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This comparative case study investigated how two Title I elementary schools within the
same school district implement, promote, and maintain familial/community engagement
programs. The district adopted and implemented a family engagement model based on Dr. Karen
Mapp's Academic Parent-Teacher Team approach within the Dual Capacity-Building
Framework in 2017. Also reviewed was how each school utilized the federal funds disbursed
specifically for parent-family engagement.

The study examines and cross-references two schools to assess the implementation and
support of Family and Community Engagement to improve student achievement and build
capacity for involvement as outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The current practices in
each school that the superintendent mandated were observed for fidelity and primarily compared
to the scholarly recommendations of thought while acknowledging the individual contributions
of the district and school initiatives.

Administrators (principals and assistant principals) at both schools were interviewed
along with the assistant superintendent over federal programs and family engagement specialist
based on their knowledge of expectations and intimacy with schools and/or families. A diverse
representation of parents from each school was interviewed as well. School improvement plans
from each school, along with the Title I Family Engagement expenditures, to determine how
funds were spent throughout the academic year and over the summer. A dual-site case study was
employed to analyze the impact of parental engagement on student achievement.

HOW TWO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN A MEDIUM-SIZED SCHOOL DISTRICT

SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

by

Robin T. Harris

A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Doctor of Education

Greensboro

2022

Approved by

_____
Dr. Craig Peck
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

I pay tribute to my ancestors for what they endured so I could engage in this and other

meaningful endeavors.

I respect my grandparents who made a way out of very little to rear my supportive

parents the best way they knew how.

*I honor my loving parents (**Doug** and **Shirley** Thorne) who continue to love, support, and*

uplift me even after numerous sacrifices.

*I adore, love, and value my tribe (**Bug**, **Amon**, **Nile**, and **Reagan**)*

for continued inspiration and resilience through life's journey together. I vowed to be

present for you. This is for us!

I acknowledge the survivors and warriors who persist.

#WILLTOWIN

Lastly, I am grateful to be positioned to further fulfill The Delta Oath.

"Saved by Zero"

This dissertation written by Robin T. Harris has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2016, I was appointed to the Director of Federal Programs and English Learners position. As a newly created position within our school district, the primary function was to monitor the effectiveness of all federal programs in funding eligible schools to ensure adherence to mandated policies and procedures. After spending almost 2 decades serving as a building-level administrator in several Title I North Carolina schools, this was an exciting professional prospect. Managing this program would allow me to foster relationships with school principals and all school staff, which could prove beneficial in enforcing, tracking, and maintaining regulatory compliance throughout the entire district. Stepping away from the demands of discipline sounded like music to my ears.

A Director of Federal Programs and English Learners must understand federal policies and mandates which affect K-12 education programs. One of these programs was the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Lyndon B. Johnson established ESEA (1965) as part of the "War on Poverty" legislation (Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 1965b). President Johnson intended to improve educational outcomes for underserved students. As a result, Title I was implemented. According to the U.S. Department of Education (ESSA, 2015), the purpose of Title I is to provide all children with a significant opportunity to learn in a fair and equitable environment.

Former President Obama was a proponent of the reauthorization and updating of ESEA. In December 2015, he signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In December 2015, he signed the ESSA legislation into law, which supports schools that educate substantial numbers of traditionally underserved students who consistently demonstrate low academic performance and secondary schools with low graduation rates. In its streamlined form, the legislation aims to

minimize, if not eliminate, existing performance, achievement, and graduation gaps among marginalized students. The demographics of marginalized students can include but are not limited to economically disadvantaged, immigrants, students of color, and those diagnosed with any form of disability. Although it removed some federal oversight, this legislation required that state and local education agencies be mandated to report summative data on the effects of these measures. To meet the new federal requirements, specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-bound plans must be maintained following state statutes and board policies. Another mandate required by the new law is an increased emphasis on family and community engagement instead of using traditional parent involvement models.

ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) included provisions for parental involvement. Schools must offer programs and activities to involve parents and family members to increase parental involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Additionally, school districts must have a plan for family engagement, build schools' capacity to engage parents, and reserve 1% of Title I funds to support parent and family engagement activities. The U.S. Department of Education created a new outreach position to "bring the family voice to discussions between the Department of Education, families, and family engagement stakeholders that will contribute at all levels" (Frost, 2017). In her inaugural address, France Frost, Family Ambassador Appointee, spoke about the lack of family engagement across some demographics and the efforts to encourage cultivating and maintaining the focus on family and community engagement within the nation's schools. My experiences with community involvement and outreach as an intentional component of positively impacting student success immediately piqued my interest as a school principal and the mother of three school-aged children at the time. She outlined the components of the U.S. Department of Education's Dual Capacity-Building Framework for

Family-School Partnerships and emphasized its potential for setting all schools on a new course (Kuttner & Mapp, 2013). This was the first time I heard about the framework, only to come back to my district and be approached about a new life-altering opportunity regarding it.

Often, educators and stakeholders differ in their perceptions and comprehension regarding positive and consistent parental engagement and the importance to families and the schools that children attend each day. Partnerships between parents and teachers are critical to the sustained success of students. Along with building and maintaining mutual respect and trust, the exchange of various forms of communication is necessary to make authentic engagement work. In the process of establishing relationships with families, educators and stakeholders need to be aware that sometimes their biggest hurdle will be to overcome prior negative experiences that marginalized families have experienced in the past when interacting with school staff. This understanding is vitally important to lay the foundation of a system to develop meaningful community connections. Successfully synthesizing these facets into a comprehensive program can help accomplish the mandated key tasks, which bolster the long-term success of every student.

Statement of the Problem

It is widely accepted that the level of family engagement a school has is one of the strongest predictors of a student's success in school. Across North Carolina, very few educational stakeholders have received sufficient guidance regarding building effective family-school partnerships. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ASCD developed the Whole School, Community and Child (WSCC) framework to assess how schools address all aspects of children's physical, mental and social well-being and how that impacts learning (Child Trends, n.d.). North Carolina did not meet many required targets in the 2017–

2018 report on state statutes and school regulations. Family Engagement was an area of interest. The report explained the necessity for professional development on family engagement and the intentional existence in policymaking on school discipline. There has been limited training for school staff and families on how to link consistent parental involvement to positive learning outcomes effectively in recent years. Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011) posited that family involvement improves facets of children's education such as attendance, student achievement, and motivation.

Furthermore, it is also apparent that there is a gap in North Carolina school districts' perception of the purpose of stakeholders. This, combined with an understanding of which programs are best to implement and how to cultivate their potential for long-term positive success, needs to be explained to governing bodies during program development. North Carolina did not meet any standards in community engagement on the 2017–2018 State Statutes and Regulations in Schools report.

Family and community engagement has become a priority in education systems in the United States. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) explained, "without attention to training and capacity building, well intentioned partnership efforts fall flat" (p. 6). Therefore, family engagement is very important to improving student achievement. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), ineffective family-school partnerships result from opportunities for school/program staff and parents to build the capacity for partnerships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways that two schools within the same school district implement, promote, and maintain familial/community engagement programs. The district adopted and implemented a family engagement model popularized by Mapp and

Kuttner yet created by the school-based work of Dr. Maria Paredes Academic Parent-Teacher Team approach in 2017 (Paredes, 2011). Also reviewed was how each school utilized the federal funds disbursed for parental engagement. The funds were expected to help improve student achievement. More specifically, I tracked expenditures earmarked for parental engagement as a mandate of funding from Title I. Student socioeconomic background reflects students' social and financial resources that may influence performance in school based on access to additional resources and outside experiences (Harter, 1999). Park and Holloway (2017) found that the influence of parent networks on student achievement may be related to socioeconomic status. According to Park and Holloway (2017), parents of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to form partnerships with schools. Conversely, lower-income families were more likely to rely upon extended family or community members for support.

The intersection and collaboration of disciplines are beneficial to all parties involved. Both individually as well as collectively, scholars like Mapp, Epstein, Lareau, and Auerbach have made groundbreaking observations, worked to debunk unreliable stereotypes regarding class and race, and have put educators and stakeholders on a trajectory that has the potential to reap synergistically positive benefits from properly utilizing the intersection of family, school, and community. Without the collaboration between sociology and education, the theoretical foundation of the current understanding and definition of family engagement would not be as comprehensive as it is today. As educators and stakeholders collaborate and test new concepts, new ways of making a marked difference in the lives of the students we as educators serve will hopefully emerge.

Research Question

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who

    participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

Background of Study

Public education in the U.S. started as common schools under Horace Mann. Students

were educated so they would grow up to be productive citizens. Education was originally

conducted through the Church. The first settlers believed that everyone should receive a

Christian education. According to Mann (1891), "The work of education is never done, the

means of education should never be withheld, as the former must be continually renewed, the

latter must be continually supplied" (p. 72). Public education started with the intent of being

equal, but women, slaves, and indigenous people were not given opportunities to learn.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) exposed the disproportionate education Black

children received under Jim Crow. The Supreme Court ruled that Separate but Equal was

unconstitutional. Chief Justice Warren delivered the majority opinion in 1954. Justice Warren

said, "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no

place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (U.S. Courts, n.d.). *Brown v. Board*

was a small step toward providing more equitable education in public schools.

President Lyndon B. Johnson passed legislation called the War on Poverty. The War on

Poverty provided support for the working poor in America. In his speech, President Johnson

said, "We must strike down the barriers which keep many from using those exits. The war on

poverty is not simply a struggle to support people to make them dependent on the generosity of

others. It is a struggle to give people a chance" (Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 1965b). Head Start

was one of the programs that resulted from the War on Poverty. Head Start promotes school

readiness for low-income children. Head Start is delivered through 1,700 agencies in communities and serves over one million children a year. Head Start strongly encourages parental involvement and family engagement and helps parents maintain employment and pursue education. Head Start also encourages parent and child educational learning experiences at home. Promoting literacy at home increases student achievement in schools (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2018).

Title I is another program resulting from the War on Poverty by the federal government. Title I is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The purpose of Title I is to provide financial assistance to educational agencies serving a significant population of children from low-income families to improve their education outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, Health, and Welfare, 1969). According to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1969), "Poverty, delinquency, unemployment, illiteracy, and school dropouts are not new to American society. What is new is the vigorous federal effort to meet these problems" (p. 1). Title I has changed over time to address new challenges to equitable education. According to the ESSA's (2015) statement of purpose, one of the purposes of Title I is "to meet the educational needs of low achieving children in our nation's highest poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children and young children" (p. 9). Challenges exist with providing fair and equitable education in Title I schools today because schools can decide how to spend Title I funds. Although 1% of Title I funds must be spent on family engagement.

Many students in high poverty areas receive an inferior education because schools lack resources to support students. According to Lafortune et al. (2018), students from low-income families often have lower test scores, lower high school and postsecondary completion rates, and

eventually lower earnings than their peers. Lafortune et al. (2016) posited that students in low-income areas attend schools with low investment in education since most schools are funded through taxes. Increased school funding provides students with better opportunities for student achievement. This research study will compare two schools in North Carolina. One Title I school serves 91.44% of students from economically advantaged households. According to the North Carolina School Report Cards, this school scored below average on state assessments. The other school in the study is Title I, and Title I applies to 67.8%. However, students exceeded academic growth projections at 86.2%. These preliminary data show that some Title I schools in the same school district may not show the same academic achievement, although the scores are provided with additional federal funds to improve educational outcomes.

Leandro v. State (1997) considered whether students were being provided with a "sound education." According to North Carolina, it is their responsibility to guarantee the privilege of education. In 2017, the same problem still existed for ELL students. In *Leandro II*, the Supreme Court ruled that state action and inaction contributed to the students' deprivation of their constitutional rights. The court determined the state failed to identify at-risk students and meet their needs with educational resources such as tutoring, extra classes, counseling, and other programs. This research project fills a gap in the literature on why disparities exist in educational programs in Title I schools, the importance of forming partnerships between families, schools, and the community, how to increase parental involvement, and how to implement a family engagement model effectively to increase student achievement.

Brief Description of Methods

This case study examined and cross-referenced two schools within the same public-school unit to assess the success of implementation and support of Family and Community

Engagement to improve student achievement and build a capacity for involvement as outlined in the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. The current practices in each school that the superintendent mandated were observed for effectiveness and compared to the scholarly recommendations of scholars such as Auerbach, Comer, Constantino, Epstein, Henderson, Jeynes, Lareau, Sanders, and Mapp while acknowledging the individual contributions of the district and school initiatives.

The setting of the schools was a medium-sized public school unit known as Dogwood City Schools (a pseudonym). Dogwood City Schools is surrounded by a large district centrally located in Cardinal County. The schools selected for this study are approximately four miles from each other. Rumors swirl each year about a merger, yet the systems will not merge due to a separate tax structure paid by one group of citizens to prevent this from happening for their children. According to the Department of Commerce, the district is located in a Tier 2 county, which ranks the distress levels from the 40 greatest to least distressed in Tier One of all 100 counties (NC Department of Commerce, 2019). The rankings are based on median household income, average unemployment rate, percentage growth in population, and adjusted property tax. Cardinal County is ordered in the state as displayed in Table 1 by the 2019 County Development Tier Rankings. The Economic Distress Rank of Cardinal County was 48th.

Table 1. Cardinal County 2019 County Development Tier Rankings

Category	Ranking
Median Household Income	58
Average Unemployment Rate	70
Percentage Growth in Population	39
Adjusted Property Tax	30

Note. Data based on Fiscal Year 2018–2019.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

The theoretical foundation for this study is the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships created by Karen Mapp with support from Paul Kuttner and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 1. Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

Note. Taken from SEDL in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family–school partnerships*. Austin, TX: SEDL

Mapp's dual capacity-building framework considers which factors contribute to successful family engagement. Mapp's (2003) study examined what factors influenced parental involvement. Mapp (2003) found that most parents want their children to do well in school and help their children succeed. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) explored how school and family partnerships are influenced by a lack of opportunities to build relationships. According to Mapp

and Kuttner (2013), student achievement and school improvement are shared responsibilities between parents, teachers, and schools. Mapp and Bergman (2021) opined that family engagement should be equity-focused. Mapp and Bergman suggest that schools must focus on three principles. First, schools must reject deficit-based views of families. Second, the new normal requires a co-design model of engagement. Third, family engagement must be viewed as a core element of effective educational practice. Mapp and Bergman explained that family engagement means there is an equitable partnership among families, educators, and the community in schools. Mapp and Bergman posited that family engagement should be relational (built on mutual trust); linked to learning and development; asset-based; culturally responsive; and respectful, collaborative, and interactive. Mapp and Bergman suggested that engagement can contribute to phenomenal student outcomes when woven into the "fabric" of a school. Mapp's dual capacity-building framework was used to support the central research question, which is "What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools" I discuss the theoretical framework in more detail in Chapter II.

Researcher Experience/Perspective

I currently serve as the Director of Equity and Inclusion for Dogwood City Schools. I most recently held the position of Director of Federal Programs and English Learners, in which I was charged with leadership through oversight, monitoring, and compliance of all federal grants. I worked closely with schools, the finance department, and state officials to successfully implement federal expectations and guidelines while planning, budgeting, and managing over $8 million in state and federal budgets. Before central office administration, I served as a school principal at all levels from Pre-K through 12, as well as an elementary school teacher. I have also

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been a university supervisor for student interns and pre-service teachers. Lastly, I have contracted with the U.S. Department of Education as a competitive grant reviewer.

The superintendent appointed me to the Director of Equity and Inclusion position effective July 2020 after serving 5 years as Director of Federal Programs and English Learners. The new superintendent established restructuring of the Central Office administration while seeking to address cultural and structural racism existing in the school district. My current position allows me to continue to work with all of the employees, the families, and the community. Having served as an experienced administrator at each grade span, explicitly addressing these issues at the school and district level, my passion was observed and appreciated by others leading to a more intensive concentration on social justice on a greater scale.

I have proven strengths in facilitating the development of teachers' and principals' capabilities and students' skill levels, as well as a background in continuous improvement planning, curriculum, and instructional coaching, family and community engagement, fiscal planning and oversight, grant writing, and policy compliance and implementation, along with stakeholder collaboration within schools and across the district. A Gallup Report identified excellent developer, restorative, adaptability, includer, and analytical skill set exists within me. These attributes allow me to serve as an advisor, resource, and primary contact for leadership and staff in areas of equity, diversity, and inclusion, regularly meeting with all Equity Teams (district and school-based) to facilitate regular data reviews with discipline, student achievement, and other areas. My new position as Director of Equity and Inclusion alleviates possible negative effects of data collection that may have occurred while serving as the federal programs director.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative case study compared how two schools within the same school system approach family engagement and parental involvement. ESSA has created guidelines for parental involvement and parental engagement in schools. Schools have been tasked with working collaboratively with parents to provide opportunities for family engagement. Additionally, school systems must earmark Title I funds for family engagement. ESSA also requires school districts and Title I schools to build capacity for involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). North Carolina has a long history of providing inequitable education for students. According to the *Leandro v. North Carolina* ruling of 1997, "The right to a free public education is explicitly guaranteed by the North Carolina Constitution, and the people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right" (N.C. Const. art. I, §15).

This research study provided strategies for effectively implementing family engagement models in public schools in North Carolina to provide fair and equitable education. The schools in this study were specifically chosen because of their Title I status and demographics. Additionally, this study aimed to understand the experiences and perceptions of school-based administrators, district-level support personnel, and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in Title I schools. Upon completing this study, educators and other stakeholders will better understand the importance of family engagement and parental involvement in student achievement in underserved populations.

Overview of the Study

This research study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter I, I provided an overview of the importance of parental involvement and family engagement in Title I schools. Empirical

studies on parental involvement and familial engagement have discovered that parental involvement positively influences academic achievement and that parents from a higher socioeconomic status tend to be more involved in schools. Title I schools serve populations that do not have the same advantages as their affluent peers. Chapter I also included the statement of purpose and the significance of the study, research questions, and a general overview. Chapter II contains a literature review, which contains the historical background of the education system, policies, legislation and litigation, school finance, and the theoretical framework. Chapter III presents the study's methodology, population, data collection, and analysis procedures. I conducted a comparative case study of two elementary schools within a medium-sized school district to determine the success of evidence-based strategies for family engagement. This qualitative study considered parents and principals from each school in addition to central office professionals who support family engagement initiatives. Data were collected through interviews and observation. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Finally, in Chapter V, I summarize the findings and their implications for parents, teachers, and administrators and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement has long been recognized as a foundation of the consistent achievement of students and, ultimately, the potential strengthening of society. Historical American figures and current administrators believed that giving all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic origins, access to the most basic education alike can allow everyone to achieve their full potential. The concept of parental engagement is not new; it results from the evolution of the core beliefs members of our country have held important since the establishment of the first American colonies. Parents have always been an integral part of the education process. The collective desire of teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to foster the consistent academic success of their students has been a part of American culture since the beginning and continues to influence education policies today. However, school finance reforms have increased the achievement gap between low and higher-income school districts (Thro, 1989). This research study will address a gap in the literature on the impact of parental involvement in Title I elementary schools.

This Literature Review focuses on:

- Parent Involvement and Family Engagement

- Cultural (Special Populations) Configurations and Engagement

- School Finance and Achievement

- Conceptual/Theoretical Framework: Parental Involvement and Dual Capacity

Parental Involvement and Family Engagement

While it is generally accepted that parental engagement is key to our students' sustained and long-term success, it is also understood that finding ways to engage parents/families is a struggle that does not have a universal method for making this a reality. Therefore, it is important

to understand the difference between involvement and engagement. Parental involvement is when a parent participates in an activity, event, or situation (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), while parental engagement is the feeling of being involved in an activity (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Factors that can decrease the effects of outreach and engagement programs include but are not limited to cultural differences, immigrant families that are fearful of engagement, work schedules, familial obligations, language barriers, racial and cultural differences, and the lack of reliable transportation (Epstein, 2005). Auerbach (2010) published the results of her study into understanding the foundations of administrator perception and understanding the dynamics of piquing the interests of parents. Through the qualitative review of anecdotal data, she realized that steps to authentic engagement did not occur in discrete steps. Rather, the understanding of how to engage and the methods that will be most successful span across a continuum of interrelated activities and approaches (Auerbach, 2010).

The understanding that parental involvement was essential and would reap both qualitative and quantitative benefits for all parties involved has long been accepted. In their study, researchers Herman and Yeh (1983) noted after studying over 250 children across schools in California that regardless of socio-economic status, a parental presence made a marked difference in many facets of the school environment. Not only were students' motivation and grades consistently higher, but they also sustained positive attitudes. When parents and children have positive attitudes toward learning, students tend to be less disruptive throughout instruction, positively emboldening educators (Herman & Yeh, 1983). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested that parental engagement is more effective if rooted in the home and in an attitude that fosters learning because it positively affects student achievement.

It is also important to note there are many passive ways that parents can affect how a student performs in school. If the parents are intimidated and uncomfortable engaging with teachers, this perception of educators being the enemy can become part of the child's belief system. If a child distrusts the educator, the educator can misinterpret the student's behavior. Therefore, it is important to understand that one of the greatest barriers to engagement can be the parents' experience with education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). A negative cycle can be perpetuated throughout the child's educational experience, which will minimize their ability to reap the benefits of resources available to students (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). For example, if a child is wary of an educator or the educational system, not engaging with staff or stakeholders might preclude them from utilizing community resources like tutoring or scholarships for higher education. The student might come to believe they are not capable of succeeding in school.

