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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership



Dr. Joey Cope, Dean of
the College of Graduate
and Professional Studies

Date November 19, 2019

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Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

Teacher Competencies Related to Family Engagement:
The Impact on Families

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Melissa Kay Williamson

January 2020

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. You all have made many sacrifices during this journey. I appreciate your support and willingness to have a partner and a mother who was not always fully present. Your support and inspiration have made me a better person. Thank you for everything, especially for being patient and loving!

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I want to take this opportunity to thank my family. I appreciate your patience and all of the support that you have provided me during this journey. To my sweet angel who kept watch over me, your light supports my dedication to serving others. To my husband Larry, you are indeed the best friend and partner anyone could ever have. Always my biggest fan and cheerleader, your support never wavered. To my children, Emily and Kyle, thank you for your confidence and support. Through this process, my goal was to teach you that nothing you strive for is out of reach. It is dedication and determination that will be your driver. Remember, always dream big and never let anyone or anything discourage you from accomplishing your goals.

To my Granny, you were truly the most influential woman in my life. You taught me the true meaning of perseverance. To my dear friends, Shelia Castle-Rivera and Mr. and Mrs. Jim Palmer, thank you for all of your support. Shelia, this journey would not have been possible without you. I hope you know how much your support means to me. Through my writing, you know me better than most. Jim and Sherry, it was divine intervention that brought you both into my life. From the moment we met, there was a special bond that was woven together through the spirit of loving angels. You have provided me guidance, love, and support that is unwavering. For that, and your heartfelt spirit of love and giving, I am forever grateful.

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Finally, to the teachers and families who participated in this research, I am forever grateful. Your willingness and honesty have provided a path to impact future generations for years to come. Each of you is truly a remarkable individual.

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Abstract

Although there is a large body of research that addresses the essential elements of family engagement, little information was available on the impact that a family engagement program had on teacher evaluation and familial self-efficacy. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to assess teacher competencies and family self-efficacy in a large urban district in West Texas. The research was conducted by gathering baseline data using questionnaires derived from the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* survey and the *2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project* University of Washington. In-depth interviews followed with both teachers and parents. Findings indicated that cognition, connection, communication, capabilities, and confidence were critical to the success of the teacher, and can impact their yearly evaluation. For teachers, this study implies that campus leaders should strive to purposefully embed intentional professional learning that provides background information and best practices on engaging families in order to build their knowledge and confidence to use family engagement as a strategy to support teachers as well as children. Moreover, the willingness of the teacher to use family engagement as a support strategy surfaced as well. Additional findings indicated that a campus environment that was developmental, collaborative, and relational supported building confidence and self-efficacy within the family. For parents, this study suggested that through a connection with the school campus, they were able to increase their knowledge and work together with the school campus to support their children's learning. Ultimately, it is the principal and faculty who must extend themselves to families in order for the families to view themselves as equal partners in the education journey.

Keywords: Family engagement, teacher evaluation, parental self-efficacy, case study, school connection

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Early childhood is said to comprise the most formative years of a child's life, during which experiences influence their individual brain development (Levine & Munsch, 2014). Schiller (2012) asserted, "by age three a child's brain has achieved 80% of its wiring foundation" (p. 10). Much of what is given to individuals genetically is fostered, or hindered, by their early environmental experiences (Goleman, 2006). The principle task of the brain during the early years is to advance brain wiring; these connections are strengthened with repetition (Schiller, 2012). The experiences that take place in prekindergarten classrooms across the United States further support this development. Research consistently supports the conclusion that families are essential to strengthen the odds of academic success of students (Egalite, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016; Kim & Bryan, 2017; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Tirrell-Corbin & Cooper, 2014).

Children with engaged parents and families who hold high expectations are more likely to earn better grades, have higher graduations rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education (Weyer, 2018). The engagement of families in schools and other educational environments is defined as, "building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships and ongoing learning and development of parents and children alike" (The National Center on Parent, Family, & Community Engagement, 2013, p. 7).

With many Texas kindergarteners entering school underprepared (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2016a), it is particularly important to begin the onset of a family's school career with positive experiences related to family engagement in the prekindergarten classroom. Although families—in particular parents—have been seen as a critical element in successful

school outcomes for children for decades, barriers to family engagement and teacher competencies to engage families still remain. Teachers and administrators continue to struggle with how to engage families (Knopf & Swick, 2007, 2008; Kocyigit, 2015; Sanchez & Walsh, 2017), even though researchers agree that children who have families engaged in their education are academically more successful than those who do not (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan, & Schick, 2016).

Due to this strong emphasis on the importance of family engagement, a change was made to the Texas Administrative Code (TAC). This change in TAC involved Chapter 149.1001-Texas Teacher, which enacted a new evaluation system, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS; TEA, 2014). For the first time in Texas' history, some of the T-TESS rubrics measure competency in family engagement (TEA, 2016b). This mandate has increased attention on family engagement in all Texas schools.

Family engagement was also brought to the forefront when the TEA announced that during the 2016-2017 school year, only 41% of the children entering kindergarten were assessed as *school-ready* (TEA, 2016b). This lack of preparation encouraged The Commissioner's Rule 102.1003, which established a mandate for High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs requiring a Family Engagement Plan and Strategies in Action (TEA, 2016b), led by the campus principal.

This case study investigated the West Independent School District (pseudonym; WISD) family engagement program in one of its early education centers, the Carson Early Education Center (pseudonym; Carson). As of the 2016-2017 school year, West ISD served over 31,000 students of which 57.8% were reported to be economically disadvantaged. The Carson campus reported that 84.4% of the children were economically disadvantaged, 10.1% were identified as qualifying for special education, and 21.6% of these children were identified as English

Language Learners. The TEA reported that West ISD did not meet standards on student achievement. This negative accountability rating led the principal of Carson to a call to action that included increasing family engagement on her campus.

With the recent adoption of the High-Quality Prekindergarten Program Family Engagement Plan, the principal felt it necessary to increase the knowledge of the faculty by providing intentional professional learning to foster the expected competencies introduced in the additional mandate of the T-TESS. The teachers at Carson and throughout Texas must prove their competence in engaging families as well as other measures that promote the attainment of academic success of their students. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) attested, “parent engagement takes many forms; however, its articulation in policy statements tend to focus on the shared responsibilities of parents in the education of their children” (p. 491). This shared responsibility can be powerful in supporting the overall confidence and competence within the home if teachers possess the necessary skills to guide families into leadership roles that truly have an impact on their child, the campus, and their community (Egalite, 2016).

This study was influenced by Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which focuses on self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), a great deal of human behavior is developed through modeling. This theory also has a direct link to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, particularly the mesosystem. Levine and Munsch (2014) explained, “the mesosystem brings together two settings that contain the child” (p. 53). In this case study, it is the relationship of the family and the school that will ultimately impact the child.

Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have demonstrated the connection between parental engagement and the potential for raising academic achievement; this is particularly true for children living in

poverty (Ferreira et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2017; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). Although Carson is located in a city that is recognized as being one of the chief oil field technology centers in the world (Mason [pseudonym] Chamber of Commerce, 2018), during the past three school years, 59% of the children attending Carson have been classified as economically disadvantaged. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), “low-income parents contend with a complex web of challenges—at work, in their child’s care and education and at home—that exacerbate the inherent difficulties of raising a family” (p. 3). These family struggles can take away from the focus of academic achievement and parent involvement, thus making it increasingly difficult for schools to engage them.

