

TOWARD EQUITABLE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: USING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
TO IMPACT TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMIDST THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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DEDICATION

For teachers, the hardest working people on the planet, and for principals, who somehow work even harder.

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD EQUITABLE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: USING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO IMPACT TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Family engagement is crucial to academic achievement. However, family engagement practices in schools are inequitable and do not reach Families of Color. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both further inequities in education and an undoubtedly critical need to partner with all families for student success. This improvement science initiative was designed to address four critical causes of inequitable family engagement practices in an urban district: limited training for educators on family engagement, a narrow school-centric definition of engagement, deficit beliefs that educators hold about families, and lack of trust between families and schools. To address these causal factors, the scholar-practitioner conducted professional learning for a cohort of educators from Title I Elementary schools. Focus groups and interviews with teachers and families, combined with a weekly practical measure, provided for qualitative and quantitative analyses of the initiative. The immediate aim of the initiative was that family engagement activities implemented by the teachers will reach more Families of Color. The ultimate aim was to increase partnership between schools and Families of Color to allow schools to better serve Students of Color and reduce opportunity gaps. Educator feedback shows that the professional learning was beneficial in expanding their definition of family engagement, providing training in making family engagement activities more equitable, positively impacting their beliefs about

families, and promoting trust between the educator participants and the families of their students. Families feedback indicate that more work is to be done to construct equitable partnerships that allow them to give input on school improvement and decision-making.

Keywords: family engagement, equity, improvement science, COVID-19 pandemic

FOREWORD

This publication is a disquisition in pursuit of an Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership at Western Carolina University. The disquisition is a “dissertation in practice” serving as the capstone of this program (Western Carolina University, n.d.). Disquisitions are different from traditional dissertations in that they are grounded in improvement science, strongly tied to the context and needs of the scholar-practitioner’s professional organization, and focused on problem-solving (Archbald, 2008; Crow et al., 2016). A critical aspect of the research work of a scholar-practitioner is the consideration of their positionality, as they are a member of the organization they are studying and part of its “particular culture, ethos, and workplace mission” (Drake & Heath, 2010, p. 47).

I, as a scholar-practitioner, recognize the complexities of insider-research, and seek to demonstrate careful consideration of my positionality, in order to leverage its benefits and propel the improvement initiative further. This disquisition outlines the problem of practice, causal analysis, interventions, measures, and outcomes for the improvement initiative, which will serve as the capstone for completion of the EdD program.

Toward Equitable Family Engagement: Using Professional Learning to Impact Teachers Beliefs and Practices Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, schools abruptly closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and everything about how students were educated changed. At first, school system leaders in Howard Public School District (HPSD) (pseudonym) thought that they may be able to reopen in a couple weeks. Then, weeks turned to months, and more months, and the closing of the school year.

In June 2020, the HPSD Board of Education partnered with the Superintendent's Leadership Team to hold virtual community forums on how best to reopen schools for the next school year. Hundreds of parents and community leaders signed up to attend these forums and give input—representing numbers twenty-fold those who had attended similar in-person events in the past. School system leaders, principals, and teachers were surprised to find that not only were the virtual forums better attended than former in-person events, the faces of parents on the screen were far more diverse than the district had ever reached before. Many students' family members signed on using the device provided by the district for the student to engage in remote learning, with students by their side assisting their families with the technology or interpreting their input. The energy in the virtual space was palpable, and barriers were noticeably being broken down in front of HPSD's leaders' eyes.

These virtual community forums gave district and school leaders a glimpse into what was possible for family engagement. This improvement initiative is designed to study and systemize what happened naturally in those sessions—where everyone, regardless of culture or background, was united around a clear, shared purpose of reopening schools safely, where families knew their voice was important to HPSD leaders and their contribution critical to the effort. Together with families and teachers, this initiative sought to alleviate the following

dilemmas. How do we leverage the increased access and engagement seen in big moments like that one into small moments where teachers interact with families on daily basis? How do we unite educators and families around the ubiquitous shared goal of ensuring every student's individual success? How do we use the momentum created for family engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic to change our practices moving forward?

Introduction

Parents and teachers are finding that they share common goals and need to share more information if they are to reach these goals.

-Joyce Epstein in Phi Delta Kappan

More than thirty years ago, Epstein established that partnership and two-way communication between families and teachers were critical to leveraging the full benefits of family engagement for improving student outcomes (Epstein, 1991) Still, in 2021, research indicates that teachers continue to describe their visions for family engagement in ways that are not about the mutual sharing of information but are instead largely school-centric. Educators have predominantly controlled “the terms of engagement and initiated school-based meetings in which families were expected to participate” and these school-centric expectations more negatively impact marginalized families (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020, p. 692). Parents are often viewed unfavorably and relegated to roles that keep them in the margins, making their influence on students' educational success invisible to educators (López et al., 2001). However, there is increased potential for equity when teachers, administrators, families, and students all view one another as authentic leaders and collectively work toward social justice (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018).

Scholarly research and the expectations of policy are aligned that practices in schools that are rooted in partnership and two-way communication with families positively impact students' academic achievement and social-emotional well-being (Epstein, 1996; Epstein & Sheldon, 2019; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ishimaru, 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Family and community ties have also been identified as a key factor in school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010). However, current school practices, often labeled family "engagement" are really focused on one-way communication from a teacher, who takes the role of expert, to families, who are viewed as passive recipients of information (Constantino, 2016; Henderson et al., 2007). These common practices do little to promote real involvement of families in their children's learning, much less engagement or partnership with the school as a whole (Epstein, 1991; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Therefore, a more critical lens is necessary to shift the lens from White middle-class communities, as the standard, toward seeing "multiple forms of cultural wealth within Communities of Color" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82).

Considerable scholarly work exists exploring the terminology of family engagement itself (Ferrara, 2011; Lawson, 2003). Research about "parental involvement" and/or "family engagement" (or any other combination of the terms such as family involvement or parental engagement) exists along a continuum from school-centric practices such as events and fundraisers to family-centric practices wherein families are part of the schools' problem-solving and decision-making (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Henderson et al., 2007; Lawson, 2003). For this improvement initiative, "family engagement" was chosen because "engagement" invokes a stronger sense of partnership than "involvement" and it places an asset-based emphasis on "family" to acknowledge that many students have loving caregivers who may not be their "parents" in the narrow or traditional sense of the word. Wilson (2019) explained that

“acknowledging the support, nurturing, and value that can come from various family configurations is essential to equitably engaging and partnering with African Americans” especially (p. 58). Family engagement is also the term currently used in federal policy and most commonly used in HPSD (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

This improvement initiative also intentionally chooses to use People of Color (POC), Students of Color, Families of Color, and Communities of Color to describe minoritized populations. This terminology better emphasizes the experiences of POC, rather than placing emphasis on the marginalization they experience due to White Supremacy (Khalifa et al., 2016). Likewise, it is utilized to recognize that Communities of Color have their own forms of valuable capital such as aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Therefore, Families of Color must be approached by educators and researchers from a lens of strengths rather than deficits (Yosso, 2005). Community cultural wealth possessed by Families of Color includes aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Yosso, 2005). It is not intended to imply a false aggregate or to suggest that various minoritized communities have the same cultures, beliefs, experiences or needs.

Problem of Practice

Schools’ family engagement practices do not reach all families. Inequitable family engagement practices reduce parent participation and engagement, which adversely affects academic achievement (Fenton et al., 2017; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Historically, schools have been institutions that perpetuated marginalization of People of Color systemically and even violently, such as segregation and Indigenous boarding schools (Hong, 2019; Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Schools have also been places ripe with

microaggressions and assimilation pedagogy that sought to distance students from their familial cultures (Emdin, 2016). Even today, when progressive schools, like the ones in HPSD, are ostensibly no longer marginalizing families intentionally, or may even be trying to promote equity, the vast majority of school leaders and teachers are still from White, middle-class backgrounds and they assume their norms are the way families should engage with schools, judging families who do not interact with them in the expected ways (Lareau, 1987; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Sleeter, 2017). When little training has been provided to educators on social justice or egalitarian partnership with families, they are more likely to draw from the only experiences they have—the ones from their own schooling—and rely on one-way communications that reinforce marginalization and schools’ power over families, with or without intention to do so (D’Haem & Griswold, 2017; Hong, 2019). Even after 60 years of research about the effectiveness of family engagement in improving outcomes for students, few schools are able to engage all families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Causal Analysis

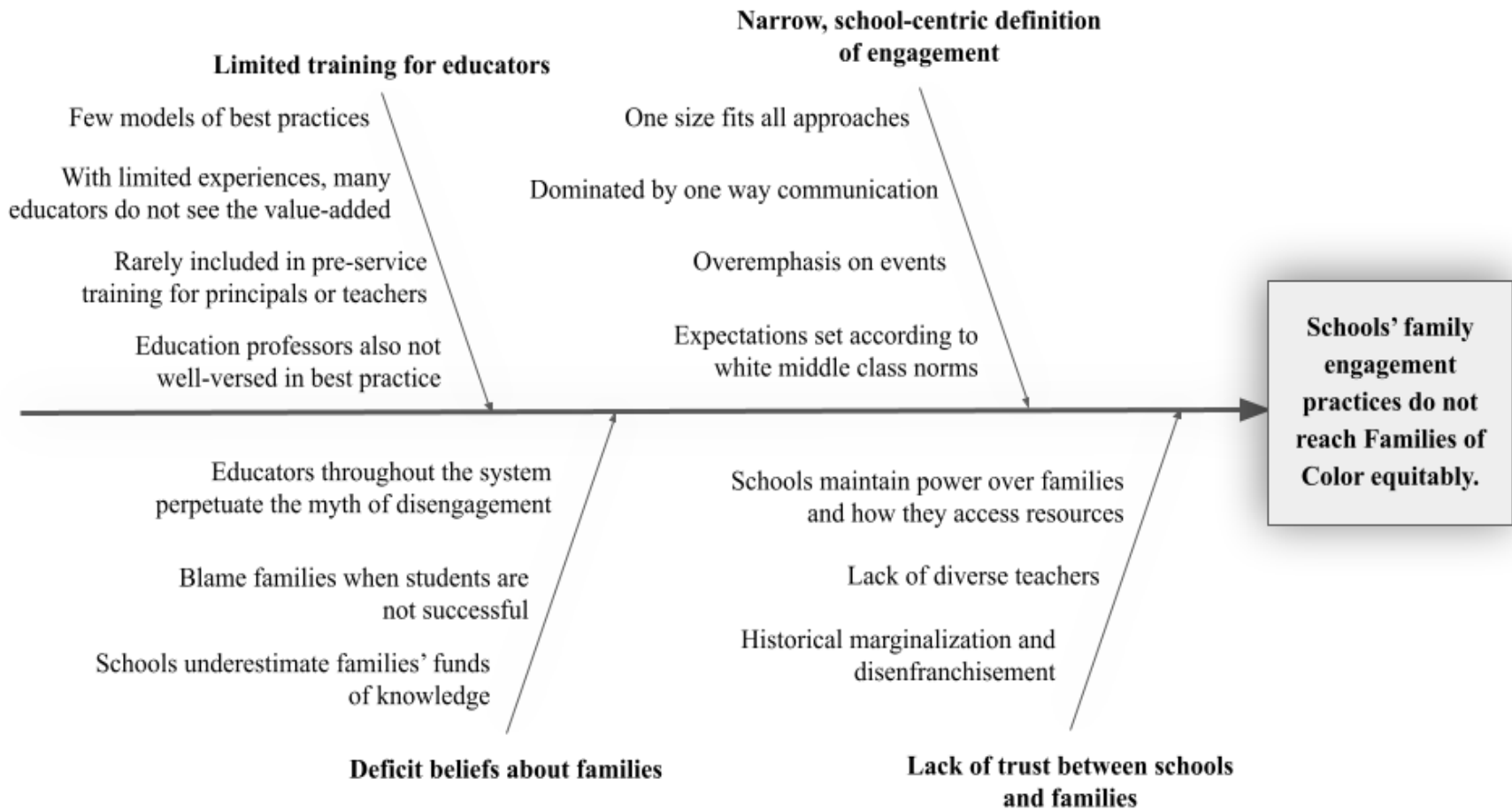
Family engagement has been a key pillar in the Howard Public School District since 2015. HPSD is a large, urban district in the Southeastern United States and is well-resourced in comparison to other nearby districts with a healthy tax base. In a recent Board of Education meeting, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Academic Advancement described family and community engagement as the first priority in ensuring that students are successful as they reopen schools for in-person instruction amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The Assistant Superintendent for Academic Advancement expounded, stating that “these efforts serve as the foundation that other areas are built upon... without the ability to engage with our students’

families, the effectiveness of all other efforts are diminished” [internal meeting notes, February 16, 2021].

In recent years, HPSD has provided training to school leaders on best practices of family engagement (including a connection to equity), launched a district-wide family survey for each school, and developed a grant program to promote innovative family engagement programming. The district’s Family Engagement work is centered around the Dual Capacity Framework from the US Department of Education (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The Dual Capacity Framework is a “compass, laying out the goals and conditions necessary to chart a path toward effective family engagement efforts that are linked to student achievement and school improvement” (Mapp & Bergmann, 2019). It outlines process conditions such as asset-based and culturally responsive practices and organizational conditions like systemic, integrated resources as critical to empowering educator and family partnerships. However, despite investing in family engagement at the district level, schools and teachers continue to experience a disconnect with families, especially Families of Color. To begin causal analysis, I conducted a series of inquiry dialogues with a diverse group of HPSD educators in small groups, including four central services staff who support family engagement, equity work, and school improvement as well as three school-based leaders who are all well-versed in family engagement practices. This included the Director of Family Engagement in the Office of Equity Affairs, the Title I Family Engagement Coordinator, two Senior Administrators for Area Superintendents, a Middle School Principal, an Elementary School Assistant Principal, and a High School Assistant Principal. I chose these stakeholders because they represented a variety of roles and would understand the initial premise that current family engagement practices promote inequities and therefore would be readily able to discuss possible root causes. I engaged in dialogue with these leaders using the “Five Whys”

protocol (*The Five Whys for Inquiry*, n.d.) because it has been used frequently in school improvement work in HPSD and was familiar to the groups. I began each dialogue by posing the first question, “Why don’t family engagement practices equitably reach Families of Color?” Then, followed each of their answers with another “why” until we agreed that we had reached potential root causes. I recorded my own notes during the inquiry discussions. Following the deliberations, I then informally coded my notes to find themes present across multiple conversations. After constructing an initial list of causes from these leaders’ input, I conducted a literature review to verify the causes and then to construct and refine a fishbone diagram to demonstrate the root causes. See figure 1 for an illustration. There are limitations to this analysis because families were not included in the discussions. However, it is important to center the analysis of root causes with educators, who hold the power and determine the practices utilized, rather than with families who can only engage in ways the schools permit. I addressed these limitations by consulting the literature and designing the improvement initiative to center the voices of families, as will be discussed later.

Figure 1: Causal Analysis



Note. A fishbone diagram showing the root causes that lead to inequitable family engagement practices.

Causal Analysis Literature

The causal analysis with stakeholders revealed four primary reasons why schools' family engagement practices do not reach diverse families: limited training for educators on family engagement, a narrow school-centric definition of engagement, deficit beliefs that educators hold about families, and lack of trust between families and schools. Educators' limited training on family engagement contributes to an over-reliance on traditional, school-centric practices. These obsolete practices do not connect to families, and therefore reinforce educators' deficit beliefs about families. Furthermore, these deficit beliefs inhibit the development of trust between families and educators. Also underpinning the educators' deficit beliefs and the mutual lack of trust between families and schools is the lack of teacher diversity.

Limited Training for Educators

When describing family engagement, school leaders often do not speak about the need for parent voice to be included (Ferrara, 2011). Few teachers or school leaders have ever been taught how to partner with families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Despite the fact that many teachers and school leaders are interested in building meaningful school-family partnerships, many do not know how, as there is a considerable lack of pre-service training and in-service professional development on family engagement (Epstein, 2011; Mapp et al., 2017).

As of 2011, none of the 50 states requires a pre-service course on family engagement for teachers, and only seven require this training for school leaders (Epstein, 2011). Furthermore, when surveyed, professors of education agree that family engagement is a critical skill for successful teaching, but they report feeling that they themselves are uninformed in best practices and unprepared to train their graduates in how to build meaningful partnerships with families (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). Nonetheless, teachers' professional capacity, knowledge, and

skills, along with schools' efforts to engage and support parents, are key factors in any improvement initiative (Bryk et al., 2010).

Studies of educational leadership indicate that Principals of Color encompass ethno-humanism into their leadership, where they draw on shared cultural experiences that give them more confidence in their students' abilities and an increased commitment to their success (Lomotey, 1993; Lomotey & Lowery, 2015). However, there is no systemic method to ensuring that all school leaders, who are disproportionately White, have this skill set (Auerbach, 2012). Teachers have also received little training on culturally sustaining pedagogies and often know little about their students' diverse cultures (Paris, 2012). This creates a circular problem, through which teachers do not know much about diverse families' cultures, but also do not know strategies for genuinely engaging families whereby they would learn more about their cultures.

Narrow School-Centric Definition of Engagement

For decades, researchers have called for schools to partner with families in planning a range of engagement efforts that honor all parenting styles, but still few schools do (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Peña, 2000). Schools have traditionally centered family engagement on events at school, which excludes families that do not have the flexibility and extra time to be at school, or may not feel comfortable there due to past or present marginalization (Constantino, 2016; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp et al., 2017). Also, lack of translators at schools commonly inhibits families whose first language is not English from being able to engage (Hill & Torres, 2010).

For some parents, teaching their children to value learning or ensuring students arrive on time to school is what they view as appropriate engagement, and schools must honor these valuable contributions (Peña, 2000). Families have increasingly busy schedules and pressures on

their time (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Researchers from the field of family studies have found flexibility is paramount in ensuring that family-school partnerships are effective in changing outcomes for a specific student (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). Furthermore, how significant of a barrier a family's economic constraints are intersects directly with the types of engagement opportunities provided to families—flexible opportunities to engage without physical presence at the school increased the engagement of families who face economic barriers (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

Even when parents do participate in school-initiated activities, they are often only engaged as *receivers* of information (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lightfoot, 2004). While many educators have moved to a child-centered view of teaching and learning, few have shifted their family engagement from school-centered to family-centered (Goodall, 2018). Most family engagement efforts are centered around school goals, such as improving test scores, rather than family or community goals (Khalifa, 2012). School leaders focus on what families “should” be doing instead of what educators can do as partners with families (Ferrara, 2011). School communication to families tends to perpetuate a “school knows best” narrative (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Building partnerships requires a transfer of power, which can be a radical concept for many teachers and schools (Frederico & Whiteside, 2016).

Deficit Beliefs about Families

Educators frequently describe impoverished parents with disparaging language, do not believe parents are capable of being partners in their children's education, and sometimes even accuse parents as being barriers to their children's success (Blitz et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2007). School staff often perceive parents as “either incapable of acting to support their children or uninterested in doing so” (Goodall, 2018, p. 616). One study conducted on pre-service

teachers found that student teachers' views about diverse families actually became less positive during their coursework and student teaching, which suggests that the culture among educators indeed indoctrinates new teachers into the myths of family disengagement (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Stories of disengagement are passed down to new educators and bias against families is created before educators ever have a chance to build a relationship with families (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017).

Even language within the research, which may not appear on the surface to be deficit-minded, still reinforces the idea that power and authority lies with the school and is to be portioned out to families. For instance, the phrase "parents are children's first teachers" is well-intentioned, but implies that when children come to school, parents relinquish their power to educators and that all *important* learning happens at school—neither of which honor the funds of knowledge possessed by diverse families (Goodall, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Moll & González, 1994).

Educators often assume that parents do not have the necessary knowledge or capital to serve as advocates for their children and are often blamed as the reason that a student may not achieve academically or socially, ignoring long-standing traditions of Black and Latino communities being involved in their children's education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; López et al., 2001; Moll & González, 1994, Walker, 1996). Even teachers who are attuned to social justice issues and would never describe children as "those kids" can fall into the trap of labeling families as "those families" (Constantino, 2016). Furthermore, even teachers who are familiar with culturally responsive pedagogy are still most likely to attribute their minoritized students' "academic difficulties to factors within the student and family" such as attendance, participation, motivation, home language, and poverty "rather than to pedagogical factors under educators'

control” such as leadership practices, teaching styles, or curriculum (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157).

Teachers who are culturally responsive can fall short on prioritizing developing school-community relationships and empowering parents and the community as educational partners, which is a critical element of culturally responsive pedagogy (Heidlebaugh-Buskey, 2013). How can educators ever expect to build relationships with students while ostracizing and denigrating their caregivers? These ingrained deficit beliefs educators have about families inhibits families’ ability to trust educators, which is the next cause of the lack of equitable family engagement.

Lack of Trust between Schools and Families

Common narratives in schools reinforce a myth of parent disengagement that is reflective of narrow, dominant views of success for students and the roles of their families in promoting that very specific version of success, making families feel judged by school leaders (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Families who are not engaged in the ways schools want them to be may be drawing from negative schooling experiences (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). Families draw on their own schooling experiences, which for Families of Color may be, justifiably, rooted in mistrust. In the past, the purpose of schooling has been explicitly assimilationist, “with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories, in order to achieve in schools” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). What teachers can interpret as a “lack of responsiveness” could actually be warranted barriers put up by families to protect their children from the types of hurtful experiences parents recall from school (Hong, 2019). Impoverished families indicate that it is hard to trust school leaders because they feel they are judged by middle-class educators (Blitz et al., 2013). Nonetheless, trust amongst stakeholders is a key driver which enables students’ individual academic achievement and school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

“One of the reasons parents do not engage at the school site can be attributed to the perception of differences in practices and beliefs held by parents and the school” (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 84). Actions taken by schools with one intent, may be received by families in an entirely different way, or vice versa. For instance, many Latinx families hold schools and educators in high regard and would not be comfortable viewing themselves as equal partners in their child’s learning (Hill & Torres, 2010). While this could look like disengagement to educators it is, in fact, reverence to their professional knowledge and skills.

Teachers retain power in their relationships with families and view the purpose of family engagement as transmission of knowledge from the teacher and school to families (Goodall, 2018). Teachers tend to see the purpose of family engagement work as helping parents reinforce school-defined goals and what is modeled in the classroom, while families’ primary concern is protecting their children’s well-being and ensuring their success; this contradiction leads to parents needing to protect their children from being neglected, negatively labeled, or diminutively assimilated (Lawson, 2003). It is critical to note that families do the best they can for their children—and sometimes this means they reject pejorative offers of assistance from schools (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). However, teachers too often incorrectly view this lack of trust as a family’s lack of interest in their children’s education and mistakenly write off input from families (Hong, 2019). This dismissal is to the detriment of both educators and their students.

Lack of Teacher Diversity. Finally, lack of teacher diversity is a significant contributing factor in the deficit beliefs held by educators and the lack of trust between schools and families. While it is a secondary cause of this problem overall, it is notable and should be elucidated. Throughout the nation, the teaching population is not reflective of increasing student diversity.

While the United States has become more diverse over the past two decades, the teacher workforce has become less so—in 2017-18, there were five percent fewer Teachers of Color than 1999-2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). HPSD ranks in the bottom half of districts in the state in proportion of Teachers of Color compared to Students of Color (DRIVE Task Force, 2020).

Furthermore, “non-Black teachers have significantly lower educational expectations for Black students than do Black teachers” such as not expecting the students to someday complete a Bachelor’s degree (Gershenson et al., 2016, p. 222). Students that have several same-race teachers experience a significantly reduced number of discipline referrals, especially for more subjective behaviors such as disrespect or noncompliance which suggests that teacher bias may play a role in these referrals (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Marginalized parents are aware of these negative expectations and biases and this further inhibits their desire to want to engage with educators (Hong, 2019). Nonetheless, many students will never have a Teacher of Color during their K-12 education. This is unlikely to improve soon, as Students of Color in universities are overwhelmingly uninterested in teaching as a profession (Mascareñaz, 2020).

Teachers and leaders from the dominant race, working in groups that are too homogenous, will reproduce their dominating outcomes, even if they intend not to do so. As Hancock and Warren (2017) explained,

far too many of our White women colleagues... toil under the guise of good intentions while simultaneously failing to be critically aware of the influence whiteness has on their professional decision-making. Not recognizing or choosing to acknowledge this racial blind spot poses significant threats to establishing and maintain culturally affirming learning environments for all students (p. viii).

Despite a growing interest in social justice, there simply is not enough that White educators can do to deconstruct the inequitable system working largely amongst themselves (Warren & Goodman, 2018). While working to diversify our teacher workforce, educators can garner more diverse perspectives immediately, by engaging more of our students' families in meaningful partnerships and seeking to learn about their funds of knowledge.

Links between Family Engagement and Social Justice

Like many other practices in schools, family engagement efforts are often centered in White, middle-class norms and expectations (Lareau, 1987). Therefore, it is necessary to apply the lens of critical race theory (CRT) to fully analyze the problem. Racism is both a cause and an effect of inequality and is therefore a system that perpetuates itself, within education and our broader society. CRT can be used to examine both the marginalizing practices that cause inequitable family engagement as well as the inequitable outcomes these practices produce. Foundational tenets of CRT, established by Delgado and Stefaniec (2012) are

- Racism is entrenched in the typical ways society operates
- Racism benefits Whites in ways that will make individuals defend the system
- Race is socially defined, as are its consequences
- Race is an intersectional influence on an individual's life
- People of Color have a unique voice that allows them to express perspectives that cannot be known by others.

Schools' family engagement practices intersect with race and overlap with all of these facets.

CRT "challenges claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity, asserting that these claims camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups" (Yosso et al., 2009). Many traditional family engagements (science fairs, for

instance) reinforce the power and privilege of dominant groups through falsified meritocracy that benefits privileged, mostly White, families and students. Schools often serve to maintain the existing White-supremacist, capitalist culture and therefore subordinate diverse families (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004).

CRT also explores “the unseen, largely invisible collections of patterns and habits” that make up racial domination (Delgado & Stefanić, 2012, p.5). Many common family engagement practices fall into this sphere. They are some of the unseen, invisible patterns and habits of school leaders that reproduce predictable outcomes that disadvantage Students of Color, even if the school leaders engaged in the process are unaware of this reality or do not consciously intend to do so. While attendees at a typical family engagement event may notice how homogenous the families present are, it is important to also acknowledge that these traditional events are also hegemonic—reinforcing White norms, ways of discourse, and worldviews (Lawson, 2003; Yosso, 2005). An important function of “hegemony is to ensure constant self-reproduction so that its outcomes—socialization for compliance with itself, for example—are mistaken as organic and natural rather than purposeful and manipulative” (Gorski, 2011, p. 159). As Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) revealed, “family background characteristics such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and employment do not unilaterally or uniformly determine parental perceptions and practices related to their child’s education, but rather intersect with teacher practices and school contexts and cultures” (p. 675). Even much of the literature on family engagement that is considered seminal does not address the role race plays in family-school partnership (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

The final tenet of CRT, the voice-of-color thesis, “holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers

and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012, p. 10). This is central to understanding why more equitable family engagement practices are critical. White teachers and school leaders, with White experiences, cannot understand the experiences of their Students of Color on their own. However, by building partnerships with Families of Color, teachers can discover their students’ unique histories and agency, which are critical to resisting oppression (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Teachers should be leveraging families’ funds of knowledge to inform instructional decisions (Moll & González, 1994). Families of Color draw from many unique types of capital to create “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005). These advantages are often not considered when schools try to engage families. It is as if there is a well of resources available to schools from Communities of Color, but they are hidden in plain sight from White teachers because these resources are not labeled in the ways that Whites have been conditioned to look for them.