The lack of a positive dynamic between the teacher and the student and their family can lead to the parent being unable to change the child's perception of their chances for a promising future. This can manifest itself as a feeling of helplessness in the parent, causing them to feel frustrated and angry. If the child has younger siblings, this scenario can have a "trickle-down" effect and might diminish their potential. Securing stronger partnerships between the home and the community and encouraging student voice could improve parental engagement and student achievement (Harris et al., 2009). Sanders (2005) also suggested that community involvement could approve school functioning. Communities can provide additional resources that schools need to educate students successfully.

In keeping with the one-size-does-not-fit-all mentality, it is important to acknowledge that a parent's level of participation in school outreach programs will vary widely due to multiple reasons (Cervone & O'Leary, 1982). Therefore, educators must not assume they know the

motives behind their actions or lack of response to invitations by educators. This is where engagement applies. By starting a conversation that puts the parents at ease, educators can pinpoint involvement gaps to encourage the parent to get involved. This can, in turn, lay the foundation for building mutual respect and trust (Harris et al., 2009).

Some parents are hesitant to engage with educators as they negatively perceive the outcome of their involvement with their children's schools. Since they can only go by their perspective at the outset of the engagement, they might not understand the positive impact of engagement. Research has shown that parental engagement positively impacts test scores, enrollment in rigorous classes, higher successful completion of classes, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates (Emerson et al., 2012). Once initial contact is made, where appropriate, a parent orientation should include an overview regarding the responsibility and opportunities to make a positive difference in the school community. Best practices should include understanding what parents already do with their children and how they are most likely to respond positively to engagement in their children's learning (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010). Where possible, if parents can be brought together early in their involvement, it can help them realize they are not alone in this new and sometimes intimidating experience (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010; Harris et al., 2009). Additionally, relationships between parents might be established, further strengthening their motivation to participate (Auerbach, 2010). Another positive reinforcement that can occur is a result of the newfound connections; parents feel a sense of accomplishment that can embolden them.

When studying the demographics of parents involved in their children's schools, the recurrent theme that researchers have encountered is that parents of minorities and parents from low-income households are disproportionately underrepresented when it comes to parental

involvement. Zhang et al. (2011) posited that parents with less education are less likely to help with homework because of a lack of skills to help. Race/ethnicity, in addition to socioeconomic status, contributes to parental involvement in school or at home. According to Zhang et al. (2011), White and Asian parents were more likely to be involved at school and less engaged at home. There are myriad reasons why minorities and low-income parents have lower levels of engagement. Some of the most common reasons include their uneasiness with encountering educators. Regardless of whether the parent has a high school education, they might fear not knowing what the educator is asking them. As a result, they may be reticent to ask questions to give them a basic understanding of what is expected of them to assist their children (Zhang et al., 2011). Students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be minorities in single-parent households, have parents with less education, and attend underfunded schools (Sirin, 2005).

Another area of concern is equity. Parents and families are considered influential in improving U.S. student outcomes and success. However, policymakers are now considering how there is a failure to build capacities and relationships with families from marginalized communities (Ishimaru, 2017). Ishimaru suggests that there are three strategies to build capacity and relationships. First, conventional parent involvement efforts intervene at the level of individual parents to build capacity. The goal is to build parental capacity to advocate for their child to ensure their success. Second, conventional approaches to parents are often unidirectional. Ishimaru suggests that schools find multiple ways to communicate with parents and build relationships. Third, asymmetric power relations infuse conventional strategies to engage parents in school. This strategy is about accessing resources, knowledge, and opportunities and building new relationships. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) also considered how schools could provide equitable partnerships with families. Kelty and Wakabayashi agreed

that building relationships was essential for supporting family engagement. Additionally, Kelty and Wakabayashi explained that inclusive activities and communication could positively impact family engagement.

Jacques and Villegas (2018) shared strategies for committing to equitable family engagement. The first is to plan strategically over time. According to Jacques and Villegas, equity practices should be a long-term effort to change the school staff's beliefs, perceptions, and regular practices. Second, schools should have school and district staff that reflect the school community to help inclusive family engagement. Third, Jacques and Villegas stressed the importance of building relationships and welcoming families in a consistently appropriate and culturally competent way. Fourth, it is important to build connections between community advocates and school staff. Finally, to build trust and relationships with families, it can be helpful for school staff to engage families in spaces or at events where families feel comfortable.

Another area of concern is the use of technology. A parent who is not proficient in technology may not be able to help students with homework or communicate with teachers. Technology has become a regular part of the school. However, it is a barrier to parental involvement. There is no equity, and some lower-income families may not have access to technology. Boutte and Boutte (2002) suggested that communications via email or learning management systems should have capabilities of meeting the diverse needs of parents. In a conference, should a teacher suggest that the child has a potential for academic improvement by accessing a computer while doing their homework, the parent can feel intimidated and embarrassed if they do not possess the correct technical jargon to elicit information from the educator. While that jargon might not be necessary, if the parent is uncomfortable, they might even be hesitant to use layman's terms (Herman & Yeh, 1983).

It is important to include broad explorations into understanding the demographics of parents in one's school to combat these scenarios. In the preparation stages of program development, it would be wise to have a task force that could delve into and explore the levels of understanding of current parental involvement. That can then be a foundation for a plan of parental engagement. Next, clearly and specifically detailing the strategies and methods used to engage and illicit involvement should be drafted. The system developed should be dynamic as opposed to static. The program ultimately implemented does not have to resemble the plan the stakeholders outline at the outset. Schools should employ culturally responsive strategies to engage culturally diverse groups and their parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Schools should assess services and accommodations for parents and address communication strategies. Best practices should include a parental involvement/engagement survey (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010).

Even though initial outreach to parents can seem daunting and unpleasant, the work is essential to opening the doors of communication (Boutte & Boutte, 2002; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). It is important to remember that people respond differently to different routes of engagement. For example, some parents prefer phone calls rather than emails and text messages instead of mailed newsletters. If resources can allow for it, layering communication with incentives can effectively encourage parents to participate. Constant contact is important in helping to minimize a parent's reluctance to participate, but some might consider initial calls to engage as unwanted solicitation (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010).

There is also a need to establish a positive culture of engagement. In other words, if possible, it would help improve and maintain the long-term success of family involvement if the sense of urgency and accomplishment of commitments were made and maintained inside the home. Schools should focus on interventions that link the behaviors of families, teachers, and

students to learning outcomes (Emerson et al., 2012). Educators are familiar with the push to have parents read to their young children daily. Considering the potential difficulties of marginalized families incorporating and following through with such a potentially unfamiliar task, strategizing before implementing could yield less resistance and greater results. By considering the unique family structures, educators can find personalized ways to subtly incorporate reading into a family's day (Zhang et al., 2011). Constantino (2015) suggested five principles for engaging every family. The five principles are creating a culture that engages every family, communicating effectively and developing relationships, building family efficacy, engaging every family in decision making, and engaging the greater community.

Parental involvement and engagement can be difficult when considering ELs (English Learners) and their families. Studies have shown that a home-school gap can develop when school learning is not reinforced at home (Panferov, 2010). According to Panferov (2010), building literacy skills, reading, and writing exposure at home is crucial. When a student lives in an extended family situation or is an immigrant, the educator could show the child and parent how to read to the older family members in English and then translate it into their primary language. For instance, the child can develop literacy and a sense of pride in teaching their grandmother or grandfather the language of their adopted country. The older family member who is reading can help support the child's reading development by being the "student." If the student's parent is the primary wage earner, this allows them to maintain a sense of control as the onus of responsibility to accomplish the task is not placed squarely on them. The mere reduction of stress alone might be a positive reinforcement. Finally, the parent might respond positively to the personalized suggestion of incorporation and feel truly supported and understood by the educator and associated stakeholders (Emerson et al., 2012; Panferov, 2010; Zhang et al., 2011).

Family Influences

This section of the literature review will focus on family influences and their impact on family engagement. The types of families include multigenerational, foster, homeless youth, and teen parents.

A multigenerational family is when multiple generations, extended families, and community members play a role in family engagement. The American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) population is known for strong familial connections. According to Bang et al. (2018), "families are the heart of the indigenous nations and communities" (p. 790). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires Title I schools (those serving low-income students), including the BIE (Bureau of Indian Education) schools, to have a family engagement policy (Bang et al., 2018). At least 1% of Title I funds must be spent on family engagement outreach and programs. A cultural disconnect exists between indigenous and non-indigenous learners and educators. Part of the family engagement plan should include building trusting and collaborative relationships with all family members. Bang et al. (2018) posited that creating opportunities for students to engage regularly with their cultural practices and in their language support academic achievement rather than hindering it.

Berlin et al. (2019) posited that the educational outcomes of children in longer-term foster care are determined by their parents' educational attainment, although previous studies on the topic have revealed that children in foster care are at risk for poor school performance. According to Werum et al. (2016), adoptive parents are more likely to invest their resources into their children. Werum et al. explained, "the intangible investments broaden their children's knowledge base, provide parents with a more in-depth understanding their child and steer their children toward positive influences" (p. 6). Foster parents do not have the same resources as

adoptive parents. Therefore, educators must encourage parental involvement to improve the academic success of children living in foster homes (Berlin et al., 2019).

Students who are experiencing homelessness or in transition face unique circumstances. The stress of being homeless acts as a barrier to academic success (Pergamit et al., 2016). Pergamit et al. (2016) suggested that closer links to schools could create additional opportunities to identify stressed families. Zhang et al. (2019) argued, "children in families experiencing homelessness face a wide range of risk factors, such as exposure to violence, poverty housing insecurity, low parental education, and parental incarceration" (p. 178). Therefore, family interventions are important to student success.

Teen parents are also facing challenges related to navigating school and parenting. Teen pregnancy changes the family dynamic as parents are often responsible for their children and their grandchildren. According to Lewin et al. (2015), "young maternal age remains a risk factor for adverse maternal and child short and long-term outcomes even after controlling for socioeconomic status" (p. 140). Lewin et al. posited that teen mothers are more likely to experience significant stressors such as limited education and poverty. Molborn and Jacobs (2015) posited that teen parents' co-parenting relationships positively impact their children.

Barriers to Family Engagement

Communication and culture are barriers to family engagement. Family engagement is essential to student achievement. A common complaint of educators is that parents are not involved in their children's education (T. L. Baker et al., 2016). Poor communication is a significant barrier that makes parents perceive that school is less family-friendly (T. L. Baker et al., 2016). T. L. Baker et al. (2016) posit that the staff perception of communication barriers focused on the problem of parent contact. Lowenhaupt (2012) explained that family engagement

practices were unequal and that schools should create meaningful connections and "promote greater cooperation, commitment, and trust" (p. 3).

Demographic changes have created significant changes in public school enrollment in the U.S. (Lowenhaupt, 2012). Over the last decade, there has been an increase in Spanish-speaking English learners (ELs). Therefore, culturally competent practices are necessary to encourage family engagement in schools. Lowenhaupt (2012) encouraged schools to reevaluate how they promote family engagement and create policies and practices that focus on equity. Hubbard (2016) explained that schools do not consider all factors, which leads to a lack of parental engagement, such as economic and time constraints, lack of transportation, and an unwelcome school environment. Hubbard's study revealed a need for increased communication with parents. Hubbard said increasing communication could increase engagement for all families.

Local Education Agency Responsibilities and Family Engagement

Local school districts are responsible for increasing engagement through family-school partnerships. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), leadership is a driver for change. Good leadership is required to create a student-centered learning environment. Family engagement initiatives should also include teachers. Ferrara (2017) suggests that professional development is needed to help teachers interact with families with different cultural backgrounds, races, and socioeconomic statuses. The National Parent Teacher Association (20008) has created standards necessary for successful family-school partnerships. The first standard is, "families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class" (as cited in Ferrara, 2017, p. 146). Ferrara posited that family engagement should be common practice in

schools because studies have shown that family involvement increases academic achievement and results in fewer discipline problems.

Policymakers should promote equitable collaboration. Research on family engagement and education has shown that parents and families are essential in improving student outcomes and success (Ishimaru, 2017). Family engagement should include equitable community and school collaborations (Ishimaru, 2017). Equitable collaboration means that communities and families must have an equal voice in constructing school policies. Ishimaru (2017) encourages schools and local districts to have family-driven programming to build welcoming climates and trust with educators. Schools should become "culture brokers" to build relationships with parents. The idea of culture brokers is important in areas where cultural barriers exist. School districts must prioritize family engagement to maintain student success.

Community Stakeholders

Building partnerships to support student learning has been credited with improving schools and strengthening families and neighborhoods (Stefanski et al., 2016). According to Stefanski et al. (2016), school-community partnerships have long been viewed as promising in helping struggling students and families. Stefanski et al. (2016) used the community development model to support their research. The study results revealed a power gap between public institutions and families, and school-community partnerships should be encouraged. Epstein and Sheldon (2016) also believe that more should be done to encourage school, family, and community partnerships. Epstein and Sheldon explained that partnership programs should engage families, especially those who are "hard to reach" (p. 210).

Comer (Comer et al., 1999) suggested that we must keep pace with our changing society to reform schools. For example, educators must consider the challenges that children and

families face, such as child development, learning, and the ability or inability of the adult at home, in schools, and in the community. Epstein and Sheldon (2016) posited that school-family and community partnerships required strong leadership. Torre and Murphy (2016) concurred with other scholars who shared that parents are important to students' success in schools and school improvement. According to Torre and Murphy (2016), "school leaders interested in nurturing the norms of membership are more successful when they direct environmental press towards creating positive relationships in the service of school improvement and student learning" (p. 211). Additionally, Torre and Murphy explained that parents should be given many opportunities to collaborate with community and school leaders in a meaningful way.

Government agencies also play a key role in promoting partnerships between schools and communities. For example, ESSA focuses on advancing equity for America's disadvantaged and high-needs students. ESSA maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools. Wechsler et al. (2016) posited that policies and programs must be created to engage families in meaningful ways. Research on family engagement finds that high levels of engagement result from strong family partnerships (Wechsler et al., 2016).

Cultural (Special Populations) Configurations and Engagement

This section of the literature review will explore cultural configurations and engagement. The populations of interest were free and reduced lunch families, exceptional families, and English Learners (EL).

Poverty adversely affects a student's ability to learn. The U.S. provides the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program to provide access to free and reduced lunch for students (Altindag et al., 2020). The NSLP was established in 1946 to provide

nutritious school meals to lower-income students. According to Altindag et al. (2020), universal school lunch programs would reduce the stigma of receiving free or reduced lunch. In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act updated the nutrition standards of the NSLP. Lunches, regardless of the source, are opportunities for parents and schools to reinforce healthy habits (Briley et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2011).

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires that a free and appropriate public education be offered to eligible children with disabilities. Teachers are tasked with creating IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) for children with disabilities. Teachers are required to extend an invitation for parents to attend and provide input on their children's strengths and weaknesses. Parental involvement is important in ensuring that an exceptional child's needs are met. O'Toole et al. (2019) posited that parent involvement positively affects their child's education. O'Toole et al. explained that schools should seek partnerships with parents and respect their contributions because they are the experts. Damianidou and Phitaka (2018) suggested that involving parents in decision-making might improve special needs children's well-being and performance.

Parents of English Learners (ELL) are less likely to participate in school activities due to their limited English proficiency. According to Weiss' (2011) study, 92% of immigrant parent participants had some or much involvement in their child's education. The majority of non-involved participants cited a lack of English proficiency as a reason why they did not participate in parent-teacher conferences. Most school officials know that there is a need for more English learner parental involvement, family engagement, and improved communication (Weiss, 2010). According to Sanchez (2018), an achievement gap involves students with large Latino and African American populations, families of low socioeconomic status (SES), and English Language Learners. Parental involvement is linked to academic and social success in children.

Sanchez (2018) posited that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning, and parents should actively be involved in their child's education. Schools must work to break down communication barriers and increase parental involvement for English Language Learners.

Ethnic Configuration and Engagement

This section of the literature review includes an overview of race and parental engagement and a discussion of the challenges that African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites face in parental involvement/engagement.

It is well documented that minorities and lower-income families have less favorable parental engagement. However, many factors contribute to lower parental engagement. In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, required states to provide equal access to education. Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the opinion of the unanimous court. According to Chief Justice Earl Warren, "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Parents like Oliver Brown wanted their daughter (Linda) to attend the best school possible. Black parents were involved during this time and encouraged their children to value education. Over the years, minority parents have been less active in schools. According to Barton et al. (2004), parental involvement is about what parents do in school. Barton et al. (2004) believe it is important to consider the structural barriers to parent participation. Barton et al.'s study showed that parental engagement should focus on communication and helping the parents see that they have a place in their child's education.

War on poverty legislation was another attempt to decrease the achievement gap and provide opportunities to lower-income and disadvantaged students (minorities and economically disadvantaged). Programs such as Title I encourage parents to participate actively in their

children's education. Mizell (1979) posited that creating parent councils could improve education. Head Start is another program developed to close the achievement gap. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (2003), children who attend Early Head Start make significant progress in acquiring language, literacy, and math. Head Start programs also increase parental engagement because they work with families to ensure that children have access to needed services. A report on the multicultural principles for Head Start programs suggested that it is important to respect and incorporate families' cultures into the systems and services provided (U.S. DHHS, 2010).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was another opportunity to address the achievement gap in schools. NCLB was supposed to empower parents with decision-making powers and provide them with opportunities to choose the best schools for their students. NCLB's emphasis was on providing equal to quality education to minorities, low-income populations, and low-income populations. Howard and Reynolds (2008) discovered that increasing numbers of African American students were finding their way to more affluent areas and better schools. However, African American students lag in reading, writing, and math proficiency. African American students face challenges because they often attend schools with underqualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning materials. Students with educated parents tend to score higher on achievement tests and have greater access to resources (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

White and Asian parents are typically more active in schools. Research on the relationship between parental involvement and achievement varies by race. Cultural factors and cultural capital often contribute to academic achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). For example, Lee and Bowen's study found that European American parents were more involved in school and

less involved in managing their children's schedules outside of school. Lee and Bowen (2006) also found that poverty and race/ethnicity played a significant role in predicting children's academic success.

The focus of this study is to consider the impact of parental involvement in Title I schools. The target population was Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. The study is not about American Indian, Asian, and multiracial, but it is important to consider parental involvement and the cultural capital of these minority groups.

AIAN (American Indian and Alaska Native) families are reluctant to trust the educational system and the American government. It is well documented that indigenous people have strong family ties and have supported their extended families and communities for a while. According to Bardhoshi et al. (2016), minority and lower-income parents have not always felt welcome in schools, which is one reason why they do not support their children's school experience. Bardhoshi et al. (2016) posited that the European-centric teaching model, feeling unwelcome in school, and negative experiences with education discourage American Indian parental involvement. Skousen (2018) posited that improving parental involvement would decrease the achievement gap between American Indians and Non-Indian students. The negative experiences that AIAN families face in schools are similar to other people of color.

A group with high parental engagement is Asian Americans. The term associated with Asian American parents is helicopter parenting. Helicopter parenting is a 'developmentally inappropriate form of over-involvement' (Kwon et al., 2017). Asian American children often exhibit stronger math and reading skills (Gibbs et al., 2017). Socioeconomic status is related to Asian American student achievement because parents are more educated and tend to invest more resources. Gibbs et al. (2017) explained that Asian American parents have a high educational

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expectation for their children and play a key role in their children's success. Butts (2017) noted that Asian American parents might recognize their child's disability while refusing formally to accept special education services from schools. Butts' (2017) study on special education and parental support is contrary to Kwon et al.'s (2017) and Gibbs et al.'s (2017) studies, which claimed that Asian American parents pressure their children to achieve academically.

Children who are multiracial face challenges based on their multiple racial identities. According to Chavez (2019), "For multiracial students who may not feel like they belong to any racial group, developing a sense of belonging in school and with peers must be incredibly important in supporting a healthy identity" (p. 1). Chavez (2019) posited that school belonging and academic achievement are related to student success. Brown (2009) explained that it is important for schools to develop partnerships with multiracial families. According to Brown (2009), positive relationships between parents and teachers lead to empowerment and improved community relationships. Brown (2009) encourages teachers to use cultural reciprocity to foster family relationships.

Parental involvement varies in urban and rural areas. Jeynes (2007) studied the relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school achievement. Jeynes's (2007) research is similar to other scholars who found a statistically significant effect of parental involvement on educational outcomes. Jeynes (2007) also found a relationship between parental support, race, and educational outcomes. Most studies on race and parental involvement focus on Black students in urban areas. However, Hispanic parents often have a low level of parental engagement in urban and rural areas. Hispanic parents' disengagement in schools occurs for many reasons. The most common reasons are language barriers, a lack of trust, a lack of understanding, and the education level of the parents (Smith et al., 2008).

Hispanic parents encourage their children to respect authority and work hard, but they often feel unwelcome at school because of communication issues. Some interventions, which could help parental engagement, are translating communication into Spanish, offering English language instruction after hours, and treating Hispanic students equitably. Immigrant parents often face multiple barriers to engagement (Isais, 2020). Despite the barrier, immigrant parents have high expectations for their children's education and desire to be involved in their children's educational journey (Isais, 2020). According to Isais, children from diverse backgrounds do better when families and school staff work together to bridge the gap between home and school. Isais evaluated a parent engagement workshop series held in a school district with a culturally diverse population. The school district used multiple methods to recruit Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers. Twenty mothers participated in the workshops. The workshops supported parents who wanted to become more active in their children's schools. A survey was distributed at the end of the 10 workshops. One participant wrote, "We each shared our points of view, we each learned from each other, and I have learned a lot" (Isais, 2020, p. 41). The workshops were presented by bilingual facilitators, which helped parents feel more comfortable. A takeaway from the study was that parents want to be in an environment where they could truly ask questions to understand the provided information and thus feel supported.