An extensive body of research accounts for the positive correlation between family engagement, parental self-efficacy and academic success, yet little research exists that identifies specific teacher competencies and campus leadership qualities that support an optimal family engagement program on a school campus. This study evaluated the effectiveness of a family engagement program according to the teachers and families. This study may also promote change in how districts design, evaluate, and improve family engagement programs for school leaders, teachers, and families.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to assess teacher competencies and family self-efficacy so district leaders may use the findings to aid in determining the effectiveness of the family engagement approach used across the district. As the importance of early education continues to gain attention from state and federal lawmakers, the engagement of families in these programs has been emphasized as well. In 2016, the TEA issued Commissioner’s Rule 102.1003(f) that guided Texas High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs to implement a Family

Engagement Plan (TEA, 2014). A portion of this rule emphasizes the evaluation of family engagement efforts and continuous improvement.

The need for improvement is not foreign to WISD. In 2018, the TEA released the new A-F State Accountability System (TEA, 2018). This system measures performance in three areas: (a) student achievement; (b) school progress; and (c) closing gaps, which are combined to produce the overall score (TEA, 2018). WISD's current rating is a "D." While Carson Early Education Center "Met Standards," four elementary schools and five middle schools in WISD were placed on the "Improvement Required" list (TEA, 2018). Connecting families to schools through engagement can be an effective strategy in supporting students' success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

According to Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), economically disadvantaged families strive to support their children's education but achieve this at much lower levels than their middle-class peers. Over the past two years, the faculty at Carson has spent a significant amount of time participating in intentional professional learning targeting teacher competencies related to family engagement. Yearly, over 550 children and their families are enrolled at Carson; yet there has been no formal evaluation of the family engagement program. The results of this study will give the school administration the opportunity to consider changes that could impact the overall family engagement approach in the district.

Research Questions

Q1. What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers?

Q2. What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program?

Definition of Key Terms

This study utilized the following operational definitions:

Capabilities. Capabilities are defined as funds of knowledge and skills that are needed by both school faculty and families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Cognition. Cognition is defined as a person's principle beliefs and worldview (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Confidence. Confidence is an individual's sense of comfort and self-efficacy (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Connections. Connections are one's social support networks (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Developmental lens. Developmental lens is the emphasis and concentration of supporting and building human capital (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Economically disadvantaged. An economically disadvantaged student is defined by TEA (2007), as a student who qualifies for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program.

Executive function (EF). Executive function is the ability to have flexible control of attention, maintain information through working memory, and the skill to sustain inhibitory control (Raver & Blair, 2016).

Family. Family is defined by the Texas Education Agency as the adults liable for a child's care and those who reinforce the early development of the child (TEA, 2016c).

Family engagement. Family engagement is when schools are supporting families to promote family well-being, as well as positive and secure parent-child relationships to optimize learning and development in both families and their children (The National Center on Parent, Family, & Community Engagement, 2013).

Family engagement plan. The family engagement plan is an individual campus plan that is created to support the uniqueness of each family while fostering a collaborative partnership between the school and home that endorses age-appropriate learning for young children and their families (TEA, 2016c).

Hard-to-reach parents. Hard-to-reach parents are defined as parents who may be new to the campus, single-parents, those who are under-educated, and teen or young adult parents (Abel, 2014).

Learning domains. Learning domains are defined as different aspects of development. In early childhood classrooms, these domains are typically categorized into cognitive, physical, language, and social-emotional (Levine & Munsch, 2014; Shiller, 2016).

Linked to learning. Linked to learning is alignment of school outreach with the campus and district social and academic goals to promote family knowledge and self-efficacy that will in turn support the learning goals for each child (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Prekindergarten. Prekindergarten refers to any educational program for children 3 and 4 years old taking place before entering elementary school (Brooks-Gunn, Markman-Pithers, & Rouse, 2016).

School learning community. A school learning community is defined by Epstein (2001), as educators, students, parents, and community partners who work collectively to advance the school and enhance students' learning opportunities.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is believing in your abilities in to improve a particular outcome (Bandura, 1977).

Summary

Luby et al. (2013) stated, “consistent findings have been provided...that supportive parenting plays a key role in a child’s hippocampal (brain) development” (p. 7). Engaging families has proven to support children academically (Egalite, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Graue, Clements, Reynolds, & Niles, 2004; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016; Kim & Bryan, 2017; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Tirrell-Corbin & Cooper, 2014). Considering Carson has never formally evaluated its family engagement program to determine effectiveness, nor have other schools in WISD, this research is essential. The insight from participants on modifications needed to a family engagement program may guide leaders to support necessary changes that will positively impact the students, families, and faculty of WISD.

The subsequent chapter is the review of the literature. The review of the literature emphasizes the important implications of a collaborative relationship between families and teachers. This chapter will review the significance of early childhood and the role of engaging families.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

At the start of the 2016-2017 school year, only 41% of Texas children entering kindergarten were assessed as “school-ready” (TEA, 2018). Not only is this a cause for awareness, but it is a cause for alarm. Recently enacted mandates surrounding teacher evaluation and family engagement, coupled with the dismal school readiness rates of our youngest learners, highlight the need for further research to explore the competencies and interventions needed to support Texas prekindergarten teachers and their leaders in engaging families. If this issue is not addressed, the rate of attrition for Texas teachers may continue to grow, school policy change will not be implemented, families may remain unengaged, and children may continue to lag behind in readiness. With many of our Texas kindergarteners entering school underprepared, it is particularly important to begin the onset of a family’s school career with positive experiences related to family engagement.

During the 2015-2016 school year, 220,640 prekindergarten children were served in classrooms across Texas; of those, 86% were economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2018). According to Henderson et al. (2007), “students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education” (p. 2). Although families, in particular parents, have been seen as a critical element in successful school outcomes for children for decades, barriers to family engagement and teacher competencies to engage families still remain (Boak, 1999). These barriers persist, even though collaboration between educators and parents empowers children to become involved and self-assured students (Janssen & Vanenbrock, 2018).

WISD, an urban school district in Texas nearing the border with New Mexico, recognizes the importance of fruitful partnerships with families and places a great deal of emphasis on

family engagement. One of the district's goals is to promote partnerships between home and school that support each child to succeed while acknowledging that engagement and empowerment are an essential part of education (ECISD, 2012). This goal aligns with the findings of the Harvard Research Project (2014), which notes, "Families and schools should actively engage in dialogue about the complementary responsibilities and strive to reach agreement on family roles as consumers of education, partners in student learning, and advocates for high performance" (p. 3). This partnership is more important than ever in WISD, as the Texas Education Agency's current rating of the district is a "D" (TEA, 2018). While WISD's Carson Early Education Center "Met Standards," focus was placed on family engagement as a strategy to support continued success. Connecting families to schools through engagement can be an effective strategy in supporting students' success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011). Despite the school administration's belief in family engagement, Carson has never formally evaluated its family engagement program to determine effectiveness, making this case study essential. The insight from participants on modifications needed for a family engagement program may guide leaders to support needed changes that will positively impact the students, families, and faculty in WISD.

A review of the literature highlights the significance of working closely with families in understanding the importance of early childhood and the family's role in supporting children's success. Literature accessed for this study included journal articles, book sources, Texas Education Agency protocols and information, and United States Department of Education Family Engagement resources. This chapter will review the importance of early childhood and family engagement. It will further establish the need for teacher competencies related to engaging families and provide details about successful professional learning that promotes

parental self-efficacy. The chapter is organized as follows: the importance of early childhood, the significance of kindergarten preparedness, family engagement, professional learning, and self-efficacy. The family engagement section will highlight specific literature on teacher competencies, Texas mandates, parent perceptions, teacher perceptions, and the Carson early childhood center.