Positionality of the Scholar-Practitioner

My positionality as a scholar-practitioner must also be noted. I am a White, middle class female who is not a parent. As a critical, equity-minded educator, I resonate with Whiteness as explained by DiAngelo (2018)

I have a White frame of reference and a White worldview, and I move through the world with a White experience. My experience is not a universal human experience. It is a particularly White experience in a society in which race matters profoundly; a society that is deeply separate and unequal by race (p. 7).

The problems I seek to solve affect people who do not share my race, and may not share my class, and who have had different socialization and lived experiences. Therefore, the research design being proposed has been intentionally framed with CRT in mind and centers the voices of minoritized families in measuring the effectiveness of the changes. The value of changes intended to promote equity are based upon how well they unite “parents, teachers, and students around the issues of power and social determination” (Giroux, 1983, p. 291). This research is intended to help teachers improve the strategies they use to center the voices of diverse families.

Theoretical Models for Asset-Based Family Engagement

Too often, schools’ interactions with families, and also some of the research body, has emphasized the reduction of “barriers” through a deficit lens (Goodall, 2018). The Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) Framework from Calabrese Barton et al. (2004) presents a way to move away from the deficit models of parental involvement toward “a dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors” (p. 3). Family engagement is more than an outcome, it is instead a complex mediation of space, capital, and relationships within a given context (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004). The goal of equitable family engagement is not “more” attendance or “more” interaction between schools or families, it is instead the creation of space through which diverse families may access capital to position themselves within the school’s decision-making and activate opportunities for reciprocal negotiations around their child’s instruction (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004). The EPE framework is especially important for analysis of family engagement in low-performing, high poverty, urban schools because it reveals how families can draw on their unique forms of capital to generate new pathways for engagement with their schools in nontraditional ways that more accurately reflect their funds of

knowledge (Barton et al., 2004; Moll & González, 1994). It is critical to examine how families manage encounters with schools as institutions differently, based on the types of knowledge, skills, and capital they possess and to acknowledge that certain middle-class, White types of capital and skillsets may be more valued by schools than those possessed by Families of Color or impoverished families (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

It also must be acknowledged that formal schooling represents only part of a child's learning (Goodall, 2018; Yosso, 2005). Goodall (2018) reimagined key principles for family engagement to promote more genuine partnerships, based on Freirean ideas:

1. School staff and parents participate in supporting the learning of the child
2. School staff and parents value the knowledge that each brings to the partnership.
3. School staff and parents engage in dialogue around the learning of the child, and with the child.
4. School staff and parents act in partnership to support the learning of the child and each other.
5. School staff and parents respect the legitimate authority of each other's roles and contributions to supporting learning (p. 616).

By drawing on these Freirean principles, school leaders can shift from deficit-based practices toward sharing power, valuing the knowledge of families, listening to families' input, and better meeting students' needs through genuine partnership.

Beyond only the cultural assets bestowed on all children by their families, all Communities of Color also have assets that can be leveraged by educational leaders to promote student success (Green, 2017; Stanley, 2020). Through embracing the "collective legacies, wealth, and perspectives of local Black communities when developing reform initiatives," school

leaders can be to repair trust by ensuring that school goals are aligned to community goals and that school-community relationships are responsive to the needs of communities (Stanley, 2020 p. 54). Additionally, it is imperative to note that community-based research is only effective if it is explicitly centered on equity and is conducted along with community partners and not by educators working autonomously (Green, 2017).

The Unique Circumstances of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The context of school changed drastically when most schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020 and instruction moved online. School closures have continued throughout the 2020-2021 school year and are exacerbating inequities as wealthy parents are forming “pandemic pods” and “micro-schools,” while marginalized families had fewer options other than fully online schooling (LaFave, 2020). Communities of Color pulled together resources in places like churches and community centers to ensure support for students in virtual learning pods, but school systems failed to partner with these organizations (Stanley, 2021). Many school systems’ work, including HPSD, was limited to ensuring food security and internet access for students, yet they were still they are unable to level the playing field (Fox, 2020). Families of Color experience higher infection and death rates due to the COVID-19 pandemic on top of pervasive structural racism, a higher burden of the climate crisis, and an impending economic crisis which all further magnify the inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2020).

By focusing on partnerships with families so they may fully participate in their children’s virtual and hybrid learning, teachers can provide opportunities to work toward a more equitable solution (Burnette II et al., 2020). Noguera (2020) posited key adaptive questions in ensuring equity as educators are forced to redesign schooling for a virtual setting, including:

What will we need to know about the children? How were they learning at home? Where might there be gaps and losses in learning? What will their social and emotional needs be? How can we tap into or rekindle their dreams and aspirations? (para. 3)

While Noguera does not offer specific strategies for addressing these questions, it is clear that they would be best answered by families and teachers in partnership. It also must be noted that Noguera's words could be interpreted as indicative of a deficit mindset, even though he is an educational equity expert. Therefore, it is important to consider why educators might assume parents need their dreams for their children rekindled and what impact this belief, or other similar beliefs, could have on how they interact with families.

Sheldon and Epstein (2005) outlined three foundational domains of family engagement: school-based engagement, home-based engagement, and academic socialization. Previous research on family engagement in virtual schools has shown that all three of these domains change in a virtual setting, as the role of the teacher and school become less influential and the role of the parent more critical (DeSpain et al., 2018). During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year, this became suddenly true for all students, who are engaged in what the Christenson Institute calls "enhanced virtual learning" that occurs mostly at home and occasionally at school or entirely in virtual learning settings (Arnett, 2020). With virtual learning, parents bear the primary responsibility for encouraging and supporting their children's engagement and motivation in online learning (Borup et al., 2019).

A literature review from Hasler Waters et al. (2014) found that, similar to in-person schooling, there is a continuum of family engagement in online and blended settings and that links can be found between student achievement and parental involvement in these settings as well, but additional research is needed. They also noted that online and blended programs tended

to be schools of choice and were often less diverse than other public schools (Hasler Waters et al., 2014) —with the onset of COVID-19, that is no longer the case. Teachers will only be able to successfully support virtual learning if they “build connections with families not merely to report on what occurs in the [virtual] classroom but also to obtain feedback and develop meaningful and productive ways to collaboratively support students” (Hong, 2019, p 163).

Accordingly, national teaching standards address the need for teachers to utilize equitable family engagement practices when implementing blended and virtual learning. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning’s Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework states that successful teachers “value collaboration with various stakeholders to enhance student learning” (Powell et al., 2014). Also the ISTE Standards for Educators state teachers “demonstrate cultural competency when communicating with students, parents and colleagues and interact with them as co-collaborators in student learning” (*ISTE Standards for Educators*, 2017). While collaboration may have always benefitted students it is more essential in virtual learning settings.

Context and setting matter greatly for virtual schooling. While increasingly digital public discourse may result in the more inclusive and democratic dialogue overall, which could encompass family engagement practices, barriers to digital access and digital literacy are still present for families in urban settings (Lomotey & Weiler, 2020). Backed by government policy, European and Australian schools have been working to increase family engagement through digital learning platforms for about a decade, and have found success in using these tools to partner with families who live in remote areas or to continue instruction when severe weather closes schools (Selwyn et al., 2011). Studies on these initiatives have found that the utilization of a platform itself does not increase family engagement, as schools tend to use them in ways that

promote one-way communication and reinforce the existing power relationship between the school and families. Research on two-way digital communication indicates that teachers' and families' beliefs about family engagement across virtual platforms are affected by "beliefs about the tool (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, compatibility)" and "beliefs about context (self-efficacy, technology facilitating conditions, other's facilitating conditions)" (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019, p. 47). However, using technology to promote family engagement can be more successful if a school also focuses on nurturing relationships with families, providing support that is family-centered, and building continuity in learning for students between home and school contexts (Lewin & Luckin, 2010).

In addition to improving academic achievement, there may be other advantages to using virtual tools for expanding family engagement. Many schools initially experienced a decline in student engagement, and lower attendance to online instruction, when schools closed in March 2020 (Goldstein et al., 2020). Research has previously indicated that school-family partnerships are a powerful intervention for attendance concerns for in-person schooling (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). It is worth exploring whether family-school partnership could also improve student attendance and engagement during virtual instruction.

Local Context

Family Engagement has been one of five key pillars in the HPSD strategic plan since 2015. Free and Reduced lunch (FRL) rates of schools in HPSD range from 4.5% to 87% [internal data]. With very few exceptions, test scores mirror schools' socio-economic status. HPSD is above the national trend in overall student performance by an average of one grade level. However, when this average is disaggregated, White students are 2.2 grade levels ahead, while

Hispanic students are -0.7 grade level behind and Black students are -1.0 grade level behind on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Rich, Cox, & Block, 2016).

Furthermore, the predictability of disparate outcomes does not only apply to student achievement, as measured by test scores, but also in other measures of engagement. A recent internal report on student survey results revealed that Students of Color had fewer positive responses on questions related to teacher-student relationships, such as “most teachers at my school are interested in me as a person, not just as a student” (Huang, 2018). According to the district’s family survey, administered using the Panorama Family-School Relationships instrument, Black and Hispanic families responded below the district average for “the degree to which families become involved with and interact with their child’s school” despite above average feelings of “perceptions of the amount of academic and social support that they provide their child with outside of school” and “how confident families are with regard to key parenting skills” (Gelbach et al., 2016). A teacher survey indicates 95% of teachers agree that their school “does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement”, while only 79% feel that “parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students” [internal data]. It must be noted that these questions themselves also demonstrate the root causes of inequitable family engagement, situating the power with the schools and putting emphasis on families supporting what the school perceives as best.

Nationally, the more impoverished the students a school serves, the more likely the family engagement practices are to be school-centric and focused on “giving” or “telling” families what the school needs from them (Lawson, 2003). Federal policy requires Title I Schools to develop family-school compacts that outline how the stakeholders will work together toward improved student outcomes (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Despite intent of policy to build

partnership through compacts, research indicates that compacts do not meet those expectations and are driven by compliance, reinforce school-centric practices, are transactional in nature, and deemphasize student and family agency (Evans & Radina, 2014). Too often, compacts end up being stale documents that schools pester parents to sign off on, rather than mutual, collaborative agreements indicative of partnership, as intended by the policy.

Aware of this research and wanting to mitigate these factors, over the last several years, HPSD has used Title I funds to provide supplementary coaching support and professional learning to build capacity in Title I school leaders for equitable family engagement. Because of the considerable supplementary resources invested, in HPSD, family engagement practices are often more intentionally designed and innovative in Title I Schools than non-Title I schools. For this reason, educators from a few Title I Schools in HPSD were invited to participate in the sample for this initiative. All the schools in the sample are more racially diverse and have a lower socio-economic status than the district overall, however that does not mean they are analogous. See Table 1 for a profile of relevant district and school data. These schools are all within the same geographic region of HPSD and these principals all regularly collaborate with one another. All the sample schools have identified family engagement as a priority in their School Improvement Plans and the school leaders have foundational knowledge about equitable family engagement that can be built upon.

Table 1: District and School Profiles

	% of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch	Student Demographics	% of Teachers who report the school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	% of Parents who report that they feel a sense of belonging with their child's school community.	% of Parents who report that the school values the diversity of children's backgrounds.	% of Parents who report they have been invited to participate in school planning such as the school improvement plan, the Title 1 plan, parent involvement policy, etc.
Howard Public School District	31.4%	45% White, 22% Black, 18% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 4% Two+ Races, <1% American Indian and Pacific Islander	91%	85%	68%	48%
Dawson ES	48.3%	40% White, 31% Hispanic, 23% Black, 3% Asian, 3% Two+ Races, <1% American Indian	77%	87%	72%	49%
Goodman ES	61.4%	47% Black, 27% White, 21% Hispanic, 4% Two+ Races, 1% Asian, <1% American Indian	98%	92%	87%	56%
Lawson ES	53.4%	40% Black, 34% White, 18% Hispanic, 5% Two+ Races, 2% Asian, <1% American Indian	100%	91%	84%	50%
Matthews ES	73.8%	41% Black, 41% Hispanic, 10% White, 4% Two+ Races, 2% Asian, 1% American Indian, <1% Pacific Islander	86%	88%	78%	57%

Note. Profiles containing relevant demographics and survey data for the district and sample schools [Internal District Data, Spring 2019]. District and school names are pseudonyms.

It is also critical to note that HPSD uses districting policies that have the stated intent of balancing schools by Socio-Economic Status (SES) as a way to integrate schools. However, the effect of this districting is that schools do not have solid base communities that are near their location but are in fact scattered around the city. While some of the attendance base is near the school (typically the wealthier neighborhoods), other students (typically poorer Students of Color) are bused as much as forty-five minutes across town. Two of these schools are also magnet schools, which further disperses students' communities, because students may be from any part of the county. In recent years, political movement for more "neighborhood schools" has lessened the true balance amongst schools by SES, as illustrated by the wide range of Free/Reduced Lunch rates amongst these schools, which are all within seven miles of one another. These districting policies make it challenging for school leaders and teachers to know where to conceptualize the geographical locations of the schools' communities—as they are in so many different satellite areas.

Even though considerable resources have been invested in professional learning for school leaders, there have been no systemic districtwide initiative for professional learning for teachers in HPSD. Meta-analysis indicates that family engagement programs that emphasize partnership between teachers and families have a significant effect (Jeynes, 2012). Therefore, this initiative will focus on building capacity in teachers to genuinely partner with families, as this is an area of focus HPSD has not yet begun to implement.

Theory of Improvement

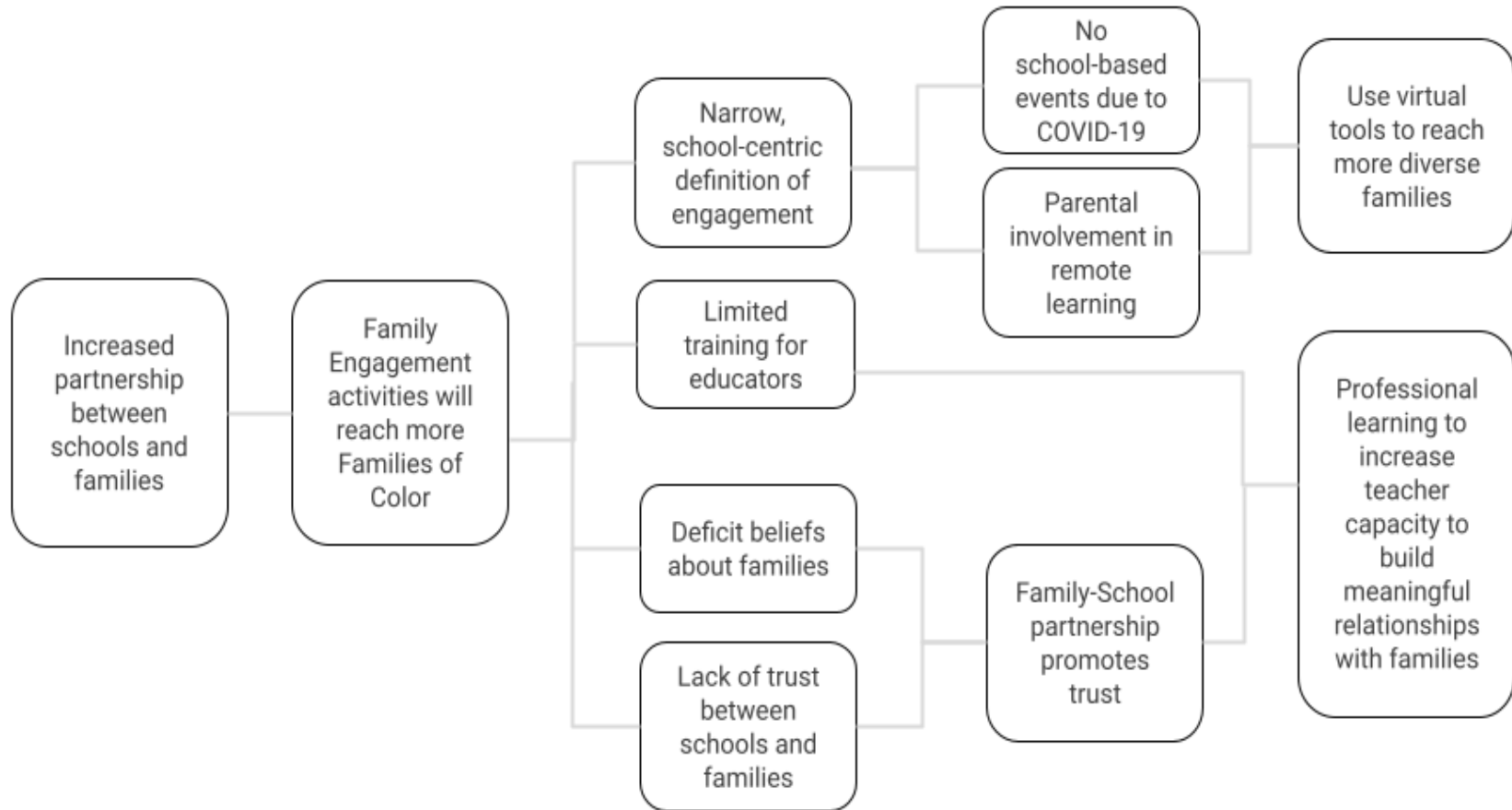
Scholar-practitioners engaging in improvement science initiatives begin by explicitly stating their hypotheses, or theory of improvement (Langley, et al, 2009). My theory of improvement reasoned that building teacher capacity to reach more Families of Color would increase the overall effectiveness of partnerships between schools and families. The immediate aim of this initiative was that family engagement activities implemented by the teachers

participating would reach more Families of Color. The ultimate aim was to increase partnership between schools and Families of Color to allow schools to better serve Students of Color and reduce opportunity gaps. Communities of Color represent a significantly under-utilized source of expertise for achieving more just educational outcomes (Ishimaru, 2020). The fundamental goal was to lessen tension between the “school’s agency for teaching and the parent’s agency for engagement in their children’s learning... work[ing] together, each being recognized as valuable in its own right” (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014, p. 407).

Driver diagrams are logic models used in improvement science to illustrate theories of improvement, illustrating the relationships between changes and desired outcomes (Spaulding & Hinnant-Crawford, 2019b). They illustrate the key structures, processes, or norms in the system that are leverage points for affecting change (Provost & Bennett, 2015). Figure 2 details an illustration of the drivers of this improvement initiative.

Figure 2: Driver Diagram

Ultimate Aim → Immediate Aim → Primary Drivers → Secondary Drivers → Change Ideas



Note. A driver diagram illustrating the theory of improvement.

As previously discussed, the primary drivers, or areas in which I can impact the outcome, of this problem are a) a narrow, school-centric definition of engagement, b) limited training for educators, c) deficit beliefs about families, and d) lack of trust between schools and families. Secondary drivers include a) school-based events are not possible for schools to fall back on, due to COVID-19, b) parental involvement in remote learning, and c) family-school partnership promotes trust. The change ideas, professional learning for teachers on building meaningful relationships with families and the use of virtual tools to reach more diverse families, combined to address all four primary drivers of the problem. Ishimaru (2014) demonstrated the shift in engagement necessary to move toward collaboration and partnership, as defined by the following factors:

- Parent Role: Nondominant parents are seen as educational leaders who contribute and help shape the agenda
- Goals: Systemic change within a culture of shared responsibility
- Strategies: Adaptive change to build capacity and relationships of a broad range of stakeholders
- Process: Reform as a political process that addresses broader issues in the community. (p. 208).

This initiative was designed around drivers and change ideas that focus on shifting the parent role and strategies, as defined by Ishimaru above through work with teachers as the agents of change that most directly impact students' experiences (Hong, 2019; Ishimaru, 2014).

Building better partnerships between teachers and diverse families, and empowering the voices of diverse families within their schools, are key pillars in the educational justice movement—"parents and teachers working together produce something more than either

working alone in isolation” (Warren & Goodman, 2018 and Jeynes, 2012, p. 733). Furthermore, this aspect of educational justice is more important now than it has ever been:

COVID-19 has made it more obvious that the public school system cannot fulfill its mission without families. This pandemic—along with the many overlapping pandemics our nation now faces, including racial, economic, political, and environmental injustices—has also heightened existing barriers between families and schools. (Gutiérrez Alvarez et al., 2020, p. 1).

Equitable family engagement practices should leverage family expertise to foster teachers’ professional learning and to position families as partners in “designing equitable educational environments... for every student” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 380).

In addition to students, meaningful school-family partnerships also benefit teachers and schools. Successful partnership with families improves teachers’ efficacy and reinforces their sense of purpose, increasing their satisfaction with their jobs (Constantino, 2016; Mapp et al., 2017). Improving trust amongst families and teachers is a key aspect of improving schools; regardless of how much formal power lies with educators, they remain mutually dependent on families for maximum success of their students (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Educators “cannot hope to pursue educational equity and justice without leveraging the assets of the communities that we serve;” and to begin to rebuild trust, educators must recognize the assets of minoritized communities and ensure that schools’ goals align with community goals (Stanley, 2020, p. 56). This is truer since the onset of COVID-19 than ever before, as schools are dependent on families and other caregivers in the community to provide access to the learning for students in virtual blended instructional settings.

Improvement Methodology

This initiative utilized improvement science, which is an approach to research that is both inductive and deductive, undergirded by “a distinctive epistemology about what we seek to learn and how we may come to understand it well” (Langley, et. al., 2009; Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 10). Improvement science originated in business and healthcare and is now used in many fields (Crow, 2019). However, it is especially helpful in education as problems are complex, dynamic, adaptive, people-oriented, and context-specific; therefore, benefitting from cyclical research designs, practical measurements, and networked improvement communities (Spaulding & Hinnant-Crawford, 2019a). Improvement science is founded upon Deming’s theory of profound knowledge, whereby emphasis is on the humanity within change, an appreciation of the system, building knowledge, and understanding variations within the system (Langley et. al., 2009). A key feature in improvement science is the use of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) inquiry cycles, sometimes named the Deming Cycle after the originator (Langley, et al., 2009). This initiative was designed to include multiple PDSA cycles

This research design was also informed by Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) in which the researcher acknowledges that they cannot know about the culture, desires, and needs of others and is therefore open to constructing knowledge with participants in an engaging and responsive process (Lahman, 2018). Within CRRRE, the researcher must connect with participants and reflect on how their own position affects the knowledge creation as well (Lahman, 2018). I am a district administrator in HPSD, who collaborates with the sample schools’ leaders and serves on the Strategic Plan Committee for Family Engagement. Therefore, as a scholar-practitioner I am positioned to incorporate participatory research tools and to collaborate with participants in the initiative to design solutions consistent with improvement

science and CRRRE (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Lahman, 2018). In alignment to CRRRE, the scholar-practitioner maintained a journal to reflect on personal evolution of thought throughout the project, allowed participants to choose their pseudonyms, and also presented themes from the data to research participants to verify accuracy (Lahman, 2018).

Design of the Initiative

This improvement initiative focused on improving relationships between teachers and families, changing teachers' beliefs about families, and equipping teachers with more equitable practices because “the most common interaction between families and schools is the parent-teacher relationship, yet... this relationship has received scant attention” in research (Hong, 2019, p. 16). This is specifically true in HPSD, as all professional learning and resources directed at making family engagement more equitable have been provided to school leaders. Nonetheless, it is the “granular-level daily practices and strategies that can catalyze (or constrain) familial agency and collaboration with educators in everyday interactions... the daily interactions between families and educators constitute the everyday moments that are also microcosms of the broader systems” (Ishimaru, 2020, p. 120). The interventions of this initiative were focused on making these everyday interactions more equitable. There were two interventions included in the initiative—professional learning and use of virtual tools to engage with families. The teacher cohort participated in a shared professional learning experience, as a networked improvement community, which is common in improvement science, and allows the teachers to “learn by doing” together (Bryk et al., 2015).

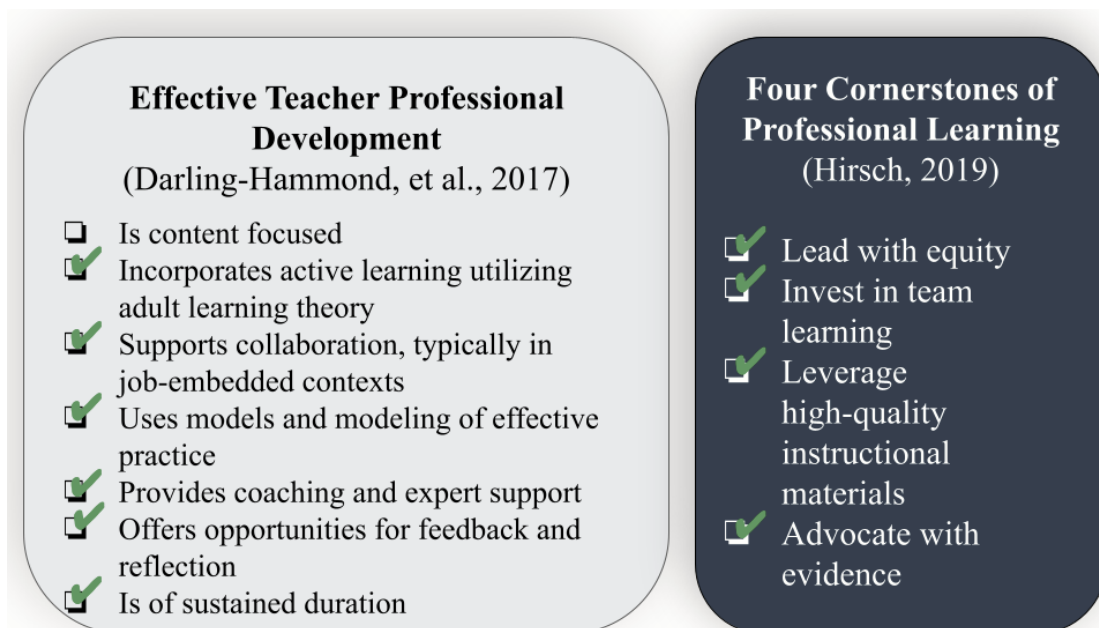
Upon initial design, this initiative was comprised of multiple PDSA cycles, that were to be analyzed by a Collaborative Inquiry Team (CIT) consisting of district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and family members of students at the sample schools. CITs allow for educators and

families to partner in order to deconstruct subconscious assumptions that may inhibit the effectiveness of the initiative (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017; Pellerin, 2011). The scholar-practitioner would have served as a facilitator and a participant on the CIT. However, due to pandemic-related challenges, the CIT was unable to convene. This will be discussed further in detail in the implementation section.

Interventions

Professional Learning. The first intervention was professional learning for teachers, consisting of four modules. The four modules were approximately two hours each, including synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities, with up to an additional four hours of reflective opportunities and focus groups. The professional learning stretched across a three-month period of time to allow for changes in teachers' practice, reflection, and inquiry. Each session of professional learning included some synchronous and asynchronous activities, and opportunities for collaboration and formative assessment. As situations with the pandemic evolved and in response to teachers' preferences, some aspects of the professional learning took place virtually, and some sessions were in-person or hybrid. The design of the professional learning for teachers incorporated best practices from two research-based models—Darling-Hammond's (2017) "Effective Teacher Professional Development", and Hirsch's (2019) "Four Cornerstones of Professional Learning." All but one element of effective professional development were addressed by this initiative, as this initiative will be designed to support teachers from multiple grade levels and content areas, and therefore not focused on a specific academic content area. See Figure 3 for an illustration of both frameworks and which elements were included in this initiative.

Figure 3: Incorporation of Research-Based Professional Learning Models



Note. This figure illustrates the elements of Effective Teacher Professional Development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and Four Cornerstones of Professional Learning (Hirsch, 2019) that were incorporated into the intervention.