Race to the Top is another program involving the educational outcomes for underserved children. The goal of Race to the Top was to close the achievement gap and support all students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. States were given grants to identify the most effective interventions. The ESSA (2015) is the most recent attempt at improving parental engagement. Title I funds must include a plan for parental engagement. The ESSA also requires schools to identify barriers to greater participation in activities for parents who are economically

disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, and of any racial and ethnic background (ESSA, 2015).

Challenges and Barriers Based on Race

Academic achievement is often linked to parental involvement. African American students face many challenges related to the achievement gap. Parental involvement in the African American community was higher in the 1960s, according to James Coleman's (1966) study. According to Coleman (1966), the average minority group is often in classes with pupils whose mothers are less educated. Coleman (1966) posited that "Negro" children, their parents, or both are highly directed toward the school system as a means toward social mobility (p. 192). Sylvestre (2018) posited, "Black parents have been positioned as disinterested in the school system" (p. 1). Sylvestre (2018) agrees with other scholars that improved student performance is linked to academic achievement. Lareau and Harvat (1999) believe that Black parents have experienced racism in school and do not trust educators to treat their children fairly. Therefore, educators must work harder to achieve desirable family-school relationships based on trust, cooperation, and deference.

According to Sylvestre (2018), structural and systemic problems continue to marginalize minority students, and a need exists for robust strategies to eliminate barriers and increase parental engagement. Mendez (2010) suggested that intervention programs to promote parental involvement should start in preschool. Mendez's (2010) study focused on African American families with children in Head Start. The study findings were the children who participated in Head Start with high parental involvement were more successful in social and cognitive development. Promoting family involvement and relationships with schools and the community at an early age will increase parental engagement.

Parental involvement in schools is tied to academic achievement. However, Latino youth are the least educated in the United States (Ceballo et al., 2014). Ceballo et al. (2014) posited that the underperformance of Latino students is due to poverty, enrollment in lower-quality schools, English language difficulties, and discrimination. The major obstacle to parent involvement is the inability of parents to speak and understand English (Smith et al., 2008). Smith et al. (2008) suggested that providing translators, sending communication home in Spanish, and understanding the importance of culturally responsive teaching and learning would improve parental involvement in schools. Ceballo et al. (2014) suggested that parental involvement in schools and academic outcomes was higher among immigrant youth. Jeynes (2007) found a significant relationship between parental involvement, academic achievement, and overall outcomes. Jeynes (2007) argued that parental involvement overall was associated with better school outcomes. Klugman et al. (2012) explained that it is also important to understand the myriad of Hispanic cultures and traditions. Klugman et al. (2012) suggested, "Schools should focus on building and maintaining strong co-ethnic networks among parents and children to create meaningful opportunities to engage with the formal education system" (p. 1335). The academic achievement of ELL students will improve if schools focus on finding ways to be inclusive and welcoming to immigrant parents.

Parental involvement in schools for White families is never discussed in isolation. Most studies show that White children benefit from increased parental engagement in schools due to high educational attainment and higher socioeconomic status. However, White parents spend less time interacting with their parents at home. Jeynes (2007) posited that parental involvement is more likely when children live in two-parent households regardless of race. Jeynes (2007) suggested that children raised in middle-class environments thrive more in school. Working-class

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parents place less emphasis on the importance of school. White parents are also more likely to

participate in the PTO/PTA, but there is a disconnect with parental involvement at home. White

families are also more likely to live in better communities, have better access to materials, and

have extensive social networks with ties to the school and community (Park & Holloway, 2017;

Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) argued that using parents' cultural capital could improve parental

involvement and school culture. Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) posited that people who speak

the "language" of the White privileged class have more opportunities in schools. Therefore, the

key to increasing parental involvement is knowing what "language" parents speak and leveraging

their social and cultural capital.

School Finance and Achievement

School finance and achievement are shared responsibilities between governments at the

local, state, and federal levels. President Thomas Jefferson suggested, "Every government

degenerates when trusted to the rulers of people alone. An amendment of our state constitution

must here come in aid of public education. The influence over government must be shared

among all people" (as cited in Thro, 1989, p. 2). The federal government provides funds for

schools through grants to support Title I, Head Start, special education, and student achievement.

According to Thro (1989), although students are provided free public education, disparities exist

in the amount available to the individual school district. The disparities in funding inhibit the

achievement of the overall system of high-quality public education (Thro, 1989). This section of

the literature review will focus on federal and state contributions to schools and the impact on

achievement and equity, and litigation and court mandates.

American public schools are usually funded by a revenue-sharing agreement between

schools and the local government. Schools are primarily funded through property taxes. In the

1950s, states lost their autonomy to manage schools when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that the separate but equal doctrine did not promote equity in education. In the 1960s, a group of legal scholars argued that local school finance violated federal and state statutes because student disparities in school funding existed on low property tax bases (Lafortune et al., 2018).

Federal legislation and policies, which address equity in school achievement, promote equity in schools. IDEA mandates that students access FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education). The 1965 ESEA established Title I to address inequities in schools. Project Head Start took away barriers to education for lower-income families. No Child Left Behind required states to follow federal mandates on standardized testing to address the achievement gap. Finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to address achievement gaps for disadvantaged and high-needs students. All of these policies require states to take accountability for student achievement.

Hanushek and Raymond (2005) posited that school accountability leads to improved student achievement. NCLB (No Child Left Behind) requires states to be accountable for educating their students. Each state has developed its own standards and assessments. However, Hanushek and Raymond question whether state accountability standards and assessments marginalize minorities and special education students. Hanushek and Raymond recommend that states focus on specific gap groups that need more support. Federal policies like NCLB seemed to marginalize students. According to Hanushek and Raymond (2005), "It should be a very high priority to ensure that all of our students do gain the skills that will be needed as our economy grows and evolves" (p. 323).

NCLB and ESSA required states to reevaluate teacher performance standards. Under NCLB (No Child Left Behind), only highly qualified teachers could teach in a classroom. According to Kraft (2018), teachers had to meet three criteria to be highly qualified. The criteria include possessing a bachelor's degree, holding full state certification, and demonstrating subject area compliance. President Obama also made a provision for teacher performance in ESSA. The Race to the Top gave states grants to reward them for improving student achievement. Part of the Race to the Top criteria was to evaluate teachers based on student achievement on standardized tests. Kraft (2018) posited competitive grants are effective at incentivizing reform. However, Kraft said, "reforms are only good if states were willing to change laws and politically controversial reforms" (p. 81).

Harris et al. (2016) analyzed the federal role in PreK-12 education. According to Harris et al. (2016), the federal government's role has decreased since legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and legislature such as IDEA, Title I, Title IX, and ESEA. Harris et al. stated, "since education is so important to individuals' success, it is also a tool for addressing what is widely seen as one of the nation's most pressing problems: wealth and income inequality" (p. 5). Harris et al.'s research is similar to other scholars who see equity as a barrier to student achievement. Harris et al. explained that four principles define the federal role in education. First, the federal government is responsible for providing equal educational opportunities. Second, the federal government should provide compensatory funding to facilitate access to educational opportunities for high-need students. Third, the federal government should support education research and development. Finally, the federal government should support the development of conditions to promote continuous improvement of state and local systems.

Policymakers in states are responsible for the distribution of state and federal funds. Title I funds are distributed to states and then local school districts. The problem is equity. The assumption is that federal aid to public schools promotes equity because it provides more resources in places with high poverty (Liu, 2007). However, Title I only represented 5-10% of the total revenue in over 1,200 school districts in 2003-2004. According to Liu, students in higher poverty areas often receive fewer funds under the current Title I formula. Liu suggests that the state expenditure factor should be eliminated. Liu stated, "This component of Title I, perhaps more than any other, frustrates equity across states, districts, and schools" (p. 33).

Lafortune et al. (2018) discussed school finance reform and student achievement in their 2016 study. Lafortune et al. (2018) explained that school finance reforms are necessary because many districts are not receiving enough funds to provide for student achievement. Additionally, many school districts do not invest the same amount of money per pupil because of the tax-revenue sharing agreements at the local level. For example, one school district may spend $3,400 per pupil while another may spend $11,000 per pupil. Lafortune et al. (2018) encourage finance reform because disparities exist between high- and low-income districts, negatively affecting student achievement.

Equity and School Finance Reforms

School finance reforms have occurred in three waves. The first wave involved efforts to use the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment to overturn financing systems. The second wave-involved litigation to challenge disparities in school funding based on state equal protection and due process clauses. The third wave challenged the inadequacy of a state's funding system and used litigation based on educational clauses in the state constitution. It is

generally accepted in the U.S. that all state-distributed resources must be distributed equally (Underwood, 1994). However, resources are being distributed unequally.

According to Underwood (1994), there are three kinds of inequality in educational opportunities. The first educational inequality is innate. This inequality exists because children have varying abilities. Social and economic conditions that governmental policies have not caused have created the second kind of educational equality. The third kind of educational inequality is caused by the state's actions or omissions related to educational funding. Heise (2017) reported that since school finance litigation started in the 1970s, there have been at least 60 lawsuits and 15 Supreme Court cases related to the school finance system. Heise (2017) stated that school districts in property-rich areas benefit from high tax revenues generated by low tax rates. Therefore, it is important to consider the disparities in per-pupil spending and the impact on student achievement. It is well documented that students in lower-income areas are underperforming in schools due to a lack of resources and the inability to hire qualified teachers. According to Heise (2017), school finance litigations are more about adequacy than equity. Heise (2017) explained, "all children are entitled to an education of at least a certain quality and that more money is necessary to bring the worst school districts up to minimum levels mandated by state education clauses" (Heise, 2017, p. 1863).

School finance reforms also affect teachers. Brunner et al. (2018) posited that school districts with strong teachers' unions push for increased spending on teacher compensation. Conversely, schools with weak unions do not prioritize teacher compensation, which leads to overcrowded classrooms and negatively affects student achievement. Brunner et al. (2018) found that unions played a critical role in determining the amount of state aid used for educational

expenditures and allocating these funds. B. D. Baker (2018) posits that money matters. Higher-performing schools often have access to resources such as technology.

Conversely, schools in lower-income areas receive less funding because of a low tax base, which contributes to negative educational outcomes. Brittain et al. (2019) explained that regional finance and desegregation plans could enhance educational equity. Brittain et al. (2019) recommend that school districts collaborate to understand what equity means in their region and provide resources for the best educational outcomes for all students.

Litigation and Court Mandates

Leandro v. State challenged school equity in North Carolina. Plaintiffs in the *Leandro* case alleged that children in poor school districts were not receiving a sufficient education to meet minimal standards for a constitutionally adequate education (Justia Law, n.d.). The plaintiffs alleged that children in their school district were denied equal access to education and not given the same opportunities as wealthier school districts. The plaintiffs in the case complained about inadequate school facilities and poor-quality teachers. The plaintiffs in the *Leandro* case also noted that the state funding system did not consider the burdens faced by urban school districts. The majority opinion in the *Leandro* case was, "In essence, I believe that our constitutional framers intended for all students to have equal access to public schools and substantially equal educational opportunities" (Justia Law, n.d.).

The Leandro ruling applies to English learners in North Carolina classrooms today. Under *Leandro v. State*, the North Carolina Constitution guarantees equitable education for students enrolled in public schools (Hudson, 2017). Hudson (2017) posited that the state of North Carolina is not offering EL (English learners) a sound basic education. A new case *Leandro II* included plaintiffs from Hoke County. The plaintiffs, in this case, presented data showing that

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disparities existed in funding that affected test scores, student graduation rates, and educational and employment opportunities. The Hoke County plaintiffs successfully proved that they failed to obtain a "Leandro-comporting" education (Hudson, 2017, p. 465). The state Supreme Court held that both state action and inaction contributed to students' deprivation of constitutional rights, and Hoke County failed to address the need of at-risk students. At-risk students in Hoke County are EL students. The Leandro ruling held that the state had a distinct burden concerning "at-risk" students such as EL students.

Parker (2019) posited that states should be held accountable for providing an equitable education. According to Parker, local governments cannot make up the difference when state funding decreases. The result is that the number of teachers decreased, and class sizes increased. Parker stated, "It is imperative that education systems are being properly funded because the future of America depends on the quality of school systems" (Parker, personal communication, March 20, 2017). Therefore, states must invest resources in ensuring that all students succeed.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

The theoretical framework used in this study is the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (2013), which was created by Karen Mapp with support from Paul Kuttner and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education. This section of the literature review includes the origin of the theory and an analysis of studies that have effectively used the theory in research.

Dual Capacity-Building Theory

Mapp developed the dual capacity-building framework. The dual capacity-building framework was formulated using research on effective family engagement and developing home-school partnerships. Dr. Mapp encouraged educators to examine their perceptions about each

family's role in fostering the success of their student's education to determine if they view the landscape of education through an "asset" or "deficit" lens. Understanding how parents view their children's education can help minimize incorrect perceptions of the parents they will be tasked with engaging. Additionally, this assessment can help expose any incorrect biases that may hold at the outset of the engagement. Dr. Mapp implores teachers to always positively approach the initial communication with families using ways that entice and excite family members and keep them interested in continuing to communicate with educators.

Henderson and Mapp's (2002) study on school, family, and community connections examined the impact of increasing parental engagement on student achievement. The key finding from Mapp and Henderson's study was that programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their student learning are linked to higher student achievement. Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded, "To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills" (p. 38). Mapp continued to study educational partnerships with schools and families at elementary schools in Boston. According to a survey about parental engagement, at least 90% of parents participated in at least one home or school-based family engagement activity, although the school was in an urban setting with parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Mapp (2003), most parents are interested in their children's success in school and desire to help them succeed. The parents in the study explained that when school personnel initiate communication and provide a welcoming environment, families are more willing to participate in school activities. Mapp (2003) suggested that if schools support a family culture where all community members are respected and honored, parents engage in partnerships to support student learning.

Mapp also researched parental involvement in high school. Mapp et al. (2008) studied the transformative benefits of high school family centers. One of the principals who was interviewed for the study said, "I don't believe that you can get student achievement done without your parents. They must be part of the process. They're not an add-on" (p. 339. It is well documented that building partnerships with parents play a critical role in child development and student achievement. However, studies have only looked at the influence of family partnerships at the primary school levels. A study conducted by (Walker et. al, 2005) revealed three key components involved in successful parental engagement in education. The first is "role construction," where parents' cultural norms and values influence their decision-making and participation in school activities. The second is the parent's sense of self-efficacy. Parents with high self-efficacy are more likely to be involved in their children's education. The third component is the parents' "sense of invitation." The school culture and environment contribute to whether parents feel welcome. Parents who feel welcome are more likely to be motivated to engage in school activities (Mapp et al., 2008).

In Mapp's view, parental engagement should always be about academics and not student behavior (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Mapp outlined the challenges, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and family and staff capacity necessary for improving family-school partnerships. The challenges are a lack of opportunities for school/program staff and families to build partnerships. Opportunity conditions can be divided into two areas. Process conditions are linked to learning, relational, focused on development, and collaborative and interactive. Organizational conditions are systemic, integrated, and sustained and can contribute to ineffective relationships.

According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), effective family-school partnerships will create a welcoming and inviting culture, connect family engagement to learning, and encourage collaboration. When developing the dual capacity framework, Dr. Mapp laid forth the essential steps in developing effective and impactful school-family partnerships. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) shared six guidelines for developing family-school partnerships, such as providing training and support for both educators and families, integrating family engagement standards and measures into educator evaluation systems, leveraging funds and resources from multiple sources, creating staff positions dedicated to family engagement, focusing on school improvement rather than procedural compliance, and making student and school data accessible. A monitoring report issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education found that family engagement was the weakest area of compliance by states (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Research Studies That Used the Dual Capacity-Building Framework

Several studies have addressed inequities in African American student achievement using the dual capacity-building framework. Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) studied how race and disability produce complex challenges for school leaders. Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) suggested that schools should be less focused on academic achievement and more focused on addressing inequities in student learning. School leaders can build partnerships through the use of culturally responsive evidence-based strategies. Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) used the dual capacity framework to develop practices to improve communication and engagement between teachers, parents, families, and the community. Mac Iver et al. (2018) conducted a case study on how family engagement tends to decline during the transition from middle school to high school. Mac Iver et al.'s (2018) study used the dual capacity-building framework as the

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theoretical foundation for their analysis of a continuous approach to family engagement. Mac Iver et al. (2018) recommended that school-family partnerships be built while students are in middle school and continue to transition into high school. Buy-in from families will be easier because they will consider the partnership and investment in their children's futures.

Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) used the dual capacity framework as a lens for understanding inequities associated with African American achievement. Clark-Louque and Latunde studied disproportionalities at majority-minority schools, disabilities, discipline, and gifted and talented programs (GATE). The dual capacity framework emphasizes the importance of establishing home-school partnerships and their relationship with student achievement. Clark-Louque and Latunde suggested that schools focus their resources on community engagement in marginalized communities. According to Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019), "In this time of reflection on segregation, desegregation, and now re-segregation, school leaders continue to strive to close the achievement gap" (p. 6). Additionally, Clark-Louque and Latunde added that culturally proficient leaders should increase inclusive policies and practices.

Conclusion

This review of literature explored the history of public education in the United States, the role of family engagement in schools, school equity, and the unique needs of minority students, federal legislation, local and state school district responsibilities, and school finance reform. The literature review provides a foundation for the research study. The emerging theme was that family engagement increased student achievement, and partnerships with families and communities were necessary. School equity is important because all students must receive an appropriate education according to the U.S. Constitution.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways that two Title I schools within the same school district implement, promote, and maintain family/community engagement programs. Furthermore, the study considered how each school utilizes federal funds for family engagement. Federal law requires that funds must be earmarked for family engagement. According to ESSA (2015), schools must reserve at least 1% of their Title I funds to support family engagement activities, and parents must be part of the process. The aim of this study was to understand which programs are successful in addressing family engagement and improving student achievement.

I interviewed the administrators (principals and assistant principals) at both schools. The assistant superintendent over federal programs and family engagement specialist were also interviewed based on their knowledge of expectations and intimacy with schools and/or families. A diverse representation of parents from each school was interviewed as well.

I also viewed the school improvement plans from each school, along with the Title I Family Engagement expenditures, to determine how funds were spent throughout the academic year and over the summer. This did not indicate spending plans, collaboration, and summative results. State and district testing documents were observed to determine how economically disadvantaged students and subgroups performed at various benchmarks.

Research Question

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

Specific Methodology

I employed a dual-site case study to analyze the impact of parental engagement in Title I elementary schools within the Dogwood City Schools district, along with the impact on student achievement. According to Yin (2014), a case study allows a researcher to study a phenomenon in a real-world context. Case studies favor collecting data in natural settings instead of relying on "derived" data (Yin, 2014). Case studies are the most common form of qualitative inquiry. Stake (1995) explained that the idea of case studies is different in many disciplines. However, according to Stake (1995), cases in educational research are people and programs. Merriam (1988) believes that a case is a phenomenon of some sort in a bounded context (Yazan, 2015). Yin (2014) explained that case study research is more likely to provide rich descriptions or insightful explanations.

Comparative case studies are highly effective in educational and social research. According to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), new approaches in qualitative research are necessary because of conceptual shifts in the social sciences concerning culture, context, space, and comparison itself. For example, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) conducted a comparative case study to examine how different material and ideological contexts affected the appropriation of learning-centered pedagogy in one country. This research is similar to this current study because my research compared how two schools in the same school district addressed family engagement and student achievement and met federal guidelines for the use of Title I funds.

Case study research was the most suitable research methodology for this study. Although all qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon, case study research allows researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue within its context to understand the phenomenon from participants' perspectives (Harrison et al., 2017). Harrison et al. (2017)

asserted, "Outcomes can lead to an in-depth understanding of behaviors, processes, practices, and relationships in context" (para. 34).

Setting

Cardinal County (all place names are pseudonyms) has an area of approximately 800 square miles with a population of just over 143,000 residents, according to the 2016 U.S. Census. The county is roughly 70 miles between the two largest cities in a Southeastern U.S. state. It is the 11th largest county in the state. The county is governed by a commissioner and manager structure. There are five members of the Board of Commissioners. The makeup is all White with one female. Cardinal County is located in the center of the state's east coast. Cardinal County is home to many local and statewide attractions. An immense national park, domestic park, popular museum, and center are all tourist attractions in the area.

Furniture continues to be the top output of the county, representing nearly 6,000 jobs. Many family units and residents have manufactured pieces for bedrooms, living rooms, decorative art, and case goods for shipment worldwide. Thirteen percent of the manufacturing workforce is in furniture. Additionally, Cardinal County comprises the head office of one of the largest plastics corporations. The industry has demonstrated an 84% growth over the past 10 years. For a few centuries, industrial fabric production has been an indispensable part of the county.

Dogwood City Schools is surrounded by a large district centrally located in Cardinal County. Oral history and some dated records show the inception of the Dogwood district by Quakers in the center of Cardinal County on approximately 200 acres of land. The school district, deemed traditionally nonurban by residents, was created from parts of Gum Tree and Roclan counties in 1779.