Early Childhood

According to Nelson (1999), early childhood lays the foundation for life. The experiences that young children are exposed to has a significant impact on their outcomes in adulthood (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017; Levine & Munsch, 2014). As Schiller (2016) asserted, the brain's leading function during the critical time of early childhood is to make connections where repeated early experiences strengthen brain wiring. During this critical period there are windows of opportunity and times when the brain is most equipped to strengthen wiring in particular learning domains (Schiller, 2016). According to Levine and Munsch (2014), children grow and learn systematically in areas known as learning domains: "physical, cognitive, and social-emotional" (p. 7). Morris et al. (2017) suggested nurturing relationships in the first years of life are vital for the success of children and to the development of early brain circuitry. Many of the vital skills of managing emotions and understanding peer relations are formed during the early years of a child's life.

Countless studies have continually proven the impact a quality, early childhood program can have on future academic success (Bakken et al., 2017; Brooks-Gunn et al., 2016; Karoly, 2016; Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005). The longitudinal study widely referred to as the Perry Preschool Project reported that quality, early childhood education reduced the likelihood of youth crime and delinquency, increased lifetime earnings, and limited the use of welfare

(Schweinhart & Weikart, 2002). This sustained impact is especially important to low-income children (Haskins & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Furthermore, Karoly (2016) suggested that a quality preschool program even has a long-term economic benefit that has a return of \$3-\$4 dollars for every dollar invested in early learning programs.

As the complexity of brain development continues during the critical period of early childhood, kindergarten preparedness is at the forefront of the conversation. According to Yoshikawa, Weiland, and Brooks-Gunn (2016), there is a significant indication that early learning programs enhance children's language and literacy acquisition and improve math skills while also lessening aggressive behavior.

Kindergarten Preparedness

Providing a high-quality early childhood environment that promotes school readiness is the foundation for future academic success. "Preschool programs offer the most promise for increasing children's school readiness" (Isaacs, 2012, p. 1). A clear progression of connections exists from preschool to third grade reading proficiency to the minimum requirement of high school completion (Weyer, 2018). According to Burlacu (2013), quality early childhood programs work to promote kindergarten preparedness through supporting interpersonal goals, self-help skills, and self-esteem. Brooks-Gunn et al. (2016) referred to these skills as "noncognitive or soft skills" (p. 10), and asserted that these skills are important for success later in life. Becky Bailey (2014), founder of the highly esteemed *Conscious Discipline* program, argued that a child's ability to practice self-regulation will support later academic success (p. 12). Denham, Basset, and Miller (2017) supported this assertion when she claimed, "an important step toward learning to interact with others occurs in preschool" (p. 3). This correlates with the research provided by Raver and Blair (2016), which states that the executive function skills are

vital for learning. Executive function (EF) is defined as “flexible control of attention, the ability to hold information through working memory, and the ability to maintain inhibitory control” (Raver & Blair, 2016, p. 95). Social emotional development plays a large role in fostering literacy development (Hansen & Zambo, 2007).

Young children use their acquired verbal skills to support their interaction with their peers and teachers in order to express their wants, needs, and emotions (Denham et al., 2017), which are especially important due to an increase in the academic rigor of early learning (Raver & Blair, 2016). In fact, Raver and Blair (2016) further asserted that there is significant evidence:

Cognitive and emotional domains of children’s brain function are wired together in both top-down and bottom-up fashion. We carefully describe how children’s regulation of higher-order thinking is related to the regulation of emotion using these top-down and bottom-up models. (p. 95)

Executive skills, such as impulse control, centering attention, and memory, serve as the foundation for goal attainment in children and adults (Raver & Blair, 2016). The ability to practice executive function skills cannot be understated when it comes to kindergarten preparedness.

In 2009 the National Center for Family Literacy released a report written by nine early literacy experts from around the country. This panel, known as the National Literacy Panel, found that there are six early literacy skills that have a relationship with later measures of literacy development (National Center for Family Literacy, 2009). Interestingly, all of the six skills begin in prekindergarten and are honed during the kindergarten year. These six variables are:

- 1) Alphabet Knowledge (AK): knowledge of the names and sounds associated with printed letters.

- 2) Phonological Awareness (PA): the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes), independent of meaning.
- 3) Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN) of letters or digits: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters or digits.
- 4) Rapid Automatic Naming of Objects or Colors: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of repeating random sets of pictures of objects (e.g., “car,” “tree,” “house,” “man”) or colors.
- 5) Writing or Writing Name: the ability to write letters in isolation on request or to write one’s own name.
- 6) Phonological Memory: the ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time. (p. 3)

In 2016, the Texas Education Agency reported that Texas kindergarteners are entering school ill-prepared (TEA, 2016a). According to Brooks-Gunn et al. (2016), kindergarten readiness “make[s] it easier for [children] to learn new skills in early elementary school: that is, skills beget skills” (p. 4). Although children who have participated in quality pre-kindergarten programs demonstrate an advantage in kindergarten preparedness, this advantage tends to fade in later school years (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2016). In consideration of the science that supports the value of family engagement, educators should be mindful of the power of partnering with families to sustain learning. Researchers have also proven the positive connection between engaging families and strong social-emotional outcomes as well as academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; McWayne et al., 2016). Epstein et al. (2002) suggested that the connection between the family, school, and community is a partnership that can also

“improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work” (p. 7).

Family Engagement

According to The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (2013), family engagement is defined as schools supporting families to promote family well-being, as well as positive and secure parent-child relationships to optimize learning and development in both families and their children. The Association for the Study of Higher Education (2015) claimed that recognizing families as a necessary element in nurturing educational achievement dates back to the 1960s. As early as 1965, considerations for engaging families were introduced by the United States Department of Education in Title I—Improving the Academic Achievement of The Disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). While this legislation predominately addressed support for economically disadvantaged children and families, it was the beginning of the movement that brings schools and homes closer together, working toward success for children. The longitudinal evidence presented by Graue et al. (2004) reinforced the need for an emphasis on parent involvement; in their study of over 900 economically disadvantaged preschool children, a short-term outcome showed parent involvement to be significantly associated to higher levels of school readiness.

The Title I Act was not updated until January 8, 2002, when President George W. Bush signed Public Law 107–110, The No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Support for this legislation grew when Johns Hopkins University Professor Joyce Epstein released a framework supporting the notion of a school learning community (Epstein et al., 2002). According to Epstein et al. (2002), a school learning community is defined as educators,

students, parents, and community partners who work collectively to advance the school and enhance students' learning opportunities. Figure 1 depicts the Epstein's "Six Keys to Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships" (Epstein et al., 2002).