Objectives for Professional Learning. As a result of participation in the professional learning, teachers:

- utilized an equity lens to understand the negative impacts of deficit beliefs about families.
- reflected on their own beliefs and family engagement practices.
- discovered ways to build more meaningful relationships that promote trust with Families of Color.
- collaborated around effective, equitable strategies for reaching more Families of Color.
- utilized virtual tools for targeted engagement with Families of Color.
- Shared lessons learned within a networked improvement community.

These objectives were chosen in alignment to the theory of improvement and drivers in order to address root causes of the problem. The scholar-practitioner facilitated the modules and

synchronous sessions. For completing the professional learning modules in full, engaging in the reflections, and participating in focus groups, teachers had the opportunity to earn 1.2 Continuing Education Credits (CEUs).

Using Virtual Tools. Many teachers were already employing more virtual tools to engage families, as HPSD was engaged in a hybrid model of virtual and in-person blended instruction for the 2020-2021 school year. Some commonly used tools included:

- Class Dojo, a communication platform that features avatars, emojis, translatable messaging, and social media like “stories” (*Class Dojo*, 2020)
- Talking Points, a communication platform sponsored by the district, with AI-translated messages, direct to text message features, and school-wide syncing capabilities (*Talking Points*, 2020)
- Seesaw, a platform designed for digital portfolios that features video and text-based direct messaging between students, teachers, and families (*Seesaw*, 2020)
- Google Meet, the district’s officially adopted video conferencing software platform, used by students, teachers, and families (*Google Meet*, 2020).

Use of a specific tool was not a stipulation of participating in this initiative. Instead, the initiative studied which tools teachers have employed and which tools families have found most helpful.

Measures

There are four essential types of measures in improvement science—driver, process, balancing, and outcome measures (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). This initiative combined qualitative and quantitative approaches for a broader understanding of the effectiveness of the improvement initiative. Focus groups and interviews were utilized to answer the essential question, “how have family engagement practices changed since COVID-19?” and “what

additional changes are needed to meet families' needs?" These focus groups served as a driver measure, designed to determine if progress is being made in the primary drivers—expanding conceptualization of family engagement beyond school-centric practices, providing training to educators, helping educators develop asset-based views of families, and promoting trust between educators and families. The focus groups also informed the professional learning provided to teachers participating in the initiative, as well as an outcome measure, to determine whether the change was an improvement. Focus groups were selected because they are particularly effective for “investigating complex behaviors and motivations” due to the synergetic interactions amongst participants (Morgan, 1996). From the lens of CRRRE, this shared construction of knowledge is critical to this initiative as the researcher is not a member of the groups being studied (Lahman, 2018).

The data from these focus groups were analyzed by the scholar-practitioner utilizing values, In Vivo, and evaluative Coding (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Sample focus group questions for teachers included:

- “Have any of your priorities around family engagement changed due to the pandemic? If so, how?”
- “Either before the pandemic, or since, what are some of the most effective family engagement practices you have utilized?”

And for families, initial focus group questions included:

- “What are communication, involvement, or engagement practices your child’s school or teacher uses that work well for you?”
- “Does your child’s teacher, or school overall, respect your culture and your background? Why does it feel like they do or do not?”

See Appendix A for the full pre-initiative teacher focus group protocol and Appendix B for the full initial family focus group protocol.

In alignment to improvement science, all of the process measures for this initiative are designed to be practical measures. Practical measures are used in improvement science to determine whether an intervention is working and if so, how? (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). The first type of practical measure was the process measures, utilized to analyze the effectiveness of the professional learning provided and whether it changed the teachers' thoughts, beliefs, or family engagement practices. The first process measure was attendance and participation records for the professional learning as well as formative assessments, exit tickets, and feedback forms, which were part of each session and informed the delivery of the next session. See Appendix C for a sample feedback form that measures the effectiveness of a module of professional learning. It was critical to formatively assess the professional learning on an ongoing basis, to ensure that the professional learning met the teachers' needs and was effective from participants' point of view (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). All feedback was collected anonymously.

The second process measure was a short, weekly inventory/checklist, completed by teachers, that measured which students' family members the teacher engaged with and how. It also contained a reflective component, to allow the researcher to determine the effect of the initiative on teachers' efficacy. This checklist was designed to be as practical as possible, in alignment with improvement science, providing the researcher with the precise information needed to monitor the initiative. The inventory took teachers no more than two minutes to complete and measured change over time—before, during, and after the interventions. One question from the practical measure asked teachers to report if they engaged in any activities defined in the “Teacher Efficacy in Engaging Families Scale” from Amatea et al., (2012). This

question was transformed from a quantitative Likert scale into a yes/no format in order to better align with the goals of the practical measure. See Appendix D for the full weekly practical measure. Practical measures, like this inventory, are designed to analyze the effectiveness of the PDSA cycles in an ongoing manner. They also collect ongoing data from the perspective of the teachers as stakeholders, which is critical to determining “how is it working?”, the key mission of improvement science (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019).

In improvement science, it is also critical to utilize balancing measures to determine whether there are any unintended impacts of the change on other factors of the participants’ lives and work (Langley, et. al., 2009). The balancing measure for this initiative was incorporated into the practical measure, where teachers were asked to report whether focusing on family engagement had any negative impacts on other priorities within their work, and if so, which priorities were shifted to make time for family engagement work (see appendix D, question number five). This balancing measure was chosen because teachers often indicate conversationally that they do not have the time needed to invest in family engagement (Baker et al., 2016; Costa & Faria, 2017). While lack time did not emerge as a key factor in causal analysis in HPSD, because it is mentioned in the literature, it was important to monitor this concern as a balancing measure. The process and balancing measures were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize data and draw conclusions about the characteristics of a group of data (Tanner, 2012).

Finally, the effectiveness of the initiative was measured by focus groups following the interventions. It was critical to determine whether teachers perceived a change in their practices and whether those changes represented an improvement from the perspectives of the families they serve. See Appendix E for the post-initiative teacher focus group protocol and Appendix F

for the post-initiative family focus group protocol. All components of this initiative were designed so that they could be implemented in a fully virtual or hybrid setting, in response to the evolving public health situation in the pandemic.

Figure 4 details the overall steps of the proposed initiative, as originally planned, including how activities align to the Deming Cycle, which types of measures were to be used for each activity, and when activities would be implemented. The activities detailed in Figure 4 incorporate both the interventions and the measures, as part of a comprehensive improvement initiative.

Figure 4: Improvement Initiative Design and Timeline

Immediate Aim: Family Engagement activities will reach more Families of Color.																
Deming Cycle	Description of Activity	Types of Measures	2021												2022	
			April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	
			Study	Scholar-Practitioner maintains a research journal	Balancing											
Plan	Form Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) with diverse school and family representatives															
Do	Recruit teachers from sample schools to participant in the initiative															
Study	Conduct initial focus groups with teachers	Driver														
Study	Conduct initial focus groups with families	Driver														
Study	Teachers complete weekly practical measures inventory	Process and Balancing														
Study	Analyze focus group data using in vivo, values, and evaluative coding	Driver														
Plan	Consult with CIT to analyze themes from focus groups															
Do	Conduct professional learning sessions for teachers															
Study	Analyze attendance, participation, and feedback surveys from professional learning	Process														
Act	Respond to data from the professional learning survey in upcoming sessions	Process														
Plan	Consult with CIT on driver, process, and balancing measures	Balancing														
Do	Respond to data from driver, process, and balancing measures															
Study	Conduct focus groups with families	Outcome														
Study	Conduct focus groups with teachers	Outcome														
Study	Analyze focus group data using in vivo, values, and evaluative coding															
Act	Publish findings															
Plan	Support teachers with future implementation of equitable family engagement practices.															

Note. This chart illustrates the PDSA phases, a brief description of the activities and action steps, the types of measures that each activity aligns to, and the timeline of the initiative, as originally planned.

Implementation

Understanding the Pandemic Context

This initiative took place across two school years from May-December 2021. When we were beginning in May 2021, all students in HPSD had been offered the opportunity to come back to in-person schooling for the final quarter of the year and approximately 60% had chosen to do so. As plans were being made for the 2021-2022 school year over the summer, the conditions of the COVID-19 Pandemic were improving, and approximately 90% of HPSD students enrolled elected to attend in-person schooling. However, the Delta Variant surged in the community right as the school year began in August, and negatively impacted our staffing and student attendance rates. Everyone in the district was overburdened as we were short-staffed in all of our instructional and noninstructional positions. Many students and teachers were impacted by quarantines. For example, the substitute teaching daily position fill rate, which is typically above 80% in HPSD was below 50% in the Fall semester of 2021 [internal data]. Principals, Assistant Principals, Central Services staff, and school-based non-instructional staff, including the scholar-practitioner, took on additional teaching and supervision duties for up to 30% of their week, having to do their typical work in the evenings and weekends. This meant that many “non-essential” functions of the district began to be halted. Most of the district’s professional learning was cancelled, and School Improvement efforts were scaled back, as was updating the district’s Strategic Plan. While we had hoped to be able to offer both in-person and virtual family engagement opportunities for the school year, the rise in cases in the community also meant that all work with families became fully virtual again.

As the pandemic continued into its eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth month, staffing shortages worsened and the district faced “sick-outs” from bus drivers and cafeteria workers who

were protesting for a more livable wage. (HPSD is in a right-to-work state, so there is no union or ability to strike). This was a fully reasonable protest, however its effects stretched educators and leaders even more thinly. Morale was down for everyone. The state budget, due in July 2021, was not signed until November. Teachers and administrators continuously sacrificed their lunch periods and planning periods, taking on extra duties (Lieberman, 2021; Schlemmer, 2021). Furthermore, all four schools participating in the initiative experienced a principal change during the pandemic—Matthews in June 2020, Dawson in August 2021, Goodman in January 2022, and Layton in February 2022.

Meanwhile, both educators and parents experienced unprecedented negative impacts to their mental health during the lengthy pandemic (Adams et. al, 2021; Gewertz, 2021). It is common in improvement science for adjustments to be made to implementation plans, to mitigate challenges coming from social factors (Langley et. al, 2009). For these reasons, the design of this research initiative had to be scaled back to focus on the most essential driver—professional learning for teachers that would impact deficit beliefs and better equip them to reach Families of Color. Also, in working around new scheduling demands due to the factors previously described, some of the timelines varied from initial design.

The pandemic related factors described above most negatively impacted the work plan for the Collaborative Inquiry Team (CIT). Two different iterations of CIT members were collected but given how over-burdened educators and the broader community were with the unending pandemic, it was not possible to hold a meeting that would have had all partners at the table. Gathering families and community members, without school leaders present to hear their input had potential to impact trust more negatively than not forming the CIT at all. Therefore, the scholar-practitioner, and teachers participating in the initiative, conducted focus groups and

interviews, then shared findings with stakeholders at times that fit their schedule. Stakeholders consulted included the district's Director of Family Engagement in the Office of Equity Affairs, Title I Family Engagement Coordinator, the teachers participating in the initiative, the administrators of the sample schools, the Title I Family Engagement Representatives of the sample schools, and the families participating in the research. This allowed the scholar-practitioner to validate the data, and themes identified, even though the CIT was not convened. The scholar-practitioner and school leaders are still interested in forming a CIT, to inform future family engagement work, and consider this to be unfinished work, that just was unable to occur in the timeline of this initiative. Figure 5 illustrates the divergence between the planned and actual implementations of the initiative.

Figure 5: Planned versus Actual Implementation

Immediate Aim: Family Engagement activities will reach more Families of Color.														
Deming Cycle	Action Step	Type of Measure	2021									2022		
			April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Study	Scholar-Practitioner maintains a research journal	Balancing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Plan	Form Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) with diverse school and family representatives		o	o				o	o					
Do	Recruit teachers from sample schools to participant in the initiative		X	X	X		X							
Study	Conduct initial focus groups with teachers	Driver		X	X									
Study	Conduct initial focus groups with families	Driver		o	o	o	o							
Study	Teachers complete weekly practical measures inventory	Process & Balancing		X	X		X	X	X	X	X			
Study	Analyze focus group data using in vivo, values, and evaluative coding	Driver				X	X	X	X					
Plan	Consult with CIT to analyze themes from focus groups				o			o	o					
Do	Conduct professional learning sessions for teachers						X	X	X	X				
Study	Analyze attendance, participation, and feedback surveys from professional learning	Process						X	X	X	X			
Act	Respond to data from the professional learning survey in upcoming sessions	Process						X	X	X				
Plan	Consult with CIT on driver, process, and balancing measures	Balancing							o	o	o			
Do	Respond to data from driver, process, and balancing measures						X	X	X	X				
Study	Conduct focus groups with families	Outcome						X	X	X	X			
Study	Conduct focus groups with teachers	Outcome									X			
Study	Analyze focus group data using in vivo, values, and evaluative coding									X	X	X		
Act	Publish findings											X	X	
Plan	Support teachers with future implementation of equitable family engagement practices.										X	X	X	

represents when the activity took place

represents that the activity was attempted, but not completed as designed

Note. This chart illustrates the PDSA phases, a brief description of the activities and action steps, the types of measures that each activity aligns to, and the timeline of the initiative. Shaded in blue is the original plan for the initiative. Marked with “X” or “o” are how the activities unfolded for the initiative. “X” represents when the activity actually took place and “o” represents when activities were attempted, but not completed as designed.

Also in response to the changes in implementation previously described, the scholar-practitioner delved into additional research to create the interventions and understand the challenges. There are eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching synthesized from literature by Muñiz (2019):

- Reflect on one's cultural lens
- Recognize and redress bias in the system
- Draw on students' culture to shape curriculum and instruction
- Bring real-world issues into the classroom
- Model high expectations for all students
- Promote respect for student differences
- Collaborate with families and the local community
- Communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways.

Through the intervention in this initiative, all eight of these practices were modeled and five were required for educators to participate in directly—reflect on one's cultural lens; draw on students' culture to shape curriculum and instruction; promote respect for student differences; collaborate with families and the local community and communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways. While the focus of the initiative became narrower, it also allowed it to go deeper into reflection on educators' beliefs and practices.

Meet the Participating Educators

Recruitment of teachers to participate was difficult, given the challenges of the pandemic described above. Nonetheless a small group of nine committed educators were assembled. Volunteers came from multiple grade levels, subjects, levels of experience, backgrounds, and roles (including counselors). Six of the participants were from Goodman ES, two from Matthews ES, and one from Dawson ES. See Table 2 for a summary of educator participants.

Table 2: Educators Participating in the Initiative

Pseudonym	School	Role	Years of Experience	Race or Ethnicity
Ms. Richards	Matthews ES	Kindergarten Teacher	7	Black
Ms. Hoyt	Goodman ES	Counselor	3	White
Ms. Spears	Goodman ES	Counselor	4	White
Ms. Allen	Goodman ES	AIG Teacher	24	White
Ms. Miller	Goodman ES	Third Grade Teacher	3	White
Ms. Daniels	Goodman ES	Spanish Teacher	2	White
Ms. Jones	Goodman ES	Pre-Kindergarten Teacher	22	White
Ms. Zimmerman	Matthews ES	Paraprofessional	6	White
Ms. Padilla	Dawson ES	English as a Second Language Teacher	2	Latina

Note. This is a brief overview of demographic information for the educators who participated in the improvement initiative and professional learning intervention.

Many of the educators who signed up to participate held roles where they serve multiple classrooms and grade levels of students. All expressed a commitment to equity as a reason they wanted to sign up for the initiative. Five of the six from Goodman were also simultaneously participating in a book study organized by another teacher at their school of Ladson-Billings's (2009) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. Here is a brief profile of each of the educator participants (all names are pseudonyms):

Ms. Richards is a kindergarten teacher with seven years of experience. She is a natural leader and has been influential in her school's equity work. She is a Black female, who is known to build strong relationships with her students. Ms. Richards began the study at Matthews ES, but then moved to another Title I school across the district. However, she continued the study because she wanted to bring some of the learning to her colleagues at her new school, which had a less diverse staff.

Ms. Hoyt is a school counselor at Goodman ES. She is a white female in her third year—she began her job in February 2020, right before the pandemic. She frequently mentions that she does not really know any other way to do her job, without relying on digital tools. She felt that throughout the pandemic, she was not able to do as much initial relationship building with students as she would have liked, because there were so many significant safety needs that had to be attended to—food security, housing security, mental health crises, virtual and in-person attendance concerns, etc.

Ms. Spears is another school counselor at Goodman ES, who started around the same time as Ms. Hoyt. Ms. Spears and Ms. Hoyt can frequently be spotted together, as they both are social justice-minded and otherwise have a lot in common. Ms. Spears had a baby during the Summer of 2021 and was on leave for a couple months in the initiative but rejoined with

enthusiasm in October 2021. Ms. Spears was particularly interested in how to better partner with families and teachers for effective problem-solving around students' academic and social needs. She is a leader in Goodman's School Improvement Plan work around family engagement.

Ms. Allen is the Academically Intellectually Gifted (AIG) teacher at Goodman ES. She is a white female and has 24 years of experience. She has taught in multiple schools in the district and throughout the state. She also attended HPSD schools as a student herself. Ms. Allen states that she came to Goodman about five years ago because of their commitment to social justice. She has been instrumental in implementing a new initiative to identify more Students of Color for gifted programs. She lamented the necessity to engage with families virtually now, as relational home visits, a previously common practice at Goodman, had been one of her favorite experiences as an educator. She also is the leadership club sponsor, which requires even more additional family engagement work. Ms. Allen is the officially assigned mentor for Ms. Miller.

Ms. Miller is a white female in her third year of teaching. She came to Goodman ES as a beginning teacher in 2019-2020 and has never experienced a completely "normal" school year. Throughout 2020-2021, as students changed modalities of instruction multiple times due to changing dynamics with the pandemic, Ms. Miller's roster of third grade students changed more than five times. She taught virtually, in-person, and hybrid classes. She cites the frequent changes as the hardest part of beginning her teaching career, but really appreciates the ability to see into students' lives at home that virtual learning afforded her.

Ms. Daniels is the Spanish teacher at Goodman ES. She is a white female. As a bilingual educator, Ms. Daniels is very attuned to many of the barriers faced by families whose primary language is not English at Goodman ES. She has been teaching for two years, both at Goodman, and frequently translates communication for other Goodman teachers. She recently joined their

School Improvement Team, because she wants to seek ways to make the school more accessible and open to families who do not primarily speak English at home.

Ms. Jones is a Pre-Kindergarten teacher at Goodman ES. She is a white female with 22 years of experience. The district's Pre-K programming has had a strong equity lens and emphasis on family engagement for some time. It is one of the most progressive programs in HPSD. Ms. Jones cites the encouragement from the Pre-K program as one of the reasons she has realized how critical family engagement is. Knowing the critical role of family engagement in reaching her students, Ms. Jones indicated was eager to join and learn new strategies. She is a reflective practitioner and a "behind the scenes" leader at her school.

Ms. Zimmerman is a white female who serves as an instructional assistant (IA), which is a paraprofessional role at Matthews ES. She has been working in education for six years. Ms. Zimmerman also serves as the Title I Family and Community Engagement Coordinator for her school, and therefore receives extra training and support from the district Title I Family Engagement Coordinator. She specifically has been focusing on becoming more fluent in Spanish and reaching out to Matthews' Spanish-speaking families.

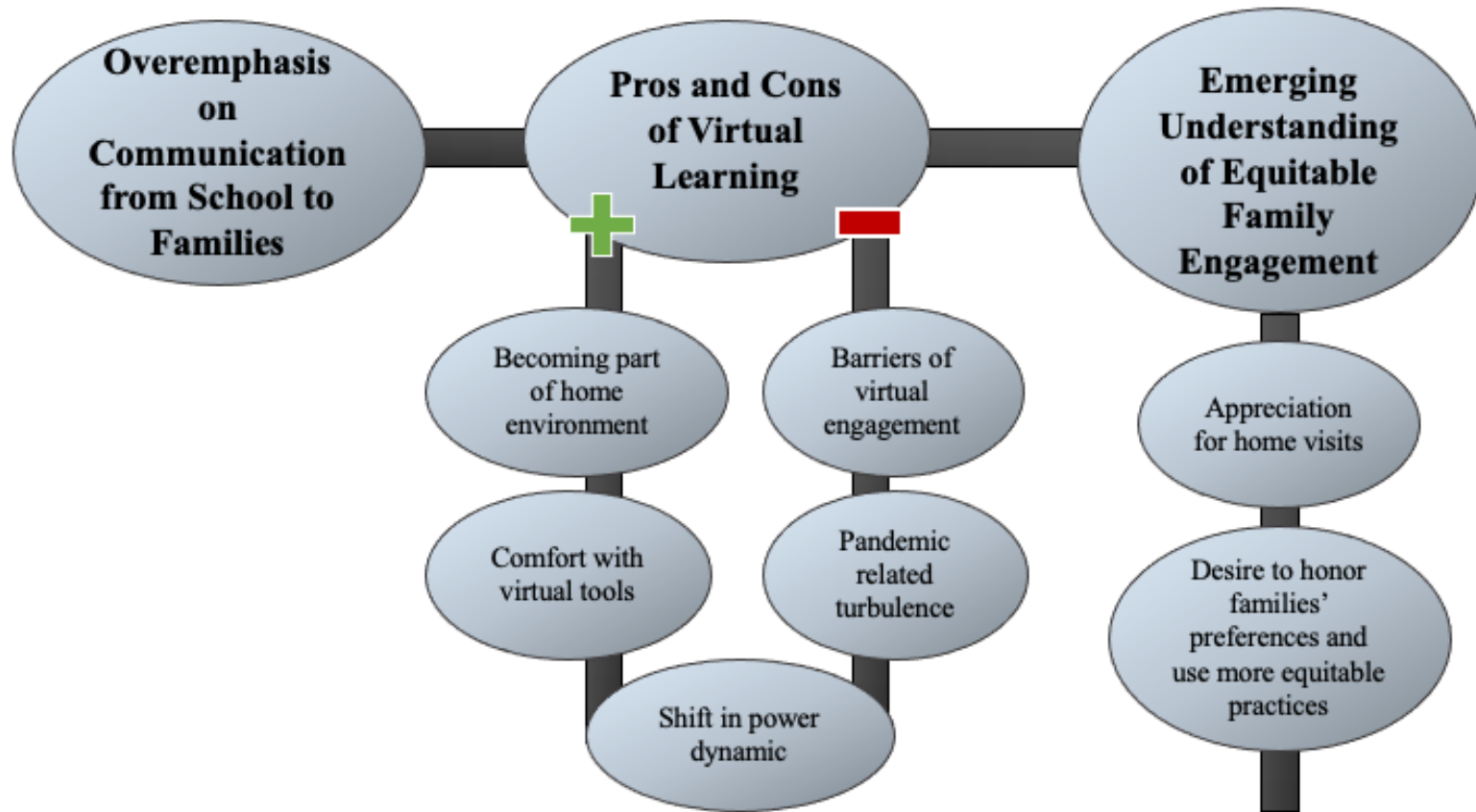
Ms. Padilla is an English as a Second Language Teacher at Dawson ES. She is in her second year of teaching but has over a decade of previous experience in communications. She is a Latina who cites her own experiences with pressure to assimilate as the reason she began a second career in education. She joined Dawson ES as the pandemic was unfolding in the Spring of 2020. She wants her students who have a primary home language other than English to know that their cultures are valuable! However, her first impression of the education field is that the bureaucracy significantly hinders the missions and aspirations of the teachers.

Due to the pressures of the pandemic, Ms. Miller, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Zimmerman, and Ms. Padilla were unable to complete the initiative in full, but their contributions to the initial focus groups, professional learning sessions, and inventories are included in the data. Five of the nine educators completed the initiative in full—Ms. Richards, Ms. Hoyt, Ms. Spears, Ms. Allen, and Ms. Jones.

Initial Findings from Baseline Educator Focus Groups

Initial focus groups were conducted with educators to establish baseline and provide foundational information for the design of the interventions. They served to confirm the root cause analysis and to determine which drivers may be most significant for the specific educators who would be participating in the intervention. They provided initial, formative data about the educators' attitudes, beliefs, and values in regard to family engagement and equity. Themes from the educators' initial focus groups are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Themes from Baseline Educator Focus Groups



Note. This graphic illustrates the major themes of the initial focus groups conducted with educator participants to provide formative data for the improvement initiative.

Overemphasis on Communication from School to Families

In the initial focus groups many of the educators' answers to questions about family engagement, were in fact about communication from schools to families, which is instead one-way communication that reveals historically dominant practices. Communication was discussed far more than any other topic, despite most of the questions asking about other aspects of family engagement. However, this was to be expected somewhat, as it is consistent with research regarding common foci of teacher preparation and in-service learning around how to approach families (Epstein, 2011). When asked to "define family engagement", one participant stated that, family engagement is "communication between school staff and students' families." Another talked about how the pandemic "changed family engagement" from her perspective because the principal sent more "newsletters" and "schoolwide messages via School Messenger" (email system).

Educator participants indicated their preference for traditional parent conferences as a "formalized check-in", providing hard copies of information for families via student folders, using text messaging services (Talking Points, Google Voice, Class Dojo) to reach families more quickly than phone calls, and the need for more translation assistance so they could better convey information to families. Although the district has an app that translates text messages (Talking Points), teachers expressed lament that sometimes that is not the best way to get through to families, as it depends on the district's student information system, which doesn't always have the most up to date phone numbers. Incorrect contact information was also cited as a reason that traditional communication, such as "backpacking home" messages through students was preferable. For instance, Ms. Allen explained,

I have all these documents I have to send home that they have to sign. And you know, when those children weren't in school, I had to mail them, Well, some of them their addresses are not correct in PowerSchool. So I was constantly re-sending, re-mailing. Whereas if they're in school, you send it home, and it's back the next day. So and you tell them, it's really important. And you can tell the child face to face, you can send an email home and say, "check your child's backpack." It's a whole different feeling than "check your mailbox." And I would do "check your mailbox" too. But it would still drag before I would get them back. And I'm still waiting on a couple right now... So I definitely think the face to face, is so much... when we can have opportunities to connect.

Notably, in this common type of school to family communication, the teacher may never directly connect with the family, but only communicate through the student as the messenger. As another educator explained, "It was like we couldn't get to the students. So I think our ways of communicating with the families had to be different this year, because we didn't have access directly to the student." The pandemic caused educators to think differently about how to connect directly to the family, rather than through the student.

Teachers seemed to concern themselves most with how they communicated to families, rather than seeking information from families. Reasons cited for engaging with families included having them sign paperwork as previously described, but also to "indicate their preferred method of communication," for teachers to "give them strategies to practice at home," and to invite families to conferences or events at school. Home visits and surveys about students were the instances where the educators mentioned seeking information from families. They viewed this practice as for the purpose of relationship-building, discussed in more depth later.

Emerging Understanding of Equitable Family Engagement

Although most of the focus group was centered around traditional paradigms of communication, teachers defined family engagement (when asked directly to define it) in ways that showed an emerging understanding of equitable family engagement. Several teachers cited an understanding of “invisible engagement” which is consistent with the research about Families of Color (López et. al, 2001). For instance, one educator stated, “not all parents are able to come to the school, but all are engaged”, another added, “it’s not just if they can’t come to the school, but also if they do not feel safe or comfortable coming to the school.” Some educators noted that attendance at school events indicates that engagement is occurring, while others contrasted and explained that engagement must also occur through the school going into the community and that a mutual understanding of engagement was needed between the schools and families. Another educator explained that “definitions of engagement are personal, and affected by one’s beliefs”, explaining that a family’s perception of engagement may be getting their kids to school prepared to learn. Another educator defined engagement as “any kind of interest in the school or education.” These varying definitions, along with other input, indicated the educators’ emerging understanding of more equitable family engagement paradigms.

