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Yet, the problem continued to persist where families from diverse backgrounds felt marginalized and not included in the partnership process (Henderson et al., 2007).

De Gaetano (2007) identified common misconceptions about Latino families and worked with families on how their culture improved involvement. De Gaetano's (2007) research examined parent perceptions and how parent involvement was characterized in schools. Zarate (2007) examined how the expectations from school staff differed from the Latino parents. Recommendations for engaging Latino families included being intentional in evaluating a family's preferred involvement practices (Zarate, 2007). Zarate described how Latino families perceived involvement in school. Families made a distinction between academic activities and those involving life participation (Zarate, 2007).

Misconceptions were rooted out of lack of knowledge and lead to the development of barriers with families. Neihaus and Adelson (2014) noted that a particular problem faced by English Language Learner (ELL) families was the teacher and school staff's perceptions. Assumptions about why parents were not involved fueled stereotypes about lack of involvement. Deficit thinking fed into the way people approached problems instead of looking at the value each family brought.

Mellom et al. (2018) explored the changing landscape of the "New South," where there was an increase in the number of students who were ELL over the past several decades. While the student population changed, the teaching population's demographics remained predominantly white and monolingual (Mellom et al., 2018). Their stance was that teachers often felt ill-

equipped to contend with their classrooms' challenges and the demands of providing support for ELL students.

Teacher beliefs impacted their students' expectations, teacher actions, and student behavior (Mellom et al., 2018). Mellom et al. (2018) contended that teachers who participated in professional development were better prepared to work with all students and their families to counteract deficit beliefs. Gorski (2008) addressed “myths” associated with deficit thinking and the culture of poverty. He recommended that we “educate ourselves about class and poverty” and “make school involvement accessible to all families.” Gorski was not alone in his ideas about bridging the gap between what we knew about culture and what we did not increase family involvement. Mapp et al. (2017) encouraged schools to avoid seeing families as needing to be rescued.

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) provided insights into factors that influenced teacher beliefs about parent involvement. Teachers prescribed their meaning of parent involvement based on their prior experiences and upbringing to their families' expectations (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The expectations for engagement may be more in line with involvement centered on volunteering, attending events, and showing up at school (Epstein, 2011). These attitudes and beliefs were not limited to families. Educators must confront their own biases and blind spots to effectively partner with families. Lindsey et al. (2019) reinforced that culturally proficient educators must learn about the families' cultures in their communities. There was evidence that teacher perceptions are framed based on their families' characteristics, including their race/ethnicity (Ho & Cherng, 2018).

Concerning low-income families, Gorski (2008) tried to debunk the myth that “poor parents are uninvolved in their children’s learning, largely because they do not value education.”

He found that low-income parents did not have as much access to involvement due to barriers driven more by their income status and considerations not being made to mitigate them. Some teachers may have possessed preconceived notions or beliefs that lower-income families do not want to engage (Grant & Ray, 2019).

Ho and Cheng (2018) also examined how teacher perception influenced teacher behaviors and perceptions. School cultures in high-performing and high poverty schools with effective results focused on caring relationships (Parrett & Budge, 2020). The foundation of poverty-disrupting classrooms resided in fostering relationships with students.

Clark-Louque et al. (2020) focused on culturally proficient family engagement practices. Culturally proficient family, school, and community engagement centered on culture/language communicating, caring/relationships, collective responsibility, and connectedness. Clark-Louque et al. (2020) also connected their culturally responsive practices to align with different frameworks, including the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). They emphasized that family-school partnerships required a shift in thinking and intentional efforts in understanding the cultural groups in a school.

To co-create effective family, school, and community engagement and partnerships might require educators to shift in thinking and behavior from a mindset of viewing cultural groups as *other*, thus shifting from being incapable of effective management to a mindset of being able to discern and value the assets inherent in cultural groups (Clark-Louque et al., 2020, p. 41).

The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (2020) published a resource guide that included culturally responsive practices for schools centered on understanding families and the assets they brought. Strategies were provided that

included creating a multilingual survey, using at least three communication methods, and engaging families in the process for schools to be culturally responsive during school closures. They included 14 different strategies in total. The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (2020) pointed out that educators' practices likely required capacity building as they may have been unfamiliar.

Challenges to Engagement

Building relationships with families was an integral factor in effective partnerships. However, challenges to engagement resided in school policies that did not support effective teacher-parent relationships. Schools should examine their communication practices, use home language, and provide access to the school (Henderson et al., 2007). All of these pertain to the climate of the school. School climate encompassed the beliefs, attitudes, and interactions within a school.

Constantino (2016) examined the principles of promoting trust and the development of relationship building with families. Trust was built by communicating effectively and creating a welcoming environment. By doing so, it established the conditions for positive family involvement. "No matter to what lengths we try and go to improve family engagement, without a real relationship built on trust and honesty, the efforts will probably fall short" (Constantino, 2016, p. 87).

In addition to the classroom teacher's relationship, the school's conditions must be established to develop relationships between families. Weiss et al. (2018) emphasized that schools and organizations must create the organizational conditions for engagement by building relational trust. Bringing together all stakeholders should be a shared responsibility between families, schools, and communities (Epstein, 2011).

Frequently referenced throughout the literature was creating a welcoming school environment (Constantino, 2016; Constantino, 2021; Epstein, 2011; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). A lack of a welcoming environment continued to be a complaint reported by families when coming to school. Therefore, the responsibility did not reside only with the classroom teacher but with every staff member engaging families. Best practices suggested that everyone in the school should be invested in creating an environment where the culture reflects every family's inclusion (Epstein, 2011; Constantino, 2016; Constantino, 2021).

Baker et al. (2016) studied staff and family groups' perceptions on the barriers or challenges to engagement highlighting themes that resonated between the parent and staff responses. Five common themes emerged from their research that existed for both families and staff. Schools should continue to provide opportunities for involvement, improve communication, welcome families; make time, and move from involvement to engagement. While both families and staff agreed on the different types of barriers, the solutions identified by each stakeholder group were unique (Baker et al., 2016).

Grant and Ray (2019) generated a synthesis of the barriers to engagement according to whether the school was in an urban, rural, or suburban setting. At the school level, urban schools' attitudes of school staff, avoidance, lack of understanding of cultural differences, and contact methods were deemed barriers. For rural schools, geographical restraints surrounding itinerant teachers posed an obstacle. Exclusionary practices in suburban schools, such as school visitation policies and parents not being allowed to visit after the first week of the school year, painted the picture that families were not welcome (Grant & Ray, 2019).

For families who did not speak English, communication was not accessible to them nor the presentations when they came to school. Effective two-way communication sought to

overcome obstacles when there was a collaborative relationship (Grant & Ray, 2019; Henderson et al., 2007). Some families did not help their children due to their lack of confidence in their ability to partner. It was not due to a lack of caring or engagement but rather a missing skill that needed to be taught.

Socio-economic circumstances and poverty serve as barriers to engagement, resulting in schools' need to examine their practices. Work schedules, childcare, and transportation were often cited as restrainers that impacted families' ability to engage in traditional forms of involvement (Grant & Ray, 2019). It required more investment in the time and energy to engage families where school hours and structures were limiting factors in communities where large numbers of low-income families may have experienced negative school experiences, thus creating barriers (Casper et al., 2011).

Communication was cited as a barrier for families to engage in meaningful partnerships with schools. Henderson et al. (2007) focused on the importance of two-way communication. Baker et al. (2016) identified that improving communication was a finding in their series of focus groups centered on perceptions and barriers to engagement. Staff responses appeared disconnected, presenting the image that involvement was valued. For parents, their solutions were more closely tied to supporting engagement practices.

While flyers, messages, or web addresses were updated, personal invitations from the classroom teacher were better perceived by families (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The lack of or poor communication timing from school to home (Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) created families unaware of school events and activities due to ineffective communication.

Communication was no longer limited to invitations sent home, and it evolved in the use of texts and social networking sites, which are bridging gaps in the dissemination of information

(Weiss et al., 2018). Schools were using more digital formats for their newsletters, websites, and resources. Technology-assisted with bridging barriers to engagement using software applications. Digital media and technology access became more widespread, which means that learning can occur at any time (Weiss et al., 2018).

The changing curriculum demands also posed a barrier to families' understanding of how to engage in school (McNamara Horvat, 2016). Thus emphasized the importance of how family engagement activities connected to learning (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Creating the opportunities to engage with the sincere interest of bringing families together to learn alongside the teacher was most important. Some schools adopted alternatives to traditional parent-teacher conferences by having family conferences (Mapp et al., 2017). At the same time, others engaged in back-to-school nights at the beginning of the school year to connect to learning.

Parents questioned their ability to help their children's beliefs about their children with their academic needs due to their own school experiences (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) explored the barriers to involvement, and the first of those was parent and family beliefs. The way parents viewed their role in their children's success was deemed crucial. These beliefs resulted from the lack of confidence in their ability to impact the school environment (Grant & Ray, 2019). Empowering families to strengthen their faith in themselves led to stronger self-efficacy and confidence in being a partner in their child's learning (Constantino, 2016; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Role of the Leader

Cultivating the environment in which family partnerships occur was vital to creating sustainable practices within schools (Sanders, 2014). Family partnerships are fostered through a combination of cohesive efforts by school leaders who understand the importance of building

connections with their families. Often the school leader was the building principal whose role was to set the tone for continuous improvement.

School leadership (Sebring et al., 2006) relied on the interconnection among stakeholders, not just the building leader. It connected the work of the family, school, and community. The school leader's vision for improvement must be articulated as drivers for instructional and school change.

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) drew upon the Chicago Consortium's work on School Research that showed a solid and sustainable effect on student learning when essential supports were put in place. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) illustrated how the Essential Supports influenced family engagement. The Essential Supports for School Improvement (Sebring et al., 2006) included five essential supports for continuous improvement. Leadership was described as the driver and the first necessary step to improving student learning. Principals were drivers for instructional and school change to develop the other essential supports. Theoharis and Scanlan (2020) delved into leadership practices for diverse schools. Their work focused on supporting leaders in promoting an inclusive climate and supporting teachers who may be reluctant to work in a diverse school. Theoharis and Scanlan (2020) noted that influential leaders do not operate in a silo but as a collective enterprise, especially in developing authentic partnerships.

Fostering family engagement was rooted in affirming relationships with families. The school leader set the tone and climate of what happened in schools. Therefore, school leaders who channeled their energy into developing a positive mindset surrounding family engagement were successful. Before launching family engagement efforts, school leaders who examined their core beliefs to know where to start ensured the established conditions (Henderson et al., 2007).

Belief systems should be reviewed to assess administrators' impact or motivation and how they approach family engagement (Auerbach, 2009).

A highlight within the study conducted by DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2020) was that the school leader identified as Principal Leon rejected deficit mindsets and was “tenaciousness toward resistance.” The principal was persistent in her efforts to support diverse families. Principal Leon drew in stakeholders to support her vision as family engagement could not occur in isolation as a leader.

According to Henderson et al. (2007), school leaders had the primary responsibility for building partnerships between the school and home. However, the leadership required did not just reside with the school leader but also with the teachers to engage families. Therefore, school leaders who enacted effective partnerships examined the capacity of their staff to engage families. Strengthening professional ability and knowledge was vital in establishing the conditions for developing effective family-school partnerships.

Goodall (2018) reinforced the idea that leadership's primary function was to support learning among staff and students. School leaders positioned for change address beliefs to move toward partnerships with families in student learning (Goodall, 2018). Schools that possessed strong collective efficacy overcame poverty's influence, thus creating a shared vision (Parrett & Budge, 2020).

Auerbach (2009) conducted a study that involved examining four administrators who were intentional in their family engagement efforts. Participants were from the Los Angeles school district, and a common thread amongst the administrators studied was that each knew the personal backgrounds of their families (Auerbach, 2009). Khalifa (2018) argued that the school leader was responsible for creating or enacting the structures that “embrace” our students'

cultural knowledge. Khalifa (2018) emphasized that leadership should collaborate with their communities to empower families to work together. Cultural responsiveness was essential to school leadership.

The increase in the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students required school leaders to intentionally seek ways to partner with families where the language was a barrier (Zacarian, 2011). As a proponent of incorporating parent engagement for English Learners (EL), Zacarian (2011) outlined parent-school partnerships with a framework-specific to EL families. These included: Bridging the cultural divide; infusing parent advocacy as part of the core; linking parent involvement to learning; and working together for the common good of students.

EL families often had no school experiences to draw from, resulting in a lack of familiarity with school routines. Infusing mutual respect into the climate by creating a welcoming environment was essential in fostering more effective partnerships (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Zacarian (2011) suggested that principals create spaces where their families' needs are considered when implementing new practices.

Watson and Bogotch (2015) found that urban school leaders lacked the knowledge and respect for diverse families resulting in a deficit lens. There was a need for school leaders to acknowledge the depth of their understanding or lack thereof to support students effectively. School leaders who put into action engagement practices were aware of their own beliefs and position amongst families. School leaders must also communicate with families by using two-way communication to listen genuinely (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016).

Dunn (2020) studied low-income, urban African American principals' leadership actions that supported teachers in establishing communication and learning at home. Leadership actions

that helped family engagement included deliberate planning as well as strategic approaches. Principals identified a lack of preparation and training to lead family engagement efforts.

While school leaders spoke about the desire to build effective school-partnerships, the lack of information focused on school leadership for family engagement suggested that it was much harder to put into action. Fitzgerald and Militello (2016) understood that school leaders must be prepared to engage with stakeholders by having the skills and dispositions to benefit all students effectively.

Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) found that parents were more likely to be engaged in schools where the principal was inclusive and welcoming. In primary schools, the quality of school culture depended on the school leader's attitude and disposition. School leaders are positioned to set the school's tone and guided how families were connected to what happened within the school (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Epstein (2011) considered it the principal's responsibility to demonstrate a commitment to families and make sure that school staff welcomed all families.

The Wallace Foundation (2013) reinforced the notion that principals were responsible for establishing school improvement conditions. The most compelling was shaping a vision for all students centered on maintaining high standards for learning. In addition to the leader's vision, the school leader was responsible for creating a climate (The Wallace Foundation, 2013) that was "hospitable" to education. Applying that context to families was equally important. Sanders (2014) examined principal leadership for the school, family, and community partnerships in an approach developed by the National Network of Partnerships Schools (NNPS). The findings suggested that principals who embraced welcoming environments collaborated with diverse families and acknowledged that parents and teachers were more effective in developing partnerships (Sanders, 2014).