According to the most recent census estimates, Dogwood is the county seat of Cardinal County and has a population of 25,884 people. Cardinal County is regarded as an agricultural and manufacturing center with traditional textiles, furniture, and apparel industries. Cardinal has an estimated population of over 140,000 people. No public transportation system exists in Dogwood. However, due to the reduced industry and workforce needs in Cardinal County, several residents leave the area to work in neighboring Gum Tree County by way of regional or self-transportation. Cardinal County has one institution of higher education, which is Cardinal County Community College. It has been noted that after graduating from Dogwood High School, 45% of the Class of 2017 intends to attend a community college, technical, or trade school. The district has an approximate enrollment of 4,500 students within five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. A five-star Early Childhood Development Center houses a 10-classroom pre-kindergarten program in a recently renovated and partially rebuilt facility. Additionally, one of three zoo schools in the country is located within this public school unit.

Table 2. Subgroups 2019–2020 as of September 2019

Subgroups 2019-2020	Percent
Asian	1.6%
Black	14.2%
Hispanic	48.8%
Multi-racial	5.1%
White	30.1%
Academically & Intellectually Gifted	9.1%
English Learners	18.1$%
Students with Disabilities	13.5%

Dogwood City Schools comprises approximately eight square miles. The district has been recognized as a Top Ten School District for achieving one of the highest graduation rates at

92.7%. Additionally, all eight schools were acknowledged for meeting or exceeding growth standards as established by the state department. The public school unit was one of only three across its home state to achieve the honor in 2018.

It is important to note that Dogwood is not the sole school system in the area. Cardinal County Schools surrounds Dogwood City Schools. Cardinal County Schools has 29 schools (17 elementary, seven middle schools, six high schools, and an early college program in conjunction with the community college).

There was a very recent change in superintendents in Dogwood City Schools beginning mid-July 2019. The newly named superintendent was formerly the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. He has over 20 years in education, with just over 3 years serving Dogwood City Schools. Dr. Bark is originally from the Midwest yet held a middle school teacher position in a northern, neighboring county. He went on to serve as a middle school assistant principal there. His first principalship was at an elementary school within Cardinal County before returning to Gum Tree County as a middle school principal. Dr. Bark left the principalship to become Executive Director of Secondary Schools in Citrus County.

Central Office Staff

The number one and two positions are no strangers to the priorities of Dogwood City Schools. Early September brought an old face but new Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to the district. The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, a recent retiree, previously served as the Director of Elementary Education. Dr. Roberts is a seasoned educator with more than thirty years of experience in the field. She has served as a classroom teacher, lead teacher, and math coach. She worked in Cardinal County Schools for

many years before transferring to Dogwood City under a previous administration. Dr. Roberts is a state leader and recipient of awards for her commitment to math instruction.

The third individual in the hierarchy of the public school unit is the Executive Director of Human Resources. Ms. Fox became employed with the school system 19 years ago as the Public Information Officer. She was appointed to Human Resources in 2013. Ms. Fox was named interim superintendent for a couple of weeks during the superintendent search before returning to her previous position.

The structure and demographics of the remainder of the Central Office Administration are predominantly White, except for one Hispanic male. There are five males and four females at this level. Three of the nine central office administrators have been school-based administrators.

The central office of Dogwood City Schools is centrally located in the city. It serves approximately 4,500 students enrolled in five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, with 77.53% low-income students. The two schools selected for participation in the study are Pine Elementary School and Tarheel Elementary School. The schools are traditional neighborhood schools without special theme programs (i.e., Spanish Immersion, A+, etc.) like other elementary schools within the district. A traditional neighborhood school can be defined as a school assigned to all nearby children of a certain grade level and are free. They are so named and so assigned because of geography. Both schools are designated as Schoolwide Title I, with Pine Elementary serving 91.44% of students from economically disadvantaged households and Tarheel Elementary serving 67.80 % with the same characteristics.

Tarheel Elementary School students exceeded academic growth projections at 86.2 range on the End-of-Grade tests with a performance grade score of 72-B for the 2016-2017 academic year, while Pine Elementary School students met growth at 84.1 range with a performance grade

score of 54-D. However, for 2018–2019, all schools in Dogwood City Schools earned a school performance grade of a B or C. Two schools exceeded growth, and five schools met growth. See Tables 3 and 4. Tables 5–7 display 2016–2017 Student Characteristics, Teacher Qualifications, and 2019–2020 School Environment, respectively.

Table 3. Performance Grade Score History 2014–2015 to 2019–2020

Academic Year	Pine	Tarheel
2019-2020	56 = C	70 = B
2018-2018	56 = C	75 = B
2017-2018	54 = D	72 = B
2016-2017	55 = C	67 = C
2015-2016	58 = C	70 = B
2014-2015	47 = D	66 = C

Table 4. Academic Growth History 2014–2015 to 2019–2020

Academic Year	Pine	Tarheel
2019–2020	87.1 = Exceeded	77.1 = Met
2018–2019	87.1 = Exceeded	84.8 = Met
2017–2018	84.1 = Met	86.2 = Exceeded
2016–2017	77.0 = Met	74.5 = Met
2015–2016	93.5 = Exceeded	88.5 = Exceeded
2014–2015	78.6 = Met	90.3 Exceeded

Table 5. Student Characteristics

Characteristic	Pine	Tarheel
Kindergarten Readiness Percentage	78.5%	69.7%
Free/Reduced Meals Percentage	87.0%	64.5%

Table 6. Teacher Qualifications

Teacher Experience	Pine		Tarheel	
	n	%	*n*	%
Beginning Teachers	1.24	4.4	5.26	14.4
Provisional Teachers	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0
Experienced Teachers	26.8	95.6	31.15	85.6

Table 7. School Environment 2019–2020

Characteristic	Pine	Tarheel
Short-Term Suspensions	119.57	38.54
Long-Term Suspensions	0.00	0.67
In-School Suspensions	89.67	8.11
Chronic Absenteeism	8.42%	<5%
Students Per Internet Device	0.89	0.76
Book Titles Per Student	28.26	24.23
Wireless Access Points Per Classroom	1.95	1.10

Table 8. Per-Pupil Source of Funding 2019–2020

Funding Source	Pine	Tarheel
State	$8,264	$7,778
Federal	$1,900	$1,293
Local	$2,022	$1,975

Table 9. Use of Funds

Expense	Pine		Tarheel	
	Amount	Percent of District Budget	Amount	Percent of District Budget
Central Expenses	$294,398	6.6	$394,399	7.2
Employee Benefits	$1,065,230	23.8	$1,277,224	23.5
Instructional Equipment	$9,802	0.2	$13,133	0.2
Purchased Services	$207,695	4.6	$250,408	4.6
Salaries	$2,660,318	59.3	$3,194,377	58.7
Supplies & Materials	$247,016	5.5	$318,347	5.8

The demographics of the remainder of the Central Office Administration are predominantly White, except for one Black female and one Hispanic male. There are five males and six females at this level. There are currently two vacancies. The Director of Secondary Education and Director of Exceptional Children need to be filled soon. Four of the 10 central office administrators have been school-based administrators.

Study Schools

Pine Elementary School opened in 1958 and paid homage to a local industrialist of the city. The school was the first in the county to be integrated. During the 90s, the school hosted a year-round school calendar option. A full-time Parent Involvement Specialist was added to the faculty in 2004, along with an Assistant Principal. The Parent Involvement Specialist served in a Social Worker capacity and is no longer there due to attrition. This school was the only school in the district of its size to have these designated positions. Now, they are in a rotation with the other itinerant personnel, meaning Pine has a part-time Assistant Principal and Social Worker. The Parent Involvement Specialist position has become one district position serving all schools

combined with being a Volunteer Coordinator, among other duties on a part-time basis by a retiree.

Pine Elementary School currently serves less than 400 Kindergarten through fifth-grade students with two special needs classrooms. A high portion of English Learners warrant two and a half English as a Second Language Teachers to serve this school each day. The school has the highest percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price meals in the school district. This status affords them the warmth of many community volunteers like local church adoption and civic group selection for service. The school is located roughly three blocks from the hospital and across from a local dentist's office. It is on the same street as a medical plaza. Across the street from the school's front doors are low-income, Section 8 rental properties and apartments.

Tarheel Elementary School was the fifth elementary school to open in the district in 1963, the same year that the Central Office Administration building was constructed. Approximately 500 students attend Tarheel, the southernmost elementary school in the Dogwood district. This school was selected in 1969 to oversee the Learning Disabilities program and has provided an extra special for exceptional children since its inception. There is a daycare across the street from the school, along with middle-class homes. Tarheel has one ESL teacher and three Exceptional Children teachers. There is a full-time veteran Assistant Principal on staff at this school. Furthermore, Tarheel has a dynamic part-time Social Worker.

Sample Population/Unit Analysis

The sample population for this study included five parents and two administrators from both schools. An invitation was sent to each school requesting a school administrator and parent volunteers. Two Central Office personnel with knowledge of Title I family engagement were also interviewed, for a total of 11 participants. Creswell (2005) informs the pragmatist research

approach on *what* and *how* to research based on the consequences of actions. Thus, parents were necessary to garner intended knowledge from the interviews about their perceptions of family engagement within the district and schools.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods included interviews and program analysis. Interviews were used to gain feedback from parents and staff on family engagement practices in Pine Elementary School and Tarheel Elementary School. Interviews are cost-effective and can be valuable to gain insight into participants' experience with programs. The interview protocol, available in the Appendix, was used to understand stakeholders' perceptions of the central phenomenon in this study.

Program analyses were used in this comparative case study. I requested procurement documents from the finance department in both schools to gain knowledge about Title I expenditures in schools. Secondary data analysis allows researchers to reanalyze data that has already been collected for another purpose (Johnston, 2014). Johnston (2014) suggested that using secondary data is a flexible approach and can be used in several ways. Johnston's (2014) study found that secondary data analysis offers methodological benefits.

Essential procedures were followed before beginning the overall study (Creswell, 2009). First, the researcher obtained approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After approval from the IRB, the researcher collaborated with administrators to establish the specifics for interviewing. Next, selected participants were contacted to obtain informed consent. The one-hour or more interviews were conducted via Zoom, and recording of the audio took place. The interview recordings were transcribed without revealing the identity of participants,

schools, or the public school unit formerly known as the local education agency (LEA) or district.

Data Analysis Strategies

Data were analyzed following Saldaña's (2015) steps outlined in his coding manual for qualitative researchers. A code is a word or short phrase that assigns a summative "essence-capturing" to data (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3). The first step is pre-code. According to Saldaña, codes emerge as one collects data from notes, transcripts, or documents. Saldaña recommends writing down preliminary codes in a notebook. Some emerging codes are parental involvement, family engagement, student achievement, and building capacity. The second step is to discover the relationships between codes. According to Saldaña, a researcher is coding for patterns. The third step is codifying and categorizing. The final step is recoding and recategorizing.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke (2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2017), "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meanings within qualitative data" (p. 297). Thematic analysis provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns within and across data related to participants.

Trustworthiness/Ethical Considerations

The quality criteria for qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the confidence that truth can be found in research findings. Transferability is the degree to which the research can be replicated in different settings or participants. Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time. Finally, confirmability is the degree to which other researchers could confirm the findings.

Credibility is the equivalent of validity in qualitative research. Credibility establishes whether the research findings are plausible. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member checking can ensure credibility. Triangulation and member checking were used in this research study. Triangulation is when a researcher uses multiple sources of data. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were the data sources for this study. Member checking is used in qualitative research for soliciting participant insight on research findings (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking has several benefits. The first benefit is that member checking offers a chance for the researcher to detect personal biases. The second benefit is that member checking supports the ethical obligation to ensure the accurate presentation of participant narratives (Kornbluh, 2015). The third benefit is that member checking provides the researcher with an opportunity to gather additional details and address gaps in confusion (Kornbluh, 2015).

Transferability is the ability to generalize data within the setting, group, or population studies to persons, events, and activities not directly represented in the data collected (Creswell, J. W., and Creswell, J. D. 2018). Transferability can be ensured by providing thick descriptions. Providing a thick description is describing behavior, experience, and their context, so it becomes meaningful to an outsider.

Dependability involves the participants' evaluation of findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Process logs and researcher notes can be used to ensure dependability. The audit trail helps researchers be transparent and provide accurate information (Connelly, 2016).

Confirmability is the degree to which findings are consistent and can be repeated. Confirmability can be ensured by maintaining an audit trail. According to Connelly (2016),

qualitative researchers keep detailed notes of all their decisions and their analysis as it progresses. I used field notes and an audit trail to ensure confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report (U.S. DHHS, 1979) provides ethical principles and guidelines for research involving humans. There are three basic principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. According to the Belmont Report, respect for persons means, "Individuals should be treated as autonomous agents." Beneficence means that people should be treated ethically. Justice is defined as "fairness in distribution" or "what is deserved" (U.S. DHHS, 1979). Informed consent is a way to ensure respect for persons. Informed consent provides participants with research procedures, purposes, risks, and anticipated benefits (U.S. DHHS, 1979). Informed consent is essential for ethical practices (Zhong et al., 2019). Informed consent was used in this study to inform participants about the risks and benefits of participating in this research study.

Researcher Positionality

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state the importance of building rapport with participants in qualitative data collection. They also mention the examination of power relations in the research act itself. Each contributor in this study knew I was a current central office administrator and a past building level administrator within the district. Employees also realized my professional knowledge of federal grant expectations for programming and spending due to my job experience and provided training.

I avoided the temptation to self-blame should unfavorable findings surface at either site. Any strengths or weaknesses revealed would potentially be used after the conclusion for correction of organizational practice. As a leader of continuous improvement, I will always monitor myself for the scrutiny of others. The researcher-participant relationship is critical as I

am more than likely viewed as someone with insider/outsider status. While it may be easy for me to understand all responses, the same may not be true for the individuals providing the responses. I am aware of the influence I have on the topic being studied and how the research process may affect each of us.

Limitations

Several limitations could have affected the outcome of this study. Three that could have had the greatest impact are population size, researcher resources, and ethical incentivizing. In this study, only those involved with the two schools selected were used for the study. First, since the sample polled in this study was small, I was worried its results might not be able to be extrapolated and applied to a larger school district. However, the results may be used to suggest what can be expected if this study were scaled and repeated on a larger population. Second, there was only one researcher responsible for advising, administering, and analyzing the results of the information obtained for the study, which affected the scope of the study in terms of population size queried, the analyses, and synthesizing of information.

Next, the information procurement from the Finance Department of the school system and the schools' respective treasurers could have limited the amount of information obtained, which was essential to completing this study. While response times were not expedient, thankfully, this was not an issue. The procurement records were requested and secured of Title I Parent Involvement expenditures. Since records had to be requested from the members of the Finance Department, some school staff members might have felt that any time allocated to collating and providing information for the study would negatively impact the deadlines required of them by their supervisors. However, all of our district staff members understood viewing expenditures of how federal funds are received and then disbursed is deemed public information,

which can infer that accurately and succinctly requesting information via the most direct and proper channels should facilitate timely furnishing of records needed for review.

As with most studies, time was also a factor. I wanted to conduct an equal number of interviews at each school site, but I was unable to obtain an interested Black parent from Tarheel for inclusion in the study after numerous attempts. I feared I would not reach data saturation and would have to delay the study to find more participants, yet 11 of 12 total participants were sufficient. Another consideration was obtaining approval to see the procurement records. The current pandemic created challenges for the researcher. Many researchers must find alternative ways to collect data, which may extend the time needed for data collection. I utilized Zoom as the platform for interviews versus face-to-face meetings because of on-site restrictions for visitors at schools.

Finally, the ability to provide incentives for the study participants to maximize accurate and timely survey responses could have negatively affected the information obtained in the study. With the need to ethically elicit information from several different demographics (stakeholders) to help ensure the validity of the responses from all participants, it was not as difficult as anticipated to determine how to most effectively encourage respondents to complete interviews with me while assuring them that the study will maintain their anonymity. Some potential respondents might have initially felt uncomfortable answering truthfully despite guarantees of anonymity, yet after establishing a welcoming environment, each of them expressed no concerns to me.

Summary

This study analyzed parental involvement by administering surveys distributed to parents and administrators from the school and district levels since both schools had not yet reached

sustained implementation (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). Epstein (2007) explained that many schools

are using new research-based approaches to turn challenges into a systemic approach for

partnership program development.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which includes Title I, Part A to improve educational opportunities for low achieving students. This legislation is filled with testing mandates, accountability measures, and choice, along with the provision of new funds for school improvement. Parent and family engagement (PFE) is the hallmark of ESSA. There are many requirements for public school units or districts and schools that receive these specific PFE funds.

One of the requirements is parental notification through Right to Know documents. Providing education to parents on their options in a way they can understand is critical to the success of this policy. The legislation requires systems of accountability for fund usage and student performance.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the research that I conducted in this study. The findings derive from the examination of interview transcripts, field notes, personal reflective journal, and financial documents from both schools (Pine and Tarheel). The comparative study sought to glean information regarding family engagement practices from two Title I schools in the same school district. The comparative, qualitative study inquired about family engagement activities, the use of Title I parent and family engagement funds, and the effect on student achievement in each school in order to enhance program offerings and provide compliance support to the school leadership. The chapter findings are organized by school.

The central research question was, "What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?" In order to answer the research question of this study, I intended to conduct interviews with two

district employees, the principals and assistant principals from Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools, along with three parents from each school, totaling six parent participants representative of the ethnic and racial populations. However, I was only able to obtain two interested respondents from Tarheel Elementary School.

This chapter will include a discussion of findings from the semi-structured interviews with district staff, administrators, and parents in the Dogwood City Schools. All participants were asked interview questions based on their roles in the school. As a result, four findings presented themselves from the participants' words. The findings were:

1. There is a lack of parental involvement in deciding how Title I funds are used

2. The utilization of Title I parent engagement funds seemed to affect student academic achievement and parent engagement

3. The perceptions of school engagement by stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, and district) differ significantly.

4. Factors such as socioeconomic status, race, inconvenience, communication, and sense of belonging influence parental engagement in the schools.

Section I: Participant Profiles

The participants in this study were district employees: central office staff and administrators from Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools, as well as parents from both schools. Pseudonyms were used for all of them. The district employees shared similarities and differences. The administrators and central office staff varied in race, gender, years of experience, and education. The parents varied based on race, gender, ethnicity, and language proficiency. Tables 10 and 11 show the variations in each group (District employees included administrators from Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools and parents, respectively).

Table 10. District Employees' Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Race	Gender	Years of Experience	Site	Education
Amanda Ellis	White	Female	7 years in administration	Tarheel	Master's in School administration
Gregory George	White	Male	2 years in administration	Pine	Master's in School administration
Judy Barnes	White	Female	12 years in administration	Pine	Master's in School administration
Rachel Martin	White	Female	19 years in administration	Tarheel	Master's in School administration
Victoria Brown	Black	Female	Retired teacher 34 years in education as a teacher, family engagement facilitator, and volunteer coordinator	Central Office	Bachelor's Degree in Middle Grades Language Arts
Wanda Roberts	White	Female	32 years in the classroom. Retired and is currently serving as the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction	Central Office	Doctor of Education (EdD)

Note. Employees' names are pseudonyms; employee participants were from both schools (Tarheel and Pine).

Table 11. Parent Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Race	Gender	Ethnicity	Language Proficiency	School	Children/ Grades
Kimberly Harrison	White	Female	European American	Native English	Pine	Two children; son in second grade
Joaquin Torrez	Hispanic	Male	Panamanian American	Native Spanish	Pine	Three children Son attends Pine
Matthew Long	Black	Male	African American	Native English	Pine	Four children ages 28, 22, and 10; grandchildren attend Pine
Jaime Herrera	Hispanic	Male	Costa Rican American	Bilingual; Grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school	Tarheel	Two children ages 8 and 13
Sara Wilson	White	Female	European American	Native English speaker	Tarheel	Four children ages 22, 8, and twins in kindergarten

Note. Parents' names are pseudonyms; parent participants were from both schools (Tarheel and Pine).

Section II: Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews took place during the summer of 2020. COVID-19 restrictions required social and physical distance among individuals. The interviews were conducted via Zoom video teleconferencing so that the eleven participants and interviewer could still meet live. There were seven women and four men.

The average length of time in school administration by the principal and assistant principal participants was 10 years. The average length of education experience among Central Office participants was 33 years. Specific information about the employee and parent participants was detailed in Tables 10 and 11. Commonalities emerged within and across schools as well as the entire school system.

Findings

Finding 1: There is a Lack of Parental Involvement in Deciding How Title I Funds Are Used

A recurring theme in the interviews with administrators and parents at each school was that parent voice was absent from the expenditure decisions of Title I funds for parental and family engagement. The federal Title I program provides financial assistance through state education agencies to school divisions and public schools with a higher percentage of low-income families (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, 2017). Dogwood City Schools' Board of Education Policy Code 1320/3560 Title I and Family Engagement states that Title I funds must be used for parent and family engagement activities. Family engagement includes but is not limited to serving on the parent advisory and leadership team, as well as providing activities that encourage parents to invest in their children's learning.

Parents at Tarheel and Pine do not have a say in how funding is used for parental engagement. In fact, parents did not know how the money was being spent. According to the Dogwood City Schools' Board of Education Policy for Title I Parent and Family Engagement, principals, or designees of Title I schools, shall provide notice to parents of the school's parent and family engagement policy, their rights to be involved in their child's school, and opportunities for parents to be involved in school.