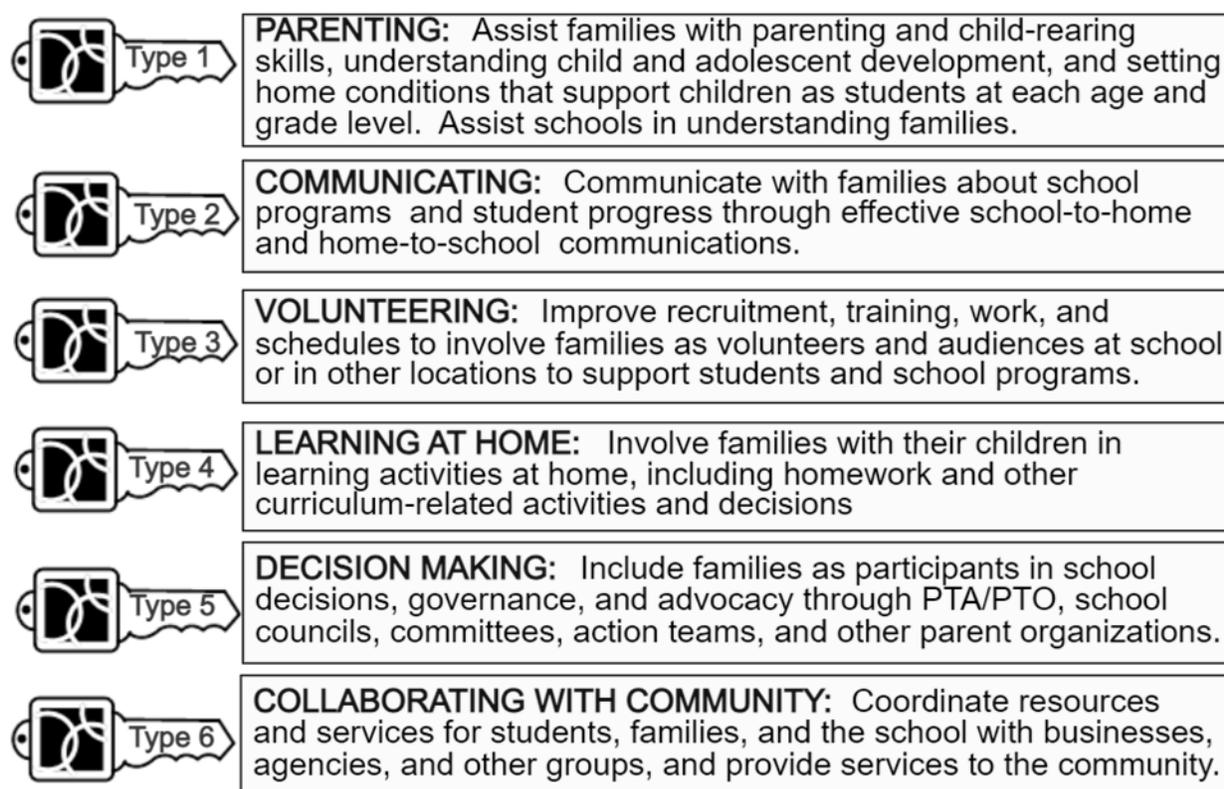


Figure 1. Epstein's six keys to successful school-family-community partnerships by Epstein et al., 2002, p. 180. Copyright 2002 by Corwin Press, Inc.

Shortly after the release of Epstein's framework, Mapp (2003) further substantiated the key features of effective family engagement is linking the learning in the classroom to the home environment. According to Henderson et al. (2007), "students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education" (p. 2). The idea of parental self-efficacy surfaced at this time when Henderson et al. (2007) suggested, "Well planned family learning and support activities tend to increase self-confidence, so parents and family members go on to pursue a high school diploma, additional job training, and higher education" (p. 3).

Just one year after taking office, President Obama's Administration continued to reinforce the importance of family engagement in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The legislation provided additional guidance in four areas:

- 1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader;
- 2) Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to educators to help them improve their students' learning;
- 3) Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and
- 4) Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, pp. 3-6)

Supporting legislation passed during President Obama's Administration and the attention placed on family engagement, the National Association for the Education for Young Children adopted a position statement outlining Developmentally Appropriate Practices for early childhood programs. This position statement includes guidelines that focus on judgments made by early childhood practitioners in five interconnected areas of practice, one of which includes, "establishing reciprocal relationships with families" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 16).

In March 2010, President Obama's administration released changes and updates to national education planning, calling it "A Blueprint for Reform the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The key priorities provided in this legislation include: (a) college and career ready students, (b) great teachers and leaders in every school, (c) equity and opportunity for all students, (d) raise the bar

and reward excellence, and (e) promote innovation and continuous improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The engagement of families as a strategy to support student success is included in the fifth priority (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This concept was emphasized through the work of McCoach et al. (2010), when their outlier analyses of factors affecting school achievement examined both under and over performing schools and found that parent collaboration and communication are clear components in student's academic achievement.

“Investment” is among several terms used to illustrate family involvement; researchers expanded on that description by noting that “taking on leadership roles in the school” also demonstrated and further promoted involvement (Larcoque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011, p. 116). It was also determined that family engagement can manifest itself in multiple ways such as activities that enhance learning, the exchanging of relevant information, shared decision making, and through home and community connections (Morrison, Storey, & Zhang, 2011). Family engagement takes places not only in school, but also at home, and entails many forms of a family's participation in their child's learning (Morrison et al., 2011).

In 2013, the United States Department of Education in conjunction with the Southwest Education Development Laboratories (SEDL) released *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This publication was provided to state-level leaders across the country as part of education reform that prioritizes the roles of families in their child's education. Included in the framework are specific competencies described as “opportunity conditions” that would support a more effective family engagement program (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Figure 2 portrays the Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Framework.



Figure 2. Partners for education: A dual capacity building framework for family-school partnerships, by Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 8. Copyright 2013 by SEDL. This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 (CC-BY-SA 3.0) license.

In the opening of the framework, former Education Secretary Arne Duncan outlined his vision of family engagement with his goal to change the outlook for many children and families. He passionately stated,

I want to have too many parents demanding excellence in their schools. I want all parents to be real partners in education with their children’s teachers, from cradle to career. In this partnership, students and parents should feel connected—and teachers should feel supported. When parents demand change and better options for their children, they become the real accountability backstop for the educational system. (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 2)

Grundmeyer and Yankey (2016) suggested, “as schools consider methods to increasing parental involvement...it is important to be cognizant of the economic disadvantages, diverse needs,

childcare obstacles, work conflicts, language and cultural barriers of the families they serve” (p. 3).

Carver Early Education Center. WISD is an urban school district that serves over 31,000 students yearly. This district lies in the middle of what was ranked a fast-growing small city in America (Kotkin, 2014). Nonetheless, in the 2016-2017 school year, 57.8% of the children attending WISD were reported to be economically disadvantaged. The Carson campus, one of WISD’s early education centers, reported that 84.4% of the children were economically disadvantaged, 10.1% were identified as qualifying for special education, and 21.6% were identified as English Language Learners. In 2016, the Texas Education Agency issued district ranking and indicated that WISD did not meet standards in student achievement. This discouraging accountability rating led the principal of Carson to a call to action that included increasing family engagement on her campus. Parent collaboration and communication are important elements in academic achievement for students attending both under- and over-performing schools. According to analyses conducted by McCoach et al. (2010), in both under and over performing schools parent collaboration and communication are clear components in student’s academic achievement.

It is necessary to pay particular attention to the scholarly research surrounding family engagement when poverty is a factor. The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (2013) purported, “both directly and indirectly, poverty impacts children’s development, parent-child interactions, and family-functioning” (p. 3). The longitudinal research that involved over 900 economically disadvantaged preschool children performed by Graue et al. (2004) produced a short-term outcome that showed parent involvement to be significantly associated with higher levels of school readiness.

Although several theories have explored the reasons behind why parents get involved in their child's education and some researchers have developed models on how to engage parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Epstein, 2001), engagement among economically disadvantaged families continues to lag behind expectations (McWayne et al., 2016). Walsh, Sanchez, Lee, Casillas, and Hansen (2016) examined national standards on engaging families and cultivated an analytical framework that consisted of six recommendations:

- 1) Incorporate families/parents' home language;
- 2) Engage in regular, meaningful two-way communication with families;
- 3) Encourage the formation of programs by and for the community;
- 4) Support family advocacy and decision making;
- 5) Foster families/parent's active participation in the school setting; and
- 6) Support parents/family-child relationships.

Understanding this research, one of Carson's goals is to recognize the role teacher competencies play in engaging families. If WISD is interested in raising their current TEA accountability rating of "D" (TEA, 2018), it would be judicious to consider family engagement as a strategy and develop teacher competencies around that strategy.