Leadership was essential in creating the organizational conditions to mitigate barriers to engagement (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Auerbach (2012) examined the dynamics of leadership in the scope of developing partnerships with families through the creation of the Characteristics of Leadership for Partnership Continuum. As school leaders move through the continuum, so do the family engagement practices towards partnerships. Leaders identified as Preventing Partnership were defined as transactional, whereas a leader who stood for Authentic Partnerships was seen as collaborative, transformative, inclusive, and centered on social justice (Auerbach, 2012).

As facilitators of learning, school leaders supported learning in school and out of school. It was a collaborative effort that relied on a focus on continuous improvement centered on supporting student learning. Hattie (2015) in *Visible Learning* bolstered the idea that a team approach, including teachers, students, parents, and community members, impacts student outcomes. Hattie (2015) examined high-impact leadership practices and the effect size (ES) of instructional methods. School leaders engaged with a clear instructional vision and focus on teaching and learning had more significant outcomes.

Vision applied to how leaders impacted instruction and how they engaged families in supporting student learning. Quezada (2016) found that too often that the key to successful partnerships between families was the building principal. Family engagement initiatives are more successful when shared buy-in, understanding, and the structures to support engagement efforts. Quezada led efforts in the evolution of family, school, & community engagement. Participating in the professional development activities of Project 2INSPIRE led to greater perceptions from teachers about families (Quezada, 2016).

Constantino (2016) addressed the need for schools and districts to establish processes to implement change effectively. He posed the question, “Is the leadership of your organization truly committed to the work of family engagement?” Constantino (2016) indicated that school leadership was key to cultivating family engagement (p. 18). Leadership must be strong and committed to the long-term success of family engagement efforts. He found that building leaders with a clear vision for leading and driving family engagement efforts successfully created a culture where family engagement was a priority. School leaders were charged with building a sense of community for all stakeholders (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leadership made a difference, especially for those who embodied the principles and mindset of family engagement.

School leaders were evaluated in North Carolina using the North Carolina Executive Principal Evaluation tool. Standard VI a. Parent and Community Involvement and Outreach (McRel, 2015) represented the standard regarding community support and engagement. School leaders are appraised using the ratings from Developing to Distinguished. For a school leader to be rated as developing, the minimum criteria included interacting with the parents/guardians and positively identifying culturally responsive traditions. School leaders were expected to empower families to make decisions and develop relationships with the families to be considered Distinguished.

Additionally, an artifact identified by the tool reflected parent involvement in the School Improvement Team. North Carolina General Statute 115C-105.27 required that the team included parents of children enrolled in the school to be part of the team. Therefore, as North Carolina school leaders created their programs and initiatives surrounding family engagement, they must understand the expectations in their evaluation process, which means that parents or families should be at the forefront of their efforts. Epstein et al. (2019) highlighted the practices

that schools and their Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) organize their efforts. Organized teams focused on specific school improvement goals. These teams became the experts on how to support families. It was recommended that ATP teams create sub-committees to address different goals. The principal serves as an essential member of this team, setting the tone for partnership to empower others to lead the work (Epstein et al., 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

The literature provided ample evidence to illustrate the importance of family partnerships and the lack of preparation to do that effectively (Epstein, 2011). Additionally, there was no research shortage recognizing that the gaps or deficits in working with families come from a limited understanding. To address the limited exposure and knowledge of working with diverse families, schools should engage their staff in capacity building to strengthen their knowledge base and increase their efficacy (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Capacity building was not limited to school staff but also for families to close achievement gaps and foster meaningful relationships with families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Family partnerships were grounded in two-way communication between home and school. Partnerships rely on establishing relationships and removing barriers or challenges (Grant & Ray, 2019). The greatest challenge for school staff was their perceptions of families based on lack of knowledge about the family's culture in question (Neihaus & Adelson, 2014). These gaps could only be filled if the principal is committed to engaging all families.

Leadership matters as schools ensure the organization conditions are present to engage all families (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Constantino (2016) emphasized that school leaders were essential in making family engagement a priority as they are the drivers for school improvement

(Sebring et al., 2006). School cultures that support families honor families and their funds of knowledge.

The study was conducted through the lens of the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), grounded in connecting the families' needs to the engagement efforts.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research study sought to build leadership capacity for family engagement for elementary school principals. The study explored how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts, provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools, and the creation of a Leadership Development series to strengthen elementary principals' capacity to lead their schools' efforts. This chapter includes the following sections: Research Design and Rationale; Sample and Sampling Procedures; Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent; Procedures; Pilot Study; Data Processing and Analysis; and the Role of the Researcher.

Study Design and Rationale

The qualitative research study occurred in three phases to address the study questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The Model for Improvement (Langley et al., 2009) was used to guide this qualitative study. The three foundational questions posed by the Model for Improvement include: (1) What are we trying to accomplish? (2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? (3) What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

The study was designed to understand how elementary principals in the same district led their schools' family engagement efforts to build cases demonstrating leadership. The sample size was relatively small, which was typical in qualitative research; this allowed a greater emphasis on the experiences' quality (Mertler, 2019). By examining each leader or case (Yin, 2018) through coding, themes emerged regarding how leaders led their family engagement efforts.

This data was used to inform the researcher of effective practices reviewed through the lens of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp &

Kuttner, 2013). Professional learning was created during Phase II, grounded in research and using the knowledge gained from Phase I to increase the understanding of elementary principals of how to lead family engagement efforts in their respective schools. As leaders of learning, a group of principals elected to participate in Phase III. Principals participated in a Leadership Development series that synthesized the knowledge gained and lessons learned to increase their capacity.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

This study took place in a large urban district with approximately 160,000 students. Due to the number of schools and geography, the district is divided into regions. Schools operated on several different calendars, including traditional, year-round, modified year-round, and magnet schools of choice. The district was committed to building partnerships with families to improve student achievement as part of their Strategic Plan. The researcher considered all elementary schools' principals as the focus audience because research indicates that family engagement tends to wane as children progress in school (Epstein, 2011).

After reviewing other research sources and narrowing the study's scope, purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was employed when the researcher selected the school leaders within the first phase of the study. Three elementary school leaders were identified for leading effective family engagement efforts to conduct semi-structured interviews to glean from them how they lead. A pilot study was also conducted to test the integrity of the Interview Protocol. After examining over 100 elementary schools in the same district in North Carolina, leaders were selected to include schools representing the school district. Schools were reviewed using a range for the Free & Reduced Lunch for elementary schools, from 4.6% to 82.8%. A range from 10% to 70% was selected to avoid extremes, but the final participants represented a narrower range of

schools due to participant acceptance in the study. The three schools operated on a traditional calendar which meant that the schools' schedules were the same versus running on a year-round or modified year-round calendar. Magnet schools were included as well. The range also included schools that previously received Title I funds where the Free & Reduced Lunch Population was 45% or greater. Schools that received Title I funds were required to set aside 1% of their budget for family engagement as part of ESSA.

Three elementary school leaders were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews to explore how they led effective family engagement efforts in their schools. Pseudonyms using tree names (see Table 1) provided as much anonymity as possible to the school and its leader. The leader demographics and background were sought during the semi-structured interviews.

Dogwood Elementary was an elementary school in the Urban district where most of the students were White 55.4%, 21.5% Black, 15.3% Hispanic, 17.8% Asian, American Indian 0.4%, and 3.4% More than one Race. The Free & Reduced Lunch population was approximately 32% which meant that the school did not meet the threshold to receive Title I funds. Dogwood Elementary served around 800 students and was known for having an involved Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The school has within its School Improvement Plan (SIP) to reach families.

Elm Elementary was a small elementary school within the Urban district but in a different city than Dogwood Elementary. It has approximately 420 students where about 40% received Free or Reduced Lunch. The school demographics were 51.8% White, 21.2% Black, 19.6% Hispanic, 4.3% were More than one Race. The LEP population was approximately 12%.

The school possessed a Resource Center for families. The school has built several actions into its School Improvement Plan to reach out to families, including a STEM Night intentionally.

Table 1

Case Study School Population Demographics as of December 2019

School	Students	F&R	Native American	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Pacific Island	More than one Race
Dogwood Elementary	805	31.7%	0.4%	55.4%	21.5%	1.4%	17.8%	0.2%	3.4%
Elm Elementary	420	40.3%	0%	51.8%	21.2%	3.1%	19.6%	0%	4.3%
Maple Elementary	542	27.3%	0.2%	61.9%	12.7%	4.2%	18.0%	0%	2.9%

Maple Elementary was comprised of approximately 540 students located in the Urban district. 27% of students received Free & Reduced Lunch, and the school did not qualify for Title-I funds. The school demographics include 61.9% White, 12.7% Black, 18.0% Hispanic, 4.2% Asian, and 2.9 % More than one Race. The number of students who were identified as LEP was approximately 9.6%. The PTA has partnered with the school in its efforts to reach families.

When determining which schools and their leaders to study, the scope had to be narrowed down using criteria consistent with creating a population that reflected the district's diverse makeup. Therefore, year-round calendar schools were eliminated from the sample to minimize the number of variables. These schools were application schools of choice which means that their unique needs would be better suited to a separate study as it would add other variables to study. If a school had a new leader within the last year or did not currently have a principal in place, the school was excluded as the assumptions identified previously included leaders who had similar experiences with family engagement from the school district.

Schools where there was a personal relationship with the school leader or the school, were excluded from Phase I of the study to maintain an impartial stance when looking at the data and be objective with leadership practices. The researcher did not want to impose bias or prescribe judgments about the integrity of the responses. The last criteria used to narrow the sample size was that some schools were too easily identifiable after applying the selection criteria. One could look at public information and then narrow down the school's name; hence those schools were excluded as there was no guarantee their identity could be kept anonymous.

Recruitment for the Leadership Development Series in Phase III was conducted via email. While the number of principals who could have responded to the initial request was large, the group's desired size was expected to be 10% of the population (Mertler, 2019). Of the 102

invited, the sample size for Phase III included seven principals who participated in the Leadership Development series for family engagement.

Procedures

The qualitative study occurred using three phases of inquiry. Langley et al. (2009) and Mertler (2019) suggested that knowledge of the subject matter was crucial in developing improvement efforts. Within this study, three phases were employed to develop school leaders' capacity in family engagement and answer the questions: (1) What are we trying to accomplish? (2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? (3) What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

Unlike studies that simply examined the cases that reinforced the objectives, the study explored how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools; and created a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals through professional learning to be able to lead the efforts in their buildings. As a researcher, it was no longer about what others have done but how we can put things in place to do it differently (Mertler, 2019). In the field of family engagement, there was evidence indicating that teacher preparation programs did not adequately prepare teachers to work with all families (Epstein, 2011). Much like teacher programs, principal preparation programs did not provide sufficient knowledge and understanding about working with diverse families and partnering with them.

The Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) addressed the desired need to improve families and school staff's capacity, with the leader as the driver of those efforts. By focusing on school leaders' development, the desired

outcome was that the school leaders had increased efficacy and knowledge in leading family engagement efforts.

Langley et al. (2009) incorporated the development of improving the capability of leaders in the workplace, much like in the field of education where professional learning enhanced educators' strengths. Creating professional development or learning opportunities should include the following four stages (Langley et al., 2009): Discovery, Learning, Implementation, and External promotion to others. The discovery stage allowed the executive or, in this case, the school leader to learn from others who have experienced success (Langley et al., 2009). Learning took place in many formats. Implementation was where the leaders tailored the experiences to the circumstances of the organization. External promotion to others occurred after the efforts to support others learning (Langley et al., 2009).

In the past, educators typically engaged in professional development, seen as a training session. Mertler (2019) emphasized that it was more about learning and improving professional practice versus just participating in the training. The Standards for Professional Learning no longer used the term training but focused more on professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011). The study's purpose was to improve the practice (Mertler, 2019) of school leaders in leading family engagement. "In many respects, it is about growing, developing, and improving as a professional educator" (Mertler, 2019, p. 138).

The study was designed to address each of the research questions through each phase of the qualitative study.

- Phase I sought to answer how school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement efforts in their schools? The researcher used semi-

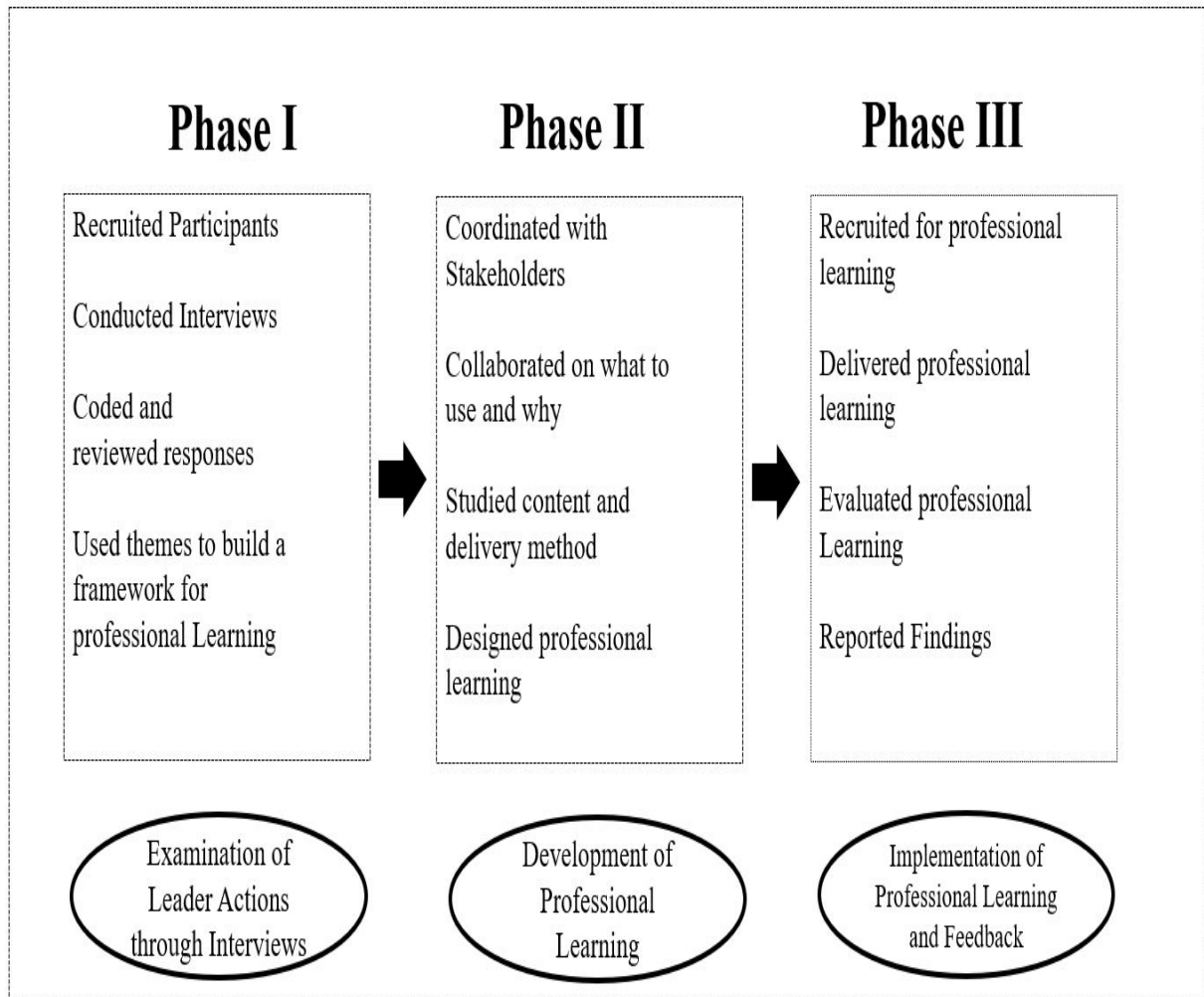
structured interviews to explore how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts and the development of cases.