Administrator Assertions. Pine Elementary School's mission statement is "Pine Elementary, in partnership with the community provides a nurturing, safe, inviting environment where all students grow academically, meet educational goals, appreciate the worth of each individual and continue to be contributing members of society." Pine's vision is to have a school where all students are honored, learning is valued, and all stakeholders are dedicated to the success of all. Gregory George (Assistant Principal at Pine) shared that the school is committed

to creating an inclusive environment and encourages parent participation whenever possible. However, Gregory George explained that there is not a lot of parent involvement, just a parent on the leadership team. Judy Barnes (Principal at Pine) was asked about parental engagement in the policies and practices of the school. Judy Barnes shared that parents are on the PTO and leadership team. However, this is the only time that parents have a voice in how school funds are spent.

Amanda Ellis explained, "I guess we could do a better job of maybe trying to actually survey parents about what resources they … Well, I mean, it's kind of like, do they necessarily know what they would need or what's relevant to their child to be learning. But, we don't really seek parent feedback." Rachel Martin agreed that parents do not have a voice in how funds are being used for parental engagement. She said that at the time, "it is hard to find parents who want to serve on the leadership team." Martin continued by saying that they encourage parents to participate when they are dropping or picking up their children and still struggle to get parents to participate in any decision-making process.

Gregory George shared there are similar challenges to increasing parent voice concerning spending school funds. However, the administrators and leadership team are actively recruiting parents to serve on the leadership team.

> Looking at being purposeful with our leadership team, advertising it to our families so that they know what they know, what we're doing, and they know they're welcome. And this is an avenue for their voice to be heard in our school. So, I think that it's a strong point right now, but it is also an area of growth as a school.

Judy Barnes (Principal, Pine) explained that the only group that has a voice in the school is the PTO. The PTO does a lot of fundraising, but Judy Barnes is not sure how they spend their

funds. She does not seek parent feedback on how money is spent. Judy Barnes also does not know much about the leadership team. The consensus is that employees of Dogwood City Schools at both schools are aware of how parental engagement funds are spent, but the parent voice is missing, although the mission of each school has a statement about an inclusive and nurturing environment that encourages parental participation in decision-making.

Parent Perspectives. Parents at Tarheel and Pine do not have a say in how funding is used for parental engagement. In fact, parents did not know how the money was being spent. According to the Dogwood City Schools' Board of Education Policy for Title I Parent and Family Engagement, principals or designees of Title I schools shall provide notice to parents of the school's parent and family engagement policy, their rights to be involved in their child's school, and opportunities for parents to be involved in school.

Parent participants were asked if they were given opportunities to participate in discussions about how the schools spend more on parent engagement. Most parent participants explained that they were not given a voice in how parental engagement funds were spent and had no idea who decided how they spent. However, parent participants at Tarheel and Pine agreed that money should be spent on improving test scores and family engagement. Kimberly Harrison (parent at Tarheel) shared that all decisions on expenditures should be based on data, and the area of most need should be addressed first. Sara Wilson (parent at Tarheel) said that to her knowledge funds at the school were limited but really had no idea because she had not been to those meetings in 2 years. Joaquin Torrez (a parent at Pine) said he was very active in the school but was not privy to any conversations about how Title I funds were spent at the school. Both Tarheel and Pine spend below the state and national averages per pupil, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Ms. Harrison, PTO president at Pine, was aware of how funding decisions were made within the school and provided the example of how the principal would come to the grade levels to specifically ask what would help the parents within the grade levels when doing the AFTT or Curriculum Nights. As a parent, she does not remember being able to choose. She could not recall how the materials were chosen. She just knew the teachers "had a good hand in that." She did not think her parents were involved with financial decisions. Mr. Torrez and Mr. Long both answered with a simple not when asked about title I Family Engagement expenditures because they had no idea how decisions funding decisions were made at Pine.

Administrator Assertions. Pine Elementary School's mission statement is "Pine Elementary, in partnership with the community provides a nurturing, safe, inviting environment where all students grow academically, meet educational goals, appreciate the worth of each individual and continue to be contributing members of society." Pine's vision is to have a school where all students are honored, learning is valued, and all stakeholders are dedicated to the success of all. Gregory George (Assistant Principal at Pine) shared that the school is committed to creating an inclusive environment and encourages parent participation whenever possible. However, Gregory George explained that there is not a lot of parent involvement, just a parent on the leadership team. Judy Barnes (Principal at Pine) was asked about parental engagement in the policies and practices of the school. Judy Barnes shared that parents are on the PTO and leadership team. However, this is the only time that parents have a voice in how school funds are spent.

Tarheel Elementary School spends $8,301 per pupil, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Tarheel Elementary School's expenditures are below the district and state averages. However, Tarheel Elementary School serves a low-income population and

has a Title I designation. According to the school's website, the mission statement is, "To be an inviting school where high expectations, respect for one another, and lifelong learning is valued and promoted." The school's vision statement is "Tarheel Elementary School will be a safe nurturing school that works collaboratively with all stakeholders, preparing students to be productive 21st-century citizens."

Amanda Ellis (Principal of Tarheel) was asked about the possibility of having a parent advisory council to give parents a voice in decision-making. Amanda Ellis said that there is the PTO, but parents do not participate, and it is more about fundraising. Amanda Ellis was also asked about how the resources at the school were used to implement the school's improvement plan. Amanda Ellis answered, "Having effective reliable technology, having strong academic resources that are readily available, the more efficient you can make instruction." Amanda Ellis was asked if parents had any say in how parent engagement funds through the school's continuous improvement plan were spent. Amanda Ellis explained that they typically do not seek parental support. The leadership team makes decisions based on what each grade level asks for.

Central Office Contributions. Victoria Brown (recently retired Family Engagement Facilitator) shared that she has never heard of a conversation with parents in terms of how that money is spent and why parents are not involved in the decision-making process. Dr. Roberts, who was Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, spoke about the parents not being solicited for involvement in financial, curricular, personnel, and other policy decisions or operations of our schools. She mentioned the formality of having a parent representative for the school's continuous improvement plans. However, each time she visits a school's continuous improvement plan meetings, no parent is present yet somehow just signs the papers. If they do attend, they just sit and do not really say anything or have a voice. She does not think school

personnel goes out to seek people and share what has been said. Dr. Roberts acknowledged that

shared decision-making with parents was not happening at all levels.

Finding 2: The Utilization of Title I Parent Engagement Funds Affected Student Academic

Achievement and Parent Engagement

Tarheel and Pine are designated as Title I schools because of the high percentage of

students from high-poverty households. The Dogwood City Schools website explained:

The Title I program is a federally supported program that aids economically disadvantaged

children to help ensure they receive an equitable, high quality, and well-rounded education to

meet the school system's challenging academic standards and provides instructional activities

and supportive services to eligible students over and above the regular school program.

Section 104 (a) of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 amended the National

School Act to provide an alternative to household eligibility applications for free and reduced

lunch in each high poverty school district, charter school, non-public, or other participating

institution (NC DPI, 2018). For example, Title I funds must be spent on parent and family

engagement activities, and parents should be involved in deciding how these funds are utilized.

Some examples of parent and family engagement include serving on parent advisory and

leadership teams and providing opportunities for parents to support their students' learning.

District Expenditures. Dogwood City Schools spends most of its resources on

personnel. However, all five elementary schools in Dogwood City Schools are below the state

and national levels in per-pupil expenditures. The national average for per-pupil spending was

$13,597 compared to North Carolina's per-pupil spending of $10,632. Dogwood City Schools

spent $9,866 per student.

Central Office Contributions. Victoria Brown (Family Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator) and Wanda Roberts (Assistant Superintendent) work at the district level and have expressed concerns over how Title I schools in the school district are using their Title I funds. All five elementary schools receive Title I funding.

Victoria Brown and Wanda Roberts were asked, "How are the resources in the school and district levels used to implement the continuous improvement plan?" Victoria Brown said, "I think they may use their space and their resources, material, and things like that, but I do a lot at most schools to make sure some of this is carried out [with] what they have." Wanda Roberts aired a need for resources beyond technology in the schools. "I would say greatly. There has not been a whole lot at most schools to make sure some of this is carried out with what they have." Wanda Roberts was asked: How do instructional expenditures affect academic achievement?

The focus should be on cultural competence. Culturally relevant books should be in teachers' hands that align with the philosophy and direction the school system is going to impact social change.

Administrator Assertions. Tarheel Elementary School spends about $8,301 per pupil, which is below the district and state average (NCES, n.d.). Tarheel Elementary School's procurement documents were provided by the treasurer at the school. Tarheel spent money mostly on resources for each grade level, including books, fraction squares, markers, addition, and multiplication/division cares. The focus seemed to be the improvement of literacy and math self-efficacy. Principal Amanda Ellis was asked how parent engagement funds are used in the implementation of the school's continuous improvement plan. Ellis expressed, "Having effective reliable technology, having strong academic resources that are readily available, the more efficient that you can make instruction."

Assistant principal Rachel Martin was asked the same questions about how resources were spent. One of the questions was, "How does the purchase of supplies affect academic achievement?" Rachel Martin explained that teachers have everything they need and are not turned down for anything reasonable. Rachel Martin was asked how decisions were made about how Title I funds were spent. She said that the leadership team and administrators ask teachers what they need. Funds utilizations are based on need and the impact on the student population. For instance, Rachel Martin said that some teachers ask for subscriptions to technology resources. Sometimes, the subscriptions are expensive, but they might be valuable for improving instruction.

Pine Elementary spent their Title I funds on similar items such as fraction squares, markers, multiplication cards, and books. Pine has focused their Title I funding on reading and math proficiency, which is similar to Tarheel's utilization of funds. However, Pine seemed to target funds for improving reading and math proficiency for a specific grade level. Purchase orders from Pine showed that a significant amount of money was spent on envelopes and postage during the 2020-2021 school year. Principal Judy Barnes was asked, "What strategies are used to spend money for parent engagement?"

Barnes explained, "We used a lot of money in postage this year. More than double in a school year. At [School] Leadership Team, we would meet and have good ideas, but not implemented well." The consensus from stakeholders at Pine (Parents and Administrators) was that Title I funds should be used to increase math and reading scores. More books and manipulatives should be ordered.

Finding 3: The Perceptions of School Engagement by Stakeholders (Parents, Teachers,
Administrators, and District) Differ Significantly

Parents, administrators, and district staff (Central office) have differing opinions on
family engagement and the efficacy of family engagement activities in schools. Parents,
depending on their race and socioeconomic status, vary in their opinions on what is important to
remember when creating and facilitating family engagement activities and their abilities to instill
a sense of belonging and an inclusive and welcoming environment. District staff is responsible
for ensuring that each school meets requirements outlined by the Board of Education's Family
Engagement Policy and follows federal guidelines for Title I schools.

Parent Perspectives. The parents at Tarheel and Pine shared similar concerns about
parental engagement. However, for the most part, parents felt that the school offered activities
that were appealing to parents, such as multicultural night, one-on-one parent-teacher
conferences, book clubs, and book fairs. All parents at both schools agreed that PTO needed to
be more diverse and inclusive and include more non-Whites, translators were needed to assist
non-English speaking parents, and more parent voice. Kimberly Harrison (Parent at Tarheel)
praised the school for having great communication. She said, "Communication has been great
with the principal and teachers. There are weekly phone calls which provide good information."
She identified an area of growth. She stated that lessening the barriers to successful parental
engagement should be the focus of schools. She spoke specifically about race.

Kimberly Harrison said,

Childcare is a barrier. They may not have a vehicle. They may not have a vehicle

[There are] so many variables. I am not sure which one. I think that every race trusted me

when I worked in the classroom, building trusting relationships. Trust the teachers and

trust the process. Parents are reassured that the school is working to make their students successful.

Joaquin Torrez (Parent, Pine) is a Hispanic male who has two sons in Dogwood City Schools. His youngest son attends Pine. He shared that, for the most part, he is content with parental engagement at Pine.

Joaquin Torrez said,

I had a really good experience with them [teachers]. They are always friendly [and] help a lot of kids. ESL helps who speak different languages. I was happy that my kids went to that school. I still keep in touch with teachers. [It's a] small town. I make good relationships. School makes kids feel comfortable and parents too.

Joaquin Torrez also mentioned that the school offered opportunities such as a Boys Book Club that parents could participate in with their sons. An area of growth is improving the accessibility of parental engagement activities. He contended, "Some parents do not participate because it interferes with work. Most parents work in construction or painting. They have to travel a lot. They do not participate but agree with what the teachers are doing." He voiced that his experience with the school was positive for the most part. He actively participates in events at school, such as the Boys Book Club, volunteering, and eating lunch with his son. According to Joaquin Torrez, an area of growth is representation on the PTO and in the school. He said, "Representation. Just knowing that other races are part of that as well. Not just White people. If Whites sponsor everything. You feel left out."

Joaquin Torrez articulated,

[The] place where I drop my son off, I don't worry. I have not had any problems. The

principal is great. I don't have to wonder if he is in good hands or not. The parents were

encouraged to come have lunch with their kids [and] just really be involved.

Matthew Long is a grandparent and parent at Pine Elementary School. He shared that the

school offers opportunities for parental engagement, including volunteering, field trips, book

fairs, and multicultural night and makes an effort to communicate with parents. However, when

the same parents participate, it can be "exhausting and taxing." An area of growth is building

relationships. He said that all parents want to feel valued and that their voice matters.

Matthew Long shared that two events were meaningful for him and his wife. He said,

"Multicultural night helps you learn from another person. The book fair [is meaningful] because

I was able to meet students (Hispanic, Black, White) because my wife and I tried to be visible.

Long maintained,

Teachers need to work on building relationships with students of color. Sometimes things

happen. You think every teacher is out to get you. That is not the case most of the time.

Teachers are there to help children. Sometimes Caucasian teachers do not know how to

teach African American children or understand their experiences.

Sara Wilson, a parent at Tarheel, also shared positive experiences about parent

engagement and did not feel that her kids should go to a private or charter school just because

they are White. She praised the school's communication but explained that the school should use

technology more due to its accessibility. She described parent voice as, "Very open, anything

just must talk about. They are back with you within 5 minutes. They are great." However, she

said an area of growth is serving parents of color and working families better.

Sara Wilson argued,

[When] Open House is [hosted] from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., it is hard for people who get

off at 5 p.m. What if you have three kids in three different schools? People must take

time off. Schools need to have two open houses. [Consider] one at night and one during

the day.

Another area of growth, according to Ms. Wilson, is providing more opportunities for

parent engagement in the age of COVID. She explained, "Do events outside. PTO versus

teachers. Teacher's kickball game. Something that's fun. Outdoor festivals. Pies in the face. Fun

activities. Have pizza. Do things outside. Do not worry about people if you are outside. Parents

versus Teachers."

Administrator Assertions. School administrators from both schools were also asked

about parent engagement activities and their perceptions about how successful their parent

engagement was in schools. Each administrator agreed that the school needed to do more to

reach non-White and non-English-speaking parents and to increase parent voice in their schools.

Amanda Ellis, principal at Tarheel, understands that she has many areas for growth. However,

she is satisfied with parent communication at her school.

Amanda Ellis said,

I think we have [good communication] from the standpoint of just supporting students.

And I think that's pretty strong. I mean, most of our classrooms have one hundred

percent participation in Class Dojo. So, I mean, they're willing to receive

communication. Does that make sense, because sometimes, you know, I have been other

places where it's been challenging to get parents to even signup for Class Dojo and I

would say the majority of our classrooms had one hundred percent participation with that?

An area of growth is cultural responsiveness. Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel) said her school needs to more to reach parents of color and hire a more diverse staff, but the primary focus is achievement.

But, you know, I've been trying to. Well, and then on top of that, when I felt we were making some progress, COVID hit, and it's like anything, any underlying negative feelings that you have about anything seem to have been exacerbated in that circumstance. So, it's definitely been a challenge now. That being said though, so I don't down to the children and instruction, our staff is primarily steadfast in maintain expectations there. I just don't think that from (you know) how do we treat one another. Acting with integrity from [a] like cultural standpoint, that is not a priority, but instructing children is.

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) also identified many areas of growth, including the toxic environment associated with teachers in the schools and how sometimes, it is impossible to have a translator available for parents of every student with non-English speaking parents. She spoke candidly about family engagement at Tarheel and her experience at another school in an administrative role.

Martin verbalized,

Outreach like volunteering to help us when I was in [another school], the people would call all the time saying I've got this I want to donate this to you, and I come here. That's help, it's not with the same, and you wouldn't know that if you hadn't worked in and been at other schools where they came so readily, and it really feels more like a surplus

instead of a need from the community. However, it kind of depends on what we're doing, the level of engagement. We did a virtual bingo night this past year. We had more parents with their kids sign up [to] play that game. Those are the same parents [who] never came to AFTT or never showed up at open house. They just put their kids on the bus the first day.

The assistant principal at Pine, Gregory George, also shared his perceptions of parental engagement. His views about parental engagement are positive. He shared that although the parents do not have the financial resources to contribute to the school, they are willing to participate in activities. He also shared there are barriers to family engagement because most students are economically disadvantaged.

Gregory George conveyed,

They love the school. They love the teachers and they love the principal. They're extremely supportive and very committed to our school. And the support that you see from our families at Pine looks very different from the support you might see at another school. For example, at Pine, we don't have a lot of parents who are going to open their checkbooks and make a donation to school you know, because they're just and you Know where they are in life, they can't do that. But they'll be the first ones to show up with a shovel and rake on PTA, you know to clean up the playground.

George also vented,

Transportation is a barrier to parent engagement. So, anything that goes on after school, one of the beasts that we have to fight is transportation. Our kids don't have a car, or they don't have gas money to waste to drive there [or] to drive to school. So that is a huge influence on engagement for our students.

Rachel Martin believes that parent engagement is great at Pine and that parents participate as much as they can. However, she revealed a similar problem as Tarheel. There is a need for non-White participation on the PTO and school leadership team. Gregory George suggested that there should be a Hispanic liaison to increase parent voice.

Judy Barnes said,

Well, our parents … I feel comfortable coming to ask the question, some of them don't know, they won't ask certain questions just culturally, we're going to trust the teacher. The teacher is in charge. The teacher knows this. I don't know the language well. [They probably think] I just culturally trust them. They are the experts here. However, I do feel like they will come to you. They've come to nothing like that [Multicultural Night] and it's pretty. One year it was like 96% of our students showed up [for it] and [I get] it's not 100%.

Yes, it [parental support] is almost universal, It's huge. I feel like that's the speech that they want their kids in school. They are excited about their kids and the school. But, as far as I can see, the families really coming out of typical upper middle class think they're [lower socioeconomic and minority] not doing that. And I understand why they were out or, you know, you're there.

Central Office Contributions. The family engagement and volunteer coordinator (Victoria Brown) shared that most of the problems with engagement in the school district related to race and socioeconomic status. She suggested that the school district should reach out to faith-based communities to improve engagement for Black families.

Victoria Brown said,

Now the faith-based, because you have the minister show, they do, we've got to get some

of our ministers there. They used to come, but now we maybe have one or two shut up.

When I say, you know Black men. For instance, this summer, because of the faith-based

group, they knew that there were some kids that would like to come to camp, but are

unable to come because of financial reasons. So that church reached out to someone in

the community and said, look, we are sponsoring this camp. We have five paid spots.

Help us fill these positions like that, in a sense. But now, as [with] our Black community.

I'm not sure, because you know, it started out with several people coming [and] several

parents coming and then it kind of weeded out.

Wanda Roberts (Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction) supervises

federal programs and all academics in Dogwood City Schools. She was also asked about family

engagement in the school district. She shared that the school district needs to work on its parental

engagement efforts.

Wanda Roberts said,

I would say, I mean, we used the AFTT model forever, it seems. I know you're familiar

with that. So, I won't go into detail, but. But I would say we still are not at [reaching]

family engagement at the level we need to be … we invite parents in, and we solicit

impact from them or sometimes we do things. But I wouldn't say they're really a partner.

I don't think we're really; truly [doing] family engagement. I still think it's through us.

When parents come, I do not think it's really inviting. And this past year, it did not help

because we're not allowing families to come in the buildings and this coming year for the

first 9 weeks, it'll be the same way, depending on how the pandemic goes. So right now,

I do not think this past year, though, with the pandemic there have been a lot more phone calls, a lot more communication and a lot more discussions with parents about student work than probably has ever happened before. I think parents were more and more collaborative closer contact, I would say then [they have] been typically. I hope that trend follows, but I don't think it is where it needs to be. It is still more contrived.

Finding 4: Factors such as Socioeconomic Status, Race, Inconvenience, Communication, and Sense of Belonging Influence Parental Engagement in the Schools

Many factors contribute to the success or failure of parental engagement in schools. Some factors that will be discussed are socioeconomic status, race, inconvenience, communication, and a sense of belonging. Parents, district employees, staff, and administrators all agree that barriers exist to successful parental engagement. Both schools (Tarheel and Pine) are Title I schools. Most of the students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Parents find it difficult to take off work to participate in parental engagement activities. Some parents work at factories and may work the first or third shift, which decreases the likelihood that the parent could attend. Another factor is that parents do not have the resources to participate in fundraising activities at the school or to allow their children to participate in clubs and extracurricular offerings. However, the assistant principal at Pine said that parents come up with creative ways to participate.

Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) shared,

Just because the money's not flowing in from our families, it doesn't mean that the school is not very supported. They will be there, you know, in the blink of an eye. If a teacher needs to come for a conference, you know, getting in touch with families and seeking their help is not something we have a problem with.