Cultural Barriers. Some educator participants also cited an initial understanding of cultural barriers as a factor affecting engagement. As Ms. Allen explained, “the majority of staff are White. And so I think that because... there's not that connection culturally, ethnically, and I think that that's... part of the issue.” Many other examples centered around the need for translation and interpretation services for families whose primary language is not English. Ms. Daniels explained that because she speaks Spanish she is often communicating with many Goodman families about a variety of topics—“I communicate with parents whose students I don't even teach, just because they need someone to be able to explain things to them.” However,

other examples cited included acknowledgement that Families of Color may be facing more systemic barriers such as long work hours and being districted to schools far from home. Ms. Richards explained

that is usually harder to reach [Families of Color], usually because of their work hours and like family dynamics, like sometimes maybe the child has to go to after school because the parents working late or they don't go home with mom right after or family right after school.

Ms. Hoyt added, “they may not work, you know, a typical eight to five job, so may not be available to talk when we call and different things like that.” Ms. Allen also cited the recently increased racial awareness in Summer 2020, after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as a factor that made systemic racism something that more people are comfortable talking about. She explained, “with more racism awareness, not that it wasn't already there, but... it's a good thing that people are recognizing it, but I think that also has affected [how teachers engage with Families of Color].” As might have been expected, the educators who signed up voluntarily to participate in an initiative about equitable family engagement, had an emerging understanding of social justice and general interest in making their practices more equitable.

A Desire to Honor Families’ Preferences and Use More Equitable Practices. Several educators cited a desire to make their practices more equitable, and therefore more effective as they teach predominantly Students of Color. Some key examples cited were the need to communicate effectively with parents to avoid conflict (such as when there is a behavior concern, or a child is injured at school). As one teacher explained, “making sure that [families] know their child is heard” and emphasizing positive interactions, so that families do not dread

hearing from the teacher. Others described using various processes to determine how families prefer to be communicated with, and to solicit information from families about their student at the beginning of the year, such as asking “what are three words that described your child?” “what are you excited for your child to learn this year?” or “how do you prefer to be communicated with?” Even in initial focus groups, all educators expressed that there was information that they needed from families, although this was mentioned less often than the information educators needed to give families.

Appreciation for Home Visits. One of the equitable family engagement practices the educators already valued were relational home visits. Both Goodman and Matthews Elementary Schools have been using the Parent Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) model, as part of their School Improvement Plan work, since 2018 (PTHV, n.d.). Several educators lamented that they were unable to do home visits during the pandemic and shared how valuable they had been for building relationships with families and students. The PTHV model is specifically designed to promote equity, and stipulates that all visits are scheduled in advance, that families have the option to decline the visit, and also that no business is to be conducted during the initial home visit. Some educators, when unable to visit a students’ home, also volunteered to attend a community event for the student, such as a sports game or arts performance, or meet at a park, so that they could still have a visit with the family. As Ms. Daniels explained, “If it is like a language barrier, or a socio-economic barrier, like the home visits are nice, because we can meet them literally, physically where they are, and engage them in, in the school community.” Educators explained that families were always very welcoming, many even hosting special meals for the teachers, or creating posters or other decorations to welcome the teachers. The practice of home visits helped teachers and families establish a positive relationship that was based on their

mutual interest of ensuring the child was successful. Ms. Richards explained that home visits had also really helped some of her more timid students open up to her, because the student saw the teacher as someone who had a connection to their family. Ms. Spears explained that even when families weren't open to home visits, community visits were helpful—

But even just like... we're all going to [local ice cream shop] and going to eat or going to this park and playing and I feel like a lot of families felt more comfortable going there than maybe to the school for more formal events or something like that. I think that was that was something that our school did well before.

Educators indicated that they hoped to be able to resume home or community visits as soon as the pandemic subsided.

Pros and Cons of Virtual Learning for Family Engagement

Accordingly, teachers cited some pros and cons of virtual learning for family engagement due to how much COVID had changed practices, and how families' interactions with educators was nuanced, as one might expect.

Advantages of Becoming Part of the Home Environment. One advantage described by the educators, was that although they were not able to conduct relational home visits as usual during virtual learning, they did often get a daily glimpse into students' home environments. Educators shared that they appreciated when parents popped onto the child's screen to ask a question, as well as the opportunity to meet students' siblings, cousins, and extended family that were helping care for them during the pandemic. Ms. Miller explained that it made her relationships easier and more natural once the students did come back into the building, as she was able to talk to students about favorite things she had seen on posters in their rooms, knew their pets' names, or knew about their baby sister or brother, "My kids lit up when they got to

show something around their house. Like, I remember in December, it was like the Christmas trees tour, that everybody took their computer around the house. And they're like, "look at my Christmas tree, look!" You could see the excitement to share... things in their home."

Also, citing her inexperience, Ms. Miller explained that she was less intimidated to engage with families virtually spur of the moment, than she would have been in a formal in-person conference setting. She suspected the same may have been true for families, also. Teachers also appreciated how many families had created learning environments for their students at home, complete with educational posters, which dissipated any negative assumptions about parents "not caring about school." Ms. Daniels explained that since she was able to speak Spanish, she frequently had individual check-ins with families to answer broader questions about the school, rather than just her class, and that she missed that opportunity once students returned to in-person learning, and her day was filled with students in front of her for instruction in every moment.

Comfort with Virtual Tools. Educators also reported that through the year and a half that the pandemic had stretched, they had become very comfortable with the use of virtual tools to connect with families. Also, based on the increased responses that they were receiving from families (in comparison to older methods), they felt families were comfortable as well. Examples cited included the ability to join a Google Meet on one's phone or on a device provided by the district to each student as well as the ease of texting. Ms. Spears noted that she had simply added her Google Voice cell phone number to her email signature, and many families chose to call or text her, rather than replying to her emails. She wondered why she had never thought of this before, and plans to continue the practice from now on. Ms. Richards added that sometimes families felt more comfortable sharing personal information specifically (such as family medical concerns) via a text than via an email, which is more formal. One student's family specifically

texted her, “Hey, we have something going on with this kid's mom. And I felt like I could text you rather than putting it on [the district communication platform].”

A Shift in the Power Dynamic. Another change noted by the educators, due to the pandemic, was that during virtual learning educators were dependent on families for students to be able to access learning. This was a complete flip from the typical dynamic and led to educators seeing a larger imperative for engaging with families. Ms. Hoyt noted that she literally did not have the ability to provide services to the child, without scheduling in advance with the family, as she “did not have access directly to the student” as she normally would in an in-person learning setting. A spectrum of interactions was mentioned as examples of the shift in dynamics—from the need to do everything possible to reach families because a child was not signing on to virtual learning to recording mini-lessons for families to review a concept with their child later, after the live lesson. Another interesting example shared by Ms. Richards was that virtual learning allowed her to see how families disciplined their children for common behaviors (such as being off task). She found it helpful when the students were back into the classroom to be able to use the same language for redirections that children were accustomed to hearing.

Pandemic Related Turbulence. A negative impact of the pandemic was the number of changes in modality, and class assignments, experienced during 2020-2021, which impacted the teachers’ ability to build relationships with students and families. More than a half dozen times, the district’s instructional plans switched between fully virtual, hybrid, or fully in-person and back and forth again. Each time, families were rightly given the option to switch modalities. This meant, that teachers experienced just as many class list changes throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Educators noted the challenge of teaching “back to school lessons in February”, meeting

new families repeatedly and on different timelines, and sending families of students you had previously built a relationship with to another teacher’s class mid-year. Also, concerns about COVID safety protocols led to educators feeling like they had to spend too much time on rules and procedures (with students and families), and therefore did not have time to build relationships. As Ms. Richards explained, “I felt like I was spitting out orders. Please do this, and this, and this. Make sure your child wears a mask, etc.”

Barriers of Virtual Engagement. Finally, the group also noted that, as was experienced in broader society throughout 2020 and 2021, sometimes it was just harder to connect when all communication was virtual. Particularly, they felt that tough conversations, like those regarding families’ concerns about their child’s social-emotional wellbeing were hard to have virtually. Also, teachers were uncomfortable with sending more “official” communications only via email, such as report cards and assessment reports. They were never sure if families really received that information. They were also unable to effectively get a sense of how families who were less engaged perceived them. Ms. Miller explained that sometimes interactions with families felt forced, like she was breaching a “school-life barrier” that the family may not want breached, describing, “I felt like I crossed many lines... some parents do not want to be engaged.” This statement carries an underlying assumption that engagement occurs with the school, rather than with the students’ learning.

Implementation of the Interventions

Use of Virtual Tools

As indicated from baseline data collected from educators and early input from families, the use of virtual tools was something that most schools and families are now comfortable with, so the focus shifted primarily toward the second intervention—professional learning to impact

educators' beliefs about Families of Color and efficacy in utilizing more equitable practices. As the pandemic continued throughout the Fall of 2021, all family engagement activities remained virtual, and therefore all data collected to monitor the improvement initiative reflects virtual activities.

Professional Learning

The modules of professional learning were designed by the scholar-practitioner based on the literature review and were shared with the district's Director of Family Engagement in the Office of Equity Affairs and Title I Family Engagement Coordinator for feedback, prior to implementation. In initial focus groups, educator participants had indicated a preference for the professional learning to be offered in-person. However, to provide maximum flexibility, a hybrid option was also offered.

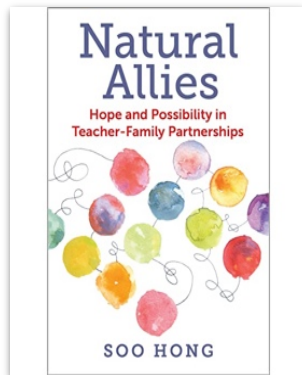
Each module of professional learning included opportunity for reflection and unpacking teachers' beliefs, as social justice is not only an end goal, but also a means to this end (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). As explained by Herrera et. al (2020),

Advocating for our families is about more than having a translator present at a potluck. It is about examining how daily practices are reinforcing alienating and inequalities and then working together to change them. Part of this process requires educators to acknowledge how current spaces and systems are benefiting the dominant group. In order to begin such reflection, a critical consciousness is required (p. 77-78).

Therefore, the professional learning incorporated multiple opportunities for educators to sharpen their critical consciousness and begin to examine practices in their schools. Participants were given *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities* (Ishimaru, 2020) and *Natural Allies: Hope and Possibility in Teacher-Family Partnerships*

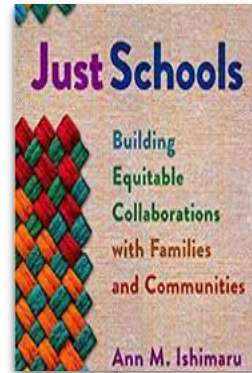
(Hong, 2019) over the summer, as background reading for the modules. See information about the texts in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Texts Provided for All Educator Participants



By: Soo Hong

- Recommended by the Title I Family Engagement Coordinator and Director of Family Engagement in the Office of Equity Affairs
- Approachable for educators
- Presents an asset-focused perspective on family-school partnerships
- Centers teachers as the change agents with which families interact most often



By: Ann Ishimaru

- Chosen based on Ishimaru's compelling scholarly research and publications
- Pushes educators toward a more critical lens
- Addresses the need to reframe the power dynamics between schools and families
- Elevates family engagement as a critical lever and creating more socially just schools

Note. These texts were provided to all of the educator participants and used in the professional learning intervention.

Each module included asynchronous pre-work, a synchronous collaborative learning opportunity, and follow up activities. The norms for each module's synchronous session were:

- Stay engaged.
- Speak your truth.
- Experience discomfort.

- Accept and expect non-closure.
- Seek equity of voice.
- Grant space to be inarticulate.
- Pursue growth.
- Extend trust.

These norms were taken from *Courageous Conversations* and the HPSD Foundations of Equity courses and therefore were intended to provide some familiarity for the participants (Singleton, 2014). Participants were offered the opportunity to make suggestions for adjustments to the norms but indicated that these would work well for them. See Appendix G for a digital notebook containing all the professional learning materials.

Module 1: Equity and Unpacking Beliefs about Families

Module 1 took place in late August, after teachers had presumably had about three weeks to settle into the school year. However, due to all the challenges of in-person schooling, things were not settled at all! Due to various obstacles, (buses that picked students up two hours after school ended, staffing shortages, quarantines, etc.) the session was offered in a hybrid model (some on Google Meet, some attending in-person at Goodman). Only five out of eight educators were able to attend the first session. (This was during Ms. Spears's maternity leave.) Prior to the session, teachers were asked to read the Introduction and Chapter 6 of *Natural Allies* (Hong, 2019). The session began with an inclusion where each of us shared what we know about how our names were chosen. This inclusion activity was intended to model an asset-oriented conversation starter that teachers could use in conversations with families, as names are intentionally and purposefully chosen, and often a way to learn about someone's culture. Next,

participants shared takeaways from the selection they read in *Natural Allies*. Some highlights noted by the educators were:

- The author’s contrast between how the system sets families and educators up as enemies, but really they are natural allies who have the shared goal of making students successful, as the title indicates.
- The conflict noted between the aspirational missions that draw teachers into the profession (including family engagement and social justice) and the bureaucracy and barriers they experience once there.
- The significance of the fact that teaching is the only profession where you experience almost two decades of modeled practices before you begin the work, making teaching practices even harder to interrupt than other professions. (Hong, 2019)

Next, the group dialogued about the examples from the “Challenging Assumptions Reflection Tool” (Flamboyan Foundation, 2020). The tool presents reflection stems to challenge one’s own or a colleague’s negative beliefs about families and five examples to practice unpacking assumptions, reflect on how the belief could potentially impact an educator’s actions, and what one would say to combat these beliefs. The groups worked through the prompts together.

Themes from the conversation focused on using asset-based language and the need to go the “extra mile” to build a relationship with families.

Exit tickets from this session indicated that teachers found the practice unpacking biases, the specific examples and experiences shared by other educators, and the ability to connect for learning in person to be beneficial. They left the session still mulling over outside the box ways to better partner with families, how to specifically address student behavior concerns while still establishing a positive relationship, and the urgency of building relationships with families

during the pandemic. As follow-up for this session and preparation for the next module, educators were asked to seek feedback from two to three families using the inventory provided by Khalifa (2018), which was specifically designed to help teachers see the need for sharing power, and to bring information they learned from families to the next session to share. The questions in this inventory are: What am I doing well with your child? What am I doing poorly, or could improve on with your child? Do you have a suggestion for me that would help me better educate your child? What should I include in the curriculum? How could I treat your child more fairly? (Khalifa, 2018, p. 38).

This inventory was chosen because it provides an invitational structure for teachers to begin sharing power with families and seeking meaningful feedback about instruction. Teachers were encouraged to make sure that at least one of the family members they sought feedback from was someone they have previously had a hard time connecting with. See Appendix H for the slide deck used for the module.

Module 2: Building Relationships and Centering Families' Assets

The synchronous session for the second module was offered virtually due to continued pandemic-related scheduling challenges for participants. Four out of eight participants attended the session (Ms. Spears was still on maternity leave.) The session began with a video reading of “The Family Book”, which is a children’s book that emphasizes that all families look different, but all love one another and help one another through life (Parr, 2010). The group then had a “get to know you” discussion centered around what we appreciate about our own families. This quick opener was designed to reinforce an asset orientation and provide an opener that teachers could use with families at a virtual event if they liked.

Educators then shared their takeaways from the Culturally-Linguistically Diverse Family Interviews (Khalifa, 2018). Key takeaways included a realization of previous “over-emphasis” on “informing” families, reflections on the importance of educators setting aside time to seek input from families, and recognition that common family engagement practices (like curriculum night) reinforce schools as places centered on white norms, and do not necessarily reflect what families would want from the school. Next, the scholar-practitioner shared some takeaways from the literature review informing this study to help educators better understand the positionality of the initiative, and the research informing its design. Then the group engaged in a Community Asset Mapping activity together, using Google Maps. Nineteen organizations in the community were added by the educators and the group discussed how we might begin to partner with these organizations, including a discussion on how the community organizations might view partnership differently than we do. Follow-up for Module 2 included the option to engage in additional interviews with the Culturally-Linguistically Diverse Family Inventory or to interview community members based on the Community Asset Map as well as a reading assignment from *Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher’s Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success* (Khalifa, 2018; Green, 2017, Mapp, et. al, 2017). These tools were chosen because they provided scaffolds for the teachers to begin to change the types of dialogue they engage in with families.

Exit tickets indicated that the session met the learning outcomes and the educators’ needs, and that they appreciated the flexibility of the session being moved to virtual. One educator noted that the activities shared (the Community Asset Map specifically, and the use of Google Maps more broadly) would be useful for work with families and students. See Appendix I for the slide deck used for the module.

Ms. Padilla and Ms. Miller withdrew after Module 2, citing busyness and the increased demands on teachers due to the pandemic. Ms. Daniels and Ms. Zimmerman were also removed from the cohort at this time, after they were unable to attend either the first or second session, leaving five educator participants who all completed the initiative.

Module 3: Strategies and Tools

In preparation for this module, educators read Chapter 1 from *Powerful Partnerships* (Mapp et. al, 2017). This chapter is focused on four essential core beliefs of family engagement:

1. “All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.”
2. “All families have the capacity to support their children’s learning.”
3. “Families and school staff are equal partners.”
4. “The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.” (Mapp et. al, 2017, p. 20).

Educators discussed the four core beliefs from their reading along with a five-minute clip from a webinar conducted by Ann Ishimaru in which she explains how dominant narratives of family engagement reinforce existing power structures and theories of change (Ishimaru, 2021). This conversation was intended to help educators bridge from the more accessible and introductory perspectives shared in Mapp et. al (2017) to the more critical approach from Ishimaru (2020) that they would read to prepare for the next session. Dialogue included a connection to the norms—experiencing discomfort, as one educator shared that it makes her uncomfortable to reflect that her actions may have reinforced inequities, even though she did not intend to do so. She shared that she now recognizes this and is working through the discomfort.

Another educator shared that many of her friends who are People of Color have shared that they do not experience a partnership orientation when educators at their children’s schools reach out to them—they are frequently “talked at,” sometimes ignored, and other times their input is dismissed. Another educator made a connection to the key question asked in each Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting, “What is your vision for your child?” She shared that that information, as it relates to the first core belief, would be helpful to have about every child, not just those with IEPs. Meanwhile, she also reflected on how the IEP process is not set up to promote the third core belief—“it does not set parents and teachers up to be equal partners”, she explained.

All five educators who completed the intervention were present in Module 3, which was facilitated in a hybrid format (some in-person at Goodman and some attending via Google Meet). The group also reviewed the Community Asset Map and any additional information the teachers had gained from their interviews. Two educators had reached out to community partners to begin to form networks for future collaboration and two educators had continued to seek information from families of students in their classroom through the Culturally-Linguistically Diverse families inventory.

To follow-up from Module 3, and prepare for Module 4, educators were asked to read the introduction and first chapter of *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities* (Ishimaru, 2020) and one teacher example from chapters two through six of *Natural Allies: Hope and Possibilities in Teacher-Family Relationships* (Hong, 2019). Exit tickets indicated that the most helpful learning participants had gained from the professional learning thus far were the question stems from the inventories, which provided a starting point for conversations with families, as well as the ideas for ways to approach families for partnership

shared by other educators. They indicated they would like more continued individual coaching, which will be provided in follow-up, as well as information from findings from initial family focus groups and interviews. See Appendix J for the slide deck used for the module.

Module 4: Sharing Lessons Learned

For the synchronous portion of Module 4, all five participants were present, and attending in-person. Per the educators request in the feedback from the previous session, the scholar-practitioner shared some initial themes from family focus groups and interviews. The group then dialogued about the contrast presented by Ishimaru (2020) between conventional partnerships and equitable collaboration (p. 50). Next, teachers collaborated around ideas of what they might “start, stop, and continue” in their own practices via a Jamboard (virtual brainstorming tool), using the equitable strategies from Amatea et. al (2012), which were also part of the weekly inventory, as a starting point. Educators’ entries on the Jamboard indicated that they intend to:

- Listen more, and begin collecting more input from families
- Seek to make less assumptions about families
- Seek opportunities for families to share about their cultures
- Share more information about ongoing classroom learning with families
- Focus on problem-solving with families
- Connect more community resources with the school and families
- Teach other coworkers about what they have learned

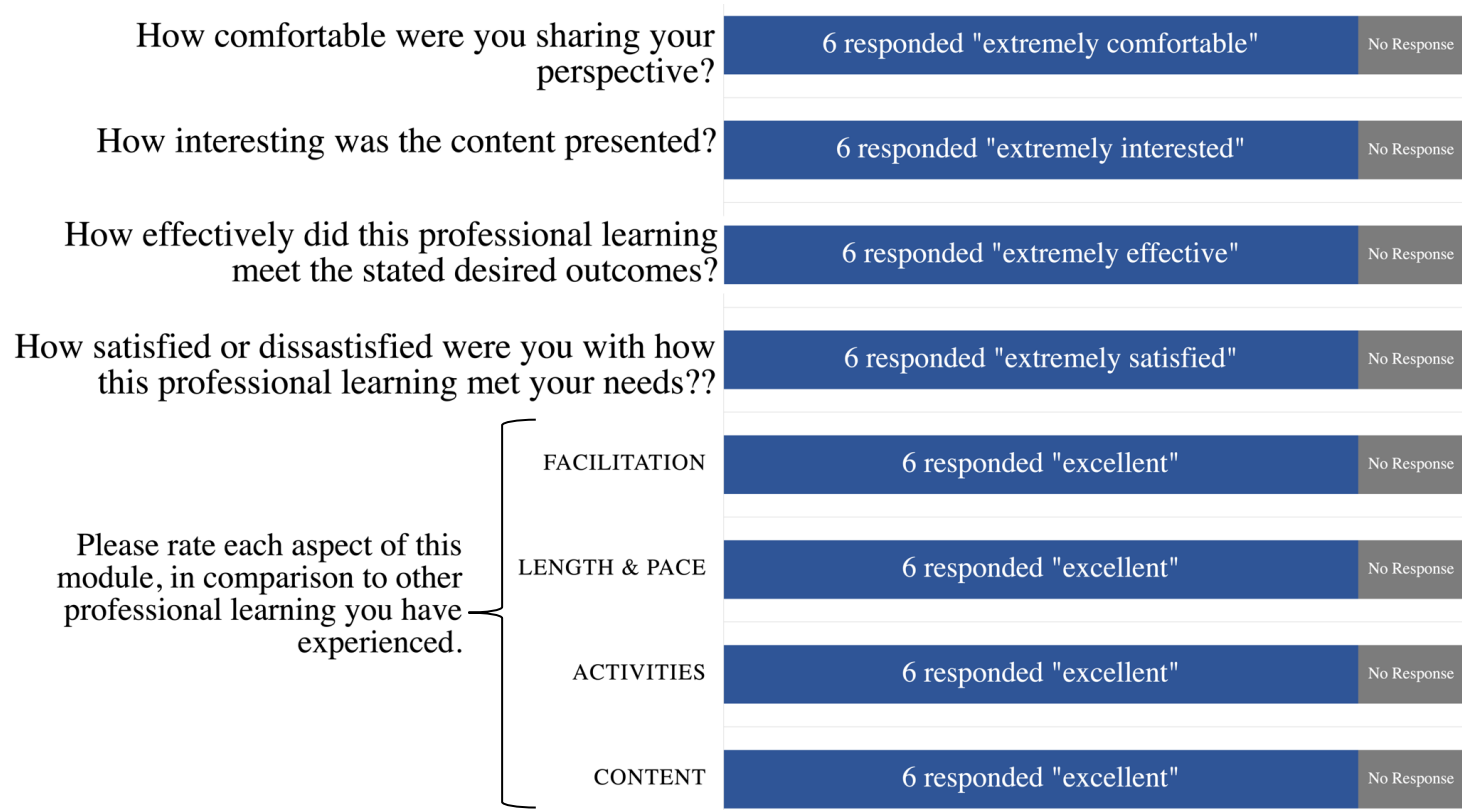
Finally, the teachers were given the Academic Partnering Toolkit for Teachers (Flamboyant Foundation, 2021) as a takeaway resource for continued learning. Exit tickets indicated that the professional learning met their needs and accomplished the learning goals. They also shared that it was particularly valuable to have the cohort of other educators to collaborate with, and that the

ongoing flexibility of how to participate (virtually and in person opportunities) was helpful. See Appendix K for the slide deck used for the module.

Evaluating the Professional Learning

For all modules, informal exit tickets were used to assess educators' learning and seek feedback on what was needed to improve future sessions, that information is summarized above. At the end of the professional learning intervention, the seven educators who had attended at least one session were invited to provide anonymous feedback. The full survey is available in Appendix C. Six participants provided responses, and all were overwhelmingly positive. One participant did not provide feedback. See Figure 8 for details.

Figure 8: Professional Learning Feedback



Note. The feedback given by educators after the completion of all the modules of professional learning. Seven educator participants were invited to give feedback, and six responded. All responses were positive.

Formative Data Collection During Implementation

Throughout implementation, the initiative was monitored with a weekly practical measure that was comprised by a quick two-minute, six-question inventory. In order to ensure effective implementation of the weekly practical measure, the scholar-practitioner created a short, four-minute video explaining the questions in the measure for the participants. Weekly email reminders were sent by the scholar-practitioner each Friday (or the last day of the work week) to remind participants to complete the quick inventory. Also, feedback from the participants was that it was hard to complete question one (a slide scale of the percentage of families engaged with in each week) because many of them were not classroom teachers. To support these educators, whose caseload consisted of the entire school, the question was adjusted. Instead, educators were asked to report the approximate number of students on their caseload and the approximate number of students' families who they engaged with in each week. The percentages were calculated by the scholar-practitioner after receiving the data. Results are detailed in the next section on findings and impact.

Implementation of Family Focus Groups and Interviews

As the scholar-practitioner is a district leader, it was advantageous that educator participants provided the initial contact information for students' family members who may want to participate in focus groups. Participants provided the contact information for 24 families (ten White, five Black and nine Latinx), and the scholar-practitioner (or a Spanish-speaking co-researcher) reached out to each these families to invite them to focus groups. These families represented a purposeful sample, as described by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). Several of the family members contacted indicated that they were too busy to attend a virtual focus group at an appointed time but were willing to provide data in an individually scheduled interview.

Therefore, the scholar-practitioner shifted to scheduling individual interviews, utilizing the criteria for effective interview data collection outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). The scholar-practitioner and co-researcher interviewed eleven family members in depth. The same questions found in Appendix B and F were used for the interviews, as timing did not line up with a pre-initiative and post-initiative data collection. Rather, data was collected from families throughout the initiative and used to inform interventions in an ongoing manner. Other families were contacted twice by email, and once via text message, but did not reply. See Table 3 for details about the focus group and interview participants.