- Phase I sought to answer how school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?
- Phase II developed the professional learning to answer the study questions in Phase III.
- Phases III sought to answer the question, how does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?

Phase I

The researcher submitted the proposal to the Institutional Review Board at East Carolina University to gain permission to conduct the study. A request was sent to the local district where the study took place and acquired consent for the study. As part of the planning phase (see Figure 2), the researcher examined existing school demographic data such as school calendar, size of the school, Free & Reduced Lunch Population, Sub-group demographics, and Title I status from publicly available information on the district website as that information was needed to identify the population. School Improvement Plans for all elementary schools in the district were reviewed to look at schools where Family Engagement was considered a priority for the school based on the School Improvement Indicator's actions. All schools within the district uses the same school improvement indicator but was able to craft the actions based on their communities.

Variation was used to the greatest extent when determining the criteria that differentiated the sites; after reviewing the data sources, a sample size of three school leaders who made family engagement a priority in their schools were selected to create the cases. Due to the time in which



Note. Adapted from Langley et al. (2009). Chapter 5-Using the Model for Improvement.

Figure 2. Transforming family engagement by developing the capacity of school leaders phases.

the publicly held data was available, a school may or may not have been Title I due to the timing of when the study took place. Over the past few years, there had been an increase in the number of studies that have employed this research design. The multiple-case study design had its advantages (Yin, 2018) in that it was perceived to be more “robust” than a single-case study. Case studies were defined in the literature as investigating a “contemporary phenomenon or “case” in-depth or a real-world context (Yin, 2018).

As a graduate researcher, it was necessary to delve into the different aspects of what constituted a case study versus another type of qualitative study. The researcher referred to the work of Baxter and Jack (2008), which helped to reinforce when it was appropriate to use a case study to delve deeper into how principals led their schools. Case study methodology explored the “how” or “what” of a particular case (Yin, 2018).

In this study, the questions drove the research, how do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement efforts in their schools? This question supported the approach that Yin (2018) took in case study research. A key element (Yin, 2018) mentioned was that as a researcher, you wanted to uncover the contextual conditions as these may have been relevant to the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In determining whether to pursue a single case study versus the multiple-case study approach, it was essential to consider the district's size. Being able to replicate the findings across other contexts or schools, in this case, was vital to determine how the results were used. Essential elements in each case's development were in using multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). One of the most time-consuming aspects of case study research was the selection of the cases. Yin (2018) indicated that each case within a multiple case study should be carefully selected so that the case either yielded similar results or to predict contrasting results. In this study, the

following data sources were used to evaluate the research questions: (1) Semi-Structured Interviews, (2) Review of School Improvement Plans, and (3) available information from each school on family engagement.

The data collection began with the desire to anticipate possible ethical issues. The activities associated with the study included site selection. From there, the ability to gain access and build a rapport with the interviewees was essential to encouraging genuine conversations.

Phase I included the development of a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The protocol questions design examined leadership practices and how school leaders fostered family engagement aligning each question to the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (see Table 2). Langley et al. (2009) suggested listening to those who have been successful would other leaders learn how to lead their organizations.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed as part of the planning phase to paint a picture of each case study school leaders' efforts to lead their family engagement efforts. The questions were framed using the categories from elements within the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships to include Culture, Challenges to Engagement, Professional Learning for Engagement, Preparation for Partnerships, and Leadership in Appendix B. The format was carefully considered to align to adhere to the goals of the study questions. The subject of the case study or phenomena supported external validity as the case study could be generalized across contexts. As questions were developed, the format was carefully considered to adhere to the study questions' goals. Before the onset, a pilot study was used to assess the Interview Protocol's validity and timing.

The rationale for conducting a pilot study was to evaluate the Interview Protocol questions' strength during Phase I. The researcher determined if the artifacts and documents

Table 2

Phase I Interview Protocol Alignment to the Conceptual Framework

Framework Element	Question(s)
The Challenge	<p>What are some barriers to engaging families at school? Families? Staff?</p> <p>How have your staff embraced working with all families, and what are some of the barriers your school has faced?</p> <p>Describe the type of courses or workshops that you've participated in parent involvement/ family engagement?</p>
Opportunity Conditions	<p>How do you, as a school leader, promote and encourage family engagement in your school?</p> <p>Describe how you communicate with families? Is it effective, and why do you feel that way?</p> <p>What organizational structures have you put in place within your school to support and leader family engagement at your school?</p> <p>Are there additional supports needed to help you connect with families as you lead this work?</p>
Program and Policy Goals	<p>Describe what training or learning have you done with staff regarding family engagement?</p> <p>How well versed are you with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships? How does that guide your work?</p> <p>How has COVID-19 impacted your family engagement efforts?</p>
Family and Capacity Outcomes	<p>How would you describe your school community?</p> <p>How do you ensure that your school is perceived as welcoming to families?</p> <p>How does your school partner with families?</p>

associated with the pilot school leader's family engagement efforts were adequate for analysis. The pilot study helped the researcher assess how closely the interview protocol was aligned with answering the study questions.

The pilot school was a school that was in the original pool of schools that could have been selected. The school was in the same district as the case study schools. Due to the school's Free & Reduced lunch population, the school had previously received Title I funding, which meant that 1% of their budget was set aside for Family Engagement.

In this qualitative study, the participants were provided with a pseudonym who participated in the study's interviews. Pseudonyms were derived from tree common names to protect the identity of the participants. These pseudonyms were used throughout the analysis while the data was analyzed. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and then coded according to patterns and themes (Mertler, 2019). After the interviews were transcribed, annotative notes were included in the transcription margins to guide the researcher to examine the problem and form initial codes.

Manual coding was completed due to the small number of participants and the time needed to assist with data processing from the interviews. After the development of a coding schema and themes, the data was organized for analysis. Classifying the data into themes into the types of questions asked allowed for a clear representation of the data.

Phase I Timeline

October- November 2019- Received IRB and district approval. The Interview Protocol was shared with IRB, and adjustments were made.

January 2020- September 2020- Selected schools and their leaders

September 2020- Conducted a pilot using the Interview Protocol, transcribed and coded responses, and adjusted, as necessary.

October 2020- Conducted semi-structured interviews, transcribed interviews, and coded and broke down into themes.

October – November 2020- Analyzed the data from the interviews.

Phase II

The researcher reviewed the information generated from the cases to analyze how the leaders effectively led their family engagement efforts as part of Phase II and feedback and content from inquiry partners who collaborated to develop the content. To gain insight into building other leaders' capacity, the researcher collaborated with stakeholders from several departments within the district, including Equity Affairs, Title I, and the Area Superintendent's office. Through this collaborative process, stakeholder input was used to consider different perspectives on approaching professional learning development using the knowledge gained in Phase I and the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The themes from Phase I were used along with research-based practices to develop professional learning. Langley et al. (2009) emphasized that adults were motivated when they had a perceived need for knowledge, thus creating the context for any changes when the leader considered Implementation. The series was also designed in collaboration with input from the school district's Office of Professional Learning, aligned with the standards from Learning Forward (2011) outlined in Table 3.

Phase II Timeline

January 2020- October 2020- Collaborated with stakeholders to develop professional learning.

July 2020- November 2020- Developed Professional Learning.

Phase III

Participants for the professional learning were recruited from elementary school leaders who sought to enhance their family engagement. The capacity building consisted of a three-sessions of professional learning series lasting approximately 1.0 hours each. The session topics were aligned with the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), applying leadership lessons from the Interviews. After each session, the participants were asked to bring the following session information about their schools.

The professional learning format incorporated the standards (see Table 3) outlined from Learning Forward (2011), where the learners were participants promoting change in educator practice. Each session began with a review of the session's goals or learning outcomes, interaction with the content, discussion, and next steps for application to their work.

Participants received a certificate of completion that they could use for Continuing Education Credit (CEU). Licensure renewal in North Carolina required that school leaders earned credits in professional learning, and these were often referred to as CEUs. Phase III involved the Promotion to Others as a measure in the analysis of the learning. At the end of the last session, participants were asked to answer questions about the sessions' goals using Qualtrics. The feedback from the series provided insight into what could be repeated with adjustments and shared with other leaders.

Table 3

Standards for Professional Learning

Domain	Description
Learning Communities	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.
Leadership	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
Resources	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.
Data	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
Learning Designs	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
Implementation	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.
Outcomes	Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Note. Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 23)

Phase III Timeline

December 2020- Recruited participants.

January 2021- Delivered the Leadership Development series.

January 2021- Evaluated the Leadership Development series.

January 2021- February 2021- Analyzed results from Phase III.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

Completing the CITI program course was necessary before submitting it to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East Carolina University for approval. Once permission was granted from the university (see Appendix A), an application was submitted to the school district and a copy of the IRB approval. In preparation for the school district process, the researcher had to review the application to research in the district and the School Board Policy surrounding Participation in Research Projects. The office of Data, Research, and Accountability reviewed the request to conduct research. Two key points that stood out in this process were that the study would ultimately benefit the district's students. The purpose and methodology should be compatible with the board and school system's goals and objectives.

In this school district, the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) was first explored in 2016 when it was first discussed as part of the Strategic Plan. From that point forward, the district based their family engagement efforts on the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) and guided their school improvement efforts. Principals were first introduced as a collective in 2018. Therefore, there was a perceived benefit to the district to learn about the effectiveness of the initiative led by principals in the district.

Researchers considered the ethical considerations outlined in The Common Rule as the policy that ensured the Protection of Human Subjects (2018). It ensured that participants were provided with informed consent. Participants were provided consent, information about the study, including the study procedures, purposes, risks, and benefits.

As with any research, the informed consent process occurred before the onset of the study. The informed consent process was designed using guidance from Creswell and Poth (2018) and the East Carolina University Institution Review Board (IRB).

Appendix A outlined the consent for this study. It also includes the researcher's background in the field to build confidence in the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Other ethical considerations include the collection and storage of confidential information during the study. The anonymity of the school leaders was maintained by removing any identifying information. A pseudonym was used for the school's name to preserve anonymity.

The transcription of the interviews, data collected, and information was analyzed and stored on a flash drive to preserve confidential information storage a challenge. Therefore, the use of an external storage device kept the information in a single location stored in a locked location except when in use.

The interviews were conducted to seek input from elementary principals regarding how they led family engagement efforts. The questions were designed by the researcher using elements from the conceptual framework. These elements included the challenges faced by staff and families, process conditions, organizational conditions, and capacity building. Phase II was developed to create professional learning aligned to the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The professional learning was designed as a three-session model that included five content areas that led into practices to create a school-based

action plan to support family engagement in their schools. The underlying presumption was that most school leaders have limited knowledge of how to lead the efforts. The research suggested that teachers and school leaders were not adequately prepared to work with diverse families (Epstein, 2011).

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

With any type of research, the ability to ascertain how credible the results were from the study's data was vital to preserving the study's integrity. A pilot study was conducted to test the Interview Protocol's questions to discern whether the questions yielded the responses aligned to the study questions. Triangulation (Mertler, 2019) was used to build each case by analyzing the data sources. Data sources included the interviews, School Improvement Plans, and information from the school representing their family engagement efforts.

Transferability, in this case, referred to the leadership efforts of elementary principals in family engagement (Mertler, 2019). For research purposes, the target audience of the study was elementary school principals. The goal of the research was to explore how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts. It is not about what they did, but how they led, including their actions to build their schools' conditions. Each phase of the study built on each other to create and deliver professional learning.

Every elementary school leader was charged with guiding their communities, which varied based on the school population's demographics and the leader's background. Therefore, it was necessary to suspend judgment and remain objective throughout the interview, data analysis, and professional learning stages to understand better the challenges that schools faced within their communities. Confirmability was essential in maintaining objectivity at each stage of data

analysis. The researcher acknowledged their position in the process and understood the need to suspend bias.

A limitation for the researcher was her district position as building leader versus someone who worked at the district level. To mitigate this, the researcher shared their experience in past roles and experience researching family engagement. The recruitment of participants who completed Phase III included a total of seven participants. Since participation in professional learning was by choice, those that participated were invested in growing their knowledge about family engagement.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in this study was a female school leader whose professional experiences included working as a high school science teacher, Middle School Assistant Principal, Elementary Principal, and more recently, a Middle School Principal. Before becoming a Principal, the school leader participated in a full-time administrative internship by completing a Master of School Administration (MSA) program. In this program, the researcher did take a course about working with diverse families. However, the researcher completed the program in 2007, and since that time, the wave of thinking about how to lead engagement with families has changed.