Teacher competencies. The research is clear; school officials are perplexed about engaging families (Knopf & Swick, 2007, 2008; Kocyigit, 2015; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017; Sanchez & Walsh, 2017), which highlights the need to create an understanding of the importance of engaging families and the competencies required for such endeavors. Something as simple as building relationships has proven to be a challenge for teachers (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Knopf & Swick, 2007, 2008; Titiz & Tokel, 2015). According to Hill (2009), "apart from the study of school policies for family-school relationships and teacher-

parent quality, school climate has largely been ignored as it relates to family-school partnerships” (p. 103). How school leaders and faculty engage families plays a dynamic role in the success of family engagement on the campus (Manzo, 2016; Watson & Bogotoch, 2015; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). The lack of effective communication between schools and families was another resonating theme in the literature (Baker et al., 2016; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Knopf & Swick, 2007, 2008; Kocyigit, 2015; Titiz & Tokel, 2015). Furthermore, teachers must possess the essential cultural competence for our changing demographic landscape (Egalite, 2016; Kocyigit, 2015; Manzo, 2016; Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, & Sanders-Smith, 2016; Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014).

In Boston’s Jamaica Plains neighborhood, schools are a place where families are viewed as allies in their child’s education. “Our schools are open to families. Parents know teachers. They see staff in action” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 57). This approach has resulted in a dramatic increase in academic success over the past several years. This is only one success story that has resulted in positive unintended outcomes such as extended engagement carrying over to community activism. These results do not come without an understanding of competencies in engaging families. According to Mapp et al. (2017), it is vital to create a group of individuals that serve as allies to children. In the end, such support enables growth in student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and supporting post-secondary readiness (TEA, 2018), and also increases families’ sense of self-efficacy.

According to Mapp (2003), another key feature of effective family engagement is linking the learning in the classroom to the home environment. With this approach, the engagement “initiatives are aligned with school and district achievement goals and connect families to the

ching and learning goals for the students” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 9). Although parents are viewed as essential elements in the success of children and ultimately their schools, obstacles to family engagement still remain with regard to schools’ competencies related to engagement (Patte, 2011; Westergård, 2013).

The skills possessed by school leaders, or conversely, not possessed, can have a dramatic impact on the success of creating real change that promotes academic success for children and transforms the lives of families resulting in a positive community impact (Young et al., 2013). According to Barr and Saltmarsh (2014), “the principal was seen across all focus groups as setting the tone” (p. 496). The actions of the school leaders have a direct impact on the children, faculty, and families they aim to serve. Faculty often take their cues from their administrator. Texas teachers continue to leave teaching at an average rate of approximately 10% each year (TEA, 2018). Perhaps these new demands will discourage the teachers and administrators even more if they do not know and understand the skill set needed to appropriately engage families. It is clear that teachers must possess the competencies to enhance their knowledge and skills when engaging families (Baker et al., 2016; Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Kocyigit, 2015; Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014). Texas recognized the importance of family engagement in the 2016 mandate change.

Texas mandates. In 2016 Texas adopted a change to the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) that placed a measurable emphasis on the significance of family engagement in prekindergarten programs. The change, Chapter 149.1001-Texas Teacher, mandated a new evaluation system, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (TEA, 2014). This was a historic event in Texas; for the first time in Texas’ history, the teacher evaluation system would begin to measure competencies in engaging families (TEA, 2016b). As a result of the mandate,

an increase in attention to family engagement by all school districts serving prekindergarten children is now inevitable.

Furthering the expectations of supporting the engagement of families in prekindergarten programs across the State of Texas, the 85th Texas Legislature and Governor Abbott enacted the General Appropriations Act, Article III, Rider 78, to guarantee that state-funded prekindergarten programs implement the guidelines consistent with the newly regulated High-Quality Prekindergarten program requirements defined by the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.167 (TEA, 2017c). The state law mandates include the mandatory use of a high-quality curriculum that is aligned with the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines, an increase in the requirements for prekindergarten teacher training and/or qualifications, the execution of children's progress monitoring, a program evaluation, and promotion of a family engagement plan (TEA, 2017c).

The Commissioner's Rule 102.1003(f) established a mandate for the campus principal to lead a Family Engagement Plan and Strategies that:

- Facilitates family-to-family support;
- Establishes a network of community resources;
- Increases family participation in decision-making; and
- Equips families with tools to enhance and extend learning (TEA, 2017c).

Parent perception. According to Henderson et al. (2007), the importance of family engagement cannot be over-emphasized; families should be viewed as partners who can provide valuable information. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established ethical responsibilities for early childhood educators noting that "families are of primary importance to children's development" (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011, p. 309). Kyle (2011) expanded on this by remarking that "parents are the experts on their children, with

teachers seeking to learn from them” (p. 9). According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2014), “schools alone cannot meet student’s needs, especially the needs of those students who are the most disadvantaged” (p. 2).

The core beliefs and values of families play a large role in their perceptions and understanding of how to interact with their child’s school (Manzo, 2016; Poza et al., 2014). Egalite (2016) expanded on this assertion when she claimed that parental education, family income, parental incarceration, and family structure all influence family engagement and student achievement. It is also essential that families are honored for their differences, principles, and culture (Baker et al., 2016; Egalite, 2016; McWayne et al., 2016). Parents perceive the lack of cultural understanding can lead to failed communication and remain a barrier to the overall engagement of any family (Funkhouser, Gonzales, & Moles, 1997; Hong, 2012). According to Soutullo et al. (2016), these barriers are compounded when immigration is taken into consideration, even though immigrant families often highly value American education.

As stated by Cox (2005), families feel more encouraged to help their children and are more at ease when schools take a more collaborative approach and treat parents as equals in the education process. Titiz and Tokel (2015) expanded on this proclamation with their findings that indicated parents expect teachers to enthusiastically communicate with them, plan and coordinate activities that involved them, and consider their children as individuals without discrimination. Rodriguez, Blatz, and Elbaum (2014) concluded similar results and affirmed, “schools that were successful in promoting collaboration actively solicited parent input, had teachers who were accessible, and communicated frequently with parents through a variety of mean” (p. 90).

According to Kim and Bryan (2017), parents who are empowered ultimately influence their child’s campus to provide high-quality education for their child, thus empowering their

children. Moreover, Kocyigit (2014) affirmed that effective communication is key to building a successful family engagement program. This supports the work of Powell, Son, File, and San Juan (2010) who determined that “parents’ view of teacher responsiveness is an attribute of the parent-school relationship” (p. 286). In the opinion of Kiliñç (2014), teachers who promote such quality effectively add to the overall institutional improvement on their campuses.

Teacher perception. Garcia (2004) reported that teachers who possess self-efficacy in their capacity to work with families contributed to an increase in overall effort to involve their student’s families in the classroom. It is highly suggested by Mapp et al. (2017) that teachers possess four core beliefs when working to engage families.

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them;
- All families have the capacity to support their children’s learning;
- Families and school staff are equal partners; and
- The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders. (p. 20)

This is the type of teacher perception that Mapp and Kuttner (2013) defined as a developmental lens versus a service-oriented lens. Classroom teachers who work toward developing families focus on fostering their academic knowledge base while supporting their social skills that holistically advance human capital (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This assertion correlates with the idea that teachers must use an “asset-based” approach when working with families (Mapp et al., 2017). According to Abel (2014), teachers who possess more optimism about familial engagement have greater success involving families, particularly those that are considered hard to reach. Hard-to-reach parents are defined as parents who may be new to the

campus, single-parents, those who are under-educated, and teen or young adult parents (Abel, 2014). This type of effort can create a solid partnership between the school and home.

In a “partnership school” teachers take on the perspective that family engagement is an integral part of the school and is not an afterthought or done only to meet compliance standards (Mapp et al., 2017). Abel (2014) agreed that teachers should view parents and learning at home as an opportunity to support each child’s overall progress. The Dual Capacity Framework outlined five process conditions that can assist school faculty in setting the stage that will enhance the overall capacity of the families they serve: (a) linked to learning, (b) relational, (c) developmental, (d) collaborative, and (e) interactive (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 8). Embracing these process conditions supports a shift in the core-beliefs and perspectives of educators that can have a lasting impact on children and families (Mapp et al., 2017).