Gregory George shared a story about the school playground, and the school district did not have the means to update the playground. The PTO raised the funds. There were parents who did not have the funds to contribute, but they offered to help in other ways like pouring [and spreading] mulch. He said,

> We don't have a lot of parents who are going to open their checkbooks and make a donation to the school, you know because they're just and you know where they are in life. They can't do it. But they'll be the first ones to show up with a shovel and a rake on PTO, you know to clean up the playground.

Socioeconomic Status. Socioeconomic status can play a role in academic achievement and parent engagement. People of lower socioeconomic status are just as interested in their children's education as more affluent parents. However, there are barriers to participation in school events like working hours, being a single parent, needing childcare, or transportation to school events. Economically marginalized students do not enjoy the same level of economic support as their wealthier peers (Gorski, 2018). Structural disadvantages, not the cultures or mindsets of the people experiencing them, pose the most significant threats to school engagement and success for students experiencing poverty.

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) explained that socioeconomic status has an impact on parent engagement. Rachel Martin said, "It is about priorities. You can be poor and incredibly supportive of education or be rich and not supportive of your students' education." Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel) and Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) both agreed that socioeconomic status negatively affects student achievement.

Amanda Ellis said,

I think we have a lot of families who have a lot of struggles financially, and just living in

poverty has created a lot of challenges and barriers that make it difficult for them to be as

present as they would like to be in their child's academic experience.

The administrators at both schools were asked this question: "Some people believe that lower-income or minority parents do not care about education. How do you feel about this?"

Judy Barnes (Principal at Pine) said,

I don't have evidence of that. I have evidence that they have some negative experiences,

but I don't believe that they don't care about education at all. In fact, I would argue that

I've got 13 years of pretty good data that they care a lot about what happens in school

from the little things, and it's not smart parents. I think you hear about school. They send

money for the book fair that tells me they care about their kids getting a book or a picture

or whatever that you are putting money in. That attendance is pretty good. That shows me

that they care about the school.

Gregory George (Assistant principal at Pine) said,

I feel very strongly and passionately about this. And it's very offensive to me to hear

people talk like that because like I said earlier. The way our families at Pine support our

school and support their children looks very different from the way they do in Wake

County. But I would put some of our Pine families up against anybody in terms of taking

any means necessary to help their child get what they need. So, I mean, I think we have

to really step back and take a look at how we're analyzing that and coming to that

conclusion, you know as a society.

One of the parents at Tarheel Elementary discussed how some families are more fortunate than others and have the means to pay for tutors or private school. Sara Wilson is a White parent at Tarheel. She and her husband are both formally educated and run a dental practice. They have the means to pay for any extra services their children may need. Sara Wilson was asked: What are your perceptions about your role in the education of your children?

Sara Wilson said,

It is important to my husband and I [me]. We got a tutor for our Kindergartener for reading. My niece tutors one day a week. She knows all the new methods. Sometimes it takes an outside source to work with a math tutor. Math gets harder. We do stress education is important.

Kimberly Harrison is a parent at Pine and an administrator in Cardinal County. She shared a different view of Pine based on the school's history. She attended Pine and explained that race and socioeconomic status are both factors that contributed to lower parent engagement and White flight based on parents who live in the mountain. Families who live in the mountains are mostly White and do not want their children educated with lower-income and racially diverse students.

Kimberly Harrison said,

Pine is a community school, and currently, population-wise, has been about the same. It's a very diverse school, although it used to be primarily White. Surrounding community members transferred out. The community was near the hosiery mill in the past. Now the community is not. A large Hispanic population comes from lower-income housing. One of my frustrations is that the mountain people choose not to send their kids to a school

with Black kids. I value people going to their districted schools. I feel like going to the district school makes the community better.

Race. Structural inequalities, institutional practices, and racial ideologies mutually reinforce each other and collectively generate different educational trajectories, but today often appear to be "nonracial" (Lewis & Diamond, 2015, p. 167). Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools are in a city school system in the Southern U.S. According to participants (Parents and District Staff), race has always been a factor that impacts family engagement. As noted by Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) and Kimberly Harrison (Parent), the "mountain" families are more likely to participate. These families are typically White and live in more affluent households than other families at Pine Elementary. Most of the mothers who participate in PTO at both schools are White women. Black and Hispanic families are less likely to participate in PTO because they do not have the time due to work.

Both schools started out as elite schools, and families moved into the area to ensure that their children attended Pine or Tarheel. However, the demographics changed due to the availability of affordable housing in the area. One program at Pine, a year-round school, created an influx of minority students. As a result, White flight occurred, and many White families chose other schools with predominantly White populations, including charter schools and private academics. A parent from Tarheel and district staff members (made up of Central Office personnel and administrators from both schools) echoed the same concern that changing demographics created a large minority population in schools, while White families chose to transfer their students to "better" schools where they could be educated with White children.

According to Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel), the demographics of Tarheel are 40% White, 35% Hispanic, 11% Black, 10% two or more races, and 4% other. She stated that at one

time, students and families wanted to transfer to Tarheel because it was the best school in the school district. She said that although demographics have changed, Tarheel is not a "White school" even though it has the largest White population in the school district.

Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel) explained,

But I think ultimately, you know; it comes down to—I think sometimes it just comes down to the barriers that we may perceive. You don't have to think anything about that. Really [most people] probably can't understand it, but I do think that. I think that that's a stereotype, but I also think there's some truth to it. Just that the barriers, oftentimes, [limit families' ability to] just be prioritized [on school].

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) shared a personal story related to race and engagement in schools. She said that until she adopted a Black child, she did not know that race impacted student engagement.

Rachel Martin shared,

I wouldn't think it was a big issue if I didn't have her. And I'm embarrassed to say, but I don't think it would be. And for this reason, I say that is because things come up that I was unaware of and because I wasn't aware, it was very real, and having her has made me be aware that it was very real. But because it didn't affect me, I didn't notice. And that is what makes me sad. And that's what I keep saying, you don't know what you don't know, because I am the exact same person I was before I had her or got her or was blessed with her.

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) had a different response to the question about whether race and economic status influence engagement in schools. She said, "I think it is definitely not race as much as socioeconomic, but culture and welcomeness, which could have a

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lot to do with race and inclusiveness. It definitely has an impact." She added, "So I got, a couple of little Hispanic moms that feel as comfortable coming here as they do in their kitchen, and I've had a couple of Black moms that feel less comfortable coming in here and making copies and plopping down in my office as anybody in the building. But they're the exception."

Pine Elementary School's demographics are different from those at Tarheel Elementary School. Their largest population is Hispanic. The population breakdown is 60% Hispanic, 20% Black, 18% White, and a small number of other races. The school's history is like Tarheel's based on the impact of the demographic shift. Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) explained that White flight happened because of school choice. Gregory George attended Tarheel but had friends who went to Pine. According to Gregory George, those "mountain" families are more affluent, White, and have strong opinions about who their children should go to school with. Their opinions have not changed over the decades, and many of his friends do not understand why he works at a school with a large non-white population.

Gregory George said,

Outside of the walls of our school district, there is still a very large pocket of people who have strongly opposed what he values. You know, I mean we've done school tours with families, you know, and that's another thing like this whole era of having to give these tours to affluent families to try to sell our school to them. But I mean, even on school tours, we have parents who literally, like gasping because they cannot believe how many Hispanic students we have at Pine. And you know, so do I believe that there's still that. A pocket of people in the community who prefer their White children to be around White children and they believe that. With a high number of Hispanic students in the school,

that it's going to take away from the education that their children would receive. Therefore, attending Pine is not good enough for their child.

George went on to say:

You know I grew up here. I have friends that grew up here with me that are still very hard for them to hear talk about equity and social justice. I have friends who I grew up here with me that are still very much in their white-walled box, and I've had very strong conversations with my friends about our school system. And you know, I've had my own friends tell me they wouldn't send their kids to city schools. It is disheartening to me, these people that I grew up with and people that I love and their families have not grown the way I have.

Matthew Long, a parent participant, shared his opinions of Pine and engagement. He is a Black male with two grandchildren and a daughter at Pine. He shared that parents and schools have equal responsibilities in ensuring student success in schools. He said that he would like to see more African American parents participate in school activities. There are Black families that participate in school activities and attend multicultural nights, but Hispanic families are more likely to attend the multicultural night. Long was also asked if race and socioeconomic status influence family engagement. Matthew Long said, "If you do not have everything that everyone else has you are not going to try to do anything." He added that it is hard to focus when everyone else is looking at you. He explained the student's perspective. Matthew Long said,

Sometimes, things happen. You think that everyone is out to get you. This is not the case most of the time. Teachers are there to help children to learn. Sometimes Caucasian teachers do not know how to teach African American children or understand their experiences.

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Two central office employees were interviewed and asked for their insight on whether race influences parent and family engagement. Victoria Brown (recently retired Family Engagement Facilitator and Volunteer Coordinator) is a Black female. The only remaining central office employee is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Victoria Brown shared that teachers are to blame to some extent for unsuccessful family engagement. She said that she asked some teachers if they were going to a Martin Luther King Jr. Brunch for the Martin Luther King holiday. Some teachers did not know it existed or where it was. Ms. Brown also shared that schools should make an effort to reach out to faith-based communities where Black families attend church.

Victoria Brown explained,

I actually enjoyed [the job] once I figured it out. I would go out and I had to be able to be that support person for people in the community and also, you know, like I say, in bridging the gap between the Black community and Dogwood City Schools, because the gap had been there a long time where no Black people were actually invited to the table.

Victoria Brown also shared her opinion on race and socioeconomic status and the impact on schools in Dogwood City. Her views are similar to administrators and parents from both schools, who explained that the demographic shift to families with lower economic status and racially diverse populations steered affluent White families away from Dogwood City Schools and into surrounding counties and cities.

Victoria Brown said,

Race and national politics … If you are White, upper-class mountain people, or if you have any influence at all within the community. That's who is running it, and that's why they are afraid to move forward with initiatives. They know what's right. And when I say

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they, central office, they know what's right. They know what needs to be done, but they talk about it, and then they begin to think, well, so-and-so is not going to like this, or we're going to get pushback from the White community and worry about pushback from us. They say that they don't worry about pushback from Hispanics, but they worry about pushback from Whites.

Wanda Roberts is the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. She is a White woman who has 34 years of experience in different roles within the school system. Wanda Roberts's opinion of race and socioeconomic status and how they influence engagement are just like Matthew Long (Parent), Victoria Brown (Family Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator), Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine), and Joaquin Torrez (Parent).

Wanda Roberts said,

None of us influence, I do think, any impacts in a way. I think some of that is teachers' perceptions and awareness in how they see things. I think sometimes there's an almost a standoffishness with some teachers, with certain parents and uncertainty of how to talk to parents, how to deal with parents. I think there's an impact to it. I don't think that necessarily is the fault of the child or family. I think that we have a lot of work to do in the area and how do we help to engage all races.

Inconvenience. Inconvenience was mentioned as a barrier to family engagement. When we hold onto old notions of family engagement that were conceived through middle-class norms, we implicitly communicate to families experiencing poverty that their needs are unimportant and that we will not be responsive to the inequities they bear. This can only deteriorate our relationships with them—something none of us wants (Gorski, 2018).

Both schools have students of a lower socioeconomic status. Many parents are single mothers. Some parents work different shifts and are unable to attend events due to the time of day they are offered. Some parents do not have the transportation to get their children back and forth to school. Transportation is a barrier to participating in extracurricular activities because children cannot get to and from school. Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) shared that he has his commercial driver's license, and he will go and find a bus to drive students home when parents cannot get there if a student has to quarantine after exposure to COVID. Several parent participants and administrators agreed that parent engagement activities should occur at different times that are more accommodating to parents' schedules or have a virtual option where parents can participate at home or on the go. Gregory George shared that schools had to get creative during the pandemic to ensure that parental engagement was encouraged.

Gregory George asserted,

> I have been AP there for 3 years. I mean, 3 years and 2 of those years have been weird with COVID, so last year we really had no family engagement. We had some virtual PTO meetings and virtual things here and there. But, as far as like, the stuff that we're used to at Pine like our multicultural night and our AFTT nights, that's been pretty nonexistent at least during the past year.

One of the parents at Pine, Matthew Long, shared that another inconvenience was having activities for multiple grades on the same night. Sometimes, parents must pick and choose which classes to visit.

> Matthew Long explained,
>
> It is hard when parents have multiple children in different grades to participate in activities. Have conversations with parents to understand where they are coming from.

Realize teachers have families. To bridge that gap, parents and teachers need to have

conversations. Not when the grades are slipping or when the child gets in trouble,

they just need general conversations. So that everyone is on the same page. Sometimes

parents do not know what the teacher has on their plate and vice versa.

A parent at Tarheel (Sara Wilson) echoed Matthew Long's view that COVID has created a

barrier to parental engagement. "With COVID, no outside visitors. No volunteers allowed since

the start of COVID. Families not coming into schools. Just children." Another parent at Tarheel

also shared the same view about providing more convenient activities for parents, such as virtual

activities to encourage parents to be active in schools.

Sara Wilson explained,

Some people cannot come to those meetings because they work. Some people cannot get

out there. Parents cannot do all those things, but they can be involved from home.

Provide things for school, sends donations, Work with their children at home. Email to

participate. Make it a Zoom meeting where anyone can participate. Make sure everyone

feels welcome.

Sara Wilson also noted, "Open house from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. It is hard for people to take

off. Schools need to have two open houses. One at night and one during the day." Amanda Ellis

(Principal, Tarheel) and Judy Barnes (Principal, Pine) did not share any insights into how they

will increase engagement for working families. However, parents at both schools agreed that

parent communication needs to improve in the schools.

Communication. A problem that was consistently shared by all participants (district

staff, parents, and administrators) was that communication was a barrier to family engagement.

Consistent two-way communication is key, rather than only reaching out with negative news,

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which sadly is what many families have come to expect (Milner, 2015). In the qualitative section of this study, the parents interviewed were asked to discuss the best ways the school or district can communicate with them. Participants indicated that they prefer face-to-face and phone communication with the school the most because it is direct and immediate. They feel that school- and district-level communication is not a problem; however, there are some individual teachers not communicating well with parents. The perception from interviews is that teacher-level communication can be improved. Participants indicate that although they prefer phone and face-to-face communication, they can appreciate the other methods, such as notes home, parent conferences, and email used by the school district, and wish for these communication practices to continue. Teachers, the school, and the district need to increase the communication to ask parents to volunteer and participate in school decision-making efforts.

One of the primary concerns was language barriers. Tarheel and Pine have limited access to interpreters/translators. Only three interpreter translators are funded by the local education agency in an itinerant model. According to participants at both schools, immigrant and non-English speaking parents will either not attend events because of the language barrier or accept whatever the teacher says.

For instance, the district staff member (Wanda Roberts) said that she feels embarrassed because she does not speak Spanish and must interact with Hispanic families. She shared a personal story. Wanda Roberts said,

> Sometimes we have the barrier with the language, even when the majority of our students
> don't speak Spanish, and for [me] it is pretty hard to communicate if you don't have a
> translator. And I will tell you that as a teacher, one of my last classes was a sophomore
> and, I had, I think eleven Hispanic students in my class. I felt inadequate and because I'm

doing my communicating through an interpreter and the parents are looking and talking

to the interpreter not to me. And so, it was a very eye-opening to me that I can't really

truly communicate with parents who need me to be able to communicate with them. So

there is a feeling of inadequacy.

Wanda Roberts shared this was an area of growth for the school district. She said,

So, I think there are hindrances and there are barriers, but I don't think necessarily that

it's something that I know we can overcome. We still just don't have the best solution

right now. We need to do work to figure out how we make sure that our families feel

comfortable coming to school and want to come to school.

Tarheel has one interpreter/translator who is shared with other schools in the district. The

school only has one other Spanish speaker in the building, the custodian, yet the population is

60% Hispanic. Parents at Tarheel also shared that not having good communication acted as a

barrier to effective parental engagement. This is not limited to language proficiency. They

recommended that the school should use multiple ways to communicate with parents. Sara

Wilson (Parent), who has twins and a third-grader at Tarheel, shared that those parents want to

be involved in school but want to feel like they belong. She said,

Parents want to participate, but it is important to get the communication out and make

parents feel welcome. I think having a Hispanic person on the board would be important.

There needs to be an advocate for them. I think it is important for any nationality to have

someone there so their voice is heard. Male and female. We do not want an all-mom

PTO. We want men to participate.

Another parent (Joaquin Torrez) said that he was satisfied with communication at

Tarheel. He said, "Class Dojo, constantly putting out notifications about meals, important dates,

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reminders. You can contact the teacher back and administrators." Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel) is also confident in communication with parents. She said,

> I think pretty strong. I mean most of our classrooms have one hundred percent of parents signed into Class Dojo. So, I mean, they're willing to at least receive communication. Does that make sense? Because sometimes, you know, I have been other places where it's been challenging to get parents to even signup for Class Dojo and I would say the majority of our classes had one hundred percent participation with that.

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) shared a different picture of communication between parents and the school. She also mentioned Class Dojo, software to share kids' most important learning moments in school and at home—through photos, videos, messages & more, as a means of communication. She said that it was good for when parents wanted to send a quick note back and forth between parents and the teacher. However, it did not translate well. She shared a story about a mom who translated a message from Spanish to English in Class Dojo and the message was lost in translation.

> Rachel Martin shared,
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> I just learned that a little girl whose mom only speaks Spanish texted me the other day and said Julia will not be at summer school the rest of the time because I tested positive for COVID. I was like, really? And she said, yeah. And she said, her baby, we have to do this through translation. So, it's a little bit broken. But she had a baby on Thursday and the baby did not test positive.

She also shared another story about a parent who did not speak English. Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) translated her message on Class Dojo. Rachel Martin said,

I have a new mom. Any symptoms. And still in second still in second grade. And so she
was and she says Julia is unpleasant because she got the Chromebook computer give-
away. And so I thought she had 16 days present. But I didn't make additional contacts
that night because I wanted to come home, come back to school, and check her file real
quick. And she has 17 days here. I said, so Julia will be in the drawing, but I thought she
meant she means she was sad, but she was unpleasant. Translation: So I really, kind of,
questioned whether that giveaway was having an impact.

Rachel Martin shared that they used other technology to increase parental engagement for
school activities like data night or AFTT nights at school. Rachel Martin said,

We try to get different things in parents' hands. Parents that come to those sessions were
not the kids or parents of the kids that we were most concerned about. We are concerned
about the ones that I felt like we were losing a little bit. You could almost count if your
kid was an AIG (gifted student), their parent was going to be at the meeting. They were
sharp and maybe their parent was at the meeting. Most of the time, that information was
not needed those parents in our minds and it was for the others. So, to adjust to that, we
did little short video clips and would send those to like all parents on Class Dojo or make
some Google videos to try to include them so but you couldn't really tell if they watched
it or how much impact it had.

Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) shared that communication is a growth area
due to the large ELL population. He shared the importance of having a translator in the school to
help with communication. He said,

We have Maria in place as our school translator, and Maria is a huge asset to Pine and
probably the most underappreciated role in our school. She is a huge advocate for our

families, especially our families that do not speak English. And that's a big piece that is missing. In our school right now in terms of engagement is. How do we include our non-English speaking families? So, I think that in that sense, we're very lucky to have Maria. She advocates for those families.

Matthew Long (a grandparent and parent) volunteered at Pine. He also believed that communication could be a barrier if teachers and parents do not understand each other. Matthew Long shared,

Have conversations with parents to understand where they are coming from. Realize teachers have families. To bridge that gap. Parents and teachers need to have conversations. Not when the grades are slipping or when the child gets in trouble. Just need general conversations. So that everyone is on the same page. Sometimes parents do not know what the teacher has on their place and vice versa.

Lack of Sense of Belonging. Ishimaru (2020) uplifts equitable collaborations between families and schools and calls us to move beyond our current paradigm, in which schools are the central actors (and holders of expertise) who reach out to "engage" families around educators' and policymakers' visions of what is best for children. Rather, a justice-based educational change agenda can only be co-constructed by both professional educators and those with the greatest expertise on their own children, their learning priorities and needs, their languages and cultural practices, their histories, and non-dominant ways of knowing—that is, the families and communities of children themselves. Each person should be accepted and respected for their contributions to the partnership in order to achieve collective success.

Parent participants mentioned that having a sense of belonging positively or negatively impacts their engagement with schools. Most participants (parents and administrators) at both

schools shared that it was important for families of color to be represented on PTO, in schools, and at engagement activities. Kimberly Harrison is a parent at Pine and PTO president. She recognizes that the PTO needs to be more inclusive and diverse.

Kimberly Harrison said,

We want an inclusive and equitable group of parents. We have very low attendance rates. We have been working on expanding. Schools must be built on community. We have a strong community. Some of the parents from one [residential] area serve on the PTO. The goal is to make it inclusive and welcoming to all families.

Parents are Tarheel explained that representation on PTO and the school leadership team could instill a sense of belonging in schools. Another parent (Sara Wilson) used to be PTO president at Tarheel, but she is now providing support to the current PTO. She explained that the PTO should hold virtual meetings, and parents' school activities should be accessible by technology. She said parent involvement begins with the parent.

Sara Wilson affirmed,

Parent involvement can make a school great. It begins with the parents. It is the foundation for everything. Parent involvement is going to make a better student. If you make it accessible with technology. Make it feel like parents are involved. Keep the students and parents involved.