Throughout the researcher's career, there was a continual focus on creating a positive working relationship. The researcher understood what it was like to have a parent who did not always feel welcome because she was from a different country. While the parent spoke English, the barriers were present for the parent and the school due to differing cultures.

In this study, the researcher served as a key instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) whereby data was collected and analyzed. Therefore, the need to remain as objective as possible

and conduct the interviews without projecting one's ideas was necessary. The participants in the study all work within the same district but not in the same school. Many of whom are colleagues of the researcher whose confidentiality and willingness to participate in the study depended on the assurance that every effort would be made to protect their identities.

The study's central tenet was to develop school leaders' capacity by examining how school principals led family engagement efforts and prepared other leaders within the district to have the skills and knowledge to lead their schools. The researcher spent significant time building their knowledge surrounding this topic, and it was important to be objective and not transfer any bias when interpreting the data.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in this qualitative study. Within this study, it was conducted in three phases to seek answers to the study questions. Decisions surrounding the data collection and the reduction of researcher bias were essential in preserving the study's integrity. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews to provide a more in-depth understanding of how the elementary school principals led their family engagement efforts. A pilot study was used to test the qualitative questions to determine alignment with the study questions. Data was used to generate the cases. The data were coded, and themes were generated to launch into Phase II in creating professional learning in family engagement. The data was used to develop Phase III where a Leadership Development series to build school leaders' capacity. The final data collection was to assess the school leaders' impact who participated in the professional learning. Chapter 4 illustrated the findings from Phases I, II, and III of the qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This qualitative research study sought to build the leadership capacity for elementary school principals' family engagement in a large urban school district. The study explored how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts, provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools, and created a Leadership Development series to strengthen elementary principals' capacity to lead their schools' efforts. This chapter's results were organized according to the unexpected event during the study, study questions, data collection, data analysis, participants, results, and the summary of the results.

Unexpected Event During the Study

During the month of March 2020, there was a pause in my research due to a global pandemic caused by a virus known as COVID-19. COVID 19 is a highly contagious virus, and the CDC guidelines urged citizens to socially distance themselves from each other and stay home to prevent from contracting this deadly disease. On March 14, 2020, all North Carolina schools closed (Hui et al., 2020) for in-person instruction. All schools shifted instruction to remote learning for the remainder of the school year. As the state's reopening plans evolved, the district began the 2020-2021 school year remotely. The pandemic caused an unforeseeable change to the study. The study timeline was changed as the recruitment phase was halted as school leaders were adapting to the closures and the movement to remote learning. This phase began in January 2020 and later resumed in September 2020 as schools prepared for students' return in rotations. Interviews were conducted virtually as face-to-face interviews were no longer a viable option for the initial data collection. Principals shifted their priorities to supporting teachers and students to online learning. They supported families with new challenges as schools had to distribute chrome

books and hot spots to families. The professional learning format and delivery changed and required additional professional learning on behalf of the researcher to adapt to the changing context because of COVID-19.

The school district utilized The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) to guide family engagement efforts. After the dissertation proposal defense, The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships was updated in July 2019, and the school district adopted the latest version. Due to the district's use of the revision, it was incorporated into the professional learning developed in Phase II. The newer version did not impact the study or the conceptual framework but reinforced the study questions. The revisions to the Framework are described in the next paragraph.

In 2019, Dr. Karen Mapp and Eyel Bergman revised The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships and called it Version 2, as seen in Figure 3. The updates to the framework resulted from stakeholder feedback from those who used the original framework created by Mapp and Kuttner (2013). The graphic design was revised with the framework's flow and direction towards effective partnerships that supported student and school improvement (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). The previous version was harder to follow, and the newer one provided greater clarity. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships Version 2 (Mapp & Bergman, 2019) more visibly defined the barriers to partnership for educators and families. In addition to the barriers being defined within The Challenge, the Process Conditions' language was revised to include asset-based and culturally responsive, and respectful. Being culturally responsive was implied with honoring a family's funds of knowledge before but was now more direct.

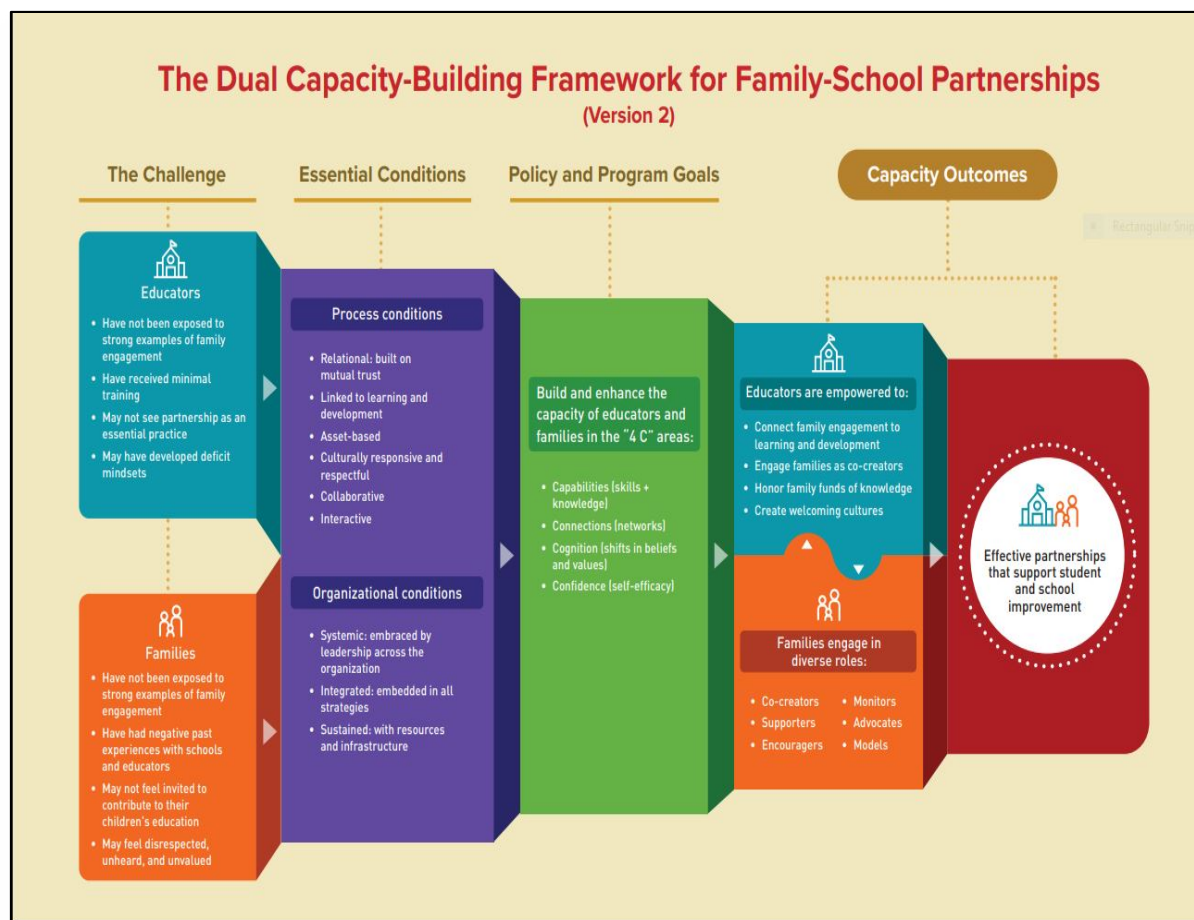


Figure 3. The dual-capacity building framework for family-school partnerships (version 2).

Another change to the Organizational Conditions in the framework addressed the need to explicitly state that for partnerships to be systemic, leadership must be embraced by leadership across the organization. While the “4C” areas were reasonably unchanged, the addition of the word values to Cognition underscores the need to establish the beliefs around partnership when approaching the capacity building. Version 2 of The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019) continued to emphasize what school leaders could do to focus on how to address capacity building for educators and their families.

After the 2019 rollout of Version 2 of The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019), the school district in this study adopted the revisions as part of their family engagement efforts. The framework changes occurred after the proposal defense. Due to the small number of changes and to be consistent with district adoptions, the revised version was used with the participants in this study alongside the conceptual framework used for the study. Leadership as a driver of school improvement efforts was emphasized in the newer version and reinforced the study's purpose.

Study Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provide insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools, and create a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals to be able to lead the efforts in their schools.

- *Study Question 1:* How do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement in their schools?
- *Study Question 2:* How do school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?

- *Study Question 3:* How does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?

Data Collection

Phase I

Pilot Study

During Phase I, a pilot study was conducted to examine the interview protocol's validity during September 2020. The time frame was adjusted due to the pandemic and school closures. The pilot study's purpose was to test the Interview Protocol for the semi-structured interviews to be utilized in this study. Yin (2018) indicated that a pilot case study could help the researcher reframe their data collection plans. Since the school leaders recruited worked in the same school district, conducting a pilot study allowed the researcher to adjust the

questions' format or others' inclusion. The pilot study took place in September 2020, and it involved one elementary school principal. The researcher developed the interview questions using the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) that examined how leaders approached the communities they served.

The pilot study was conducted with a school leader whose school was more easily identifiable yet met the study's criteria. The pilot school met the initial criteria of 10% to 80% Free & Reduced Lunch population and defined School Improvement goals. The pilot study's feedback validated the Interview Protocol (see Appendix B) and evidence of partnership practices aligned with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships. The pilot study deleted a redundant question and provided a few lessons learned when conducting interviews (Yin, 2018). The pilot study allowed the researcher to practice how to perform a virtual interview and practice timing. This information helped begin to prepare for the

development of cases (Yin, 2018) as an effective way to collect data for Phase I of this study. After reviewing the interview for alignment with the study questions, a question was eliminated due to redundancy based on the first participant's response. The question was, how has your school-led efforts with families to help them understand their role as a partner in their child's education? The participant's response was covered in another question.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The recruitment phase of Phase I for the semi-structured interviews began in January 2020. Still, due to factors beyond the researcher's control, such as the pandemic and movement of principals into new positions, it was halted until the fall. The recruitment continued once school leaders and staff returned to the building full-time, which was in September 2020. Participants were contacted via phone and sent the interview protocol after consenting that outlined their participation.

Schools were closed for in-person instruction from March 2020 until October 2020. Therefore, the interviews were scheduled when schools were expected to return to in-person instruction and staff returned to campus. All three interviews occurred within the same week of October 5th. The interviews were conducted virtually and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each elementary school principal participant answered each question in its entirety. The recordings were transcribed, and themes were examined in the development of cases. These themes were used in professional learning along with research-based practices in the field of family engagement.

It was important when conducting the interviews to remain unbiased when participants responded. If a response needed further clarification or a more in-depth answer, the participant was asked to elaborate. Yin (2018) emphasized the need for those who conduct case studies to be

effective listeners, ask good questions, and stay adaptive. Participants were sent copies of their transcripts to check for validity.

Phase II

Phase II involved the creation of professional learning. The professional learning involved more preparation than expected. For instance, aligning to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) required multiple meetings with the Office of Professional Learning. The first meeting was to figure out how to map out the professional learning so that the sessions would be well received. The second meeting was scheduled to understand better how to create a plan for professional learning using the district template in conjunction with the different audience types in July 2020. It was noted that anything conducted virtually took more time, and the pacing was important. The researcher was also informed that providing homework or follow would help participants connect and reflect on the content.

It was necessary to review resources for converting to a virtual environment (Huggett, 2017) due to COVID-19. The strategies and suggestions included having a blueprint or road map, align the content, and manage the flow of information to present precise information. Virtual sessions should be ideally no more than 60-minutes (Huggett, 2017). Pre-work and other offline activities were included to connect the work that occurred during the session.

The planning for Phase II took place over several months and included input from Central Services personnel. An Area Assistant provided feedback on content associated with family engagement practices and their alignment with The Dual-Capacity Building-Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). The researcher met with the Area Assistant on two separate occasions. The first occasion was to learn more about what they felt that school leaders would find valuable in terms of the format. We discussed the connections to

sustainability with the school improvement process. A comment that stood out was that often principals know the what but not the how. The second meeting was to review the content and receive feedback based on her experience working with principals. The missing components were added after the completion of the interviews.

In addition to the Area Assistant, the researcher worked with the Director of Family and Community Engagement to analyze the content and support leaders in their efforts. The researcher was reminded to be thoughtful regarding the amount of content per slide and the entire professional learning.

The researcher participated in two pre-recorded webinars during July 2020 to learn about family engagement practices and how leaders were adapting to COVID-19 by Dr. Steven Constantino. These were helpful in the development of the Professional Learning Series content. Content developed examining the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Resources addressed leadership practice, family engagement, and additional articles considering the pandemic to support families in alignment with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Clark-Louque et al., 2020; Constantino, 2020; Constantino, 2021; Epstein et al., 2019; Grant & Ray, 2019; Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2020; Seale, 2020).

Phase III

Phase III invitations to elementary principals were sent during the second week of December. The invitation included the dates of the Professional Learning dates of January 6th, 13th, and 20th. The recruitment email was sent to 102 elementary school principals. Those who participated in Phase I were omitted, nor were retiring principals, changing schools, or

participants in Phase I. Participants were instructed to respond via email to the researcher regarding their willingness to participate.

Initially, twelve participants acknowledged their participation, but that number reduced. The Google Meet code was sent to the participants, and a reminder email was sent out before the first session and each session. At the initial session, there were 11 participants, but only five participants completed all three sessions. Two participants completed two sessions due to different challenges with timing for seven who completed the program evaluation. There was an issue with connectivity at schools resulting in delays and the ability to participate in the final session. Each participant was provided with access to a participant folder with resources and an agenda for each session. For participants that missed a session, they had access to the professional learning content and resources. At the end of the last session, participants were provided the Professional Learning feedback questions via Qualtrics, but all had access to the content. A follow-up email was sent to remind participants to complete the survey and link to the resources in the participant folder.