Professional Learning

On-going professional learning is required for all Texas teachers. According to Carpenter and Linton (2016), teachers have a variety of modalities available to them to receive the required training. Interestingly, Chen and McCray (2012) asserted that just as teachers of young children teach to the whole child, professional learning should be catered to the whole teacher. Knopf and Swick (2008) understood the importance of this concept when they claimed,

Early childhood professionals must build their collective repertoire of tools that are effective in eliciting information from families. These tools will only be effective if practitioners know and understand the conditions that are considered in selecting the appropriate tools for the task (of strengthening family involvement). (p. 421)

Unfortunately, Mapp and Kuttner (2013) emphasized, “school personnel receive inadequate training in engaging families and often feel ill-equipped to handle such expectations” (p. 5). According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), effective family-school partnerships are established with the “4 Cs of Capacity:” capabilities, connections, confidence, and cognition.

Furthermore, Gulamhussein (2013) purported specialized content should be considered before generic opportunities are offered. Supporting this assertion Alacam and Olgan (2017), claimed that teachers who have received courses in parental involvement conveyed more resourceful and productive ideas on how to engage families. Adams (2017) furthered this claim when he observed that professional learning should extend throughout a teacher's career "beginning with one's current knowledge, beliefs, and practice and then working backward" (p. 168). In 2017 the Learning Policy Institute unveiled a policy brief that linked the seven elements of effective professional development from over 35 studies. These elements included professional development that:

1. Is content focused;
2. Incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory;
3. Supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts;
4. Uses models and modeling of effective practice;
5. Provides coaching and expert support;
6. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection; and
7. Is of sustained duration. (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, & Espinoza, 2017, p. 1)

Through intentional performative professional learning, the faculty at Carson has spent over 50 hours working together to further their knowledge of engaging families over the past two years, in addition to supporting and furthering their understanding as part of the professional learning community on their campus. This action learning allowed the staff at Carson to move away from generic professional learning and focus on learning that could enhance their overall practice of engaging families while supporting an increase in the knowledge of newly required T-TESS skills.

Lloyd and Davis (2017) claimed solution focused learning opportunities result in synergistic determination. According to Gulamhussein (2013), “the duration of professional development must be significant and ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with the implementation problem” (p. 14). The foundation of the professional learning provided to Carson was embedded in the Six Building Blocks of Family Engagement which includes: building relationships, viewing families as senior partners, identifying families’ strengths, involving the whole family, linked to learning, and expanding families’ networks of support.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is believing in your abilities to improve a particular outcome (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy and confidence can have a direct impact on the efforts that families put forth in engaging in their child’s schooling. According to Bandura (1986), individuals with greater self-efficacy remain diligent to the tasks at hand, even when they are difficult. Numerous scholars agree that many families, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, have the desire to support their children, though they may not possess the knowledge of what to do to improve their children’s learning (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005). According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parental self-efficacy is critical when considering the barriers to family engagement.

Henderson et al. (2007) claimed well organized and executed family learning and engagement opportunities are more likely to increase parental self-efficacy and confidence, so parents and family members not only support their children, but are able to pursue additional resources that will create a more solid family foundation. Such well-planned activities correlate with the constructs of Bandura’s social learning theory that included observational learning and

modeling (Krapp, 2015). Moreover, Krapp (2015) argued that “programs designed to increase empowerment help people improve their problem-solving skills...and also help people develop a sense of self-efficacy” (Empowerment programs section, para. 3). As suggested by Goodall and Montgomery (2013), parental agency increases as families gain self-efficacy and become engaged in their child’s learning.

Summary

Family engagement does not only take place in the school; it is extended to the home, and such involvement expands on the participation of the families in their child’s learning (Morrison et al., 2011). Family engagement has not only been recognized to support children’s academic achievement (Egalite, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Graue et al., 2004; Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016; Kim & Bryan, 2017; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Tirrell-Corbin & Cooper, 2014), but also suggests that children with involved families are more prone to enroll in postsecondary education (Weyer, 2018).

With a TEA Accountability rating of “D” (TEA, 2018), WISD must consider family engagement a strategy to support district achievement. According to Mapp et al. (2017), it is vital to create a group of individuals that serve as allies to children. This support can ultimately work in tandem to create growth in the performance index framework of student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and supporting post-secondary readiness (TEA, 2018), while increasing the self-efficacy of families.

Chapter 3: Research Method and Design

There is an extensive body of research that connects the advantages of family engagement and positive student outcomes in many areas (Egalite, 2016; Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013; Harvard Family Research Project, 2014; Henderson et al., 2007; McWayne et al., 2016). The State of Texas, 85th Texas Legislature alongside the administration of Texas Governor Greg Abbott passed the General Appropriations Act, Article III, Rider 78, which mandated that state-funded prekindergarten programs put into action procedures that correlated with the newly structured High-Quality Prekindergarten program constraints that were outlined by the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.167 (TEA, 2017). The state recognized and implemented Commissioner’s Rule 102. 1003(f) that guided Texas High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs to implement a Family Engagement Plan (TEA, 2014).

Along with new legislation, changes were made to the teacher evaluation system. For the first time in history, Chapter 149.1001-Texas Teacher, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) mandated the evaluation of teacher competencies in engaging families (TEA, 2016b). Unfortunately, there is little research that identifies explicit teacher competencies that support an ideal family engagement program on a school campus. This knowledge is imperative for districts across Texas like WISD, which in 2018 received a “D” rating in the TEA A-F State Accountability System (TEA, 2018). This structure quantifies performance in three areas: (a) student achievement, (b) school progress, and (c) closing gaps (TEA, 2018). Although Carson Early Childhood Center “Met Standards,” four elementary campuses and five middle school campuses in WISD were categorized as “Improvement Required” (TEA, 2018). Linking families to schools through engagement can be a valuable and practical approach to supporting

students' achievement measured through standardized assessment (Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

This same evidence is also especially true for children living in poverty (Ferreira et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2017; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). Unfortunately, living in one of the largest oil field technology centers in the world has not protected WISD's youngest children from living in poverty. Over the previous three school years, over 59% of the children attending Carson have been classified as economically disadvantaged. Children living in low socio-economic households have a more significant disadvantage when it comes to kindergarten readiness (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2009). According to TEA (2016a), Texas kindergartens are underprepared, even though Brooks-Gunn et al. (2016) found that kindergarten readiness supports cognitive connections for skills taught in early elementary.

This case study evaluated teacher competencies and family self-efficacy in an effort to use the findings to support and determine the effectiveness of the family engagement approach at Carson. The findings may be used to influence practice at campuses across WISD, as there has never been a formal evaluation of any family engagement efforts district-wide.

In this chapter, I will explain how the research design evaluated the success and usefulness of the Carson Family Engagement program in WISD. The central research questions that guided the research are (a) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers? and (b) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program? This chapter contains the following sections: (a) research design and method, (b) population, (c) sample, (d) materials/instruments, (e) data collection and analysis

procedures, (f) ethical considerations, (g) assumptions, (h) limitations, (i) delimitations, and (j) summary.

Research Design and Method

This qualitative case study assessed a family engagement program in an urban school district in the city of West, Texas. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research provides an analysis of system functions, often from the perspective of individuals. Leavy (2017) agreed that qualitative methods are suitable when the principle goal of the research is to “explore, describe or explain” (p. 9). Creswell (2014) maintained the qualitative approach aides in the perception that persons ascribe to. Patton (2015) expanded on that idea when he claimed,

Qualitative research often inquiries into the stories of individuals to capture and understand their perspectives...But often the answer to why people do what they do is found not just within the individual but, rather within the systems of which they are a part of social, family, organizational, community, religious, political, and economic systems. (p. 8)

Understanding the perspectives and systems of teachers and families at Carson may provide an enhanced opportunity to create practices that may support improved engagement at this campus and across WISD.