Jaime Herrera (parent at Tarheel) was asked what makes parents participate in parent engagement activities. He declared, "Representation. Just knowing that other races are part of that as well. Not just White people. If Whites sponsor everything, you feel left out." He was also asked about his role in his children's education. He said that it is important to instill a sense of belonging in your child, especially if you are a minority. Jaime Herrera is a Hispanic male. He

said, "The household is for the kid. Where kids learned life skills. As a parent, I play a very important role. Especially as a minority. It is important for them to understand they are just like everyone else."

Administrators at both schools shared that encouraging a sense of belonging is a growth area. The principal at Tarheel shared that this year their mission focuses on achieving, engaging, and belonging. When asked about belonging, Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel) shared,

I do not think we create a better sense of belonging sometimes for students. Maybe half

and really understanding over the last few years and there has definitely been some areas

that have come up as maybe concerns that I've really also been trying to work on.

Rachel Martin (Assistant Principal, Tarheel) shared,

So, I think the language barrier for Hispanic parents can impact and when they do have a

suggestion, it's usually about an interpreter. They was an interpreter for different things.

Rightly so, it that can be something that is a hindrance because we can't just do that. Of

course, we strive whenever possible, but sometimes you know we just do the best we can.

Judy Barnes (Principal, Pine) concurred with the principal and assistant principal at

Tarheel and expressed the need to be more inclusive in the leadership team and PTO to lessen

barriers to communication for non-English speaking parents. Gregory George (Assistant

Principal, Pine) believes that a lack of parental involvement has to do with creating a sense of

belonging in the schools.

Gregory George shared,

Last year we were kind of forced to do virtual PTO meetings. From that we realized it

was a good thing because we had seen a lot of families that showed up to those virtual

meetings that would never have shown up in person. So, we saw some more

representation from our non-white families.

Gregory George added,

Trying to move forward to find a kinda—like a Latino liaison, I guess you could say, so

that our Hispanic families can feel comfortable coming to this person to express their

ideas and thoughts about certain PTO events or practices in place.

Summary

While there are similarities between how district staff and parents view parental

engagement included in this study, there are major differences in the experiences of parents and

administrators who facilitate and participate in parent engagement at schools. Chapter IV

focused on participants' experiences with parental engagement in two Title I schools in the same

school district at varying levels. Chapter 5 focuses on analyzing data on family and parent

engagement and making connections to existing literature. The chapter will also include

recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the ways that two schools within the same school district implemented, promoted, and maintained familial and community engagement programs. Family engagement is no longer a luxury. The expectation for strong partnerships with families is one of the five components essential to improved student learning (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education released a family-and community-engagement model in 2014 to encourage school districts and states to adopt parent-engagement strategies that link to learning. I used Dr. Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity-Building Framework as my conceptual guide.

This summary provides an overview of the work completed during this qualitative research process, from key findings, discussion and implications, limitations, recommendations for practice and future research, to my final thought to sustain the work. Dogwood City Schools has immense potential to make all nine of its schools the nucleus of the community with focused efforts to partner with families. The work to date suggests strong foundational efforts, yet continuous improvement is required to link parent engagement specifically to improved student learning in schools.

There seems to be a general understanding of the purpose of the federal Title I Engagement Policy in this district, as evidenced during the personal interviews. However, the interest that accompanied the benefits of the federal program seems to have gone away. This is largely due to the initial implementation of the Dual Capacity Framework aspect of the policy that was dictated by the former district leader. The intent of the legislation and district expectations was to benefit all parts of the total school program.

In my study, I interviewed eleven participants (six district employees and five parents) to fully understand how Title I schools in one district focused their resources on parental engagement and the challenges and barriers to implementing effective parental engagement in schools. A cross-case analysis was used to identify similarities and dissimilarities across the cases in order to point to generalizations. Four findings were revealed during semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (administrators and parents) at Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools and district staff. In this chapter, I will begin by answering the research questions with the findings and then analyzing the findings by referencing existing literature. I will then offer recommendations based on what I learned from conducting the study.

Analysis

The study centered around a primary question, in which I sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of teachers, administrators, and parents concerning the utilization of Title I funds. This research project provided a more comprehensive view of how race, SES, English language proficiency, and the use of Title I funds affected parental engagement. My research question was: "What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?"

By investigating how two schools support family engagement in the same school district, it became apparent that low parental engagement was a product of a consistency gap in practice due to understanding comprehensive family engagement. Certainly, district leaders wanted to see parents in schools and wanted to increase parental participation, but there was a gap in data to reveal what parents were doing at home to support the efforts of the school.

Research Question

What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

The experiences of stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators, and district employees) differ significantly based on their involvement in the schools and the efficacy of parental engagement activities. The participants in this study all agreed that parent engagement was an area of growth at both Title I schools (Tarheel and Pine). All participants gave specific examples of their attempts to engage parents, such as data nights, AFTT nights, family nights, and multicultural nights. The most popular event seemed to be multicultural night. Parents seemed to feel that there was a lack of parent voice in decision-making concerning how the school spent Title I funds. Another parent concern was how leadership teams who had influence in the schools were predominantly White and did not reflect the demographics at the school. Administrators at both schools identified several areas of growth, including communication, cultural competency, and increasing parent voice. District staff found that schools need to do more to be more inclusive in their family engagement activities and allow more parent voice.

I recognized there were four findings in the responses that were given and actions observed. The findings were:

- *There is a lack of parental involvement in deciding how Title I funds are used*

- *The utilization of Title I parent engagement funds seemed to affect student academic achievement and parent engagement*

- *The perceptions of school engagement by stakeholders (parents, administrators, and district staff) differ significantly.*

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- *Factors such as socioeconomic status, race, inconvenience, communication, and sense of belonging influence parental engagement in the schools.*

Finding 1: There is a Lack of Parental Involvement in Deciding how Title I Funds are Used

The finding for this research question was the utilization of Title I parent engagement funds affected student academic achievement and parent engagement. Tarheel and Pine Elementary Schools were both provided with Title I funds for family engagement and student achievement. The focus of these funds was on student achievement. Both schools bought resources to improve math and reading proficiency, such as fraction squares, multiplication cards, books, and other resources, including subscriptions to websites. Data derived from the North Carolina Department of Education revealed that both schools are struggling with their reading and math scores on standardized tests.

Both principals at Tarheel and Pine Elementary Schools suggested that funds should be used for whatever teachers find useful. However, there is no parent involvement in how these funds are being spent. The only influence that parents have in the school is the PTO. The PTO has low participation, and the members do not reflect the make-up of the families in the school. Gregory George (Assistant Principal) at Pine suggests that more parents of color should be on the leadership team who makes decisions about how money is spent. Gregory George suggested that a Hispanic liaison would be a good addition because the school is predominantly Hispanic.

Parental engagement is also limited by the schools' utilization of Title I funds. Tarheel Elementary School spent its funds to improve performance at each grade level. Pine Elementary School spent its funds without parental involvement in its leadership or a parent advisory council. The funds were not spent on buses to help transport students to and from school for events or to purchase food to entice parents to come to events.

Title I funds were spent on student achievement instead of family engagement. The purchase orders from each school showed how manipulatives and resources were purchased to support students in school. However, none of the funds were specifically earmarked for family engagement. The records at Tarheel showed that certain items were purchased for each grade level based on what teachers requested. For example, a subscription to a learning tool was purchased with Title I funds. The leadership team is the only entity that can decide how funds are spent. There is only one parent on the leadership team, although there are many parent stakeholders of different races, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses. The parent who is on the leadership team at Tarheel is White and middle class. They would have different needs than a parent who has limited income or limited English proficiency.

Title I funds could be better spent on creating opportunities for engagement with parents who do not speak English. According to Ishimaru (2020), schools should focus their efforts on removing barriers to accessing school-centric activities and events. For example, translating filers into different languages or providing childcare or food at school events.

Finding 2: The Utilization of Title I Parent Engagement Funds Seemed to Affect Student Academic Achievement and Parent Engagement

There were several methods used to build capacity for engagement in the schools. There were nights when parents could receive data about their child's progress compared to other students. Parents were provided with resources to support their children. The parent participants in this study explained that they preferred one on one parent-teacher conferences because they had to ability to answer questions without being interrupted by other parents. One of the administrators at Tarheel said that teachers had created videos about their classes and what students and parents should focus on to support instruction. These videos were created to reach

parents who were not available for data nights or parent-teacher conferences. Another strategy is encouraging parents to participate in activities with their students.

Several participants mentioned multicultural night at the school, where parents were given opportunities to showcase their country's food and culture. The community was invested in this activity. Businesses donated food, parents brought in food, and teachers worked on activities with their students, which involved the study of different cultures. This activity was well attended by families. Last year remote learning created some challenges for engagement. The PTO and schools had to adapt to online family engagement. PTO meetings were held virtually, and Tarheel offered a virtual Bingo night. All families participated in this event. Virtual activities could improve family engagement because schools will have the ability to reach more parents via Zoom or Google Meets. One participant suggested that some activities should be outside, which would lessen the risk of COVID and encourage parental involvement.

Tarheel and Pine offer at least three family engagement activities per year as required by the district family engagement model. However, they do not measure the success of these programs or ask parents for feedback. An administrator at Tarheel said that she should send out surveys to assist her in creating family engagement activities that are meaningful to students and their families. The same administrator said that she does not solicit parent feedback because she believes that parents are content with parent engagement in school. Another administrator at Tarheel said that the school should provide interpreters to help with family engagement in the schools, but interpreters were not readily available.

It seems that there is a reliance on the PTO to sponsor events instead of utilizing Title I funds to increase engagement. The administrator at Pine Elementary School also shared the same sentiment in terms of family engagement. She said that they communicate with parents over

newsletters, Sunday calls, email, and Class Dojo, and most teachers quickly respond when parents reach out with questions or concerns. Ishimaru (2020) shared a story in her book about a mother who had limited English proficiency. She received phone calls that her son was not participating in class. Her son was being bullied. Instead of listening to the parent's concerns, the teacher and principal both explained that being teased was a part of life and she should not be concerned. Building relationships with families has a significant impact on parent engagement.

According to Kaiser and Rasminsky (2019), it is important for teachers to support consistently warm and caring relationships between families and their children. Kaiser and Rasminsky explained that if a classroom does not reflect and validate their families and cultures, children may feel invisible, unimportant, incompetent, and ashamed. According to Mapp et al. (2017), there are five different supports of parental engagement: leadership as the driver of change, professional capacity, parent-community ties, student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance.

Mapp's Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships model states that ineffective family-school partnerships are defined as a lack of opportunities for school staff to build capacity for partnerships and a lack of opportunities for families to build partnerships. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) explained that a successful family-school partnership should include an initiative that is relational, collaborative, and developmental. According to Mapp and Kuttner, the goal of family-school partnerships should be building relationships and capacity while directly addressing student success. Also, according to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), initiatives that encourage family-school partnerships should focus on sharing responsibility, building trust between home and school, and families and school staff see themselves as equal partners.

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The Dogwood City Schools website noted, "Parents are full partners in their child's education, and parents and family members are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child." Mapp et al. (2017) said an effective family-school partnership involves school staff who can honor and recognize families' funds of knowledge, connect family engagement to student learning, and create welcoming, inviting cultures.

Finding 3: The Perceptions of School Engagement by Stakeholders (Parents, Teachers, Administrators, and District) Differ Significantly

One study defined the parent-school relationship as the degree to which parents build relationships with school staff and feel welcome at the school. Fenton et al.'s (2017) study on parent engagement and the quest for equity revealed that one of the challenges to parental engagement is a lack of trust and empathy. Fenton et al. encourage teachers to consider their own unconscious biases before interacting with parents and students. Previous research on parental engagement shows that when parents trust teachers and schools, their students' performance is increased.

Parents at Pine and Tarheel and administrators expressed concern about parent voice in student engagement. The schools are required to have annual meetings to discuss how Title I funds are spent. However, all participants in the study explained that parents do not have a voice in making decisions about Title I expenditures or the planning of family engagement activities such as family night, data night, open house, and curriculum. Jung and Sheldon (2020) examined school leadership and its impact on family engagement. The study found that family engagement was successful when principals actively encouraged families to participate in involvement activities. Parent perceptions of their role in their children's education and their decision to

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participate in engagement activities are dependent on how they feel about the leadership, teachers, and the school community.

In Chapter II, I introduced my Conceptual Framework, which was derived from my review of the literature, particularly Mapp and Kuttner (2013). This initial conceptual framework represented the challenges, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and family and staff capacity outcomes from ineffective family-school partnerships to effective family-school partnerships. The framework relied on a relationship graphic that illustrates how the different components are used independently of each other. However, when stakeholders use the different components simultaneously, family-school partnerships become more effective.

After I completed my research, I revisited my initial conceptual framework. For the most part, the data gathered through my interviews supported the basic structure of my original conceptual framework. I found a more concise way to demonstrate the relationships that build capacity for family engagement in schools. First, school leadership should take an active role in influencing the culture of the school. Second, parents must be given opportunities to participate in decision-making in terms of what is in the best interest of their children. Third, communication should be prioritized to ensure that families feel welcome and included in the school.

Finding 4: Factors Such as Socioeconomic Status, Race, Inconvenience, Communication, and Sense of Belonging Influence Parental Engagement in the Schools

Several barriers to effective parent engagement were revealed during the research study. For example, socioeconomic status, race, inconvenience, communication, and a sense of belonging can positively or negatively influence parental engagement. A barrier to parent engagement is associated with race and socioeconomic status. Parents expressed the challenges

associated with poverty and the impact on education. A significant number of students at Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools are economically disadvantaged, which is why both schools receive federal funding from Title I to provide more resources for students and to improve equity. Tarheel and Pine Elementary Schools have a long history associated with race and socioeconomic class and how they influenced White flight.

Administrators from both schools identified a need to improve parent engagement with non-White and ELL students. Yull et al. (2018) examined community engagement in schools through the lens of African American families. According to Yull et al. (2018), "School districts across the U.S. maintain a stance of disengagement with families of color because deficit thinking has led to assumptions by school personnel that parents of color are unable to mak[e] meaningful contributions to their children's education" (p. 323). Markowitz et al. studied teacher-child racial/ethnic match and parental engagement in Head Start. The findings of their study were that teacher-child racial/ethnic match enhances parental engagement and decreases student absence, particularly among Hispanic families. According to Ntekane (2018), parental involvement improves academic performance. Ntekane posited that school administrators must encourage parents to get involved and make contributions towards helping the school achieve its missions and goals. Therefore, parent engagement activities should include opportunities for parents to support their students. Shultz et al. (2014) opined that cultural responsiveness in schools is grounded in the belief that culturally linguistic students can academically excel if given adequate support and resources. Shultz et al. added that students are more likely to succeed when there is an atmosphere of warmth and cooperation and low degrees of conflict. Student success is dependent on building those relationships with families. According to Stearns

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(2008),"Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe that students want to learn, and they assume until proven otherwise, that they can" (p. 20).

All participants recognized that socioeconomic status, race, communication, and a sense of belonging negatively impacted parental involvement. Tarheel and Pine are both high-poverty schools. Most parents work in the service industry or in factories. They work shifts that are flexible and often miss out on school-related activities. Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine) cited socioeconomic factors as a barrier to student participation in school activities. Gregory George mentioned that some parents do not have transportation. He has his CDL license and has driven students home when they needed to quarantine and the parents could not come to school to get them. Race is also a barrier to parental engagement. Pine and Tarheel Schools have large minority populations. Hispanics make up most of each school's population, according to Amanda Ellis and Judy Barnes (Principals at Tarheel and Pine, respectively). Many White families used to send their children to Pine or Tarheel but are exploring other options, including private academies and charter schools. The White families who remain have the resources to participate financially in school-related activities. One of the parents at Pine explained that if there are no people who look like you, then you are less willing to participate in activities. Language barriers provide challenges Pine and Tarheel face. The administrators at Pine and Tarheel do not have full-time interpreters who can speak with parents with limited English proficiency. They rely on custodians or other workers who may speak Spanish.

Pine Elementary School has similar challenges with Title I utilization. Parents do not have a voice in determining how Title I funds will be spent. According to the purchase orders from the finance office, most of Pine's Title I expenditures were used for postage, envelopes, books, and some math resources. The Title I funds at Pine could be used to eliminate barriers to

parent engagement. For example, the assistant principal at Pine shared that he had to drive a bus to take students home after they were exposed to COVID. He said the bus driver shortage impacted students who needed to get home while their parents were at work. Title I funds could have been used for the bus. Some school systems are using money from the stimulus packet and Title I funds to offer free meals to students. Students can eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner for free, and family members can also eat dinner for free. Family engagement could be improved if Pine earmarked some funds for parent engagement while focusing on student achievement. It is well documented that student achievement is tied to parent engagement. According to Mapp, schools and parents can increase capacity if families have enhanced knowledge and understanding of educational policies and programs such as those associated with special needs and Title I funds. The lack of parent voice in decision-making was a recurring theme throughout all the interviews.

It has been duly noted based on the participant responses that parents should be respected as partners to school and district staff no matter their background. All individuals are invested in the outcome of student success. Collaboration is required at each level of governance based on legislation. Constrained identities and opportunities have implications for families' engagement and actions in schools, as well as teachers' engagement with and actions toward them (Ishimaru, 2020). In practice, the "good parent" supports students where, when, and how educators deem appropriate (e.g., participating in fundraisers, classroom preparation, monitoring homework, talking to their child about going to college).

Limitations

This comparative case study utilized qualitative data, as described earlier, to examine the success (perceived and actual) of the Title I Parent Engagement within two elementary schools. This opportunity provided an in-depth understanding of what some stakeholders perceive as it

relates to their roles as well as others to ultimately support student achievement while giving voice primarily to parents along with school administrators and central office staff members. Ideally, this study would have tracked the progress of the students whose parents chose to participate in each school. A look at their standardized test scores, classroom assessments, and behavior at home and school would have provided data regarding the benefits of parental involvement. However, that data were difficult to come by due to the COVID-19 pandemic that drastically changed teaching and learning during the course of the study as well as parental access to schools. This type of study would be beneficial to school and district leaders for targeted planning and evaluation in the future.

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Recommendations for Practice

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Engage in Ongoing Stakeholder Professional Development for Continuous Improvement

The current ESSA legislation specifies the parent's role in the education of their child. To effectively afford the opportunity, school staff must receive in-service training regarding federal mandates. While the purpose of the funding is to increase high-quality education service to low-income students, their families are required to have input into the academic operation of the schools serving their students. The significance of family engagement in education has been an expectation for decades. However, time and time again, evidence suggests parents are not obtaining the chance to partner as anticipated due to a lack of clarity and definition among entities (Ferlazzo, 2016).

Developing and sustaining promising partnership practices has long been an expectation in public education as strong suggestions have been illuminated by family involvement practitioners and researchers like Susan Auerbach, James Comer, Joyce Epstein, Nancy Hill, William Jeynes, and Karen Mapp, among others. The previously mentioned researchers shared

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effective models used to strengthen structures when schools and districts utilize them with fidelity. Their collective works detail the importance of effective leadership, academic preparation in the home, care for families, academic socialization, as well as increasing student achievement. Dogwood City was selected to follow the thought leader Karen Mapp for her proven Dual Capacity-Building Framework that was lifted as a replicable model by the U.S. Department of Education. The immediate past superintendent oversaw locally designed approaches to achieve the components of the Mapp model. These processes could continue to provide ways for schools to embrace engagement versus the involvement of parents. Unfortunately, these methods to institutionalize expected practice in each school were not maintained in totality with true fidelity in each school beyond the tenure of the superintendent.

Effective and enduring professional development is a necessity for all stakeholders. Professional development should take place during various points of the academic year involving different target audiences. The student body makeup across Dogwood City Schools differs, resulting in varying learning needs for the adults. Offerings should take place beyond strategic planning and compliance objectives for pending monitoring cycles. A Cross Program Consolidated Federal Monitoring Visit conducted within the last 2 months shared a recommendation consistent with this assertion. Though the district met the minimum Title I, Part A requirement, the evaluator from the pass-through agency suggested:

> … teachers, principals, and district leadership shared multiple methods input regarding professional development is gathered. School-level and district-level documentation was shared demonstrating stakeholder input, feedback, and presentations from professional development opportunities. Interviews revealed that most of the professional development was relevant to the current needs related to responding to the pandemic

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(technology, remote instruction, etc.). Principals shared that their input is valued however the district leads efforts related to funding. The principals expressed a desire to learn more about federal funds. It is recommended that principals receive professional development to build their fiscal management capacity to further strengthen their ability to create high quality comprehensive improvement plans to address student needs and strategically monitor and evaluate the use of funds for each school.

An additional point of compliance and/or documentation was recommended by the monitoring agency officials to be strengthened with reasonable measures. The report suggested, "It is recommended that each Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) school include a discussion of TSI status during the annual Title I meeting and provide written documentation to stakeholders that clearly explains TSI status each year the schools remain in TSI status."

Cultural Competence

One recommendation for practice is cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching. Both schools in this study had staff that was predominantly White and had students who were mostly minorities. One of the parents in the study mentioned that some White teachers did not know how to teach African American children and used implicit bias when disciplining them. Another parent who is Hispanic shared that families of color are less likely to participate in engagement activities if they do not see themselves represented in leadership or in groups like the PTO. One of the administrators at Tarheel shared that her focus was going to be on improving equity in schools and securing resources for students of color. She told a story about her daughter, who is Black, being raised by a White woman. She said her daughter was excited to see a Black girl in one of the books she was reading. It was a moment of discovery for her. She realized that children deserve to see themselves reflected in books and classrooms.