Table 3: Families Giving Feedback through Focus Groups or Interviews

Parent Pseudonym	Parent's Race	Parent's Gender	Number of Children at the School	Child's Race	Child's Gender	School	Notes
Krista	White	Female	1	Mixed – Asian and White	Female	Goodman	This family is new to Goodman ES, having chosen to return to base after being displeased with their charter school.
Trisha	White	Female	2	White – Hispanic	Male Female	Goodman	
Everett	Did not report	Male	2	Did not report	Male	Goodman	PTA Board Member – frequent classroom volunteer pre-pandemic
Kesha	Black	Female	1	Black	Male	Goodman	This family is also new to Goodman ES, having recently moved to the area.
Alice	White	Female	2	White	Female	Goodman	This family is also new to Goodman ES, having recently moved from out of state.
R	White	Non-binary	1	Mixed – White and Black	Non-binary	Goodman	
Iris	White – Hispanic	Female	1	White – Hispanic	Female	Goodman	
Juan	Latino	Male	1	Latina	Female	Goodman	Interviewed in Spanish
Elizabeth	White	Female	1	White	Female	Layton	PTA President
Daria	Mixed —Latina	Female	1	Mixed—Latina	Male	Matthews	Interviewed in Spanish

Flora	Hispanic	Female	1	Hispanic	Male	Matthews	Interviewed in Spanish
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Note. These are the parents who were interviewed, or participated in an in-depth focus group, as part of this initiative. All these parents were suggested for the study by educator participants. Participants were offered the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms. Race and gender information was collected via an open-ended question and is reflected here as participants provided it.

Seeking more input, the scholar-practitioner also sought opportunities to embed into the family engagement activities at the participating schools. One very robust opportunity to garner families' thoughts was after the principal of Goodman announced that she would retire at the end of 2021. District leaders, including the scholar-practitioner, then hosted a virtual input session to seek feedback from families to inform the selection of the new principal. Thirty-seven family members attended the virtual session, which was a turnout exceeding what is typically seen in these settings, and the group was more diverse than other similar input sessions as well (41% White, 31% Hispanic, and 27% Black.) Translation services were offered to ensure full participation of Spanish speaking participants. Similar input sessions were also conducted for Dawson Elementary (five attendees) and Layton Elementary (13 attendees), although both sessions were smaller and had less diverse attendees. At all three input sessions, families gave input on four questions:

- What are some qualities, abilities, and experiences which you would like the next principal of your school to possess?
- What is important for the next principal to know about your school - its staff, culture, communities?
- What are some aspects of your school which you value?
- What are some aspects of your school that you feel could use some improvement?

As part of normal job responsibilities, the scholar-practitioner took detailed notes during the input session, that were close to a transcription. All three schools also collected feedback related to these questions via Google Form, which garnered additional anonymous responses (Goodman- 28 responses, Layton- 21 responses, Dawson- 19 responses) and were incorporated into the qualitative data set as well. Demographic information is not collected in this Google Form input.

Although, we do know that two responses were submitted in Spanish and translated. In sum, feedback from more than 130 families was included in the data set.

Data from the interviews and input sessions were transcribed and translated as needed. Then the scholar-practitioner analyzed the data utilizing values, In Vivo, evaluative, and pattern coding (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016) in three rounds of coding. Because of the adjustments to the timeline of the initiative due to the pandemic, as well as the changes in the data collection methods, the family input is not reasonably able to be divided into “pre-initiative” and “post-initiative data” as originally designed. Instead, it was analyzed by the scholar-practitioner in aggregate for overarching themes that relate to the ultimate aim of the initiative—to increase partnership between schools and Families of Color to allow schools to better serve Students of Color and reduce opportunity gaps. Conclusions are detailed in the next section on findings and impact.

Fine-tuning the Critical Lens

Nonetheless, the families who participated in focus groups and interviews were disproportionately White. Despite efforts of the scholar-practitioner to solicit input from and help teachers partner with more Families of Color throughout the initiative, this initial goal was not achieved for the focus groups. Research indicates that this may be due to a general lack of trust between the district, schools and Communities of Color or persistent systemic barriers that this initiative did not have time to redress (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017; Hong, 2019; Ishimaru, 2019). However, it would be outside the scope of this initiative to attempt to draw new conclusions about the inability to reach more diverse families at these schools at this time.

In response to the ratio of feedback provided by families being too White, the scholar-practitioner delved into an additional aspect of CRT—Critical Whiteness Theory, to ensure that

the findings from parental input were situated within the most appropriate critical lens. As described by Matias and Mackey (2016), “the hegemony of Whiteness has so naturalized itself within the field of U.S. education that it goes undetected, despite the major implications it imposes on the educational equity of Students of Color” (p. 34). Few White people in White-dominant societies have had reason or obligation to consider their lived experience through the lens of race (Bell, 2021). Naming Whiteness as a focus of study is a significant step in analyzing the normative practices and interactions that institute racial privilege (Giroux, 1997). It was essential that these factors be attended to in the analysis of the data from this initiative, and therefore became an additional critical lens for inquiry.

Discourse that is often invoked in service of White supremacy includes “colorblind discourse, whiteness as natural and normal, difference being about non-whites and not of whites themselves, affirmative action assumptions, etc.” (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 40). Corces-Zimmerman and Guida (2019) offer a methodology framework that helped conceptualize my role as a scholar-practitioner in the analysis of the data. Their tenets include two systemic principles: the centrality of Whiteness in education and traditional research methods as critical Whiteness praxis. They also describe three individual principles: responsibility to challenge Whiteness through the research process, Whiteness as rhetorical, emotional, and epistemological, and White researcher as complicit in Whiteness (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019).

I intentionally kept these factors top of mind during qualitative coding so as not to White-wash the findings. Whiteness represents a cultural disability that can render White educators unable to transform good intentions into effective outcomes for Students of Color; “the cultural disability of Whiteness, like other disabilities, limits a person’s movements, senses, or activities.” (Morton et. al, 2016, p. 8). Therefore, intentionality and precaution were taken

throughout the analysis of the data, with the scholar-practitioner acknowledging in each step that far too many of the voices being heard in this input were those of White families. As someone who has worked to tune her critical lens, I took care to monitor for the impact of my own cultural disability of Whiteness while drawing conclusions.

Findings and Impact

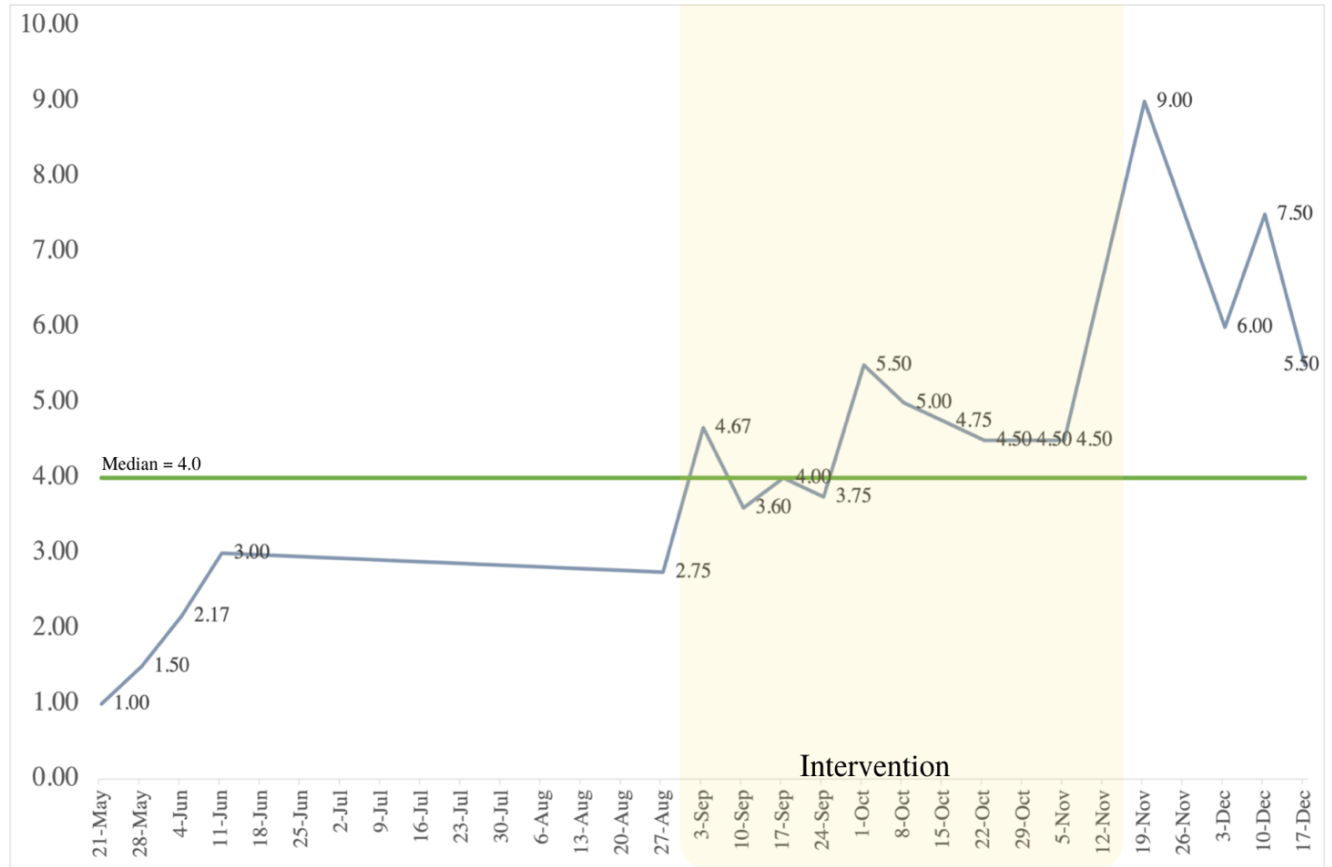
This initiative was designed to positively impact four drivers – narrow school-centric definition of engagement, limited training for educators, deficit beliefs about families, and lack of trust between schools and families. These drivers were chosen for their leverage toward the immediate goal of family engagement activities reaching more Families of Color and the ultimate goal of increased partnership between school and families. The initiative was successful in positively impacting three of the four drivers conclusively, and the fourth driver in the eyes of the educators. Educators felt they made progress toward the immediate aim of reaching more families of color and ultimate aim of increased partnership between schools and families, but data collected from families was insufficient to verify this decisively. Detailed below are findings from each type of measure.

Weekly Practical Measure

A weekly practice measure (two-minute inventory completed by the educator participants) served as a process and balancing measure throughout the initiative. Run charts were used to monitor how many equitable family engagement activities educators reported engaging in with families. A run chart is designed to illustrate changes to a given measurement over a period of time (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). The activities included were adapted from Amatea et. al (2012) and were found from their synthesis to promote equitable family engagement. In this study, it was helpful to graph changes before, during, and after the

interventions using run charts. Figure 9 shows the average number of equitable family engagement activities reported by week.

Figure 9: Average Number of Equitable Family Engagement Activities per Week

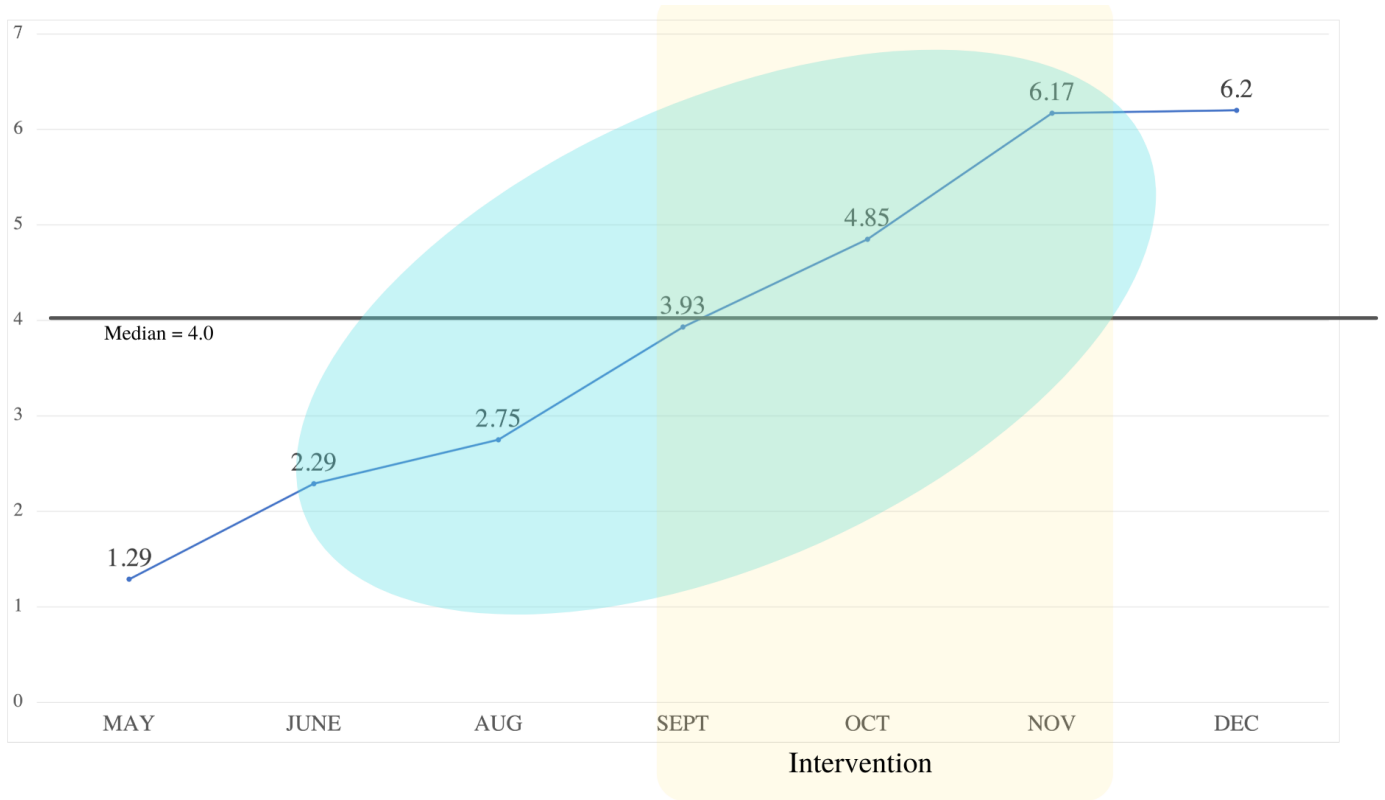


Note. This run chart illustrates the average number of equitable family engagement activities reported by educator participants per week. The timing of the intervention is highlighted in yellow. Shown in green is the median, which was four equitable family engagement activities per week.

Statistically, more than six points above the median are indicative of a shift in practice (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). This run chart illustrates that there are eleven weeks where the average number of activities reported were above the median of four. This denotes a change in the practices of educators. Throughout the professional learning intervention and following, educators engaged in more equitable family engagement activities. Because of the small sample of educators

participating in the initiative, and the fact that not all educator participants reported data each week, it is also helpful to look at the data averaged monthly, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Average Number of Equitable Family Engagement Activities per Month



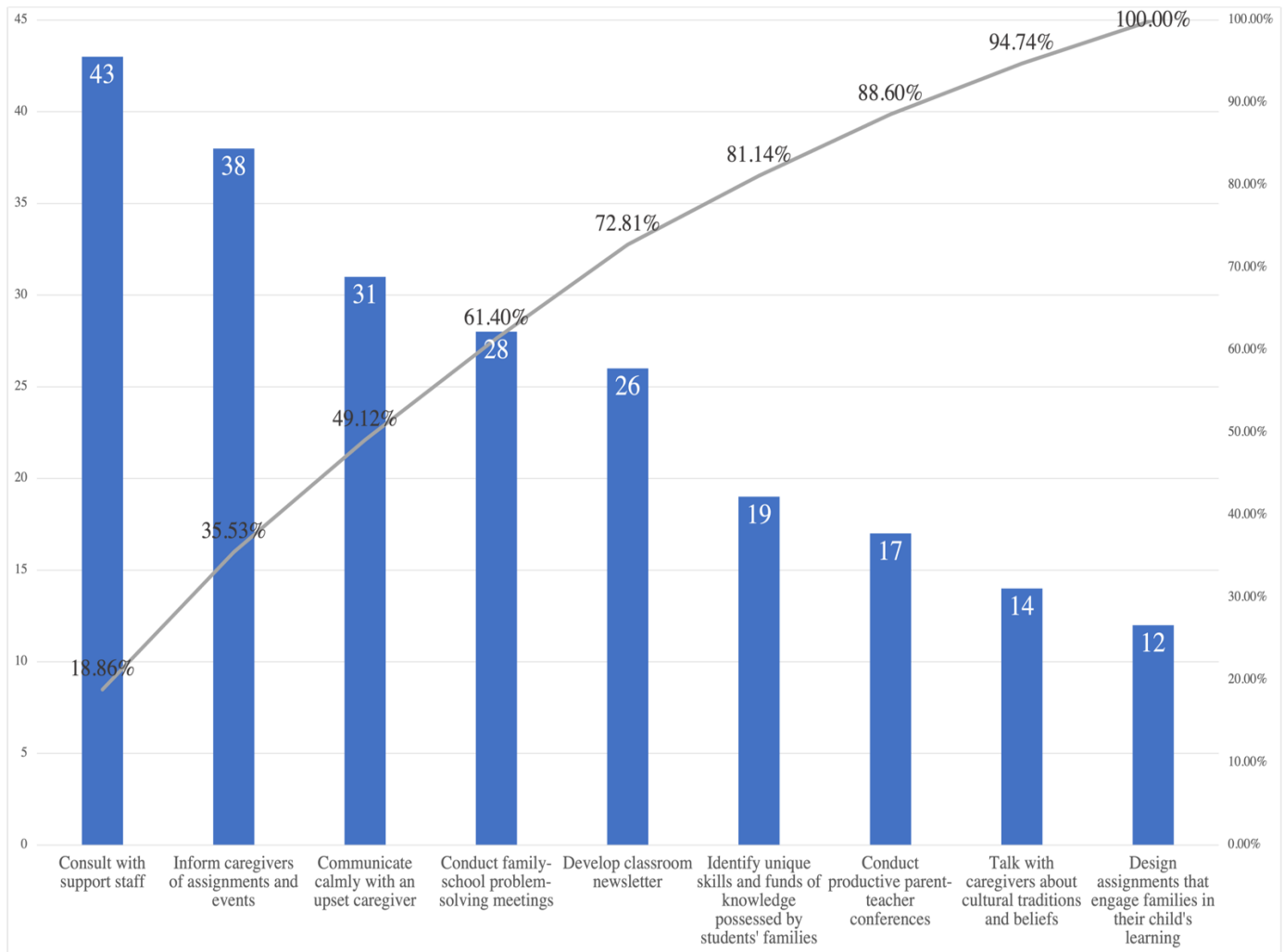
Note. This run chart illustrates the number of weekly equitable family engagement activities reported by educators during the initiative, averaged by month. The timing of the intervention is highlighted in yellow. Circled in blue is an upward trend in the number of equitable family engagement activities.

Educator participants reported an increased number of equitable activities throughout the initiative, with the largest increases coinciding with the intervention. The increase from June to November shows a “trend,” consistent with statistical analysis, that indicates that the pattern is not due to chance because five or more points are going in the same direction (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). According to qualitative data provided by educators, the increase pre-intervention is due to amplified attention on family engagement as a result of deciding to

participate the initiative and tracking activities, while the larger increases during the interventions are due to an increase in knowledge and resources for equitably engaging families. The initial increases may have been a result of attention bias or quixotic reliability. However, as shown in the analyses above, there was an increase month-to-month in equitable family engagement activities throughout the initiative, with the largest increase coinciding with the professional learning intervention. Also, data in the month following the intervention indicates that initially equitable family engagement activities continued at the higher rate following the conclusion of the professional learning. As will be detailed later, qualitative data reinforces the increases demonstrated in the quantitative data collected from this practical measure.

The frequency of types of equitable family engagement activities engaged in by the educator participants throughout the initiative were analyzed using a Pareto chart. Pareto charts are helpful for knowing the most vital few activities to focus on (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). See Figure 11 for a Pareto chart from the practical measure.

Figure 11: Pareto Chart Showing the Frequency of Equitable Family Engagement Activities



Note. This Pareto chart shows the frequency of the types of equitable family engagement activities engaged in most frequently by the teachers participating in the initiative. Each bar represents the number of times educator participants reported engaging in an activity throughout the initiative, while the line represents the cumulative percentage of these activities.

The Pareto principal suggests that it is most advantageous to focus on the few activities that make up approximately 80% of the activities reported (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). This data suggests the equitable family engagement activities from Amatea et. al (2012) that educators engaged in most frequently were:

- Consult with school support staff (e.g., school counselor/school psychologist) to access needed services for students and their families.
- Inform students' caregivers about day-to-day school assignments and events.
- Communicate calmly and effectively with a caregiver who is upset with the school or situation.
- Conduct family-school problem-solving meetings in which I develop an action plan with a student and their family/caregiver.
- Develop a classroom newsletter describing my class's activities on a regular basis.
- Identify the unique skills and funds of knowledge (historical, cultural, & community-based assets) possessed by students' families and community members to use in developing lessons for my students.

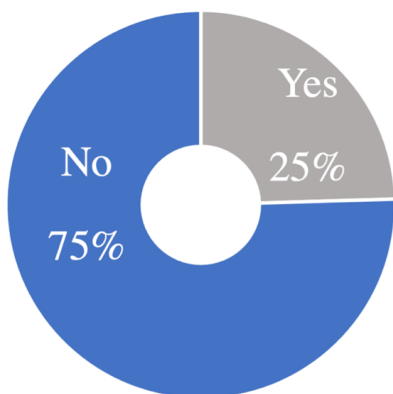
Therefore, the professional learning intervention focused on providing resources around these activities. Furthermore, future professional learning or improvement initiatives may want to emphasize these aspects that the educators use most frequently as well.

The second question of the measure asked educators to report which demographics of families they engaged in two-way communication with each week. Throughout the initiative, educators rarely supplied data in response to this question. They reported that it did not align with something they typically track and therefore was hard to report. Also, because most of these schools have Students of Color as the majority, they reported that it would be presumed they engaged in the activities reported with Families of Color. Unfortunately, there is not quantitative data available to confirm this assumption reported by the educators.

Finally, the weekly practical measure also monitored whether educators had to shift other priorities in a given week, in order to focus on family engagement. This was a balancing

measure, intended to ensure that focus on family engagement did not negatively impact other aspects of the educators' work. Figure 12 illustrates the outcome of this balancing measure.

Figure 12: Were There Any Other Priorities Shifted to Focus on Family Engagement?



Note. Throughout the initiative, educators reported that 75% of the time they did not have to shift other priorities backward to focus on family engagement.

In the 25% of instances where educators did have to shift priorities, they reported impacts on the following types of work:

- Inability to cover classes and help with COVID-related staff shortages (reported twice)
- Organization for standardized testing (reported twice)
- Lesson-planning (reported twice)
- Paperwork (reported once)
- Reorganization of student groups (reported three times)

These activities are predominantly managerial. In the small number of instances where priorities were shifted, qualitative data indicates that the shifts were effective for achieving the educators' other goals and improving outcomes for students. Educators shared that even when important tasks were reprioritized, such as lesson planning, it was because they saw a pressing need to connect with a family. The educators also reported the inability to engage in as much family

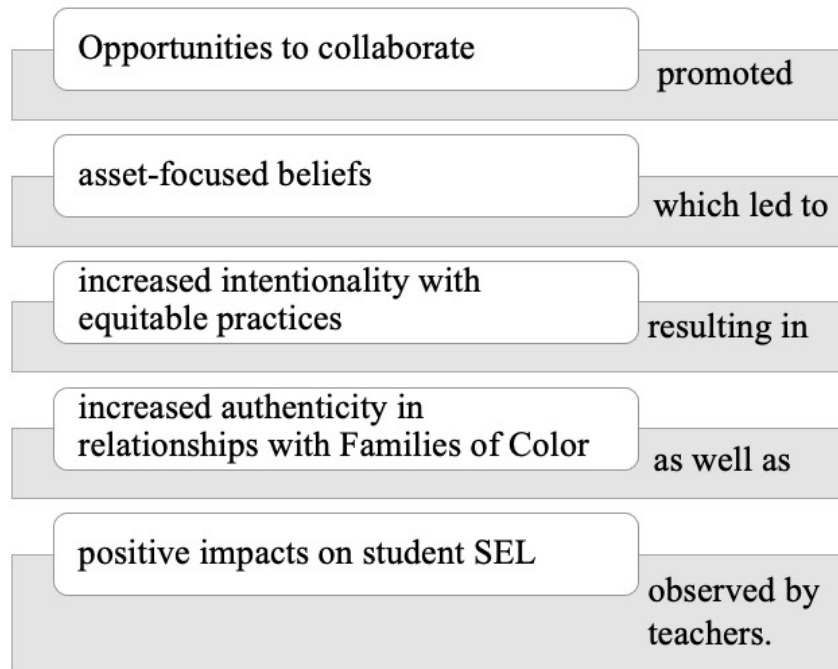
engagement during a certain week as they would have liked due to crisis response nine times. Several shared qualitatively that they wished they had more protected time within their schedules for family engagement work.

As shown by the process and balancing measures, educators increased their use of equitable family engagement activities, without a significant negative impact on their other work. These data indicate that teachers engaged in more equitable activities throughout the initiative, as demonstrated by a statistically significant increase that coincided with the interventions. Teachers also indicated qualitatively that their beliefs and practices had been positively impacted through the professional learning.

Teacher Summative Focus Groups

At the conclusion of the initiative, virtual focus groups were held with the educator participants to determine effects on their practice qualitatively. Educators expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with one another around strategies, increased intentionality in their family engagement practices, and positive impacts of the professional learning on relationships with families and student outcomes. Figure 13 illustrates the most significant impacts of the initiative, according to the educator participants. The networked improvement community and opportunities to reflect on their beliefs led educators to increase their intentionality in utilizing equitable practices. This resulted in increased authenticity in relationships with Families of Color and positive impacts on students' social-emotional learning (SEL) especially.

Figure 13: Impacts of the Initiative for Educators



Note. This figure illustrates the positive impacts of the initiative from the perspective of the educator participants.

Educators described the new strategies they learned from the modules, as well as from collaborating with one another, as beneficial for engagement. As one educator noted, “Hearing specific examples from everyone helps put a lot of the theory into context.” Based on group discussions, some increased their use of Talking Points and texting with families, others began or resumed having weekly class newsletters, and all worked together to clarify which types of communication are best for which subjects. Educators also noted a more proactive approach to family engagement overall. For example, one educator described how she reworked her weekly schedule to be sure she had time to engage with families.

Educators also described how their beliefs shifted as a result of the reflection and discussion in the professional learning. For instance, Ms. Jones shared how the equity conversations had impacted her thinking:

It's conversations that we are all trying so hard to have now, just about equity, and what that looks like and what that feels like and in a meaningful way, and not just you know, on the surface. That's all just so new... It hurts your heart to think that things that you've done in the past could have negatively impacted people. And when you really did not, [sic] that was not your intention. That's when 'you know better, you do better.'

Ms. Richards also explained that she had shifted her perspective more towards partnership, focusing on "other ways to engage and also make sure I include or asked for their input before I plan things and do things." Ms. Spears explained the importance of her reflection on the need for translation to ensure equity, "I feel like we really have reached out to more of those (families whose home language is not English) this year. And like, how many more are we missing out on because we haven't taken the time or the energy to really be intentional with that."