The intricacy of gathering information from multiple sources contributes to the complexity of qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2014) claimed that “case studies are a design of inquiry found in fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process” (p. 14). Moreover, case study research allowed the researcher the ability to obtain testimonials related to specific events (Yin, 2014). Merriam (1998) purported that a case may be chosen because of an illustrated event causing alarm. In fact, this is the type of “education” that Aaltio and Heilmann (2012) described. During the 2017-2018 school years, WISD had a TEA Accountability System rating of “D” and

the number of school campuses categorized as “Improvement Required” throughout the district, (TEA, 2018) merited some concern. According to Roberts (2010), the qualitative approach provides the opportunity to investigate details about perception that individuals may possess. This research design is the most suitable approach for investigating the impact of the Carson Family Engagement program on teacher evaluation and family self-efficacy from the perspective of the teachers and families involved in the program. It was necessary to be able to uncover exactly what the program possessed that is either making it systemic and successful or not. The findings of the case study will not only add to the current literature, but may also elucidate facts on the usefulness and value of engaging families while possibly serving as a guide to any needed changes in the practices and policies of engaging families across WISD.

Population

West ISD (WISD) is an urban school district in far west Texas nearing the border with New Mexico. WISD serves over 31,000 students annually. During the 2017-2018 school year, 3.9% of the students were African-American, 75.5% Hispanic, 18.2% White, and 2.8% were classified as Other. Of these students, 51.7% were economically disadvantaged. Although this district lies in the middle of an area ranked as a fast-growing small city in America (Kotkin, 2014) and is home to the ever-growing petrochemical industry, during the 2017-2018 school year, 51% of the children attending WISD were reported to be economically disadvantaged. The Carson campus reported that 83.2% of its students were economically disadvantaged, 10.4% were identified as qualifying for special education, and 19.4% were identified as English Language Learners. The study population was made up of the 18 teachers and 547 families at Carson. There are nine general education teachers, three bilingual education teachers, and six special education teachers serving the entire campus.

Sample

The sample population was determined by using the purposeful sampling methodology. According to Creswell (2014), purposeful sampling selection supports the researcher in best understanding the problem and research questions. This type of sampling focuses on characteristics of particular subgroups of interest and facilitates comparisons (Patton, 2015). To reach saturation when interviewing multiple groups of participants, it will be necessary to select enough participants to achieve “redundancy” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Saturation and redundancy will be reached once the researcher “begins to hear the same responses to interview questions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2106, p. 101). I began with purposefully selecting 15 teachers and 15 family members to participate in interviews. Stratified purposeful sampling was used to determine the interview participants, excluding those who have identified themselves as English language learners (ELL). The study employed stratified purposeful sampling to identify interview participants. This approach identified the characteristics of subgroups of interest, readily facilitating comparisons (Patton, 2015).

As suggested by Brinkmann (2013) qualitative studies characteristically do not exceed more than 15 participants; for that reason, the target sample size was 12 participants from each group. Although, Patton (2015) argued:

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources. (p. 311)

Upon identification of the sample population, I recruited the family members and the teachers by soliciting their participation through face-to-face, email, and/or telephone contact asking for potential volunteers. All of the elected participants in each of the two groups agreed to contribute to this research study. Once the agreements had been established, I notified each

person of the expected duration of the interview and set-up individual interview times that were convenient for every individual. In doing so, it was necessary to offer all research participants the opportunity to choose whether face-to-face or electronic interface using the Zoom platform would be preferred. After the timetable was set, I conducted the research. To ensure that I upheld ethical standards during each interview, I asked each research volunteer to attend to a description of the informed consent agreement, and in the end sign the informed consent document. Ethics can be defined as a set of ideals that we use to make decisions on what is right or wrong in our dealings with others (Boatright, 2012; Yadav, Kohli, & Kumar, 2016).

During the verbal articulation and signing process of the consent, I clarified the importance of the research to WISD, the overall purpose of the research, the research process, and disclosure of ethical considerations. Once I secured the necessary informed consent forms, I proceeded with providing the questionnaires to the participants. According to the university core ethics for human participants, informed consent necessitates that the case study participants comprehend, from their viewpoint rather than mine, what will occur through their participation in the study.

Materials/Instruments

For this case study, data were collected using a two-phase process. The first phase consisted of the administration of a questionnaire, and the second phase entailed participant interviews. Considering that this case study involved evaluating information from both teachers and families and strived to report on two research questions, data were collected using contrasting questionnaires and interview questions, one for participating teachers and the other for participating families. The questionnaires administered were only used to gather baseline

information from each participant in the case study. It was necessary to gather this information in an effort to identify strengths and weaknesses in the Carson Family Engagement program.

To address the first research question, What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers?, I first administered a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed through an open sourced document provided for reproduction by Epstein et al. (2002) in conjunction with Northwestern Regional Education Laboratory. The purpose of the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnership* survey questions selected was to determine if the intentional family engagement professional learning contributed to their overall understanding and appreciation of the value of family engagement (see Appendix B). These questions were only used as baseline data for this research. The questions worked to establish the teachers' perceptions on the significance of the learning in conjunction with their current T-TESS evaluation score. Also, anecdotal information was gathered from the participating faculty's formal T-TESS evaluations. The questionnaire responses and the T-TESS evaluation scores were then used as a foundation for each of the interviews. During the second phase, I requested demographic information (see Appendix A), and conducted in-depth interviews using a predetermined set of open-ended questions, where participants used their own language to respond (Leavy, 2017; see Appendix C). According to Chenail (2011),

When performing as a discovery-oriented research instrument, qualitative researchers tend to construct study-specific sets of questions that are open-ended in nature so the investigators provide openings through which interviewees can contribute their insiders' perspectives with little or no limitations imposed by more closed-ended questions. (p. 255)

The second research question, What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the

program?, was researched through the engagement of families who had children attending Carson during the 2018-2019 school year. First, family perception data were gathered using a pre-determined set of questions from the 2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project University of Washington (EPSC-UW; see Appendix E). I gathered this information to serve only as baseline data for the research conducted with the families. Excerpts from this questionnaire were chosen for two reasons: (a) the tool was piloted, validated, and provided for use in multiple languages; and (b) the senior author is Paul Kuttner, who also served as the co-author for the *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*. This publication serves as the United States Department of Education guidance to state-level leaders as part of education reform that prioritizes the roles of families in their child's education. The ease of understanding the user's guide (made possible by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Community Center for Education Results, and the Road Map Project Community Network Steering Committee) made this a natural choice for gaining baseline insight from families.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative researchers gather data from multiple sources rather than relying on a single data source. Therefore, phase two consisted of gathering information from an open-ended interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed that interviews are the most widely used method of data collection in education. The purpose of the interview questions was to determine from the perceptions of the families, what impact the Carson Family Engagement program had on their self-efficacy.

Finally, to address any concerns about the integrity of the interview instrument, the lack of rigor, or potential researcher bias, the tool was validated by conducting field-testing. The field test took place prior to the beginning of the actual research. According to Saldaña and Omasta

(2018), field-testing is necessary when forming an interview protocol. Also, I closely followed suggestions provided by Creswell (2014) for the interview protocol by (a) opening with an ice-breaker question, (b) following the ice-breaker with four to five research questions, and (c) providing adequate time to record responses. The field test participants were recruited from a pool of individuals not participating in the research study.