Data Analysis

Phase I

Pilot Study

The findings from this pilot study indicated that the leader demonstrated through their actions and practices a strong commitment to family engagement. Within the interview, the participant's responses supported Study Question 1 about how the principal led family engagement and Study Question 2 about how the leader created organizational conditions and strategies. The participant knew their school community and was intentional in welcoming families. The principal had served the school community for five years and had developed the

family engagement efforts. More specifically, the response was, “it starts with me.” As a school leader, the pilot study participant removed barriers to engagement by being creative to bridge the gap by partnering with community members. The school had also been in and out of Title I status, which meant that there had been some prior support in professional learning and access to additional resources to enhance their family engagement efforts. The school led by the participant was a magnet school where families lived in the attendance area while others did not as part of the choice process. As a magnet school, families applied to attend the school based on the magnet theme. The school’s demographics were diverse, as was the faculty. One interesting point that the principal made was that there were quite a few visiting faculty from other countries. The visiting faculty experienced unique challenges as the culture of the families in the school was different than in their home countries.

When addressing organization structures, the pilot participant’s school had a family engagement committee, a PTA board, and events to welcome families to the school. There was a connection to the learning at home in the form of family literacy nights. Due to the pandemic, many of these activities were on hold because of district limitations on visitors and social distancing requirements. However, the participant shared that their community had stepped up to help those in need by providing gift cards for groceries, etc., during school closures.

Much of the leader's training was through book studies and equity workshops offered by the school district. However, the leader invested in time and energy with their team using the book *Powerful partnerships: A teacher’s guide to engaging families for student success* (Mapp et al., 2017). This book served as the guiding efforts for the family engagement committee and school improvement. The pilot study also found that the leader had not taken any courses to support family engagement efforts in their undergraduate or graduate program.

The participant indicated that communication was emphasized through coordinated and intentional efforts. The school sent a communication to the families as well as the teachers through Class Dojo. Schedules were intentionally posted in student-friendly and parent-friendly language. Due to the pandemic, parents were having to support learning at home since school began in August. Communication was intentional, using a weekly message as well as information sessions using Zoom.

While the school leader focused on communication, the leader also acknowledged that language was a barrier for many families. Therefore, for Spanish-speaking families, there was a direct contact within the office to help support their communication needs, including the principal and key office staff. Approximately 15% of the students were Hispanic/ Latino. For parents who spoke other languages such as Spanish, the school continually sought opportunities to minimize the impact of those barriers, especially after using the Panorama survey data. At this school, questions surrounding efficacy and engagement from the survey were the lowest for that demographic.

The participant indicated that most activities and practices associated with family engagement became digital or virtual due to the pandemic. The school did have a presence on its website and social media to promote its school activities. Still, many things they may have done in the past to bring families on campus were no longer relevant due to restrictions about visitors on campus.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The average length of time in education was 18 years for Phase I participants for the semi-structured interviews. The average years as a school leader was eight years, as outlined in Table 4. Table 5 includes the demographics of all participants in Phase I. Before the onset of the

Table 4

Participants in Phase I Semi-Structured Interviews

Participant	Years in Education	Years as a School Leader	Time in Current School
Elm Elementary Principal	19	9 years	5 Years
Dogwood Elementary	22	8 years	5 years
Maple Elementary	19	9 years	3 years

Table 5

Participant Demographics in Phase I

Demographics		Number
Gender	Female	3
	Male	1
Race	Black	1
	White	3
	Other	

study, the experience of the principal was not a factor in selection. The principals in Phase I had spent between 3-5 years in their current buildings, which was reflected in their school needs' awareness. The highest degree level of all the participants in Phase I was a master's degree.

To facilitate the first order coding, the researcher transferred the transcription into a table. The table was used to hand code the data. While the researcher had used NVIVO briefly, due to the small number of participants and the time needed to manipulate the data effectively, coding took place by hand. Saldana (2016) noted that this might be more effective for the novice or first-time researchers due to the time spent learning the program. The codes were categorized, and common themes labeled each category. Codes were generated based on participant responses considering leadership practices, organizational structures, and partnerships. During this time, the researcher took notes that included questions as well as for analytic memos (Saldana, 2016). This practice was used to avoid generalizing and to see the connections to the study questions. Since the interviews sought to answer two study questions, the coding process approach also required the researcher to think about how they led their efforts and organizational structures. The second level of coding narrowed down the number of codes as it led to themes to address the research questions.

The creation of cases (Yin, 2018) required the researcher to develop an analytic strategy to examine the interviews' data. The first stage was to read each transcript to edit and ensure that the participant's responses were accurately captured. The data were organized according to the responses by question to look at the participants' patterns and trends. In addition to reviewing the transcripts multiple times, the participants were sent their transcripts, and a few corrections were made. Using the lens of The Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnership (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), the analysis was finalized to reflect confirming elements (see Table 5) from how

the school leaders led their school to create the organizational conditions. The cases were developed from the interviews, School Improvement Plans, and available information supporting family engagement.

In Phase I, the researcher developed cases by reviewing School Improvement Plans; conducting semi-structured interviews; and reviewing available information that included website information and, in one case, a script. The cases revealed leadership practices and actions, specifically addressing how school leaders led their family engagement efforts.

Case I: Dogwood Elementary Principal. The principal at Dogwood Elementary responded to all questions in their entirety and elaborated when necessary to respond fully to a question. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted during the first week of October 2020. The principal described the community as family-driven and close-knit. A strategy for ensuring that the school was perceived as welcoming to families was hiring friendly staff that balance each other's personalities. The leader mentioned that they talked about hugs a lot and connected to the Conscious Discipline program implemented at the school. The use of Conscious Discipline was part of the school's culture, where families were also involved in supporting it at the school. Conscious Discipline incorporates strategies to increase school climate, foster success, and build relationships founded by Dr. Becky Bailey (Retrieved from <https://consciousdiscipline.com>).

Dogwood Elementary principal considered families as experts and recognized that might be harder for some teachers than others. The principal shared the following to describe their approach to working with families “we do feel as educators that we know how to educate children the best, but until you consider the family as the expert, you don't seem better then you become part of their family.” Considering the family as the expert was beneficial when

addressing educational and behavioral problems. Having “an open mind and presuming positive intentions on “family” was something that the principal recognized was necessary, as well as the need for constant reminders.

Due to the pandemic, the principal indicated that the staff conducted family conferences through Google Meet during the fall of 2020. The school staff was provided with training and a script on how to organize a family conference. Previously, there was a perception that technology was a barrier, but now that everyone had a device or could use their child’s device to participate, as coming to school, it was not an issue. The principal commented that these were well received by staff even though there was a little bit of hesitance at first. Not only did parents attend the conferences, but so did neighbors and grandparents. The feedback was positive, and the principal felt that the “family conference opened the door to so many things.” The staff could reach parents that they did not think they would connect with going back to the “mindset.”

Throughout the year, the principal solicited families' feedback and was willing to call them to hear their feedback. Maintaining two-way communication was evident in the responses, especially with the willingness to reach families where some school staff did not want to call families on the phone, relying on other communication methods like texts and emails. In addition to creating the structures and support for family conferences, Dogwood Elementary trained its staff on using Google Voice to remove a barrier to communication.

The principal sent out a weekly message to families on the same day of the week via text, sent it on School Messenger and posted it on Class Dojo. The principal commented that families prefer Class Dojo. The use of School Messenger, a district-provided option, helped the principal know which addresses and phone numbers were correct. The leader maintained a consistent

format of the messages using a third of new material, a third from teachers, parents, families, and a third of district updates.

Dogwood Elementary tracked and monitored family contacts with each child's name, and staff is expected to record communications. The family contacts documents were created for teachers to allow staff to see if there were concerns or kudos with a particular family. The principal also sent positive postcards home to say how proud the principal and teacher were of their child. These actions did not occur in isolation but occurred in conjunction with the School Improvement Team. While not a Title I school, the principal focused on family engagement and social-emotional learning. The principal used the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) to guide the school's direction and the second book by Dr. Mapp, *Powerful partnerships: A teacher's guide to engaging families for student success* (Mapp et al. 2017).

The principal indicated that additional support needed for the school increased willingness to connect outside of school hours. Calling after hours was preferred for some families, but it is a challenge with school-staff taking on so much. While this challenge exists, the principal noted that COVID-19 helped the school with their family engagement efforts as other barriers no longer existed. Families participated in Google Meets versus having to come to school. Staff was able to see inside their homes that “ignited a little more compassion and empathy” instead of making assumptions about families.

Case II: Elm Elementary Principal. The principal at Elm Elementary responded to all questions posed by the interview protocol and elaborated on responses. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted during the first week of October 2020. The school community was described as supportive by rallying around its teachers and staff. The PTA was

active and sought to be representative of the overall community. During the principal's tenure at the school, creating an advocacy committee within the PTA began to offer parents a voice in school practices and planning. The principal described the committee as "the group kind of helped the parent side of getting parents on and listening to parent voices and finding out, you know, what do families need?" The family engagement committee also brainstormed new ideas on how to adapt events due to the current environment. The work of the committee was a component of the School Improvement Plan.

Elm Elementary established various means to communicate with families that included a weekly principal newsletter, posting the newsletter on the website, Coffee Chats with the Principal, video messages, Talking Points, Twitter, and Facebook. Talking Points was highlighted as it was new this year, which helped to minimize language barriers as that was an area where the school continues to struggle. Previously, the school used Tuesday Folders, but now all communication was electronic. The principal emphasized the need to delegate responsibilities with communication, especially with social media. The administrative team's strengths were leveraged to ensure communication met the families' needs and noted that "I've never had anybody say stop communicating with me."

The school has ebbed and flowed as a Title I school, which meant that the leader had more access to family engagement opportunities at different times and funding. Professional development was also provided that the principal attributed to helping the school think differently about engaging families. The principal had attended family engagement conferences and intentionally sought out programs to strengthen working with all families. While the funding and human resources were no longer available, the principal continued the commitment to working with families. The shift to virtual experiences provided an opening to continue family

programming that generally took place in literacy and STEM nights. COVID-19 did impact the events, but in some ways, the need to adapt removed barriers to attending school events that previously included childcare and food.

The principal valued that families should feel welcome, which began with the office staff. Due to the school year starting in a remote environment, the office staff was considered invaluable in helping families as they navigated technology issues. School staff went above and beyond to support families. The principal eluded that they were “laying the foundations for equity.” The school connected its actions with the Multiple-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process. Each year another piece was added, including the connection to school discipline and behavior. The school staff held discussions and participated in professional learning, which brought out that it came down to “people’s beliefs.” The process reiterated the need to focus on relationships first and recognize that it was hard to change beliefs. While the principal demonstrated a strong desire to partner with families, there was an awareness that some families may not have had positive experiences about school.

Beyond the classroom, the school reached out to the community to create partnerships with the local high school to provide after-school tutoring for students and the creation of a family center. While COVID-19 stopped some of these programs, for the time being, there was a desire on behalf of the principal to continue partnering together in the future.

While many of Elm Elementary's efforts focused on communication, the principal also recognized that they were still working through barriers to working with families that included the distance for families not within their base and language barriers for Spanish-speaking families. Even though the school used Talking Points that sent messages in the home language, it did not solve all the communication challenges.

Case III: Maple Elementary Principal. The principal of Maple Elementary responded to all questions posed by the interview protocol. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted during the first week of October 2020. The principal described the school community as supportive and diverse. Students within the base attend the school and outside of the base were bused in from other areas within the district. The school recognized that distance was a barrier for families who must travel far to come to school. Despite this barrier, the principal sought to create a welcoming environment for all students. When responding to the question, How do you ensure that your school is perceived as welcoming to families? the principal stated that it starts with the leader's vision "to make sure we're perceived that way." The vision had to be communicated with the office staff because they set the tone as families enter the building. The principal shared their role in supporting the environment to be hospitable.

The school continually tried to find ways to help families as the distance barrier had created the need to adapt to different families' needs within the same school. A community approach was taken that included the school social worker, counselor, and connecting with local churches in the community. With the shift to a virtual learning environment this fall, families participated virtually. Previously, the school reached out and went into the local community center to minimize barriers to distance for families.

Over the past few years, the Hispanic population has grown, and many students who do not speak English have enrolled. The principal commented that a member of their office team spoke Spanish, which helped bridge the communication for families. To honor their students' traditions, Maple Elementary celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month using videos completed in Spanish to connect through culture. The principal also shared that the school's mural represents

the school's diversity, and it was essential to create a sense of inclusion for families to feel welcome.

The principal described their awareness of the impact of beliefs about student discipline due to a lack of understanding. A challenge was how to address bias when staff may not be aware of their comments or actions. There was a need to be strategic and purposeful as the staff was described as supportive and loving.

Communication was an avenue for the school to share information with families, including School Messenger. The principal indicated that reaching all families was an area of growth to ensure they reached all families. In March, the forced school shutdown brought this to the attention of school staff. They were not connecting through school messenger, which was the principal's primary form of school-wide communication. There were still challenges due to a lack of translation resources. However, more direct contact from the teachers was more effective, including the use of Seesaw.

Historically, the school had students come to their STEM night, and parents would not attend but made a shift this past year for parents to accompany their children. They planned to continue this practice. In addition to changing traditional events, the school also hosted a Parent Academy to connect learning at home. They hosted family engagement nights through Google Meets since the beginning of the year as a means to capacity building. A virtual celebration during Hispanic Heritage month also took place and was in thanks to the Counselor.

The structures in place at the school that supported family engagement efforts included a PTA and goals within the School Improvement Plan. While the principal had not participated in courses outside of the sessions offered at the district level, there was a commitment to all families.

Despite the continued challenges, the principal shared that “I think that actually probably for us, we’ve done more family engagement wise than we have ever done before.” Families have engaged more one-on-one with teachers. The school has taken advantage of the technology, which was something that would continue. The principal noted that more resources were needed to support non-English speaking families at the school level.

Phase I Results

The first study question was how do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district lead family engagement in their schools?

Common themes and patterns from the interviews revealed that elementary principals led their school family engagement efforts by being intentional in their expectations for school staff by creating a shared responsibility; fostered welcoming environments; created cultures that supported engagement; and communication was prioritized (see Table 6).

A theme highlighted was that the elementary school leaders developed a sense of shared responsibility when working with families. School counselors, social workers, Interventionists, and teachers were portrayed as integral partners to the collaboration with family engagement. However, that shared responsibility extended into the communities that the schools served. The PTA organizations, faith-based partnerships, and collaboration with the local high school were examples of how elementary schools supported their families by partnering in different ways. Communities were described as tight, supportive, family-driven, and inclusive.