Increased intentionality around family engagement was the most salient theme of the teachers' summative qualitative feedback. Several talked about the importance of establishing two-way communication as a necessary first step for engagement. As one educator described, different families "can engage with our school differently" and it's important that we offer multiple ways to connect. Ms. Miller, Ms. Hoyt, and Ms. Jones cited the importance of the questionnaires included in the modules (Culturally, Linguistically Diverse Family Inventory from Khalifa (2018) and Questions for Community Leaders from Green (2017)) in helping them open pathways of communication with families. Others mentioned the importance of ensuring all communication is translated to the families' home language, and the importance of knowing families' individual preferences for communication. Educators described communicating with one family via email, while communicating with another via text, rather than taking a one-size fits all approach. Ms. Spears and Ms. Hoyt both noted that increasing the amount of

communication that was translated from their Student Services department yielded more responses from Spanish-speaking families throughout the semester, because those families began to realize that people at the school would be able to understand and receive their input. Ms. Allen talked about how building relationships with families resulted in positive outcomes in other equity work she was doing. Ms. Allen is the advisor for the leadership club at Goodman, and this year they implemented a more intentional process to ensure that the club represented the student body demographically. She explained, “we were very intentional with the selection of student [leadership club]. I mean, we literally wrote down how many we had of different nationalities... so that it would be a diverse group... we were very intentional, trying to, you know, be more representative of the population.” She further explained that even though many “active PTA member’s” children were not accepted, she did not see a reduction in family engagement with the club. This experience debunked one of the worries she previously would have had, that she would have needed to admit the “active” families’ children in order for the club to have support. Ms. Jones, Ms. Richards, Ms. Hoyt, and Ms. Spears all shared the importance of intentionality in ensuring that communication was far more positive than negative with individual families in order to allow for relationship-building. As Ms. Jones shared that one student:

...has some pretty significant emotional issues, and all the acronyms he’s diagnosed with all the acronyms. So, before he started, I had read his Individualized Education Plan, I knew that there were some things to be aware of. And so I reached out before he ever started ...and just started trying to build a relationship with [his family]... And that helped, but then also, every single day, once he started... every day, I made sure to tell them about all the positive things he did. So that because I knew that there was a potential for some conversations about negative things, but I wanted to have a bank of all those, all

the wonderful things that he did too. So they, they knew that we weren't just focused, hyper-focused on those negative behaviors that we might see.

Educators felt that establishing effective communication with families benefit their work and student outcomes.

The impacts noted by the educator participants included positive effects on students' social-emotional learning (SEL), the ability to repair relationships with families after conflict, and better relationships with Families of Color by using more equitable strategies. Educators cited multiple positive impacts on students' SEL as a result of family-engagement work during this initiative. For example, Ms. Richards described her success with being able to improve the attendance of a student with excessive absences due to partnering with her family. She explained that she "spoke with the parents and let them know what [the student] was missing" and her absences decreased drastically from first quarter to second quarter. One parent who was interviewed, Kesha, also validated in the positive effect of connecting with her child's counselor on SEL for her son. In fact, she felt it had been beneficial that they had established a positive ongoing conversation between herself, the school counselor, and the child's therapist.

Ms. Jones talked about profound growth a student had experienced in his ability to self-regulate his behavior due to the teacher and family using the same language at home and at school. The student is now better able to take breaks on his own and calm himself, and she feels it is because of the consistency provided by partnering with the family. Ms. Jones also described how increasing communication with a parent allowed her to repair a broken relationship after a conflict. Increasing communication, respecting the role and views of the parent, and showing that Ms. Jones would "do her best to meet the child's needs in the way [the parent] wanted" allowed

the relationship to be repaired quickly, and therefore Ms. Jones felt she was also more effective with the student.

Educators also reported increased relationships with Families of Color through use of more equitable strategies. Multiple educators mentioned that they had noticed more Families of Color reaching out to them than in the past, and attributed it to the new strategies they had tried for soliciting partnership and feedback. Ms. Spears said she felt that more Families of Color were willing to partner with her as a counselor when their child was having social or emotional difficulty. She attributed the increased willingness to partner to a “team approach” and the families knowing that she was on their side, trusting that she had their child’s best interest at heart. Ms. Hoyt described a very communicative relationship she had developed with one parent that allowed two younger siblings to feel comfortable attending school in-person for the first time. Ms. Hoyt said she would communicate with the parent, and the students, multiple times per day, often relaying messages between them, to help reduce anxiousness on the part of the students and the parent. As Ms. Richards explained, building relationships with families requires transparency and willingness to discuss the good and the bad. The educators in the initiative reported more authenticity in their relationships with families which improved their ability to positively impact students.

Moving forward, the educators articulated a need for more general equity and social justice learning, the desire to increase how students’ cultures are brought into instruction, curriculum, and the classroom environment as well as the need to continue to solicit additional feedback from families. Some mentioned that they felt continuing to learn about equity and social justice would help them to partner better with families and find more opportunities to bring families’ cultures and assets into the classroom, which would improve student learning and

family engagement. Others described the intent to continue to collect additional feedback from families and to use that information not only for planning for family engagement work, but for school improvement more broadly. Specifically, Ms. Spears is helping to start the Collaborative Inquiry Team (CIT) work in the Spring semester and specified, “I’m looking forward to how this kind of work is going to be a focus of our SIP planning and, and then into next year too, and there’s going to be a whole committee working on it. So I’m looking forward to kind of what that brings about. And I’m hoping that I can bring a lot of what I learned here into that work.” Educators also noted the appreciation of continued networked improvement community opportunities such as collaborative learning, accountability partners and coaching. Ms. Jones explained, “I mean, not just professional development, but working with a group of people who are wishing to learn more. And then I think probably an accountability partner, to help encourage me to reach out.”

Finally, educators noted the importance of participating in this initiative in solidifying their beliefs around equity and family engagement. As Ms. Hoyt stated, it helped her better articulate what she “knew in the back of her mind.” Ms. Allen said that the initiative had helped her shift her mindset and be more open-minded about what family engagement truly means, that “just because a family is not showing up to school or not doing what we think is the traditional way of being an involved family or an involved parent” doesn’t mean that they do not want to be involved. Lastly, Ms. Jones stated that what she learned

would have a long-lasting impact for as long as I’m teaching, because that is the core... having that relationship with that family... you can’t really make a difference with a student, whether it is academically... or social emotional behavior, unless you have a partnership with that family.

While teacher input indicates positive impacts to their practices, family input requires more nuance.

Family Input via Focus Groups and Interviews

As described above, input from families was collected throughout the initiative through focus groups, interviews, and observations of family engagement activities at the participating schools (such as input sessions for principal hiring processes). Fifty-five family members attended input sessions for principal hiring and provided feedback, 69 family or community members provided feedback via an anonymous Google Form related to the principal hiring input sessions, and 11 parents were specifically interviewed for this initiative. The purpose of conducting the interviews was to garner additional input from families about how they define partnership and how they would like to be engaged by schools. Unfortunately, the families who participated in these groups were disproportionately White. Therefore, the scholar-practitioner performed three rounds of coding, utilizing the lens of Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT). Particularly, Corces-Zimmerman & Guida's Critical Whiteness Methodology framework's (2019) principles of responsibility to challenge Whiteness, and Whiteness as rhetorical, emotional, and epistemological were placed in the foreground of the analysis.

Spoken and Unspoken practices of Whiteness can be used to avoid, dismiss or protect the speaker from a critical examination of oneself and their role in acts of racism or Whiteness. It should be noted that both White participants and White researchers are likely to engage in these strategies, and thus the role of the researcher is not solely to remain vigilant of the words, actions and beliefs of the participant, but also of our own acts of Whiteness (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019, p. 103).

While coding data, I was careful to monitor for when participants, or myself as the scholar-practitioner, may have been engaging in these “spoken or unspoken practices” and to interrogate possible assumption when coagulating themes.

Some significant themes identified across multiple families’ feedback were a shared value between families and educators for diversity, equity, and inclusion, barriers for engaging with the school (including: busyness, not knowing how to approach teachers, not knowing what to ask), appreciation for educators, desire for improved communication and a greater sense of community within the school, as well as improvement needed in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and communication strategies. Table 4 shows how the families’ feedback compared to the themes from teacher focus groups. Families’ and educators’ perspectives were more aligned on the challenges of the pandemic, appreciation for DEI work, and SEL. Perspectives differed on communication, academics, and what are effective strategies for community building.

Table 4: Comparing Themes from Educator and Family Feedback

Educators' Perspectives	Themes	Families' Perspectives
<p>Overemphasis on one-way communication from school to home</p> <p>Concerned about bothering families if messaging too often</p>	Communication	<p>Mixed reviews of communication apps used by schools</p> <p>Would like to hear from the school more often</p> <p>Do not know what or how to ask their questions</p>
<p>Positive: Ease of connecting to the home during virtual learning</p> <p>Negative: turbulence of changing modalities and the inability to connect in person</p>	Pandemic Challenges	<p>Turbulence of frequently changing modalities</p> <p>Staffing concerns and turnover make building relationships difficult</p> <p>Busyness and other strains on families and educators is a barrier</p>
<p>Professional learning and opportunities to reflect are helpful and continue to be needed</p> <p>Changes in practices yielded results with Families of Color</p> <p>Beliefs became more asset-based</p>	Appreciation for DEI	<p>Diversity is a significant reason for choosing a public school</p> <p>Want to see diversity, equity, and inclusion centered in the school's vision</p> <p>Appreciate second language instruction</p>
<p>Experienced an increased authenticity in relationships with Families of Color due to increased intentionality using equitable practices</p>	Community-Building	<p>Mixed reviews of PTA</p> <p>Concerns about PTA lacking inclusiveness, desire to recruit more Families of Color</p>
<p>Building relationships results in positive impacts on students' Social-Emotional Learning</p>	SEL	<p>Building relationships results in positive impacts on students' Social-Emotional Learning</p>
<p>Typical family engagement is not connected to students' academic goals</p>	Academics	<p>Families strongly desire to be more involved in decision-making about students' academic goals</p> <p>Families are unsure what children are learning and whether they are making progress</p>

Note. This table compares major themes cited by educators and families in the focus groups for a summative overview.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The first theme identified in families’ and educators’ feedback is a shared value for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the schools. Several families mentioned the importance of the diverse student body as the reason the families had chosen to attend the school—noting that they wanted their children to have friends from different backgrounds and learn alongside Students of Color. Two of the four schools are magnet schools, another has a “global designation”, and another is a year-round calendar option. Due to state and district policies promoting school choice, all of the families interviewed have multiple other private, charter, and public options for their children to attend. However, many mentioned that they had chosen to attend this school for its diversity. Some parents/families stated, “we are a Title I school” and “we serve a lot of refugees.” Several also shared appreciation for DEI work the teachers are engaged in as well as requesting a Person of Color as their principal at two of the schools’ hiring input sessions. Many expressed gratefulness for diversity in the curriculum such as students learning about gender issues, learning what schools are like in other countries, learning about the Civil Rights movement, learning about human rights issues internationally and having second-language instruction. Both Iris and Juan shared how the Spanish instruction at Goodman was very beneficial, because they were native Spanish-speakers, but had not taught their children to speak the language at home. They were thankful that their children could learn Spanish at school, and then they could practice at home. Juan elaborated

My girl was born here and speaks a little Spanish, but she is learning Spanish in Goodman. She gets very excited and tells me when she learns something about Mexico, a Mexican tradition or when they learn something from Guatemala. Indeed, they learn from different cultures. Yes, they respect my culture! Honestly the Guatemala Culture has

nothing in particular with the culture here, but at least they take into account to learn from other cultures, which is important (translated from Spanish.)

Alice contrasted her child's school experience at Goodman with their school in another state that was obviously anti-immigrant and said that they appreciated that their current school "celebrated diversity" many overt ways through schoolwide celebrations and curriculum.

Conversely, multiple families in the input sessions for hiring new principals at Goodman, Dawson, and Layton also cited the need to recruit more "base families" back to the school. Most of these schools are in gentrifying neighborhoods, where many White families choose other private, charter, or public options that are more White demographically. Often, this was described as "recruiting the base" or "having more neighborhood families choose the school." These overwhelming White families, mostly at the input sessions used for principal hiring processes, did not seem to see the contradiction between saying they "value diversity and inclusion" and "we need more neighborhood (White) families" at our school. No one addressed why they needed to recruit more "neighborhood" families, although some hinted at not wanting to have to defend their choice of a diverse school to their neighbors. These families did not seem to see the contradiction between saying they "value diversity and inclusion" and "we need more neighborhood (White) families" at our school. Others mentioned things such as involving more of the community, beyond just families, to get more resources and programs for the benefit of "all of the students." Using a critical lens, one may theorize that these families want DEI work for the benefits of making their children more cosmopolitan but want more "neighborhood" families to attend the school so that they have more homogeneity and are able to preserve the hegemony of Whiteness overall. Research in other settings has corroborated these phenomenon—White parents are more likely to choose a school with a White majority, even

when they state that they seek “diversity” and schools that predominantly serve Students of Color are seen as “bad” choices under school-choice policies (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Evans, 2021; Roda & Wells, 2013). Even parents “seeking diversity” may do so for the perceived cultural and social advantages it can bring their White children or to affirm their identity as progressives (Evans, 2021). These contradictions are important for school leaders to keep in mind when using family input.

Barriers to Engagement. Several barriers to engagement were described by families including the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher turnover and staffing shortages, busyness (on the part of educators and families), and not knowing how and what to ask educators.

Pandemic-related turbulence. Many families mentioned the general difficulty of the COVID-19 pandemic as a barrier to engagement including the fact that students’ teacher assignments changed often, the frequent changes in the modality of instruction throughout the 2020-2021 school year, and the high demands on parents of young children during virtual learning. Several mentioned that more flexibility was needed if virtual instruction were ever to resume, including R who acknowledged that burden was even more difficult to carry for less-privileged families. Families also expressed appreciation for educators and endorsed the immense value of more consistent in-person learning being available during 2021-2022—many citing the importance of in-person learning for their child’s social-emotional well-being. Trisha specifically noted that she wanted to be sure the teachers were not “suffering” (due to being put on the frontlines with staffing shortages) for the children to experience the “benefits of in-person learning.” Several families expressed willingness to volunteer to assist with staffing shortages in the schools and provide teachers with some coverage and breaks, although current district

policies make this murky, if not impossible. Overall, as might be expected from mostly White families, who overall describe themselves as “involved”, they are eager to play a bigger role in the school and desire to help educators. Through the critical lens, one can hypothesize that these sentiments may come from both a place of compassion and also a desire to consolidate more power.

Staffing and turnover. Somewhat related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, some families cited educator turnover and staffing shortages as a barrier. This was particularly a theme at the principal hiring input sessions. Families described class sizes that were too large, frequent class coverage obligations on teachers, and general knowledge from the media that teachers were overwhelmed and quitting. The majority of families expressed empathy and appreciation for teachers, and therefore a hesitancy to reach out to teachers with questions or concerns. They described the educators as “amazing”, “wonderful”, “compassionate”, “loving” but also “underpaid”, “underappreciated”, “overworked” and “just keeping afloat.” Therefore, families said they did not want to be an additional burden to the educators. Krista shared that when she attended a virtual “open house”, she could tell that the educators were responding to criticism and complaints about COVID protocols. She felt surprised and disappointed that other parents had been complaining, and therefore she tabled her questions about the curriculum for fear of overwhelming the educators.

Teacher turnover was also mentioned as a related barrier. Parents cited examples of entire grade levels of teachers leaving and needing to be replaced in the same year, having a fourth grade child with no remaining previous teachers still at the school, and inconsistency with services such as special education caseworkers. Families felt that it was hard to build a sense of community, and long-term relationships with teachers, due to the high rates of turnover in their

schools. It is imperative to note that if privileged families feel like their questions are not welcomed, and that it is hard to build relationships with educators at their schools marginalized families are likely to experience these barriers to a greater degree.

Busyness. Parents cited educators' busyness, as well as their families' own busy schedules as reasons they were unable to engage with the school. Several parents mentioned they would know how to get involved at the school if they had bandwidth to do so, including Kesha, R, and Iris. Others cited demanding, and ever-changing, work schedules as reasons they did not have time to reach out to their children's teachers and would likely never be able to go to an in-person event at the school. R also described the feeling of "trying to pull information" out of the school but explained that it was because "the teachers are just so saturated" that they do not have time to talk to parents. Other families explained that they do not have time to talk to teachers. This is consistent with ongoing districtwide family engagement survey data, across multiple years, that indicates busyness as one of the main reasons families do not engage with their schools [internal data, 2017, 2018. 2019].

How and what to ask. Another barrier described by families was not knowing how and what to ask educators. Many did not know whether teachers and school leaders prefer to hear from them via email, phone calls, or apps such as Talking Points and Class Dojo, since so many different methods are used. Others felt their questions were not welcomed unless the teacher asked for a conference. Many families also expressed that they did not understand the assessment reports, or how to advocate when they felt their children were falling behind. As R said, "I am educated, and I still don't understand the reports they send home. [It is] educator 'gobbledygook'." Alice and Krista talked about how the benchmarks for report cards, and different types of assessments are different from one another. Therefore, they do not know what questions to

begin with when various assessments are sent home. They also do not where to go to find out more information about the assessments or the reports. Some even suggested that if they, as more privileged parents, did not know how to interpret this information, others must have even more trouble, and likely disengage for that reason

What are kids learning? The final, and most common, barrier parents described is also related. Families repeatedly mentioned not knowing what their children are learning about in class in a given day, week, or month. This was a significant theme in principal hiring input sessions and individual interviews. Many requested some type of syllabus/schedule, or short messages about what the students learned that day or week. They would like to be able to reinforce learning at home, through conversations and activities, and therefore need more information about what students are working on. Some cited the desired to head off the common, “What did you learn today?” question, typically answered by “nothing.” Others wanted to be able to frontload or preview what they would be learning soon. As Alice described, “the biggest thing I am concerned with is really getting any kind of an idea what my kids are learning.” This barrier reflects elements of Goodall’s Freirean “Banking Model of Parental Engagement”—“the teacher knows a great deal about the child’s learning and the parent knows almost nothing” (Goodall, 2018, p. 611). Again, this is a problem reported by White parents, but is even more likely to be exasperated for Families of Color to experience marginalization in schools and society. Flora, a Spanish-speaking parent, described herself as very involved, but still felt that she needed more information about what her son is and is not mastering,

Ah, well, I don't know because I practically participate in everything. I keep up with my children’s grades. The school keeps me informed. Perhaps the only thing I would like them to do more is to communicate about what happens in the school in the classes with

them and about the help they are receiving to understand. There are times when my older son has a problem and he feels like they don't understand him, he is confused and lost. He says he asks for help, but they don't help him. It's complicated. More communication of how my child is doing in class (translated from Spanish).

She also noted that the school respects their Latino culture and her decision-making as a parent, but they did not share enough information about her child's academic progress.

Mixed Reviews for PTA and Communication. Families' feedback varied on the topics of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and communication from the school. Families who were part of the PTA often talked about the need to diversify the organization and recruit more Families of Color to better reflect the population of the school. While others, who were not members, described themselves as "not the PTA type." Some felt that the PTA would be more effective if they had more influence over policies and decision-making at the school, whereas others would like to be able to partner more with the school outside of PTA. Some families did say that they thought PTA meetings becoming virtual made them more accessible, and as well as less intimidating and formal. PTA leaders, like Everett and Trisha, mentioned that their attendance and membership had gone up, and become more diverse, since switching to online meetings and that they planned to continue to hold virtual meetings in the future, in hopes of getting more families involved. Juan said he attended virtual PTA meetings, but hoped they would resume in person, as it is harder to "get our attention and participate" virtually.

Communication from the school, also received mixed reviews. Some families stated the messaging was consistent and the level of communication "impressive," while others at the same school would note discrepancies between what the teacher sends and what the school sends. Opinions about which types of communication were "best" varied widely. Some wished

the school would increase the use of “weekly folders” to see their child’s work and announcements in hard copy, whereas others felt the folders were useless clutter or forgettable. Juan explained that they often forget to check the folder unless their daughter tells them there is something to look at in there. Meanwhile, he shared that they always check the texting apps. He suggested that perhaps the teacher should send texts to tell them there is something important in the folder in a given week.

The apps also received mixed reviews. In input sessions, one family said, “there need to be some more communication tools,” while the next said “there are too many communication tools.” Class Dojo and Talking Points were both praised and critiqued, although the convenience of Talking Points translating and interfacing for families like a text message were specifically noted as more convenient than Class Dojo. English-speaking families praised Talking Points for translation in support of DEI, but Spanish-speaking families praised the app as well. Daria explained

Yes, through Spanish we communicate. So that we can communicate, the teacher gave me an application to download. She would get the communication in English and I in Spanish. I would like for them to continue using this application “Talking Points.” It is very good (translated from Spanish.)

In input sessions, families shared that largely, communication comes from the individual teachers, rather than schoolwide, and explained that this accounted for the wide disparity in experiences.

Notably however, no families said there was too much communication overall, but rather just too much reliance on certain types. Multiple families stated, “there is no such thing as too much communication.” For example, “if I heard from my child’s teacher every day, I wouldn’t

think that was too much,” “too much communication is not possible,” and “if you don’t tell us, we don’t know.” Flora stated that she usually got texts about her child every day and wanted that same pace to continue. Although, it is a common misconception amongst educators—that families do not want to hear from the school so often, the input from this initiative disputed this conclusion. Specifically, families appreciate being communicated with directly, rather than through their child, and appreciate when the communication is short and straight-forward. Many asked for more frequent, yet shorter, communication that was direct, in plain language, and predictable (such as coming around the same day or time and using a specific app, such as Talking Points to text). Another suggestion was to establish a predictable time to bring questions, such as virtual principal chats and teachers having office hours.

What Needs Improvement. It is important to again note that this feedback is not representative, and that without more data it is difficult to know whether Families of Color may have the same sentiments about what needs improvement as those who provided input. Families participating in this initiative desire for an increased sense of community within the schools and better information about what students are learning and how they are progressing. Many families described a yearning for the ability to go back into the school building and to meet their child’s classmates and their classmates’ families. Several said they missed the types of community-building activities that used to be held in the school prior to the pandemic—such as Meet and Greets, holiday parties, schoolwide celebrations, performances, etc. This came from a place of wanting a sense of the environment of the school, as Kesha, a parent of a younger student stated—“I didn’t even know that school had an upstairs” until her child came home and told her. For others, it comes from a place of wanting to meet the other families for the purposes of organizing out of school community-building activities such as playdates and birthday parties.

Trisha and Everett mentioned that they missed the home or community visits that teachers used to do, because they thought it helped them get to know the teachers better. Several parents also talked about needing to explore how to better leverage school buildings as community centers and gathering places (post-pandemic.) These were significant points of feedback in the principal hiring input sessions. Latino families also shared the opinion that schools should resume in-person events, although they noted that this was partly because they felt confident the school would have interpretation and information in their language. Daria explained that visiting the school is how she knew they respected her culture

I think the teachers and the principal are very good people, well in my opinion. Ah I always attend school events and always see the principal and he greets me normally.

There are several teachers who work with my child, and I have talked to them, and they seemed to be good people. You know that you can feel dirty looks and they say a lot and the bad attitudes speak for themselves. The principal usually always takes us into account in everything that relates to the school and school events. The same does the teacher. I have my child in the after-school program that take care of him and what I have managed to see is that they are very good people. Of course, I feel respected for being Latina (translated from Spanish.)

While several mentioned wanting to resume these types of community building activities in-person, others specifically noted that the “meetings” needed to “stay virtual.” For example, quarterly conferences, PTA meetings, and information sessions (such as literacy night and math night) all need to be offered virtually. Some parents advocated for this for their own convenience, while others noted that it seemed to be more largely attended and better for others, but all agreed that these were not the types of events they would prefer to come to the school

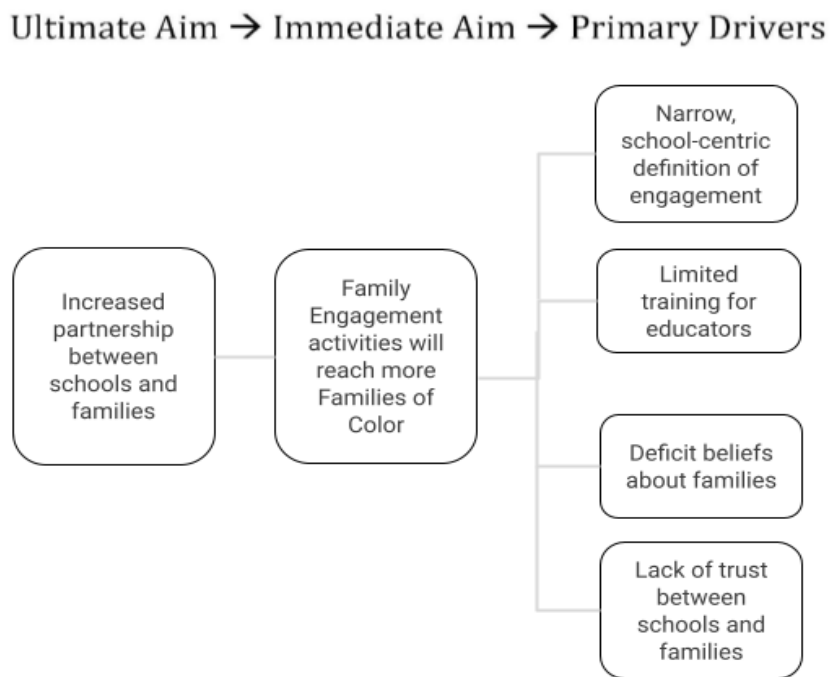
building for. R specifically noted the importance of virtual options for families working nontraditional business hours and those with disabilities and other accessibility needs.

As previously noted, many parents also felt communication needed improvement. While the reviews on the types of communication coming from the school were mixed, the feedback on the content of that communication was not. Families feel that communication is often too lengthy and not written in a way they can understand it. Communication is often about rules, procedures, activities, and events, and not about learning. Families would like increased communication about what their child is learning, and more opportunities for two-way communication, where their questions and concerns are solicited and responded to by educators. As Alice explained, they would like to better understand what their child is learning and “how they are progressing toward their goals.” R explained that families would like to be involved in conversations about setting students’ goals, and better understand how assessment data is used by educators. Again, it must be specified, as some families did acknowledge, that if White families who are from mostly privileged backgrounds feel disconnected, likely Families of Color feel even more disconnected and unable to get their questions answered or concerns addressed. Improvement towards more of a partnership orientation on the part of educators is still needed. Furthermore, it must also be mentioned that it is likely White families would resist when and if school leaders began to make changes based on the input of Families of Color (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Analysis

This improvement initiative was designed to impact four primary drivers towards the ultimate goal of increased partnership between schools and Families of Color. Figure 14 illustrates these drivers.

Figure 14: Primary Drivers of the Improvement Initiative

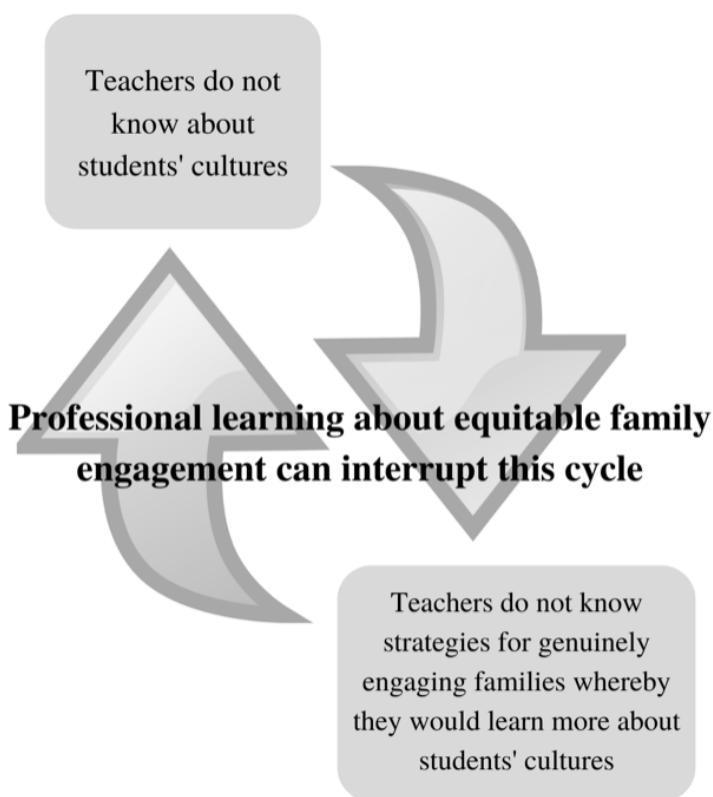


Note. Driver Diagram showing the ultimate aim, immediate aim, and primary drivers of this improvement initiative.