The school district seems to also be focusing on increasing cultural competence and improving equity based on the new 2022–2026 Strategic Plan goals one and two with nested objectives. Various district policy and practice documents highlight the necessity for parental engagement at each grade level to improve student achievement. This evidence collectively provided guidance and directions for operationalizing the goals. It should be noted here that prior attempts have been made to remedy problems through the district Race and Equity Policy adopted in March 2020, which explicitly addressed needs in the areas of policy and practice, relationships and engagement, as well as teaching and learning. Equity and Inclusion Plan 2021–2024 has removed some of the action steps from the initial Equity Plan 2018–2021, which spawned the policy and new plan that caused consternation for some educators and community members based on the outside oppositional, political influence that did not share the vision of disrupting existing inequities.

Professional development should be offered that continues to improve teacher and leader practices as well as build the capacity of families. Moving past attempts to avoid critical conversations altogether should occur with an analysis of how disparities based on socio-economic status and race exist as well as matter. According to Mapp, building capacity should include an increase in knowledge and understanding of culturally responsive practices and pedagogy. Barajas-Lopez and Ishimaru (2020) concurred with Mapp (2013) and stated that non-dominant families are often viewed by teachers and school administrators from a cultural deficit perspective. Barajas-Lopez and Ishimaru suggested that schools and teachers should use evidence-based practices to improve parent engagement.

Increase Educator Diversity

"Over the past two decades, the K-12 student population has become much more racially diverse, but that same trend in diversity is not reflected in teachers and school leaders," says Dr. Javaid Siddiqi, president and chief executive officer of the Hunt Institute (Rash, 2021). The Hunt Institute, named for the renowned governor of North Carolina who was a proponent of public schooling, focuses on creating innovative methods to address challenges within the United States education structure through a participatory format of politicians, leaders, and other collaborators. Current governor, Roy Cooper, established the Develop a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) task force in 2019 to continue to develop and refine strategies for identifying, recruiting, preparing, and supporting more educators of color (Exec. Order No. 113, 2019). DRIVE communicated 10 guidance statements for use in response to local, state, and national data.

Each school in this study has a predominantly White staff. At one school, no African Americans were employed at the school. At the other school, there was one African American teacher and one paraprofessional. Each school had at least one Hispanic employee. The custodian at one school is Hispanic and is often asked to translate when the translator is not available. The translator only comes two data a week. There is a full-time translator at the other school, and the school is 60% Hispanic. According to Stevens and Motamedi (2019), when students of color have a teacher of the same race or ethnicity, there is a likelihood that test scores may increase, and disciplinary issues may decrease. Stevens and Motamedi also said, "from preparation to recruitment, and hiring to welcoming and mentoring, everyone has a role in creating a school community that values diversity and encourages educations to learning from one another" ("Creating a Culture of Diversity," para. 3).

They agreed that educator diversity may lead to more positive outcomes for all students and that bilingual teachers of color are especially needed in areas with large numbers of linguistically diverse students. Stevens and Motamedi (2019) posited that when staff is diverse, it can build community ties and foster a sense of belonging.

Build Genuine Relationships with Stakeholders

The importance of building relationships was mentioned throughout the interview process and is part of the dual capacity framework. Family-school partnerships can increase capacity for both parents and school staff. According to Mapp, families and school staff increase their comfort level and sense of self-efficacy when they engage in home-school partnerships and events. According to one of the parents in the study, schools should focus on relationships and not call parents when students are doing 'bad.' They should take the time to call the parents when they are doing something well. A recurring theme during the interviews was increasing a sense of belonging. Most participants (parents and administrators) explained that building relationships is an area of growth. Two of the participants in the study shared that providing translators at events and creating opportunities for Hispanic parents to be involved in decision-making could increase parent engagement. According to Ishimaru (2020), it is important to reach out to families of color and proactively build relationships with diverse families. Ishimaru explained that cultural brokering strategies should focus on building relationships between educators and families.

Increase Parent Voice

Increasing parent voice should also be a strategy for increasing engagement. Parent engagement requires parental involvement. Parents should be privy to any decisions being made about their children and education experiences. This is especially important in Title I schools,

where parents have the right to request data about the school's continuous improvement plan, assessments, and teacher performance. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), family engagement should be relational. Mapp explained that building dual capacity should involve building respectful and trusting relationships between home and school. Mapp posited that a relationship between home and school could act as an incentive and motivating agent for the continued participation of families and staff.

School and district efforts to obtain the parent voice on their perceptions of engagement beyond the development of continuous improvement and strategic plans are critical in building partnerships. Genuine action on feedback could change the climate and community at each level beyond the representative structure of the district-structured advisory councils to involve parents. Representation should be inclusive of more than highly skilled participants from the community yet members with different types of contributions and points of view. Opportunities to lend opinions, receive invitations for volunteerism, and engage in racial dialogue should happen more often. The schools and districts should institute different methods of retrieving perception data while recognizing the varied interests of the populations. It will be important to keep the variations top of mind when and where offering capacity-building programs based on socioeconomic status, race, educational attainment, and language status. Engagement requires attendance and choice, so researching parental interests is key.

Create an Accountability System

Parental engagement was measured by the experiences of stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, and district staff) who organized and participated in parent engagement at two Title schools in Cardinal County. The two schools were Tarheel and Pine Elementary Schools, which are Title I schools within the same school district. This research project involved an

analysis of Title I schools in Dogwood City and its surrounding county (Cardinal County). All five elementary schools in the Dogwood City Schools are Title I schools. Parents, teachers, administrators, and district staff were interviewed to determine their experiences with parental engagement activities. According to Dogwood County schools' policy on parent and family engagement policy, "parent and family engagement means the participation of parents, guardians, and other family members in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student learning and other school activities. According to the Dogwood City schools, each year, the school system must have annual meetings with parents to discuss how Title I funds are spent and parents' rights and responsibilities.

The schools must be explicit about how those funds are spent. Data should also be presented on the school's progress on the continuous improvement plan. The meeting is often held at one of the Title I schools in the district. According to the Dogwood City school district, Title I funds support our students. For example, Title I schools must have teachers and teacher assistants that are highly qualified. Highly qualified teachers must be licensed by the state, fully certified, and able to demonstrate competence in the subject they teach. Parents may require information about the professional qualifications of their child's teachers, and parents will be notified if a child is being taught by a teacher who is not considered highly qualified. Each school must offer at least three parent nights and maintain consistent contact with families.

Developing relationships with parents can increase their sense of belonging and encourage them to actively participate in their children's education (St-Amand et al., 2017). Pine and Tarheel Elementary schools hold events to increase parent engagement. However, both schools need improvement when attracting lower-income families and non-English speaking parents. Amanda Ellis (Principal, Tarheel ES) and Gregory George (Assistant Principal, Pine ES)

agreed that parental engagement was a growth area. The Bierman et. al (2017) conducted a literature review on studies associated with family engagement. Building strong parent-school relationships is another way to increase school and student engagement.

Each public school unit is required to generate a continuous improvement plan with strategic goals through the use of relevant data. It is imperative to identify inclusive, value-added metrics in order to establish urgency for action. The leadership should:

1. Identify the needs of stakeholder professional development

2. Select and define success measures

3. Set targets and incorporate equity

4. Focus on drivers to periodically monitor progress

5. Develop a process to ensure ongoing gains. (AIR, 2022)

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. One recommendation is that this study is replicated in another school district with a similar population to determine if that school system shares similar challenges. Researchers could learn more about how to use Title I funds effectively and increase family engagement through evidence-based practices. Another recommendation is a quantitative study to compare family engagement in different settings and how family engagement is impacted over time based on race and socioeconomic status. Finally, another recommendation for future research is the influence of race and socioeconomic status on student achievement and family engagement. Race and socioeconomic status were factors that contributed to White flight in Pine and Tarheel Elementary Schools. A study on the influence of race and socioeconomic status on parent engagement and school enrollment could be beneficial

when educators and administrators are considering the most effective way to implement family engagement practices.

Final Thoughts

Parental engagement can be effective if schools and parents work as a collaborative team. A recurring theme throughout this study was parent voice. Parents are stakeholders and need to feel included in their children's education. Parental engagement is not only the responsibility of school leadership. All stakeholders need to work together to increase student achievement and parental engagement. One takeaway from this study was that cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching methods are needed in many classrooms and especially in the South. Several parents mentioned that families of color had no representation in any leadership capacity and parents with limited English proficiency had no way to communicate with staff in the schools.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework adapted from the work of Karen Mapp was only visible in small increments between the two schools of study. The remnants highlighted positive and negative feelings from participants. During the interviews, the enthusiasm of parents was evident as they seemed to appreciate the actionable data provided by teachers during the Academic Teacher Team Meetings yet also longed for more traditional parent conferencing in addition to the newer method. Staff seemed to view the model from a lens of compliance requirements instead of a value-added approach demonstrative the excitement once felt due to increased participation had been lost over the years. Therefore, finding ways to improve the implementation and evaluation of any family engagement initiative is imperative to achieve the desired goal for all stakeholders.

In my role as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I have learned that parental engagement is a systemic issue. Multiple schools struggle with engaging parents and providing

an inclusive culture where all are valued. I will continue to push for equity in all schools in Dogwood City. It is my hope that this project will inspire social change and help schools understand how building capacity for parent engagement will improve a school's culture and student achievement.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Format:

It will take approximately an hour to complete the interview. All responses will be audio-recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder and Zoom. If you need clarification on any questions as the interview is being conducted, please feel free to ask. If you have any questions after the interview, I can be reached via cell phone at (336) 509-7313 or by email at rtharri2@uncg.edu.

Interview Questions

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

2. What can you tell me about the school's history?

3. Describe the school now.

4. What are you trying to accomplish in your role at the school?

5. Describe the family and community engagement present in the school.

6. In what ways does the school advocate for parents?

Research Questions

2. **What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?**

   a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family engagement?**

    b. How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?

    c. What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?

Interview Questions

What are the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders who engage in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

1. What are your perceptions about your role in the education of your children?

2. What role should parents play in the education of their children?

3. What determines whether parents will participate in parent engagement activities initiated by the schools?

4. What does parent engagement look like to you?

5. How is parent-community participation viewed by parents, teachers, and students? Is there any resistance to these relationships, and if so, by whom?

6. How accessible is the school to parents and community officials?

7. What voice do they have in the school?

8. How can the school better serve working families, families of color, and those who may not feel connected?

9. What kind of strategies are utilized to help students succeed?

10. What is the most effective parent/community stakeholder partnership experience that you have witnessed for students at your school?

11. Describe an integration obstacle you have experienced in building community partnerships within the school. Describe how you overcame it.

12. What are Title I parents' beliefs and values about home-school partnerships?

13. What can be learned from your experiences in this school as it relates specifically to engaging community members with the school?

   a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family engagement?**

1. What types of parent engagement activities are held at the school?

2. How do you feel about the activities that are held at schools?

3. In what ways do you/they promote family and community engagement?

4. How do they promote parent-led activities?

5. Does the school facilitate differentiated parent engagement activities? If so, please tell me about those methods?

6. What is a home-school partnership?

7. Are home-school partnerships important? Why or Why not?

8. How do administrators and teachers empower parents and the community?

9. How do they nurture parent-teacher relationships?

10. What strategies have you employed to facilitate parents becoming part of the school community?

11. What communication occurs between home and school? How often, what is the nature of the communication?

12. What other partners are working with the school community?

13. What strategies have you employed to facilitate partners becoming part of the school community?

14. What communication occurs between other partners and the school? How often, what is the nature of the communication?

    b. How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?

1. What strategies should educators employ to help Title I parents be more successful in working with their children at home and in school?

2. What do educators do to try to get parents involved in the education of their children?

3. Is there anything the school/district can do to make these activities better? If so, what?

4. If you were directly responsible for increasing parent engagement at the schools, what would you do?

5. Is there anything that educators can do to help parents feel better about engagement in the education of their children?

6. What role do parents feel the community plays in helping or hindering the academic and social success of their children?

7. Do you think the community plays a role in the education of children? If so, what is their role?

8. What does a home-school-community partnership look like to you?

9. How might parents be more meaningfully included in the process of educating students?

10. What are the current instructional vision and improvement strategies at the school level to advance student achievement?

    c. What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?

1. How are resources at the school and district levels used to implement the schools' Continuous Improvement Plan?

2. What strategies are used to determine expenditures for parent engagement?

3. How and by whom is fund allocation determined for the schools?

4. How do the allocation and use of resources at the school change in response to budget adjustments, including overall funding reductions and changes in the use of parent involvement funds?

5. How do the actual resource use patterns at the school sites align with or differ from the resource use strategies used in the Evidence-Based Model (Dual Capacity-Building Framework [Dr. Karen Mapp])?

6. How do instructional supplies expenditures affect academic achievement?

7. How are parents involved in the financial, curricular, personnel, and other policy decisions or operations of the school?

Questions regarding race and socioeconomic status

1. Do you feel that race and socioeconomic status (how much money you make) influence engagement at schools? If so, in what way?

2. Do you feel parent engagement experiences are different based on race or socioeconomic status?

3. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your parent engagement experiences?

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me. I appreciate it.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATORS

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Format:

It will take approximately an hour to complete the interview. All responses will be audio-recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder and Zoom. If you need clarification on any questions as the interview is being conducted, please feel free to ask. If you have any questions after the interview, I can be reached via cell phone at (336) 509-7313 or by email at rtharri2@uncg.edu.

Interview Questions

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

2. What can you tell me about the school's history?

3. Describe the school now.

4. What are you trying to accomplish in your role at the school?

5. Describe the family and community engagement present in the school.

6. In what ways does the school advocate for parents?

Research Questions

1. **What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?**

a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family engagement?**

b. **How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?**

c. **What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?**

Interview Questions

What are the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders who engage in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

1. What are your perceptions about the parents' role in the education of their children?

2. What role should parents play in the education of their children?

3. What determines whether parents will participate in parent engagement activities initiated by the schools?

4. What does parent engagement look like to you?

5. How is parent-community participation viewed by parents, teachers, and students? Is there any resistance to these relationships, and if so, by whom?

6. How accessible is the school to parents and community officials?

7. What voice do they have in the school?

8. How can the school better serve working families, families of color, and those who may not feel connected?

9. What have you learned about moving a school from a place of little stakeholder involvement, to a place where the school is working closely with parents and the community?

10. What kind of strategies do you employ to help students succeed?

11. What is the most effective parent/community stakeholder partnership experience
that you have witnessed for students at your school?

12. Describe an integration obstacle you have experienced in building community
partnerships within the school. Describe how you overcame it.

13. What are Title I school administrators' beliefs and values about home-school
partnerships?

14. What can be learned from your experiences in this school as it relates specifically
to engaging community members with the school.

    a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family
engagement?**

1. What types of parent engagement activities are held at the schools?

2. How do you feel about the activities that are held at schools?

3. In what ways do you/they promote family and community engagement?

4. How do they promote parent-led activities?

5. Does the school facilitate differentiated parent engagement activities? If so, please tell me
about those methods?

6. What is a home-school partnership?

7. Are home-school partnerships important? Why or Why not?

8. How do administrators and teachers empower parents and the community?

9. How do they nurture parent-teacher relationships?

10. What strategies have you employed to facilitate parents becoming part of the school
community?

11. What communication occurs between home and school? How often, what is the nature of the communication?

12. What other partners are working with the school community?

13. What strategies have you employed to facilitate partners becoming part of the school community?

14. What communication occurs between other partners and the school? How often, what is the nature of the communication?

     b. How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?

1. What strategies should educators employ to help Title I parents be more successful in working with their children at home and in school?

2. What do educators do to try to get parents involved in the education of their children?

3. Is there anything the school/district can do to make these activities better? If so, what?

4. If you were directly responsible for increasing parent engagement at the schools, what would you do?

5. Is there anything that educators can do to help parents feel better about engagement in the education of their children?

6. What role do Title I school administrators feel the community plays in helping or hindering the academic and social success of their children?

7. Do you think the community plays a role in the education of children? If so, what is their role?

8. What does a home-school-community partnership look like to you?

9. How might parents be more meaningfully included in the process of educating students?

10. What are the current instructional vision and improvement strategies at the school level to advance student achievement?

    c. What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?

1. How are resources at the school and district levels used to implement the schools' Continuous Improvement Plan?

2. What strategies are used to determine expenditures for parent engagement?

3. How and by whom is fund allocation determined for the schools?

4. How do the allocation and use of resources at the school change in response to budget adjustments, including overall funding reductions and changes in the use of parent involvement funds?

5. How do the actual resource use patterns at the school sites align with or differ from the resource use strategies used in the Evidence-Based Model (Dual Capacity-Building Framework [Dr. Karen Mapp])?

6. How do instructional supplies expenditures affect academic achievement?

7. How are parents involved in the financial, curricular, personnel, and other policy decisions or operations of the school?

Questions regarding race and socioeconomic status

1. Do you feel that race and socioeconomic status (how much money you make) influence engagement at schools? If so, in what way?

2. Do you feel parent engagement experiences are different based on race or socioeconomic status?

3. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your parent engagement experiences?

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me. I appreciate it.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS FOR CENTRAL OFFICE

PERSONNEL

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Format:

It will take approximately one hour to complete the interview. All responses will be
audio-recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder and Zoom. If you need clarification on any
questions as the interview is being conducted, please feel free to ask. If you have any questions
after the interview, I can be reached via cell phone at (336) 509-7313 or by email at
rtharri2@uncg.edu.

Interview Questions

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

2. What can you tell me about the school's history?

3. Describe the school now.

4. What are you trying to accomplish in your role at the school?

5. Describe the family and community engagement present in the school.

6. In what ways does the school advocate for parents?

Research Questions

1. **What are the experiences and perceptions of administrators and parents who participate in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?**

   a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family engagement?**

   b. **How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?**

   c. **What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?**

Interview Questions

What are the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders who engage in parent engagement efforts in two Title I schools?

1. What are Title I Central Office employees' perceptions about the parents' role in the education of their children?

2. What role should parents play in the education of their children?

3. What determines whether parents will participate in parent engagement activities initiated by the schools?

4. What does parent engagement look like to you?

5. How is parent-community participation viewed by parents, teachers, and students? Is there any resistance to these relationships, and if so, by whom?

6. How accessible is the school to parents and community officials?

7. What voice do they have in the school?

8. How can the school better serve working families, families of color, and those who may not feel connected?

9. What have you learned about moving a school from a place of little stakeholder involvement to a place where the school is working closely with parents and the community?

10. What kind of strategies do you employ to help students succeed?

11. What is the most effective parent/community stakeholder partnership experience that you have witnessed for students at your school?

12. Describe an integration obstacle you have experienced in building community partnerships within the school. Describe how you overcame it.

13. What are Title I Central Office employees' beliefs and values about home-school partnerships?

14. What can be learned from your experiences in this school as it relates specifically to engaging community members with the school?

   a. **What methods, practices, and strategies are used to build capacity for family engagement?**

1. What types of parent engagement activities are held at the schools?

2. How do you feel about the activities that are held at schools?

3. In what ways do you/they promote family and community engagement?

4. How do they promote parent-led activities?

5. Do they facilitate differentiated parent engagement activities? If so, please tell me about those methods?

6. What is a home-school partnership?

7. Are home-school partnerships important? Why or Why not?

8. How do administrators and teachers empower parents and the community?

9. How do they nurture parent-teacher relationships?

10. What strategies have you employed to facilitate parents becoming part of the school community?

11. What communication occurs between home and school? How often, what is the nature of the communication?

12. What other partners are working with the school community?

13. What strategies have you employed to facilitate partners becoming part of the school community?

14. What communication occurs between other partners and the school? How often is the communication, and what is the nature of the communication?

b. How do the schools interpret and implement the current district family engagement model?

1. What strategies should educators employ to help Title I parents be more successful in working with their children at home and in school?

2. What do educators do to try to get parents involved in the education of their children?

3. Is there anything the school/district can do to make these activities better? If so, what?

4. If you were directly responsible for increasing parent engagement at the schools, what would you do?

5. Is there anything that educators can do to help parents feel better about engagement in the education of their children?

6. What role do Title I Central Office employees feel the community plays in helping or hindering the academic and social success of their children?

7. Do you think the community plays a role in the education of children? If so, what is their role?

8. What does a home-school-community partnership look like to you?

9. How might parents be more meaningfully included in the process of educating elementary school students?

10. What are the current instructional vision and improvement strategies at the school level to advance student achievement?

c. **What is the main utilization of Title I Parent Engagement funds at each school in efforts to improve student academic achievement?**

1. How are resources at the school and district levels used to implement the schools' Continuous Improvement Plan?

2. What strategies are used to determine expenditures for parent engagement?

3. How and by whom is fund allocation determined for the schools?

4. How do the allocation and use of resources at the school change in response to budget adjustments, including overall funding reductions and changes in the use of parent involvement funds?

5. How do the actual resource use patterns at the school sites align with or differ from the resource use strategies used in the Evidence-Based Model (Dual Capacity-Building Framework [Dr. Karen Mapp])?

6. How do instructional supplies expenditures affect academic achievement?

7. How are parents involved in the financial, curricular, personnel, and other policy decisions or operations of the school?

Questions regarding race and socioeconomic status

1. Do you feel that race and socioeconomic status (how much money you make) influence engagement at schools? If so, in what way?

2. Do you feel parent engagement experiences are different based on race or socioeconomic status?

3. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your parent engagement experiences?

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me. I appreciate it.