In each case, the front office staff was deemed essential in the creation of a welcoming atmosphere. The schools also tried to minimize communication barriers, mainly if someone in the office spoke Spanish. There was also an acknowledgment that the principal was responsible

Table 6

Code Analysis of the Leadership Actions for Family Engagement

Organization	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Themes	Created cultures supporting engagement	Communication was prioritized	Shared Responsibility	Worked to challenge beliefs
Codes	Office staff, friendly, culture, positive, trust, welcome, family, relationships	Communication, Newsletters, Two-Way Communication, language, scripts, technology assisted	Expectations, feedback, accountability, structure, stakeholders, advocacy, commitment	pre-conceived notions, scared, beliefs, mindset, bias, open communication, persistence, checked assumptions, vision
Quotes and Concepts	“from the second somebody steps on my campus, I want them to know that we want them to be on our campus and to be with us”	“I do video messages so that families can see and hear me. Sometimes I will do coffee chats”	“that group kind of helped the parent side of getting parents on and listening to parent voices”	“this is what’s going to make everything better for our kids, when they’re here with us if they have those tight relationships”
	“I think hiring is the biggest part of that, hiring people who are friendly”	“a third of it is input from teachers, parents, and families. So, there’s always a family picture or something that is going on in the community”	“I’m asking, asking a lot of parents for feedback”	“To have an open mind and presume positive intentions on family, sometimes they have a preconceived notion”
	“we are always on a search to find ways to be supportive of our families”	“we are just always trying to create ways and pathways for us to connect and engage”	“I have a very good social worker and guidance counselor who will literally hit the road”	“Sometimes people don’t want to admit certain biases”

for setting the expectations that families were welcome. The welcoming environments set the stage for partnership and the development of relationships between the home and school.

Each elementary school leader possessed family-centered beliefs about engagement, as evidenced in their responses. A theme that stood out was an awareness of when staff beliefs were not aligned and the need to find ways to minimize those barriers or challenges. Much like in the study conducted by DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2020), the leaders addressed deficit thinking by mitigating the obstacles to barriers. In one case, the Principal at Dogwood Elementary understood what Parrett and Budge (2020) highlighted in their studies: the behavior changes led to greater confidence and efficacy when working with families once they implemented their family conferences. Thus, emphasizing the need to develop effective relationships with staff and families to establish partnership practices. Elm Elementary shared that they had engaged in conversations, discussions, and professional learning to support their staff understanding that it took time.

Communication was prioritized and intentionally used to ensure families were connected at the school and classroom levels. While some school efforts were more well-developed, the use of consistent messaging and platforms was used by each school. Schools used various tools that ranged from Class Dojo, See Saw, Talking Points, and Google Voice to communicate with families. School Messenger was a mechanism for one-way communication with families and the use of newsletters. It was evident that the development of the communication processes took time. For one school, they used social media to communicate with families that have evolved during their tenure.

With the shift to remote learning, each of the schools highlighted how they adapted to the current context using Google Meet to maintain two-way communication. Families became more

integral in supporting learning at home. Schools adapted their pathways to work with families and capacity building (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Family engagement activities were converted to virtual events.

The second study question was how do school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) was a mechanism to drive the family engagement efforts in each case. The SIP plans created accountability for the schools to implement the actions to meet the goals. These goals specifically outlined the expectations for how the school was supporting families with the indicator E1:06: The school regularly communicates with parents about its expectations of them and the importance of the curriculum of the home (what parents can do at home to support their children's learning) (American Development Institute, 2016). School plans were posted on each school's website and were publicly available. Organizational conditions described how schools and their programming were systemic, integrated, and sustained (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Systemic family partnerships should be embedded in the school-wide goals.

Specific actions that supported integrated efforts from the SIP plans included school-wide expectations for communicating with families in each school. Elm Elementary outlined clear expectations, including the frequency of positive phone calls home per quarter and the use of Talking Points. The principal commented about the positive impact of these efforts commenting "that whole language barrier now is not such a big barrier, because we can easily get information out to our families" due to the use of Talking Points this year. These expectations and accountability ensured that family partnership practices were centered on communicating with families. With the shift to online learning, an action also included capacity building for staff and

families in using Google Classroom to support learning at home (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Elm Elementary's principal also supported the PTSA advocacy committee to help them reach out to parents to create engagement structures.

Maple Elementary focused on the alignment of the SIP committees when they first arrived at their school. The realignment created systems and structures to lead the work. This school's ongoing action was to ensure that two-way communication occurred with families by all classroom teachers. Langley et al. (2009) shared that organizations move toward changes, leaders may need to increase the structures in place during early phases of improvement.

Family conferences were new to Dogwood Elementary to connect learning at home. This structure provided for staff included clear expectations for staff, scripts, and training to conduct the conferences. Staff was trained on how to use Google Voice to minimize barriers to sharing personal information. Dogwood Elementary principal shared that “the family conference opened the door to so many different things. I said, tell them, invite anyone that they want to that cares about their child’s education.” Sustainability was created by sharing the responsibility of working with families by involving the classroom teachers and the members of the child’s family, which involved grandparents and neighbors.

The shift to virtual events reduced funding resources to minimize barriers for engaging families, such as providing meals and childcare for events. All three schools converted events to occur via an online platform. Previously, Elm Elementary was a Title I school. The principal mentioned they lost the family engagement funds and the human resources to support those efforts when the school’s Title I status changed. More specifically, the school had support from the Title I department to guide their family engagement efforts.

Phase II

Phase II involved using the themes and codes and the information found in the literature to create the professional learning to be used in Phase III. The themes were used to highlight the best practices of school leaders in family engagement. The information provided by the school leaders included actions found to be successful for their school community to support their families.

The completion of the school district's Professional Learning template guided this stage. It required delving into the standards outlined in Learning Forward (2011) and the different audience types, thus creating a blueprint. Huggett (2017) also recommended using a blueprint to ensure that the session's flow made sense and the selection of work offline.

Collaborating with the Office of Professional Learning supported the validity of using the standards and how to implement them effectively. The template emphasized the importance of professional learning, which was “The primary purpose of professional learning is to improve educator effectiveness and student results” (Learning Forward, 2011). The first question that the template asked was the need or the gap you are trying to address in this professional learning? The template also asked how it aligns with federal, state, district, school, or departmental initiatives? Learning outcomes were designed in advance as well as the follow-up plan. The template also provided resources on the process or learning plan for professional learning. Finally, the template helped to examine how to craft the agendas and feedback from the participants. By working through this process, it helped with pacing and timing. Suggestions provided during the pre-planning stage included recommendations on how to deliver content virtually even though live effectively. Considerations included what pre-work, homework, or other offline activities would occur outside of the learning.

The content was developed using the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) as a guide; lessons learned from the semi-structured interviews; content from the literature review; district resources about School Improvement. Current articles were found so principals could use them to support their teams. The ultimate goal of partnership based on the framework was to have positive outcomes for families and school staff. Figure 4 highlights the topics selected as the culmination of what transpired in Phase II.

Since all schools within the district were expected to have actions and goals to support their school efforts to create sustainability, I collaborated with an Area Assistant on School Improvement practices. Her role was to support School Improvement for schools in her region. She also served on the Family Engagement Committee, providing insight into what principals needed, including suggestions about how to lead. The Director of Family and Community Engagement provided recommendations for content based on prior experiences and professional knowledge. Both of these collaborators were very familiar with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Having a vision for partnership and communicating that vision was highlighted from each principal interviewed in Phase I. The partnership vision should be co-constructed with families and shared with the community illustrating families as priorities (Epstein et al., 2019). Resources from prior learning regarding School Improvement provided by the district were reviewed. During the first session (see Appendix E), there was a segment entitled Leadership Matters. The purpose of this was to emphasize how principal leadership was necessary to create sustainable conditions in their schools. Leadership lessons and best practices learned from Phase I were shared in the second session.

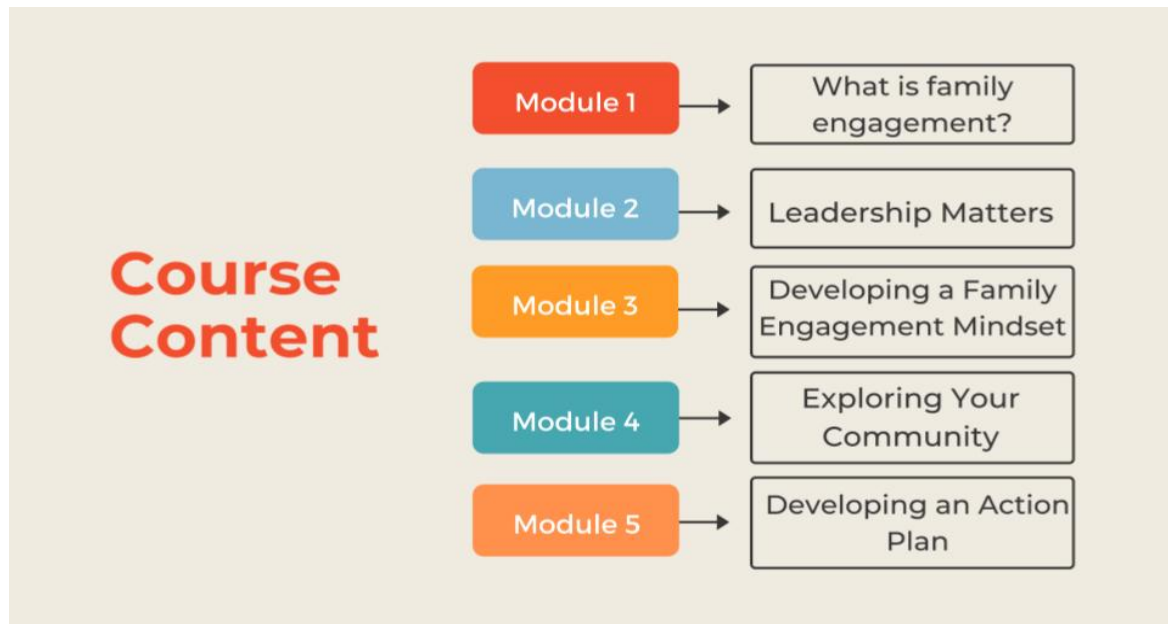


Figure 4. Professional learning content.

A challenge that principals in Phase I experienced were how to tackle staff mindset and issues pertaining to bias in family engagement. Since this was highlighted in the literature review and the interviews, a segment was added to the professional learning outlining the importance when creating plans for staff. Cognition was one of the 4Cs outlined by Mapp and Kuttner (2013). It was cited as a challenge for school staff due to the lack of experience with partnership practices. Culturally responsive family engagement practices were gathered, including articles and recent resources to emphasize being asset-based. Therefore, this was added to the agenda for the second session (see Appendix F).

A valuable resource used to prepare the professional learning was *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action-Fourth Edition* (Epstein et al., 2019) as it outlined out how to form teams, who needed to be on the team, and tools to build the capacity of the school staff. Principals were deemed essential members of the Action Team for Partnerships. The recommendation was that these teams operate separately from the School Improvement Team to support the overall School Improvement goals as its committee resulting in intentional efforts and empowerment to oversee family engagement efforts (Epstein et al., 2019). Three of the four principals interviewed in Phase I had separate Family Engagement Committees to help lead this work. The creation of a Family Engagement Team was a suggested step for principals was incorporated into the third session as part of the professional learning (Appendix G). Also, Title I schools typically possessed such committees to share the responsibility across the organization and include parent voice. with the process into thinking about action. Resources for each stage were converted into digital tools that could be used in a virtual environment.

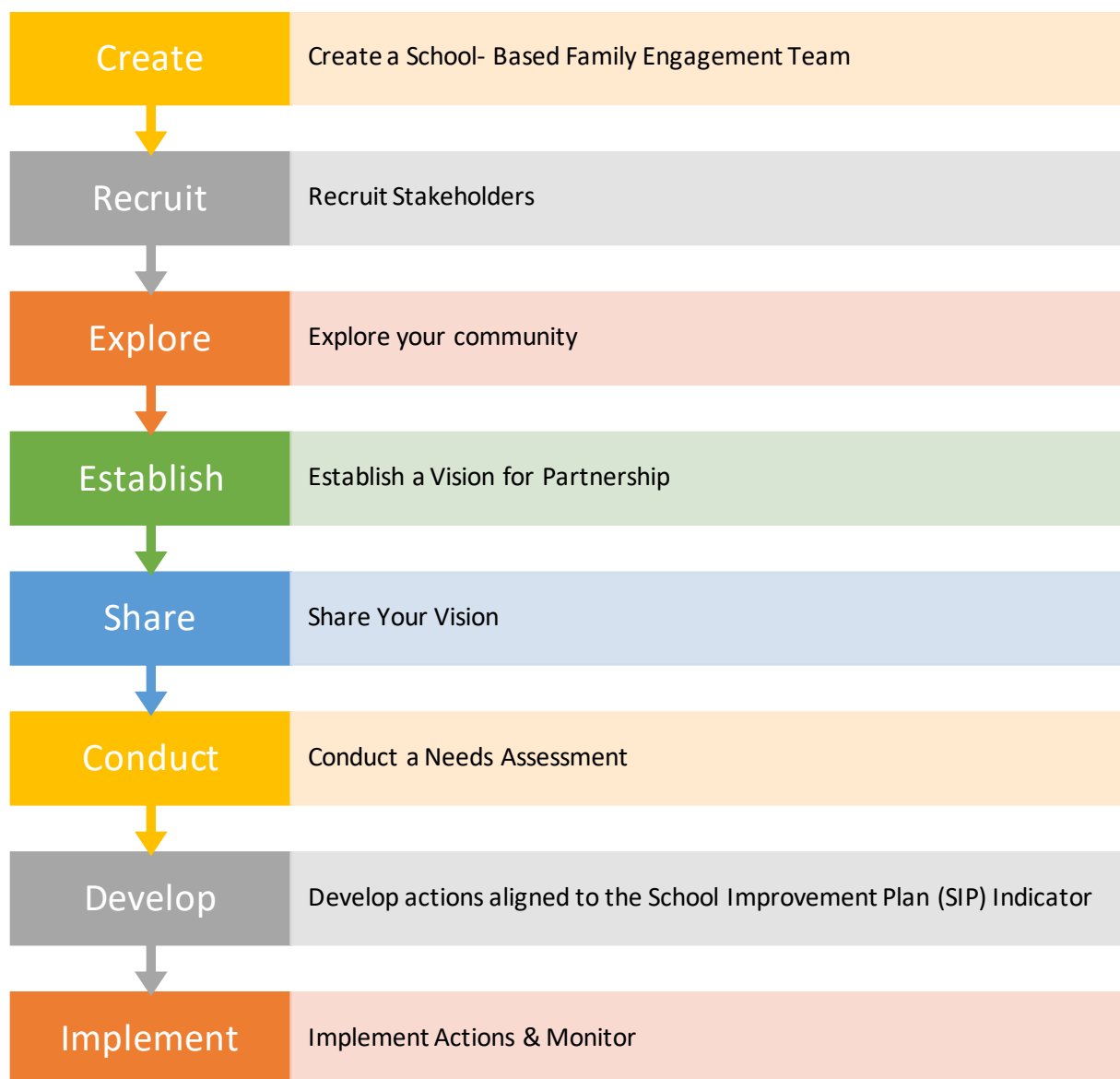


Figure 5. School-based action plan flow chart.