Educator feedback shows that the professional learning was beneficial in expanding their definition of family engagement, providing training in making family engagement activities more equitable, positively impacting their beliefs about families, and promoting trust between the educator participants and the families they work with—positively impacting all four drivers. Teachers indicated that they made progress toward the immediate and ultimate aims of reaching more Families of Color and increasing partnership between schools and families. Key factors in shifting engagement toward partnership, as defined by Ishimaru (2014) include moving toward a culture of shared responsibility and adaptive strategies that build capacity and relationships amongst stakeholders. This initiative was successful in building the capacity of the educator participants, their relationships with the families they serve, their orientation toward shared responsibility, and their ability to use adaptive strategies to promote partnership.

This problem was initially described as circular—in which teachers do not know much about the cultures of Families of Color, but also do not know strategies for genuinely engaging families, whereby they would learn more about their cultures. This initiative has shown that through professional learning interventions, the circular problem of inequitable family engagement can be interrupted by helping educators learn strategies for genuinely engaging families. This effect is illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Interrupting the Circular Problem of Inequitable Family Engagement



Note. Illustration of how professional learning can interrupt the circular problem of inequitable family engagement, as shown in this initiative.

High-quality professional learning, in a networked improvement community, that narrowly focuses on equitable family engagement can impact educators' beliefs and practices and model strategies that allow them to better engage with families and learn about students' cultures.

The initiative also analyzed feedback from more than 130 families on what would improve the schools' family engagement work from their perspective. Themes from their feedback included appreciation for diversity, equity, and inclusion, improving communication, and reducing critical barriers such as busyness (on the part of educators and families), lack of access to ask questions, and families not knowing what their child is learning at school. Nevertheless, the initiative did not reach enough Families of Color to have adequate input to verify positive impacts on relationships with the schools from their perspectives specifically. This remains unfinished work that the scholar-practitioner and school leaders will continue to pursue. The finite timeline of this initiative, and the barriers presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, mean that more work is necessary to continue to improve partnership with Families of Color specifically.

Recommendations

The success of this initiative to positively impact educators' beliefs and practices, and its shortcomings in engaging with enough Families of Color to conclusively verify outcomes from their perspectives lead directly into the recommendations for future scholarship and for school leaders.

For Future Scholarship

It is imperative to continuously seek to include the voices of those who have been marginalized into scholarship. Therefore, the most essential need for future scholarship is garnering continued feedback of Families of Color on family engagement practices in schools, moving toward families being decision-makers not only on family engagement work but also school improvement work. Enduring, continual efforts are needed to build trust between educators and communities that will allow for this scholarship to take place. The Collaborative

Inquiry Team (CIT) is still an appropriate structure to consider for engaging in this work, even though the finite timeline of this initiative and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow it to convene. CITs allow for educators and families to work together to ensure that decisions are not made based on educators' false assumptions and that any new initiatives implemented by the school meet the needs of the families they are trying to serve (Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017; Pellerin, 2011). Research also needs to continue to better incorporate the assets and capital of Communities of Color in scholarship (Yosso, 2005; Stanley, 2020b, Stanley & Gilzene, 2022). Too few educators learn about the cultural prosperity within Communities of Color, while too many are preoccupied with only the burdens Students of Color face due to marginalization. These deficit views continue to inhibit partnership between many schools and families.

For School Leaders

Feedback from the educators and the families provides several recommendations school leaders should consider—continue diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, invite further opportunities for Families of Color specifically to provide input, differentiate and increase communication, and seek additional low-barrier ways to engage with families.

Additional equity and social justice learning was the most essential topic that the educators participating in the study said they needed to continue growing. Families' input also indicated that they appreciate schools' DEI work. School leaders may even want to consider DEI learning and inquiry that brings families and teachers together, as suggested by Elizabeth, the PTA President at Layton Elementary. Research indicates that learning about social justice together can help establish a truly shared vision and further break down barriers between educators and families (Herrera et. al, 2020). Also, due to the success of this initiative in

impacting the beliefs and practices of the educators who participated, school leaders may consider replicating or expanding this professional learning, providing targeted learning around equitable family engagement particularly.

School leaders should also explore how to invite more opportunities for families to ask questions and provide feedback, moving toward the objective of partnering with families as collaborators in educational reform. Many families indicated that they did not know what questions to ask or how to ask those questions. This indicates that schools are not soliciting as much feedback as they may assume. Educators need to provide increased opportunities for individual families to ask questions about their child’s learning, but also more schoolwide opportunities for families to give input as well. The Collaborative Inquiry Team is a good place to start for schoolwide feedback, as are the tools used in this professional learning intervention, such as questions for community leaders included in the Community-Based Equity Audits process (Green, 2017; Parr & Vander Dussen, 2017). To partner with families individually, the Culturally, Linguistically Diverse families inventory is helpful (Khalifa, 2018). School leaders may also want to explore family training opportunities from the Right Questions Institute, which has learning designed specifically for empowering families to formulate questions to ask educators (Right Questions Institute, 2022). These workshops have been designed with a social justice lens and are specifically planned to promote efficacy and empowerment. Additionally, school leaders must pursue “leadership that leverages the expertise of students, families, and community members to critique forward current systems” as described in the Listening, Engaging, Advocating, and Partnering (LEAP) Model from Stanley and Gilzene (2022, p. 4). In HPSD, not only is more professional learning needed for educators overall, but also for school leaders specifically. Most notably a shift in orientation from school-centered to community-

centered family engagement is still a work in progress that further professional learning would support.

Families also indicated that they would like more communication from the school, although opinions differed on what was the best way to communicate. This means that educators need to communicate more often and to differentiate how they communicate. For instance, some teachers shared that they like to send a classroom newsletter home (which addresses another family concern—not knowing what students are learning). However, some families would prefer this digitally and some prefer this in hard print. It is ultimately no additional work on the part of an educator to send this type of information both ways so that it is convenient for more families. However, it is key to note that these newsletters need to address curriculum and educational goals, not just class parties and supplies needed. Newsletters also should be translated, so that all families can access the information.

Finally, the most frequent barrier described by families was busyness. Therefore, as educators are seeking ways to better engage families, they need to be thinking of types of engagement that are quick and simple. The most popular way of communication for families was in fact texting, so educators should explore ways to shift toward this low-barrier form of communication, as well as opportunities to *seek more input* from families via text. Google Meets are also popular, for the same reason. Families can join from wherever they are. However, educators should focus on making virtual meetings quick and to the point, as well as personalized. Families are much more interested in information about their own child's learning, than generic announcements from educators. They would much rather sign-on to a Meet for a 15-minute conversation about their child's learning, where their input is solicited, than attend a 90-minute information about generic information, such as Common Core Math.

It also cannot be ignored that families indicated they felt educators were too busy for them. School leaders need to explore ways to set aside time for educators to engage with families during protected, working hours. These times should be predictable, and well-advertised, so that families know educators are available and truly want to receive their input. Past patterns of too many platitudes and insincere solicitations for input has damaged families' ability to trust that educators really do want to hear what they have to say and will use it to improve their schools. Going into communities, as the schools did formerly for home visits, is an important step to resume to demonstrate that schools want to connect with families and their communities. Opportunities for engagement offered to families need to be experiences that look and feel more substantial than the invitations of the past.

Conclusion

Equipping Educators to Reimagine Family Engagement

A fluid relationship between teachers and their students, families, and communities has been a hallmark of culturally-relevant pedagogy since its inception (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, the COVID-19 pandemic is a critical point in time, where families and schools are acknowledging their need for one another more than ever. We have an opportunity to reimagine how we engage with families and need to prioritize equitable practices for partnering with Families of Color above and beyond generic family engagement efforts. It has been evident for some time to social justice minded educators, that our predominantly White teaching force needs to learn about the cultures of their mostly Black and Latinx students. Families are the keepers of students' cultures, and the best source of the critical knowledge educators seek in order to pursue culturally-sustaining pedagogy.

This improvement science initiative addressed the deficit beliefs that educators hold about families to promote trust between families and schools, as well as more structural causes of the problem such as limited training for educators and a narrow school-centric definition of engagement. It sought to address a targeted problem of practice—that schools’ family engagement practices do not reach Families of Color equitably and effectively impacted a detrimental cycle of educators not knowing how to partner with families to learn about students’ cultures.

Through a professional learning intervention, a small cohort of educators reflected on their own beliefs and built a more equitable toolbox that improved their ability to build relationships with more Families of Color. Educators also used virtual tools to increase access and communication with families. Nevertheless, family input indicates that more work is to be done. The steps to move forward were clarified through focus groups, input sessions, and interviews—continue social justice work, invite families to the conversation, and lower barriers to access for families. Intentionality is required to expand two-way communication and partnership. These lessons learned can be used to continue inquiry, as we seek to continually improve how educators partner with Families of Color.

Family Engagement as a Lever for Social Justice

Family engagement is a critical component to pursuing social justice, and one that is frequently overlooked as school staff toil away in equity teams on their own (Radd et. al, 2021, Mascareñaz, 2022). Working only amongst ourselves to solve problems, White, middle-class educators cannot know what we do not know about the rich cultural capital available to students from their families. However, approaching families with unexamined deficit beliefs, and without a partnership orientation, will not result in the level of collaboration necessary for teachers to

change their practices and for schools to shift their outcomes. Therefore, teachers must be engaging in their own reflective equity work prior to approaching families (Morton et. al, 2016). Professional learning interventions, like the modules designed for this improvement initiative, assist educators who are seeking more equitable practices to reflect deeply and begin shifting their perspective and ways of interacting with families.

However, like other social justice work, changes to the ways schools engage with families are not made quickly or easily. While teachers who are pursuing equity and begin to partner with families can make vast impacts on the lives of their specific students, changing the practices of a school or district require broader changes than the scope of this improvement initiative. It will require educators to abdicate some of their decision-making about individual students' goals and instruction, the curriculum overall, and systemic schoolwide decisions. When considering scaling up, it is critical to ensure that families' input is sought in key school improvement decisions, not just decisions about social events or fundraising. This means working to establish more open systems where school improvement becomes community driven families, where families are the party hosts and educators the party guests, rather than the other way around (L.L.Mascareñaz, 2017; L.M. Mascareñaz, 2022). Families, like any stakeholder group, need to see that their input is resulting in changes in order to want to continue to partner with the school. Otherwise, they will feel their time was wasted and, rightfully, disconnect. There are centuries of marginalization to overcome in schools. So, families are right not to trust predominantly White educators. We must prove through action that we value families. Plainly stated, there is a lot more work to do.

Tools for Disruptive Leadership

Good intentions are not enough. Far too many White educators, myself included, have toiled away ineffectively attempting to reach Students of Color using the same methods from how they themselves were taught. As Love (2019b) described, “White teachers who, at their core, were good people but unknowingly were murdering my spirit with their lack of knowledge, care, and love of my culture” (p. 2). The same is true for school and district leaders. Too many have been “trying” to improve outcomes for Students of Color using White pedagogy. However, to riff from Audre Lord, the White’s tools (curriculum and instruction) will never dismantle the ineffective White schools. We cannot solve the persistent problems that plague our schools using “recycled” hegemonic strategies (Mattias & Mackey, 2016). Far too many White school leaders, intentionally or mistakenly, toil under the misconception that “we don’t know how” to make our schools more just. It would be an entirely different study to determine whether educational leaders do not know or do not want to know. I used to be one of them, and I would hypothesize that it is some of both. Nonetheless, that premise is false—much has been written about how to lead more equitably by Scholars of Color.

New tools exist. What I have learned in this EdD program, above anything else, is that other methods are available to school leaders. Too name just a few that I have drawn from often: improvement science allows us to identify drivers that will impact our ultimate aim, even if the task seems insurmountable at first (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020); culturally responsive school leadership gives actionable steps for school leaders to take to improve their practice and the practices of their teachers (Khalifa, 2018); culturally-sustaining pedagogy reframes the purpose of instruction (Paris & Alim, 2017); and abolitionist teaching practices show us how we could be teaching differently, more joyfully (Love, 2019a). A common thread amongst these, and other

models for radical school change, is the notable significance of the voices of Students and Families of Color in ensuring changes are effective. It is my obligation, and the obligation of other White educational leaders, to use our leadership to seek to abdicate White privilege, and to lead teachers to more equitable ways of thinking and doing. Leadership for any purpose other than furthering social justice will be fruitless.

Epilogue – Grounded and Whole

It was difficult to maintain fidelity to the idea of the intellectual as someone who sought to be whole—well-grounded in a context where there was little emphasis on spiritual well-being, on care of the soul.

-bell hooks

This improvement initiative was designed in the Spring of 2021, when vaccines were becoming widely available, and we all thought that the COVID-19 Pandemic was nearing the beginning of the end. It was implemented throughout the Fall of 2021, during what turned out to be the hardest part of the Pandemic thus far for educators. In the early days of the pandemic there had been a sense of unity, a sense of community spirit and like we were “all in this together.” Instead, we have now collectively languished for twenty-three months, and the sense of unity has devolved entirely into unprecedented divisiveness—more angry parents at school board meetings than we have ever seen before, educators organizing walk outs, turnover at extraordinary numbers, each day wondering aloud with one another how much longer we could go on, each quarter a new variant spreading faster than we can contact-trace. As I write in January 2022, most of us now wonder if it will ever end.

This was so hard. Teachers cried during professional learning. Parents cried during input sessions. Principals cried for their teachers and for their families. Students cried so much! As we all saw how much virtual learning had impacted students’ social-emotional health, we vowed to do everything we could to keep schools open, even if that meant that we transferred more stress onto our own shoulders. Parents were weary, teachers were exhausted. Everyone was carrying so many personal and professional burdens.

I, as a scholar-practitioner, felt torn between my passion for this work and honoring the struggles of everyone I was working with. Should I be pushing for more? Or am I asking too much in these difficult times? How do I honor how hard everything is for everyone right now, while also holding us accountable for the goals we set for ourselves? Ultimately, I settled on providing as much grace and flexibility to participants as needed and scaling back the initiative. This was hard for me; my natural proclivity is more incessant. I was careful at each step not to push, constantly aware of others' loads. I cautiously made sure that communication was not too insistent and that each step of the intervention was framed invitationally, but still unease persisted.

It was when bell hooks passed away, and I revisited her work, that I found some peace with where we were and came to terms with what had and had not been accomplished. As stated in the quote above, we cannot separate the intellectual from their spiritual well-being. In fact, it is only the White supremacist patriarchy that would deceive us into thinking we should attempt to separate the intellectual and spiritual (hooks, 2013). We must employ radical joy, trust, imagination, and disruption to build anti-racist educational spaces (Love et. al, 2021). We must care for those who are doing the work, and for ourselves, even if it means progress is slower than we had hoped. As Love illuminated,

In no way does being well somehow stop injustice, but it does allow you to be your best self while fighting injustice. Being well helps you fight racism with love, grace, and compassion and frees mental space to freedom-dream and to give them hell, and then retreat to your community of love for support, fulfillment, and nourishment—your homeplace (2019a, p. 158).

This was a critical leadership lesson for me personally, and I may not have learned if I had not completed a doctoral program during a pandemic. It is necessary for a leader to care for oneself, but it is also the leader's role to ensure that those they lead care for themselves. If we are not grounded and whole, we cannot seek to make anything better for anyone else.

May we all be intellectuals who seek to be whole and care for others' souls.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Initial Teacher Focus Group Protocol*

“Welcome. We are glad you can join us.” (Introduce self.) “I assume we are all accustomed to the features in Google Meet, but are there any technical questions I can answer before we get started?” (Pause for response. Answer questions as needed). “I will remind you that participation in today’s session is completely voluntary. You are welcome to mute your mic or turn off your camera, although it’s nice for the conversation if you don’t mind turning cameras on. You are welcome to choose an alternate background if you would like.”

“The purpose of this research is to assess how schools’ family engagement practices have changed due to COVID-19 and how we can make our practices more equitable. This initial focus group will serve as baseline data.”

“Let’s get started with the consent form. I am going to drop the link in the chat.” (Paste link and share screen to review). This session will be recorded, but names will be changed when transcribed. We cannot ensure confidentiality, but we encourage that what is discussed here stays here. You are not compelled to answer any question and you may leave at any time. Are there questions about the consent form?” (Answer as needed). I’ll give you a few minutes to complete that. If you decline to participate, that is no problem. We hope you have a lovely rest of your day and you are free to sign off.”

“Now, we’ll begin by introducing ourselves and sharing our favorite things about our jobs. We will popcorn, you can unmute and share whatever you would like.”

“Thank you everyone for sharing. I’m so encouraged by your responses. It helps us focus on what’s really important about what we do, and that is a great launch to our conversation today. I have a few prepared questions, which we will discuss openly. However, I may also ask

follow-up questions and you are welcome to engage in open dialogue or to ask one another questions. The goal is to collaboratively build a better understanding through our conversation today.”

Questions:

1. How do you define “family engagement”?
2. “Have your individual family engagement practices changed due to COVID-19? If so, how?”
3. “Have your schoolwide family engagement practices changed due to COVID-19? If so, how?”
4. “Have you experienced any change in how families interact with you? If so, please describe.”
5. “Have any of your priorities around family engagement changed due to the pandemic? If so, how?”
6. “Either before the pandemic, or since, what are some of the most effective family engagement practices you have utilized?”
7. “Has it been your experience that schools have a harder time engaging with families of color? If so, why do you think this might be?”
8. “Are there any particular strategies you have found to be successful for engaging with families of color? If so, please describe those practices.”

“Thank you all for your time. We are going to close now, as I know you are all very busy. I sincerely appreciate your time and your input.”

Appendix B: *Initial Family Focus Group Protocol*

“Welcome. We are glad you can join us.” (Introduce self.) “Let me take a moment to show you the tools in our Google Meet.” (Demonstrate camera on/off and mic on/off, and any other features as needed.) “I will remind you that participation in today’s session is completely voluntary. You are welcome to mute your mic or turn off your camera, although it’s nice for the conversation if you consider turning cameras on. You are welcome to choose an alternate background if you would like.” (Demo how to change backgrounds.)

“The purpose of this research is to assess how schools’ family engagement practices have changed due to COVID-19 and how we can make our practices more equitable. This initial focus group will serve as baseline data.”

“Let’s get started with the consent form. I am going to drop the link in the chat.” (Paste link and share screen to review). This session will be recorded, but names will be changed when transcribed. We cannot ensure confidentiality, but we encourage that what is discussed here stays here. You are not compelled to answer any question and you may leave at any time. Are there questions about the consent form?” (Answer as needed). I’ll give you a few minutes to complete that. If you decline to participate, that is no problem. We hope you have a lovely rest of your day and you are free to sign off.”

“Now, we’ll begin by introducing ourselves and sharing a hope you have for your family. We will popcorn, you can unmute and share whatever you would like.”

“Thank you everyone for sharing. I’m so encouraged by your responses. It helps us focus on what’s really important, and that is a great launch to our conversation today. I have a few prepared questions, which we will discuss openly. However, I may also ask follow-up questions

and you are welcome to engage in open dialogue or to ask one another questions. The goal is to collaboratively build a better understanding through our conversation today.”

Questions:

1. “What are communication, involvement, or engagement practices your child’s school or teacher uses that work well for you?”
2. “Have you experienced a change in the way your child’s school interacts with you since COVID-19? If so, how?”
3. “Are there any new practices you would like for your child’s school or teacher to continue after the pandemic?”
4. “What are the best ways for your child’s school or teacher to communicate with you?”
5. “What are the things that you hope your child’s school or teacher never does again?”
6. “Does your child’s teacher, or school overall, respect your culture and your background? Why does it feel like they do or do not?”
7. “What are some examples of things you would like to be involved with at your child’s school that you are not currently?”

“Thank you all for your time. We are going to close now, as I know you are all very busy. I sincerely appreciate your time and your input.”

Note. This protocol will also be translated for focus group sessions in Spanish.

Appendix C: Sample Professional Learning Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in this module of professional learning. Your feedback will help make the next one better.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how this module of professional learning met your needs?

- Extremely satisfied
 - Somewhat satisfied
 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - Somewhat dissatisfied
 - Extremely dissatisfied
-

Overall, how effectively did this module of professional learning meet the stated desired outcomes?

- Extremely effective
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not effective at all
-

How interesting was the content presented in this module?

- Extremely interesting
- Very interesting
- Moderately interesting
- Slightly interesting
- Not interesting at all

How comfortable were you sharing your perspective?

- Extremely comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Extremely uncomfortable

Please rate each aspect of this module, in comparison to other professional learning you have experienced.

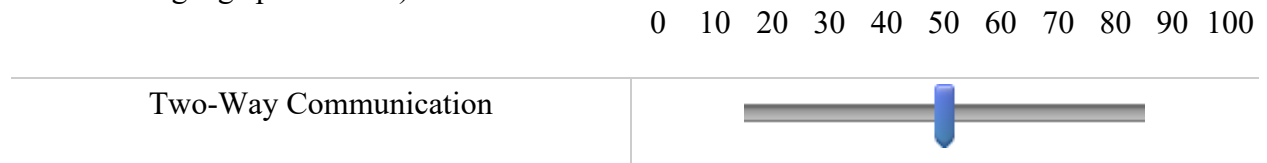
	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Unsatisfactory
Content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Length & Pace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please share any additional feedback you have for the professional learning organizers (optional).

Note. This form is a sample and may be adapted by the CIT to better fit the specific content of a specific professional learning module.

Appendix D: Weekly Practical Measure for Teacher-Family Relationships

In your estimation, what percentage of families of students in your class did you engage in *two-way communication* with this week? (Two-way communication is defined as school or family-initiated communication that is timely and continuous, includes follow-up, and reflects the families' language preference.)¹



Which demographics of families did you engage in *two-way communication* with this week?

	Does not apply	No	Yes
American Indian Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Asian Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Black Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Latinx Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multi-Racial Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pacific Islander Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
White Families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families with LEP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families of SWD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which, if any, of the following family engagement activities did you conduct this week?
*(Check all that may apply).*²

Yes		No
<input type="radio"/>	Talk with my students' caregivers to learn about their cultural traditions and beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Identify the unique skills and funds of knowledge (historical, cultural, & community-based assets) possessed by students' families and community members to use in developing lessons for my students.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Design student homework assignments or projects that engage my students' families in their child's learning in some way.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Develop a classroom newsletter describing my class's activities on a regular basis.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Inform my students' caregivers about day-to-day school assignments and events.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Conduct family-school problem-solving meetings in which I develop an action plan with a student and their family/caregiver.	<input type="radio"/>

<input type="radio"/>	Consult with school support staff (e.g., school counselor/school psychologist) to access needed services for students and their families.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Communicate calmly and effectively with a caregiver who is upset with the school or situation.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Conduct productive parent-teacher conferences with students and their caregivers.	<input type="radio"/>

Were there any other priorities you had to shift to the back-burner, in order to prioritize family engagement this week?

- Yes
- No

If you needed to shift priorities this week, in order to prioritize family engagement, please describe.

Are there any reflections you would like to share about your family engagement work this week?
(Optional)

¹Definition adapted from *Principles of Effective Family Engagement*. (n.d.). Principles of Effective Family Engagement. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement/principles>

²Question adapted from Amatea, E. S., Cholewa, B., & Mixon, K. A. (2012). Teacher Efficacy in Engaging Families Scale [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t16213-000>

Appendix E: *Post-Initiative Teacher Focus Group Protocol*

Note. At this time, this focus group is planned to be virtual. If the context has changed, it may be shifted to in-person, and the protocol would be adjusted accordingly.

“Welcome. We are glad you can join us.” (Introduce self.) “I assume we are all accustomed to the features in Google Meet, but are there any technical questions I can answer before we get started?” (Pause for response. Answer questions as needed). “I will remind you that participation in today’s session is completely voluntary. You are welcome to mute your mic or turn off your camera, although it’s nice for the conversation if you don’t mind turning cameras on. You are welcome to choose an alternate background if you would like.”

“The purpose of this research is to assess how schools’ family engagement practices have changed due to COVID-19 and how we can make our practices more equitable.”

“Let’s get started with the consent form. I am going to drop the link in the chat.” (Paste link and share screen to review). This session will be recorded, but names will be changed when transcribed. We cannot ensure confidentiality, but we encourage that what is discussed here stays here. You are not compelled to answer any question and you may leave at any time. Are there questions about the consent form?” (Answer as needed). I’ll give you a few minutes to complete that. If you decline to participate, that is no problem. We hope you have a lovely rest of your day and you are free to sign off.”

“Now, we’ll begin by introducing ourselves and sharing a highlight from your week. We will popcorn, you can unmute and share whatever you would like.”

“Thank you everyone for sharing. That is a great launch to our conversation today. I have a few prepared questions, which we will discuss openly. However, I may also ask follow-up

questions and you are welcome to engage in open dialogue or to ask one another questions. The goal is to collaboratively build a better understanding through our conversation today.”

Questions:

1. “What have been some of the lessons you learned from participating in this initiative, either from the professional learning, or from families?”
2. “Has your perspective about family engagement change, if so, how?”
3. “Have your practices changed, if so, how?”
4. “Of new any things you tried, what was effective and what wasn’t? Why?”
5. “Have you experienced any change in how families interact with you? If so, please describe.”
6. “Have you experienced additional success in engaging families of color? Why do you think that is?”
7. “Have you experienced any changes in student outcomes (such as grades, attendance, engagement, etc.) due to your family engagement efforts? If so, how?”
8. “Are there any particular strategies you have found to be successful for engaging with families of color? If so, please describe those practices.”
9. “What additional learning or supports do you feel you need to continue making your family engagement practices more equitable?”

“Thank you all for your time. We are going to close now, as I know you are all very busy. I sincerely appreciate your time and your input.”

Appendix F: *Post-Initiative Family Focus Group Protocol*

Note. This protocol will also be translated for focus group sessions in Spanish. At this time, this focus group is planned to be virtual. If the context has changed, it may be shifted to in-person, and the protocol would be adjusted accordingly.

“Welcome. We are glad you can join us.” (Introduce self.) “Let me take a moment to show you the tools in our Google Meet.” (Demonstrate camera on/off and mic on/off, and any other features as needed.) “I will remind you that participation in today’s session is completely voluntary. You are welcome to mute your mic or turn off your camera, although it’s nice for the conversation if you consider turning cameras on. You are welcome to choose an alternate background if you would like.” (Demo how to change backgrounds.)

“The purpose of this research is to assess how schools’ family engagement practices have changed due to COVID-19 and how we can make our practices more equitable. This initial focus group will serve as baseline data.”

“Let’s get started with the consent form. I am going to drop the link in the chat.” (Paste link and share screen to review). This session will be recorded, but names will be changed when transcribed. We cannot ensure confidentiality, but we encourage that what is discussed here stays here. You are not compelled to answer any question and you may leave at any time. Are there questions about the consent form?” (Answer as needed). I’ll give you a few minutes to complete that. If you decline to participate, that is no problem. We hope you have a lovely rest of your day and you are free to sign off.”

“Now, we’ll begin by introducing ourselves and sharing a highlight from your week. We will popcorn, you can unmute and share whatever you would like.”

“Thank you everyone for sharing. That is a great launch to our conversation today. I have a few prepared questions, which we will discuss openly. However, I may also ask follow-up questions and you are welcome to engage in open dialogue or to ask one another questions. The goal is to collaboratively build a better understanding through our conversation today.”

Questions:

1. What are communication, involvement, or engagement practices your child’s school or teacher uses that work well for you?”
2. “Have the family engagement practices at your child’s school changed since COVID-19? If so, how?”
3. “What are the things that you hope your child’s school or teacher never does again?”
4. “What are the best ways for your child’s school or teacher to communicate with you?”
5. “Does your child’s teacher, or school overall, respect your culture and your background? Why does it feel like they do or do not?”
6. “What could your child’s school or teacher do to improve how they honor your culture and partner with you as the students’ families?”
7. “What are some examples of things you would like to be involved with at your child’s school that you are not currently?”

“Thank you all for your time. We are going to close now, as I know you are all very busy. I sincerely appreciate your time and your input.”

Appendix G: Teacher Professional Learning Overview: Digital Notebook

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Equitable Family Engagement

Professional Learning
2021

https://bit.ly/eфе_docs

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Course Schedule

May 27, June 14	Initial Teacher Focus Groups
August 31, 4:30-5:30pm	Module 1: Equity and Unpacking Beliefs about Families
September 13, 14, & 16 (<u>English</u> <u>Spanish</u>)	Initial Family Focus Groups
September 28, 4:30-5:30pm	Module 2: Building Relationships and Centering Families' Assets
October 19, 4:30-5:30pm	Module 3: Strategies and Tools
November 16, 4:30-5:30pm	Module 4: Sharing Lessons Learned
November 30, December 1 & 2	Concluding Family Focus Groups
December 6 or 7	Concluding Teacher Focus Groups

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Objectives for Professional Learning

As a result of participation in this professional learning, teachers will:

- utilize an equity lens to understand the negative impacts of deficit beliefs about families.
- reflect on their own beliefs and family engagement practices.
- discover ways to build more meaningful relationships that promote trust with Families of Color.
- collaborate around effective, equitable strategies for reaching more Families of Color.
- utilize virtual tools for targeted engagement with Families of Color.
- share lessons learned within a networked improvement community.

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Equity and Unpacking Beliefs about Families

Session Agenda

Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read <i>Natural Allies</i> Introduction and Chapter 6.
Slides	< Link >
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name Stories Reflections from reading <u>Challenging Our Assumptions & Beliefs</u> Exit Ticket
Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit families for focus groups on September 13, 14 & 16 (English Spanish). Conduct <u>Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Family inventory</u> for 2-3 students, be prepared to share reflections at the next session.

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CLD Family Inventory

Ask 2-3 Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students' Families these questions either in a phone or Meet interview. Choose families of students you feel you need extra support reaching. Take notes. Be prepared to share your reflections on their responses in Module 2 on September 28.

1. What am I doing well with your child?
2. What am I doing poorly, or could improve on with your child?
3. Do you have a suggestion for me that would help me better educate your child?
4. What should I include in the curriculum?
5. How could I treat your child more fairly?

(Khalifa, 2018, p. 38)

Building Relationships and Centering Families' Assets

Session Agenda

Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct <u>Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Family inventory</u> for 2-3 students, be prepared to share reflections.
Slides	<Link>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Family Book Community Asset Mapping - https://bit.ly/efemap Defining Equitable Family Engagement & Connecting to Culturally Sustaining Instruction Feedback Form- https://bit.ly/efesurvey928
Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and interview <u>1-2 community leaders</u>. Be prepared to add findings to our Community Asset Map <u>Read <i>Powerful Partnerships</i> Chapter 1</u> (pp. 17-35)

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Questions for Community Leaders

Questions to ask to identify informal community leaders:

1. When this community has had a problem in the past what person(s) has been involved in working to solve it?
2. Whom do people in this neighborhood go to for help or advice?
3. Whom do children go to for help or advice?
4. Who gets things done in the community?

Questions for Formal Community Leaders:

1. What is your organization's history in the community, and given this history, what are the assets in the community?
2. What systems, structures, policies, and practices contribute to school and community inequity?
3. In what ways does your organization support members of the community, especially students and families?
4. What are some of your current and long-term goals for improving the community in equitable ways?
5. What resources can your organization contribute to these goals, and what other organizations do you partner with (and in what ways) to address these goals?
6. How and in what ways might we collaborate to address community-school concerns?
7. For me to gain a better understanding of the community, what experience would you suggest I participate in, why, and does your organization offer any of these experiences?

(Green, 2017)

Questions for Community Leaders

Section 2: Questions for Informal Community Leaders

1. How long have you lived in this community and how has that experience been?
2. What are some things that you like about living in this community? If you had a magic wand, what would you change about this community?
3. What is your dream for this community and the schools located within it?
4. What skills, interests, and abilities do you contribute toward equitable community change?
5. If there were others, especially at the local school that shared similar vision would you be willing to partner with them or fold your existing efforts into such an initiative?
6. What would excite you to become involved (or more involved) in improving our community?

(Green, 2017)

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Strategies and Tools

Session Agenda

Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be prepared to share information gathered about community leaders. ● <i>Powerful Partnerships</i> Chapter 1 (pp. 17-35)
slides	< Link >
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grounding: What has evolved about your thinking since we began? ● Revisit Asset Map ● “Contrasting Rules of Engagement Between Conventional Partnerships and Equitable Collaborations” from <i>Just Schools</i> (p. 50)
Follow-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read Just Schools Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-34) ● Choose one teacher’s story to read about from <i>Natural Allies</i> (Chapters 2-5) ● Be prepared to share reflections. ● Recruit families for interviews; add to <u>spreadsheet</u>.

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Sharing Lessons Learned

Session Agenda

Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read Just Schools Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-34) ● Choose one teacher's story to read about from Natural Allies (Chapters 2-5) ● Be prepared to share reflections.
Slides	< Link >
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What's Worked? ● Initial Findings ● Rethinking Current Strategies Jamboard: https://bit.ly/efe_jam ● Feedback Form- https://bit.ly/efesurvey928 ● Academic Partnering Toolkit from Teachers
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Takeaway: Academic Partnering Toolkit for Teachers ● Submit names of families for interviews ● Attend concluding teacher focus group- December 6 or 7

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References

- Amatea, E. S., Cholewa, B., & Mixon, K. A. (2012). Teacher Efficacy in Engaging Families Scale [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t16213-000>
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EXTENSIONS

References

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Race ethnicity and education: Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, (8)*, 69-91.

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Appendix H: *Module 1 Slide Deck*




Equity & Unpacking Beliefs about Families



Equitable Family Engagement Initiative: Module 1

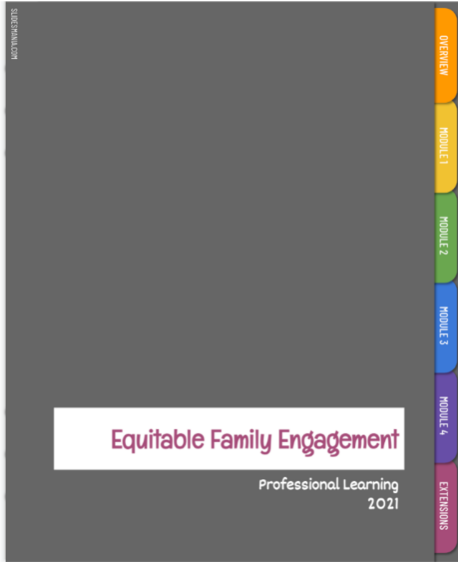


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Welcome!

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Agreements

Stay engaged.
Speak your truth.
Experience discomfort.
Accept and expect non-closure.
Seek equity of voice.
Grant space to be inarticulate.
Pursue growth.
Extend trust.

*(From Courageous Conversations & WCPSS
Equity Foundations)*

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Inclusion

Introduce yourself. What do you know about the story of how your name was chosen?

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Sharing Reflections

Topic:

What was something important that you took away from the *Natural Allies Reading*?

Coaching Circle Protocol:

Listening to understand is an important part of Equitable Family Engagement (EFE). We will use a quick protocol to practice this skill.

We will go around the room, all listening to one another, like a circle.

Each person will ask the person to their right the topic question. Then, the coach will ask a follow up question, based on what they said, to dig deeper and understand more. After each round, the coach becomes the interviewee. We will repeat until everyone has had a chance to share!

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Challenging Our Beliefs and Assumptions

Reflection Stems to Challenge Negative Beliefs About Families

- Whose voice is missing? Whose voice needs to be heard?
- What would the family/student say about that? What would ___ say if they heard that/about that?
- Who is this actually true for and how do you know? Can you identify someone for whom this is not true?
- How true would this be through ___'s eyes?
- We have heard your story about [a family, situation, circumstance, etc.]. What do you think their [i.e., the family] story is about [a family, situation, circumstance, etc.]?
- What does this mean for students' opportunities at your school?
- How can you think about supporting this student/family differently?
- Let's say you decide not to address this mindset where it exists? What are the implications of that decision?

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Challenging Our Beliefs and Assumptions

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS REFLECTION TOOL (cont.)

Example Negative Beliefs about Families	What assumptions are being made about what it takes or what it looks/sounds like to support a child's learning?	How could this belief potentially impact an educator's actions?	What would you say to yourself/ask yourself (or someone else) if you were challenging this belief?*
"Families aren't invested here."	Investment is when families attend school events, participate in the PTO, and volunteer to chaper. If parents aren't doing these things, then they are not invested.	If we operate from the belief that families aren't invested, we may limit communication and information sharing with families. We might stop trying to engage.	What are some of the invisible investments families might be making in their child's schooling? Who is this true for and how do you know? What would families say about that belief that they are not invested? Would they agree? What reasons might families have for not "showing up" in ways that we, as educators, hope they will?
"Families here are functionally illiterate, so they can't support distance learning."			
"Families don't have the capacity to support learning at home."			
"Families don't care."			

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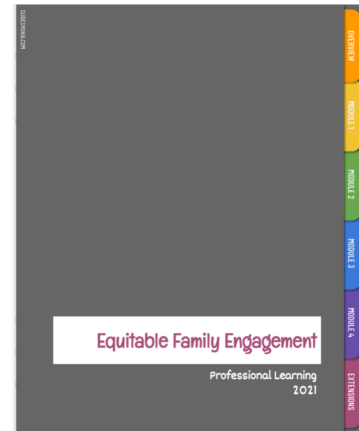
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Follow Up

Continue weekly inventory. Please share reflections & feedback about today & follow up activities there.

Conduct Culturally, Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Family inventory for 1-2 students, be prepared to share reflections at our next session on September 28.

Recruit Families of Color for focus groups on September 13, 14 & 16 ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)).



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Exit Ticket

What did you find interesting today?

What's something you're still mulling over?

References

- Epstein, J. L. (1991). Paths to partnership: What we can learn from federal, state, district, and school initiatives. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72(5), 344–349.
- Flamboyant Foundation (2020). Challenging Assumptions Reflection Tool. <https://flamboyantfoundation.org/resource/challenging-assumptions-reflection-tool/>
- Hong, S. (2019). *Natural allies: Hope and possibility in teacher-family partnerships*. Harvard Education Press.
- Khalifa, M. (2020). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
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Appendix I: Module 2 Slide Deck




Building Relationships and Centering Families' Assets

Equitable Family Engagement Initiative: Module 2

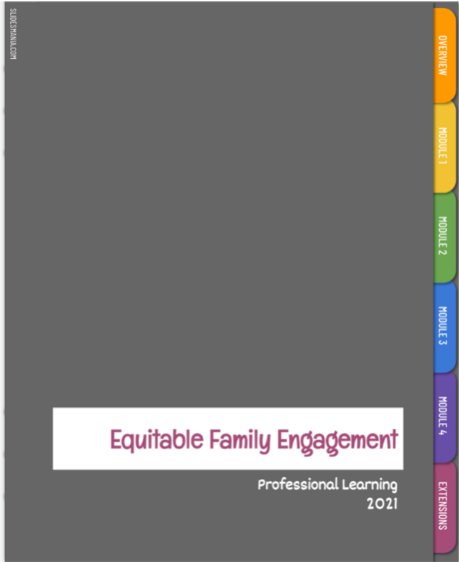


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Welcome!

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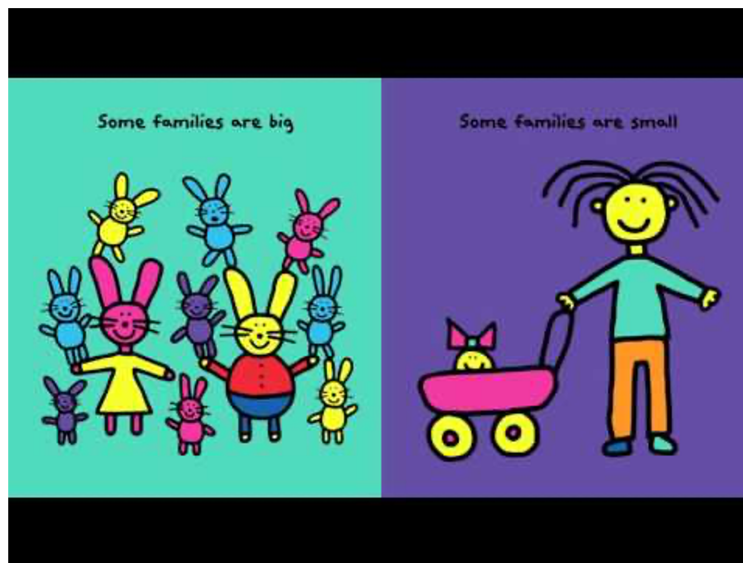
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Agreements

Stay engaged.
Speak your truth.
Experience discomfort.
Accept and expect non-closure.
Seek equity of voice.
Grant space to be inarticulate.
Pursue growth.
Extend trust.

*(From Courageous Conversations & WCPSS
Equity Foundations)*

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Grounding

Sharing Reflections

Topic:

What did you learn from the Culturally-Linguistically Diverse Family Interviews?

Coaching Circle Protocol:

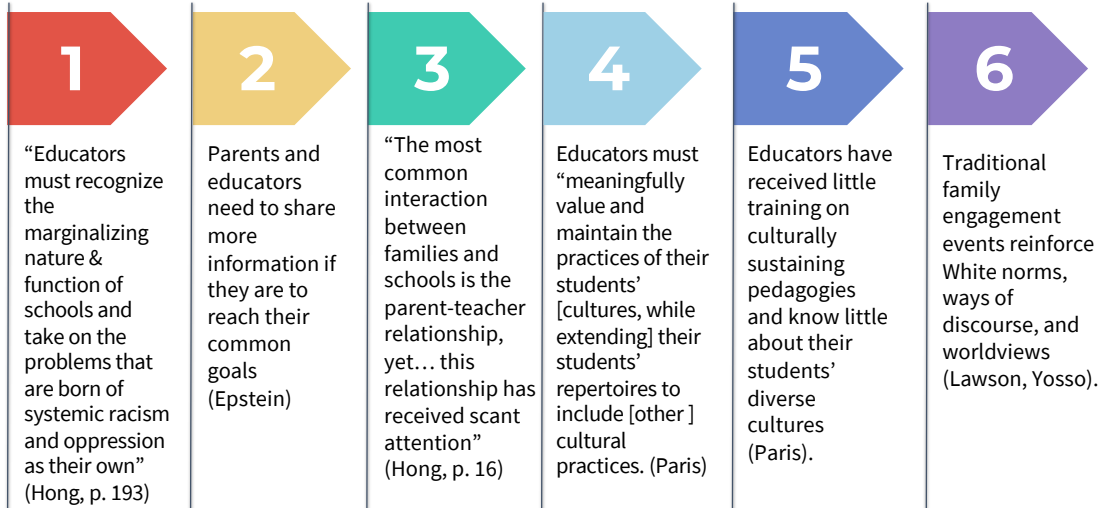
Listening to understand is an important part of Equitable Family Engagement (EFE). We will use a quick protocol to practice this skill.

We will go around the room, all listening to one another, like a circle.

Each person will ask the person to their right the topic question. Then, the coach will ask a follow up question, based on what they said, to dig deeper and understand more. After each round, the coach becomes the interviewee. We will repeat until everyone has had a chance to share!

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Connecting EFE and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy



Families don't need us, we need them.

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Community Asset Mapping

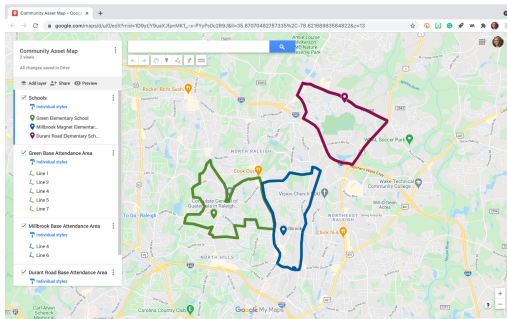
Assets are defined as the “gifts, skills, and capacities of individuals, associations, and institutions” within a community, which the “entire community can use to reduce or prevent poverty and injustice” ... Initially focus on mapping institutional assets (e.g., places of worship, shelters), because they often serve as sites of connection, places of engagement, and avenues for social capital development for students, families, and community members.

(Green, 2017, p. 21).

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Community Asset Mapping

Access the map at
<https://bit.ly/efemap>



Add markers for places in your school community such as:

- places of worship,
- social service organizations,
- Nonprofits
- Financial institutions
- Community-oriented, locally-owned businesses

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Community Asset Mapping

- Why are these organizations assets to our school communities?
- How might we partner with them?
- How do you define partnership?
- How might they view partnership differently?

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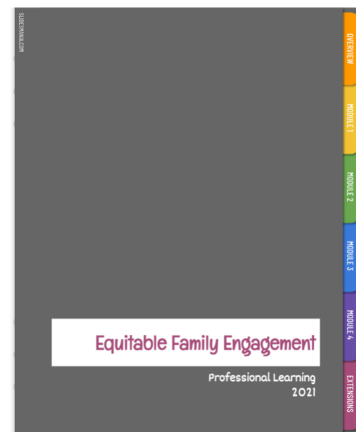
Follow Up

-Identify and interview [1-2 community leaders](#) (page 8-9).

Option to also circle back to the [CLD Inventory](#) (Page 6), if you didn't get to that before.

-Be prepared to add findings to our Community Asset Map

-Read [Powerful Partnerships Chapter 1 \(pp. 17-35\)](#)



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Exit Ticket

<https://bit.ly/efesurvey928>

Learning Targets

As a result of participation in this professional learning, teachers will:

- utilize an equity lens to understand the negative impacts of deficit beliefs about families.
- reflect on their own beliefs and family engagement practices.
- discover ways to build more meaningful relationships that promote trust with Families of Color.
- collaborate around effective, equitable strategies for reaching more Families of Color.
- utilize virtual tools for targeted engagement with Families of Color.
- share lessons learned within a networked improvement community.

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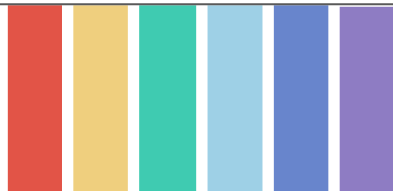


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Appendix J: Module 3 Slide Deck




Strategies and Tools

Equitable Family Engagement Initiative: Module 3

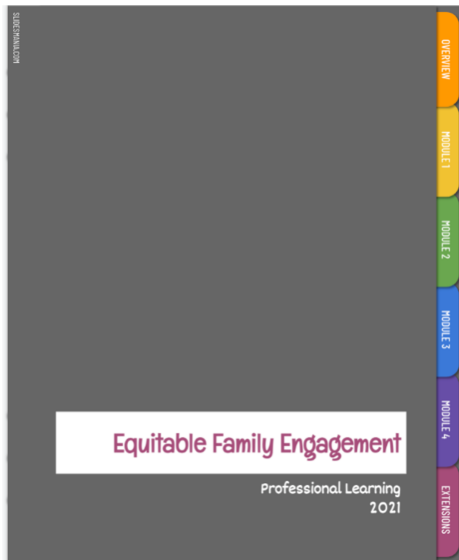


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Welcome!

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Agreements

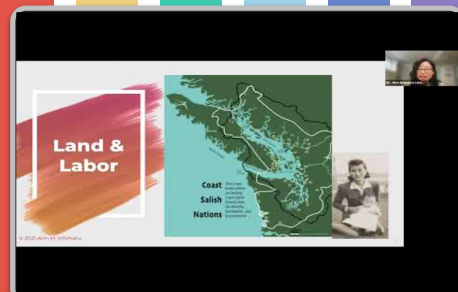
Stay engaged.
Speak your truth.
Experience discomfort.
Accept and expect non-closure.
Seek equity of voice.
Grant space to be inarticulate.
Pursue growth.
Extend trust.

*(From Courageous Conversations & WCPSS
Equity Foundations)*

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Grounding

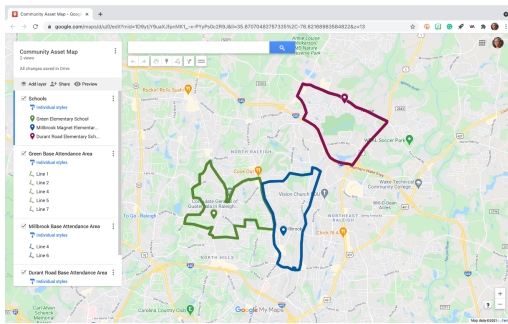
What has evolved about your
thinking, since we began?



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Community Asset Mapping

Access the map at
<https://bit.ly/efemap>



- Let's revisit-- did you gain any additional ideas from your community leader interviews?

Powerful Partnerships

Which of the four Core Beliefs come more naturally to you or your work?

Which of the Core Beliefs may challenge your former beliefs or assumptions most?

The Four Essential Core Beliefs of Family Engagement

1. All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
2. All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Families and school staff are equal partners.
4. The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

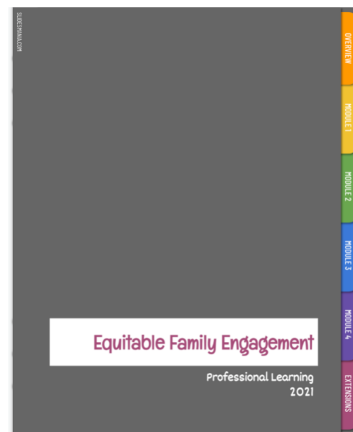
Follow Up

For the final session on November 16:

- Read Just Schools Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-34)
- Choose one teacher's story to read about from Natural Allies (Chapters 2-5)
- Be prepared to share reflections.

In conclusion:

- Complete weekly inventory through December 17.
- Recruit families for interviews; add to spreadsheet.
- Mark your calendar for Concluding Focus Group December 6 **or** 7 (5:00pm, virtual).



Exit Ticket

https://bit.ly/efe_jam

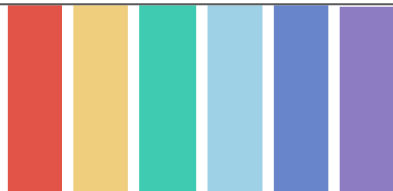
Considering we have one learning session left, what have you gotten from this initiative so far? What do you still want to know?




References

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Appendix K: *Module 4 Slides*




Lessons Learned



Equitable Family Engagement Initiative: Module 4

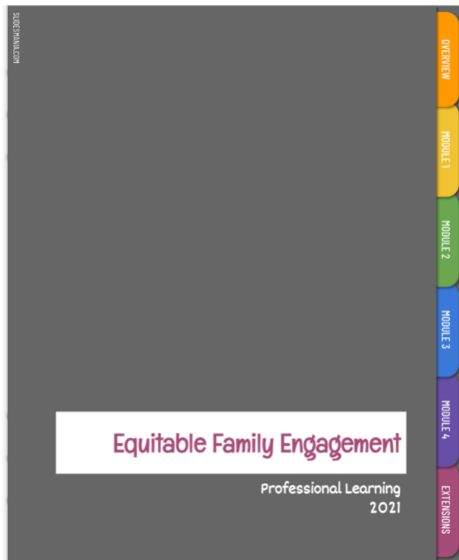


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Welcome!

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Agreements

Stay engaged.
Speak your truth.
Experience discomfort.
Accept and expect non-closure.
Seek equity of voice.
Grant space to be inarticulate.
Pursue growth.
Extend trust.

*(From Courageous Conversations & WCPSS
Equity Foundations)*

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Initial Findings

Families:

- Value more communication over less (Talking Points, Dojo, and Text Messages are all helpful)
- Prefer virtual for “meetings”-- conferences, PTA meetings, etc.
- Wish community building events at school could resume (performances, meet and greets with other families, holiday celebrations, seeing the classroom environment)
 - Suggestions include: Room parents, classroom gatherings at parks, etc.
- Have differing opinions on Class Dojo points & folders home

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Initial Findings

Families:

- Appreciate the safety measures in place during the pandemic
- Miss being able to volunteer and miss home/community visits
- Like to know what their student is learning in a given week or month, so they can have conversations at home
- Understand how hard it is for educators and are very compassionate (hesitant to ask for too much, are willing to “fill in the gaps”)
- Find assessment results hard to understand (i.e. mCLASS)
- Would like to streamline communication -- school-wide, PTA, and teacher messaging all consistent

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Just Schools (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 50)

Conventional PARTNERSHIPS	Equitable COLLABORATION
ROLES: Nondominant parents and families as clients and beneficiaries	ROLES: Nondominant parents and families as educational leaders who contribute and help shape the agenda
GOALS: Individual remediation aims within a culture of denial or implicit blame	GOALS: Equitable systemic change within a culture of shared responsibility
STRATEGIES: Technical changes with existing practices and system. Formal leaders buffer from outside “intrusion”.	STRATEGIES: Build relationships and capacity for systems change; formal leaders bridge.
CHANGE PROCESS: Apolitical approach focused on schools in isolation	CHANGE PROCESS: Change as a political process that addresses broader issues in community

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Rethinking Current Strategies



https://bit.ly/efe_jam

Listed on the Jamboard are equitable family engagement activities. (You'll probably recognize them from our weekly inventory.)

Reviewing each slide, add post-its for what you might start, stop, or continue in your own practices to make them more equitable and collaborative. Based on your role, some activities may be more relevant than others, so a response is not expected for every slide.

As you are reflecting, consider:

- How can I better PARTNER with families?
- Is there a digital tool that would better facilitate this partnership?

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Academic Partnering Toolkit for Teachers

From Flamboyan Foundation



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Exit Ticket

<https://bit.ly/efesurvey928>

Learning Targets

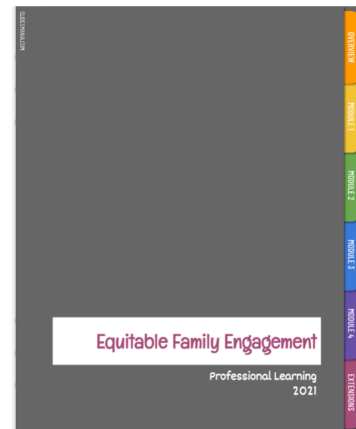
As a result of participation in this professional learning, teachers will:

- utilize an equity lens to understand the negative impacts of deficit beliefs about families.
- reflect on their own beliefs and family engagement practices.
- discover ways to build more meaningful relationships that promote trust with Families of Color.
- collaborate around effective, equitable strategies for reaching more Families of Color.
- utilize virtual tools for targeted engagement with Families of Color.
- share lessons learned within a networked improvement community.

Follow Up

In conclusion:

- **Grant paperwork**
- Complete weekly inventory through December 17.
- Recruit families for interviews; add to [spreadsheet](#).
- Who will attend which focus groups?
 - Monday, December 6 at 5:00pm (virtual)
 - Tuesday, December 7 at 6:00pm (virtual)
 - Does anyone need another time?





References

- Amatea, E. S., Cholewa, B., & Mixon, K. A. (2012). Teacher Efficacy in Engaging Families Scale [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t16213-000>
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