Phase III

The data collection process for Phase III began with recruiting the participants for professional learning during December 2020. Each participant received the recruitment email with the dates and times. Participants responded via email and then sent the Google Meet Codes, which was more secure than other platforms if they were still at school when they engaged. The participants who agreed to participate in the professional learning in Phase III provided their years of experience via a poll during the professional learning (see Table 7). Only participants who completed the evaluation after the professional learning were included. The experience levels ranged from 0-2 years as a principal to 15-20 years as a principal. The participants shared where they worked, but to preserve the participant leaders and their schools' anonymity, the Title I status was the only part included to provide more context about the participants.

Participants were also provided with a Participant Folder to access the agendas, handouts, and presentations. Activities included using a presentation that included a poll, chat, Jamboards, Padlet, articles, brief videos, and discussions. Once the participants completed the professional learning, they were provided with the Professional Learning Evaluation Questions via Qualtrics using the questions in Appendix H.

Table 7

Participants in Phase III

Leader	Years as School Principal (Range)	Title I School
A	2-5	No
B	0-2	No
C	15-20	Yes
D	5-10	No
E	10-15	Yes
F	5-10	No
G	10-15	No

Phase III Results

The final study question was how does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?

The themes from the responses suggested that professional learning increased participant knowledge. Participants shared a variety of ways that professional learning would be used in their school planning. A crucial aspect of the study's design (Langley et al., 2009) was that the training or professional learning results centered on improvement. The elementary school leaders who participated in the study were exposed to the following topics during the professional learning series: Why is family engagement, Leadership Matters, Developing a Family Engagement Mindset, Exploring your Community, and Developing an Action Plan. The sessions occurred over three meetings, and as a result, professional learning did highlight confidence in how to lead efforts in their schools.

The Professional Learning Evaluation (see Appendix H) questions were opened ended except for the question about confidence in leading family engagement within their buildings. In this case, the professional learning was centered on leadership practices that would help leaders guide family engagement efforts. Of the participants, 5 of the 7 participants were either confident or extremely confident, as seen in Figure 6. Two of the participants felt somewhat confident to lead their efforts.

The participants were asked, how will you as the school leader make family engagement a priority in your school? In each case, the elementary principals were able to describe their connections to the content. More specially, participants shared that they may remodel their current actions plans; review their professional learning to see where they might fall on the

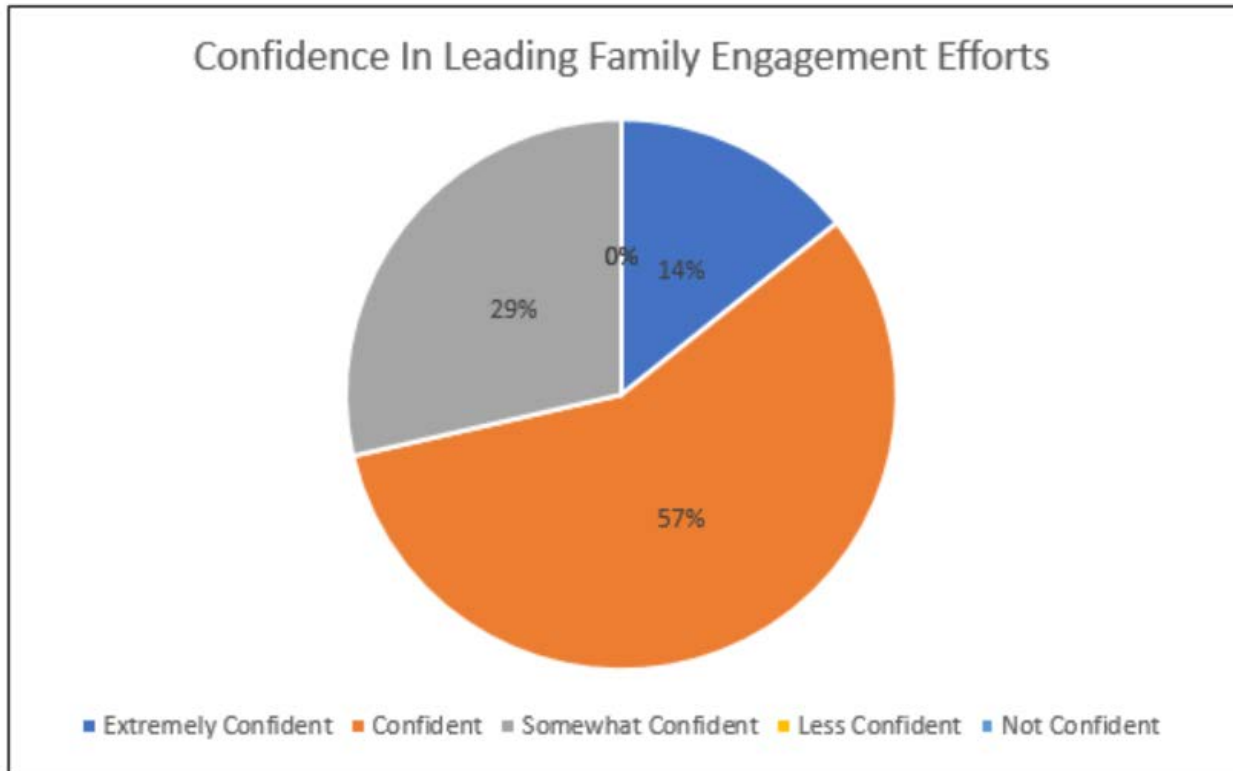


Figure 6. Confidence after professional learning to lead family engagement.

family engagement continuum; dialogue with stakeholders; and use articles and resources to develop a collective vision.

Through these sessions, I have realized that the work with family engagement is never done. It is a constant ebb and flow of relationship deposits and academic withdrawals.

What we do here and now to show value in these families results in learning efforts that take kids to a new level. Prioritizing family engagement within our school begins with me. I can't wait and hope for teachers to get the family engagement bug. I have to foster an environment within my school that breeds family engagement.

It would have been helpful to have included a pre-and post-assessment to evaluate participant knowledge at the sessions' onset. It would have adapted the pacing and the depth of the content to provide more significant evidence to support the increased understanding through professional learning. Langley et al. (2009) emphasized not falling into an activity trap when conducting training and that feedback was noted from the participants. If the sessions were repeated, this would be included in the first session based on the feedback recommendations.

The learning outcomes of the sessions were emphasized at the beginning of each session. At the onset, participants were informed that the professional learning desired results were that participants would know how to lead their schools' family engagement efforts. A goal was that each school would examine their school's progress and consider how to enact changes within their schools based on their communities. The Model of Improvement (Langley et al., 2009) was used as a guide when supporting school leaders in their journey towards creating a vision for those changes. Langley et al. (2009) emphasized the need for organizations to possess the capability for improvement. Hence, the desired outcome of professional learning was for school leaders to review their existing plans. They were also provided with the tools to think about

organizational structures to make practices sustainable (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). In this case, the leaders could reflect on how to apply the learning in their respective buildings. An element highlighted within the professional learning was how to create sustainability by creating a Family Engagement Team and how to use that team to channel the school's efforts in support of the School Improvement Plans (Epstein et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2007).

Summary

This qualitative explored how elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provided insights into what additional supports school leaders needed to lead their schools, and created a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals to be able to lead the efforts in their schools. The study questions examined how principals led efforts in their schools, organizational conditions, and how professional learning in family engagement improved school leaders' efficacy and knowledge. School leaders employed various strategies to engage families, but successful leaders focused on communicating with families. Chapter 5 provides a more in-depth review of the findings, implications, limitations, and research recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study explored how effective elementary principals led their family engagement efforts; provided insights into what additional supports school leaders need to lead their schools; and the creation of a Leadership Development series to strengthen the capacity of elementary principals to be able to lead the efforts in their schools. The study answered the study questions. This chapter was organized by the key findings, limitations, implications, recommendations, and conclusion.

- *Study Question 1:* How do school elementary school leaders in a large urban district led family engagement in their schools?
- *Study Question 2:* How do school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families?
- *Study Question 3:* How does professional learning for school leaders improve their knowledge and efficacy to lead family engagement efforts in their schools?

Key Findings

Key findings that evolved from this study included that principals led their school family engagement efforts by being intentional in their expectations for school staff by creating a shared responsibility (Epstein, 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013); fostered welcoming environments by developing cultures that supported engagement (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Constantino, 2016; Constantino, 2021; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013); worked to challenge beliefs (Mapp et al., 2017; Mellom et al., 2018) and prioritized clear and constant communication (Henderson et al., 2007). These findings provided answers to the first study question about how school leaders in a large urban district led their family engagement efforts.

A theme evident from the semi-structured interviews was that intentional efforts were needed to develop school cultures that support partnerships with families. They were essential in creating the conditions for a partnership to occur. Principals who developed a vision for partnership and established the organizational structures such as a team created sustainability (Epstein, 2019; Henderson et al., 2007; Sanders, 2014). While systems could be put in place, school leaders had to be adaptable, especially when partnering with families to meet their communities' needs. The structural elements created a framework for partnership activities to occur to answer study question 2 of how school leaders create the organizational conditions and structures to effectively engage families? Organizational conditions as outlined in the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) support sustainability.

Being culturally responsive was a critical shift emphasizing the need to build a strong foundation for partnership efforts (Clark-Louque et al., 2020; Constantino, 2016). Mapp and Bergman (2019) added the need for family engagement to be culturally responsive, which meant that the families' culture was integrated into the planning. This required a deeper understanding and the mindset to support all families to establish a more inclusive climate (Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Mapp and Kuttner (2013) emphasized that families' "funds of knowledge" be honored as part of partnership.

Professional learning was still needed to support schools in working with families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). While professional learning acknowledged the pandemic's current context and the need to adapt their leadership practices, additional professional learning would be needed to address particular elements of family engagement practices, including new challenges caused by supporting families during a pandemic. Individual sessions could have been created for each

component within the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships to provide more comprehensive content interactions. Providing choice would allow a school leader to decide which topics were relevant based on their partnership needs (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Two of the four principals in Phase I included capacity building for staff. As an essential part of the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships, this would be an area to support school leaders as they partner with teachers and families. However, capacity building for families was evident in each school.

Due to the pandemic COVID-19, some of the challenges that schools experienced before the pandemic were exacerbated during school closures and reopening in the form of remote learning. Challenges such as distance to the school, home language, turbulence, staff mindset, and communication were shared during Phase III as schools' challenges when engaging families as of January 2021. The elementary principals who participated in Phase I of this study experienced difficulties and wanted to support their families, especially families who spoke another language. Similar concerns arose in Phase III, which should be shared with district leadership as a tangible way to help principals with strategies. Phase III participants were provided time to dialogue and share their barriers or challenges to engagement during an activity. New challenges arose where the participants nor did the researcher possessed the answers: caregivers sharing responsibility for children because of the school closures so that families could work; the stresses on families balancing responsibilities; lack of unified vision for family engagement; technology issues; and central service staff working remotely. The challenges shared provided suggestions for strategies needed by principals to further their family engagement efforts.

Much like past research (Epstein, 2011), school leaders who participated in Phase I had not received any training during their university preparation programs in family engagement. However, two of the leaders whose schools had been a Title I in Phase I were exposed to more professional learning and resources to lead their family engagement efforts. These school leaders also tried to maintain what they learned and adapted to continue what worked during the pandemic. In one case, the leader had limited training but had the desire to partner with families as their school did not meet the Title I threshold. Hence, non-Title I schools required additional support to lead the efforts in their schools.

Due to the school closures and reopening in a virtual environment resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic, schools spent more time engaging families, impacting family engagement efforts. Time was spent trying to support families with helping their children log on to Google Meets and the use of Google Classroom. School leaders indicated that more time was spent trying to reach those who were not participating in classes. All the principals who participated in Phase I shared that they were doing more. The advent of having technology in every student's hands allowed families to connect with the school opening new pathways, which was very similar to Phase III's responses.

Limitations

The sample size for Phase I was small ($n=4$), with four school leaders' participation, including the pilot study. While the sample size was small, it allowed more time to delve into the responses. A larger population may have provided more diversity in thought and practice. The initial plan was to include more participants in Phase I with a broader range of schools. The small sample size was a result of those who volunteered to participate. In the case of one Title I principal, there was a willingness but a conflict of time. The pandemic also caused an unforeseen

limitation to different aspects of the study. The timeframe was expanded as school closures and reopening for remote learning created other family engagement challenges for school leaders.

There were no anticipated limitations for Phase II because this phase focused on document analysis and analysis of case studies from Phase I. Phase II scholarly work led to developing professional development for school leaders. However, the pandemic changed the space for professional learning from a brick-and-mortar space to a virtual one. I did not know this at the onset of this study. This change caused me some angst due to the additional time to learn new online professional development formats and adapt participant engagement. The shift to an online platform and the need to convert the content pacing posed limitations and impacted the development of engagement activities during the sessions. If the sessions were to be repeated, revisions would be made to the content and the delivery. The revisions would consider the feedback given by the principals who were participants of Phase III in this study. Additionally, if the training were to be repeated with an audience outside of the school district, the content would be adapted. The examples were specific to models within the district and would need to be generalized for other audiences.

There were initial limitations concerning the applicant pool's size for the number of principals committed to the professional learning sessions. While the number who agreed to participate exceeded the initial criteria for selection to participate with 11 principals, seven completed the series. After reviewing the participant feedback, one participant commented that it would have been great to hear from more principals about how they led their efforts. Additionally, the researcher's familiarity with some of the participants who elected to participate posed a need to connect differently as the professional learning format was virtual.

I could not have anticipated the experience created by the pandemic. As the final stages of the study evolved, it became evident that it was necessary to adapt and remain relevant to the current context of COVID-19. The challenges that a school faced were different than those that occurred when students attended school in person. While some areas were shared from the interviews, that would be an area for future study to explore.

Implications

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) and Mapp and Bergman (2019) described the organizational conditions for effective family engagement as systemic, integrated, and sustained. Systemic implied that planning family engagement should be purposeful and carefully designed to meet the school goals connecting to student achievement. Sustainability was created by developing an integrated program that includes professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum, and community collaboration (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). System engagement at the district level should emphasize leadership as a driver in working with families. Therefore, school districts should examine how systemically they support building principals in their efforts to support families, especially since the challenge schools were contending with during a pandemic at the time of the study may differ from those in the past. The challenge was cited when the framework was first shared with the study participants, but it continues to pose opportunities for school districts.

For large urban districts where they do not have organized family engagement support efforts for non-Title I schools, they should consider creating a comprehensive plan that is communicated and includes the infrastructure to work with school teams on how to serve their communities best. When schools planned well, resources and infrastructure support were aligned to support their engagement efforts. Brooks et al. (2019) studied how school districts

implemented sustainable practices aligned with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships. Drawing from these resources may provide relevant examples of systemic engagement practices, especially as post-pandemic plans are created. More importantly, consider how to reach families with whom schools struggled with a lack of online learning engagement due to long-lasting implications for those students' success.

The implications for sustainable organizational conditions for the participants will take time and support. District leaders may need to explore providing additional professional learning and coaching. For schools where their School Improvement Plans required adjustments, the district should guide to support implementation and planning. Furthermore, the creation of action steps supports schools to examine their cultures to ensure they can promote change.

Implications for school leaders in this study centered on creating more time and space for sharing best practices. The participant feedback indicated that more time to learn from one another and other principals would have enhanced the sessions. Therefore, other school leaders would benefit from having a dialogue on family engagement topics and time to discuss solutions to the challenges to engagement that the principals shared during the professional learning. Knowing that the school leaders who participated in Phase I did not have courses in family engagement before becoming a leader, this presented with an opportunity for further capacity-building efforts at the district level (Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

For new school leaders, there is a need to include sessions on family engagement to allow them to see families as partners and allies. It would also be important for new leaders to learn from experienced principals how to make family engagement a part of the school culture. The district should help new leaders strategically use their School Improvement Plans as a mechanism to implement change in their schools. By focusing on both, those efforts could be

sustainable. While new school leaders have many things to focus on and may not see family engagement as a priority, they should as the foundation for partnership is relationship building and trust.

Purposeful leaders who value partnership seek to improve children's learning outcomes by leveraging their families' cultural capital (Clark-Loque et al.). Thus, schools need leaders who prioritize family engagement as a strategy to build relationships with families regardless of their background. These partnerships develop with intentional efforts focused on culturally responsive practices driven by their principals. Therefore, implications for district leadership including how to approach hiring new principals for diverse schools.

University preparation programs should continue to include courses aligned to The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) and the standards within the North Carolina Executive Principal Evaluation (McRel, 2015). These standards reflect a focus on family and community engagement. New leaders will need exposure to the content and how to implement those into practice. Teacher preparation programs should also continue to provide coursework on culturally responsive family engagement practices to ensure that candidates understand how to work with families where their backgrounds may differ from those they will serve.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future study would be to explore more strategies to support school leaders with families where the language was a barrier to engagement. While schools were aware of this issue, each of the principals interviewed recognized this dilemma but needed more resources to support families. Additional resources were required at the school level to meet the needs of their families more effectively. COVID-19 opened doors to homes using

technology, but for English Language Learners (ELL), the typical acquisition of language and knowledge did not occur as readily. The time away from school buildings created new challenges for elementary schools and their families. For some families whose home language was Spanish, the shift to online learning brought to light existing and new opportunity gaps associated with the pandemic (Innis & Murphy, 2021).

For the elementary school leaders who felt somewhat confident in their ability to lead family engagement efforts in their schools, additional professional learning in the form of individual coaching would be a possible source for future study. This would allow more time to customize the learning to meet the needs of those principals. The coaching and feedback could build greater confidence to lead their efforts.

At the district level, a recommendation would be to establish consistent professional learning opportunities for building principals and assistant principals on how to develop their efforts using the key components within the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships Version 2 (Mapp & Bergman, 2019) and make intentional connections to School Improvement efforts. Deconstructing these elements and the interconnection with School Improvement will help schools develop the cultures to sustain family engagement and structures. The rationale for including assistant principals would be that they eventually could be leading schools in the future.

Another recommendation would be to include the voices of the families. An essential component in the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) was that capacity building took place with families to improve efficacy supporting the learning at home. School closures exacerbated this, and without knowing

what families needed, schools may simply be adapting existing programs without a deep understanding of family needs.

Growth and Development as a Leader

Throughout this process, I discovered how to become fully immersed in a topic and realized that family engagement is multi-faceted, requiring many different leadership skills. As a leader, I learned the importance of being adaptable as there were times that I had to adjust my thinking to move forward during this process. I have grown in my ability to see things from a systems perspective versus just the view as a building leader because of the collaborative work done to complete this dissertation. My professional network has expanded by spending time learning from others. Much like the trip to Peru during the EdD program, the climb up left you a bit out of breath, but I had others to encourage me along the journey. Once I got to the top, I was able to breathe and enjoy the beauty of the experience and the landscape.

Conclusion

While professional learning did impact elementary school principals' knowledge, time was needed to process and think about their schools' plans. The professional learning was centered on leadership for family engagement which opened the doors for the principals to share what they learned with their school communities. "Effective family engagement never happens overnight- it is the result of hard sustained work over the course of a year" (Mapp et al., 2017) meant that for schools to integrate family engagement into their communities, it would take time to establish the conditions for that to occur. My vision is that every school in the district is equipped with the tools they need to develop the cultures that create and sustain strong partnerships with families in their communities. Leading elementary schools, especially during a pandemic, was complicated and required leadership to adapt to meet their families' needs. Strong

leadership was needed to partner with families effectively and keep them at the forefront of their efforts. Common leadership themes that emerged in this study included how principals led their school family engagement efforts by being intentional in their expectations for school staff by creating a shared responsibility; fostered welcoming environments by developing cultures that supported engagement; worked to challenge beliefs and prioritized clear and constant communication.

Family engagement intersects equity, leadership, and culture, ultimately impacting school improvement efforts, especially when families assume more responsibility at home. However, actionable steps must occur for family engagement efforts to take root, which could not be stated any better than by one of the leaders:

Putting my money where my mouth is by engaging families in the visioning and planning of family engagement actions. I will try to live the motto I heard a parent share at a conference - "Plan nothing about us without us."

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284
redc.ecu.edu/umcib/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Stephanie Raiford](#)
CC: [Marlorie Ringler](#)
[Stephanie Raiford](#)
Date: 11/12/2019
Re: [UMCIRB 19-001946](#)
Transforming Family Engagement By Developing Leadership Capacity

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 11/12/2019. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2B.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Interview Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group
Interview Protocol(0.01)	Scripts/Questions
Program evaluation(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Recruitment language(0.03)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Transforming Family Engagement By Developing Leadership Capacity(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Transforming Family Engagement By Developing Leadership Capacity(0.01)	Consent Forms
Transforming Family Engagement By Developing Leadership Capacity(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Transforming Family Engagement By Developing Leadership Capacity(0.02)	Consent Forms

For research studies where a waiver of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(2)(ii) has been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Transforming Family Engagement by Developing the Capacity of School Leaders

Institution: East Carolina University

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: Stephanie Raiford

Introductory Statement:

To facilitate our notetaking, I would like to conduct an audio recording of our conversations today. For your information, I will be the only person who will be privy to the recordings, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreement to participate.

Introduction:

I am a graduate student at East Carolina University in the Education Leadership EdD program. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today to help guide my research on how different elementary leaders lead the family engagement efforts in their schools.

School selection was limited to traditional elementary school principals placing family engagement as a priority. I plan to gather artifacts associated with the school's family engagement efforts. The goal is to determine how the school leader has led their family engagement efforts as well as examine the organizational conditions present in the school to support those efforts.

Interview Protocol

School Pseudonym: _____

Demographic Profile of Interviewee:

Gender: Male Female Other

Race: White Black Hispanic Other____

Ethnicity: _____

Age: _____

Highest level of Education attained: BA/BS Masters Doctor Other _____

Years in Education: _____

Years as a School Leader: _____

Time in this school: _____

Questions:

Tell me about your background and what brought you to your current role?

How would you describe your school community?

How do you ensure that your school is perceived as welcoming to families?

How does your school partner with families?

What are some barriers to engaging families at school?

Families?

Staff?

How do you, as a school leader, promote and encourage family engagement in your school?

Describe how you communicate with families? Is it effective, and why do you feel that way?

How have your staff embraced working with all families, and what are some of the barriers your school has faced?

Describe the type of courses or workshops that you've participated in parent involvement/ family engagement?

Describe what training or learning have you done with staff regarding family engagement?

What organizational structures have you put in place within your school to support and leader family engagement at your school?

How well versed are you with the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships?
How does that guide your work?

Are there additional supports needed to help you connect with families as you lead this work?

How has COVID-19 impacted your family engagement efforts?

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL- PHASE I

Colleague,

I am reaching out to you as a leader in the field of family engagement within the district. You are invited to participate with no obligation in a research study that has as its main purpose to develop the capacity of elementary school leaders within the school district. From the semi-structured interviews, a case study will be developed for each school leader in how they created the organizational structures to engage families in their schools. The information will be used to create a professional learning series for other school leaders.

For the purposes of this research study, data will be coded and will not be released with your name on it.

Your participation is voluntary, and there is limited risk associated with participation in this study.

You are deciding whether or not to allow the Principal Investigator to use the information obtained through interviews and data collection to be used for the study. You understand that you are agreeing for the interviews to be recorded.

The information will be securely locked for three years after the end of the study and then will be destroyed.

Please reply to this email to alert the Investigator that you would like to participate.

Principal Investigator (PI): Stephanie R. Raiford, East Carolina University

Project Title: Transforming Family Engagement by Developing Leadership Capacity

If you have any questions, I may be reached at raifords18@students.ecu.edu.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT PARAGRAPH

“Transforming Family Engagement by Developing Leadership Capacity.”


Professional Learning Participation- Phase III

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “*Transforming Family Engagement by Developing Leadership Capacity*,” being conducted by *Stephanie Raiford*, a *graduate student* at East Carolina University in the *Educational Leadership* department. The goal of this phase of the study is to conduct professional learning as part of a Leadership Development Series comprised of 3 sessions to enhance the knowledge and skills of elementary school leaders in family engagement. At the end of the professional learning, school leaders will be asked to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning. The professional learning will be designed using the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships and the Professional Learning Standards-aligned with our district priorities.

It is the final stage of my research that examines *how to develop the leadership capacity of school leaders in family engagement*. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please email *Stephanie Raiford* at *raifords18@students.ecu.edu* for any research-related questions or the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

APPENDIX E: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AGENDA- SESSION I

Transforming Your Leadership For Family Engagement Presenter: Stephanie Raiford

January January 6, 2021- Session I January 13, 2021- Session II January 20, 2021- Session III	Meeting Link: 
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Desired Outcomes:

Participants will...


- Discuss the importance of family engagement
- Highlight the impact of COVID-19 on families
- Connect leadership practices

January 6, 2021- Session I- Link to [Slides](#)

Time	Topic (What)	Process (How)	Notes:
4:00	Welcome & Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions• Rationale for the Study	
4:10	Why is Family Engagement Important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview• Message from the Director of Family and Community Engagement• Group Activity- Padlet	
4:25	COVID-19 Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact on schools• Strategy Harvest- Activity• Reflection	
4:40	Leadership Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connections to Leadership Standards• Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships & (Version 2)• Connection to your school<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Rubric	
4:58	Next Steps Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next Steps/Action Items	

APPENDIX F: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AGENDA- SESSION II

Transforming Your Leadership For Family Engagement Presenter: Stephanie Raiford

January January 6, 2021- Session I January 13, 2021- Session II January 20, 2021- Session III	Meeting Link: 
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Desired Outcomes:

Participants will...


- Discuss welcoming school environments
- Delve further into the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships
- Learn about effective leadership practices from the field
- Connect core beliefs to family engagement
- Explore your community

January 13, 2021- Session II- Link to Slides

Time	Topic (What)	Process (How)	Notes:
4:00	Welcome & Grounding	Where do you feel your school is today in terms of partnership?	
4:15	Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships	Connecting to the 4Cs of Policy and Program Goals Leadership Lessons from WCPSS Principals	
4:30	Mindset for Engagement	Examining Core Beliefs	
4:40	Exploring your community	Connecting to your families	
4:58	Next Steps Closing	Next Steps/Action Items	

APPENDIX G: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AGENDA- SESSION III

Transforming Your Leadership For Family Engagement Presenter: Stephanie Raiford

January January 6, 2021- Session I January 13, 2021- Session II January 20, 2021- Session III	Meeting Link: 
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Desired Outcomes:

Participants will...

- Discuss current challenges to engagement
- Connect to your school plans
- Bring together elements of a school-based action plan
- Complete the professional learning evaluation

January 20, 2021- Session III

Time	Topic (What)	Process (How)	Notes:
4:00	Welcome & Grounding	Share one way you stay positive	
4:15	Current challenges to Engagement	Group Activity	
4:25	Connect to your schools	SIP Plans	
4:35	School Based Action Plans	Strategies to support family engagement	
4:50	Professional Learning Evaluation	Complete independently	

APPENDIX H: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVALUATION

Leadership Development Professional Learning Evaluation

How will you, as the school leader, make family engagement a priority in your school?

Do you feel more confident in your ability to lead family engagement efforts?

From the session topics, what additional information do you need to launch or continue the efforts at your school?

If these sessions were repeated, what changes would you suggest if this learning were shared with another group of principals?

How does your action plan incorporate the professional learning, and how will it drive the family engagement efforts in your school?