I conducted the face-to-face interviews using semi-structured questions that were prepared in using an interview guide format. Patton (2015) noted interview guides ensure continuity of the interview and work to ensure that the same inquiry is pursued with each participant. Having a pre-determined set of questions guarded against variations and allowing for little deviation, which added credibility to the project. “The primary goal of the qualitative interview is to acquire knowledge from the interviewees that will provide a personal viewpoint on the topic of study” (Patton, 2015, p. 426). According to Leavy (2017), interviews use conversation methods that people are accustomed to; all of the recorded interviews took place in person with the participants at Carson or via the electronic interface, Zoom. Creswell (2014) claimed that participants’ natural environment is best. In addition to programmatic research questions, I also gathered and reported some demographic data relating to the teachers.

Data Collection

The participants were recruited on campus using the face-to-face method. Once I had several names in each group, I purposefully selected 12 parents, and 12 teachers. I then communicated with each person through email and/or telephone, inviting them to participate in this study. Data were collected from 12 teachers and 12 family members from the Carson Early Childhood campus.

In order to sustain ethical standards during the research process, I asked each of the 24 participants to listen to an explanation of the informed consent agreement. During the verbal articulation and signing process, I explained the importance of the research to WISD, conferred the overall reason for the research, made clear the research process, and divulged ethical considerations. After all the aforementioned was complete, each research participant was asked to sign the informed consent document. Upon gathering the signed informed consent from each case study participant, I provided them with a Likert-scale survey. These surveys (see Appendix B and E) were used only to establish baseline data for teachers as well as parents. At the beginning of each interview, I addressed confidentiality, the intent to record, awareness of transcription modality, and requested permission for note taking.

Each participant was afforded the opportunity to respond. Upon the conclusion of each interview, I shared any written notes with the participants to ensure accuracy, clarified any questions, and notified them of the intent to inform them of the research results and thanked them for their participation. After the conclusion the interviews, the recordings were sent to a transcription service. The surveys, interviews, and transcriptions will be securely kept on campus with the faculty mentor for a period of three years at which time the documents will be destroyed.

Analysis Procedure

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative data analysis can begin as soon as the research begins. For this case study, the framework method was used to analyze the data collected. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) stated that the framework method includes seven steps that compare data and generate themes while producing organized outputs of summarized data. The seven steps include: (a) transcription, (b) interview familiarization, (c) coding, (d)

developing a working analytical framework, (e) applying the analytical framework, (f) charting data into a framework matrix, and (g) interpreting the data (Gale et al., 2013, pp. 4-5).

When coding the data, it was imperative that I conducted several passes and identify themes. According to Saldana (2013) coding is a “craft.” This craft supported the researcher to make meaning of the data collected. According to Patton (2015), the logical first step in the coding process is developing a system; the system I used included reading and reviewing the data several times before I began the chunking of the data (Creswell, 2014). For this case study, it seems most logical to perform *in vivo* coding on my first pass. I chose this method first due to the concept of using participants’ language. Ivankova (2015) stated that this method “preserve[s] their voice” (p. 239). I then employed pattern coding. Like its name, this is simply identifying patterns in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Gale et al. (2013) claimed employing the practice of grouping codes and categories assists to form the analytical framework.

Methods for establishing trustworthiness. It is imperative to ensure the collection of trustworthy and credible data. As part of the process, Patton (2015) urged that it is necessary to “engage in systematic and conscientious search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations” (p. 653), doing so I supported the integrity of my data during the analysis process. Once my data were analyzed, it was necessary to take additional considerations to ensure reliability and validity within my findings (Creswell, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that ethical data collection is a major consideration for validity and reliability in a qualitative research study. I used triangulation and member checking. In order to operate as a Title 1 campus, each campus must establish a Campus Improvement Plan (CIP; TEA, 2019a). The Texas Education Agency (2019a) mandates, under section six, that the plan considers and implements family engagement strategies.

Research continues to demonstrate that successful schools have significant and sustained levels of parental involvement. Therefore, [the] CIP must contain strategies to involve parents, especially in helping their children do well in school. CIP must also demonstrate how parents will be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating your schoolwide program. (TEA, 2019a, para. 15)

I also referenced the teachers T-TESS scores and, the County Independent School District Improvement Plan 2018-2020 Goals/Performance Objectives and Strategies. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the most widely recognized strategy to determine the internal validity of a study is triangulation. These strategies provided a continuous voice of the participants.

Transferability was another important consideration in establishing trustworthiness within this case study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is a necessity to provide enough narrative information for others wishing to apply the information elsewhere. In the case of the low state accountability rating, the district personnel of WISD may be the first interested in replicating the study at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Shenton (2004) suggested the following to be included:

1. The number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based;
2. Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;
3. The number of participants involved in the fieldwork;
4. The data collection methods that were employed;
5. The number and length of the data collection sessions; and
6. The time period over which the data were collected. (p. 70)

Now that the research is complete, it opens the door to add to the literature and create an opportunity for actionable processes to occur through the implementation of the new knowledge gained from this case study.

Researcher's Role

As a professional learning consultant for a well-respected and widely used early childhood curriculum, I provide professional learning to teachers across the country on a variety of topics. The topic of family engagement and increasing parental self-efficacy is often one that is requested. Over the last three years I have provided over 50 hours of intentional professional learning on the topic of family engagement to the faculty and staff of Carson. For the past two-years I have engaged in numerous meetings with the parents enrolled at Carson, guiding them on topics related to all facets of learning for pre-kindergarten children. Not only will I have the opportunity to share the research findings with WISD administrators and faculty, but the findings will be shared across the country through professional development activities for other districts. I completed all of the necessary training required by the IRB when dealing with human subjects. I have no relationship with any of the administrators, faculty, staff, or families in WISD.

Ethical Considerations

Before participant selection and data collection, this research proposal was submitted to the Abilene Christian University's Internal Review Board (IRB). To ensure confidentiality required for any research study, I provided a pseudonym for the name of the school district and campus. To ensure confidentiality as required by the IRB, I:

1. Isolated forms containing identifying information from instruments containing data;
2. Store paper files containing identifying information away from the public in a locked cabinet.

Information provided to the IRB included the district's research approval. As the researcher, I followed all ethical guidelines detailed for those performing research on human subjects.

Assumptions

This case study was based on the following assumptions: (a) WISD provided consent to perform the study due to acknowledging the importance of the information that may be gained, (b) the study participants responded to the survey and the interview questions in an open and honest manner; and (c) employing purposeful sampling allowed for information to be gathered from the best possible participants.

The first assumption, WISD provided consent to perform the study due to acknowledging the importance of the information that may be gained, was addressed by ensuring the two research questions remained the focus of the study at all times. This focus allowed insight to be gained from teachers and parents on specific information pertaining to family engagement. I addressed the second assumption, the study participants responded to the survey and the interview questions in an open and honest manner by taking the following steps: (a) participants who were part of the study were voluntary, and (b) each participated signed a consent form which discussed their anonymity. Finally, it was necessary to employ purposeful sampling in order to choose the volunteers who met the study criteria. One example was not choosing teachers or families who were in dual-language classrooms.

Delimitations

This research study only included the perception of the teachers and parents on one pre-kindergarten campus in a large urban school district. I attempted to delimit this study by only seeking information solely related to family engagement.

Summary

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making

a difference in people's lives" (p. 1). With a TEA Accountability rating of "D" (TEA, 2018a), WISD is willing to consider family engagement a strategy to support district achievement. According to Mapp et al. (2017), it is vital to create a group of individuals that serve as allies to children. This support can ultimately work in tandem to create growth in the performance index framework of student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and supporting post-secondary readiness (TEA, 2018), while increasing the self-efficacy of families.

The purpose of this qualitative research was to conduct a case study of the family engagement program at Carson, an early childhood campus in WISD. The goal is for the results to further contribute to the research and provide insight into teacher competencies and perceptions of family self-efficacy in order to provide district personnel with information they can use to impact family engagement programs throughout the district.

There were two central research questions that guided the research: (a) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers, and (b) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program? Survey information and interviews were gathered from 12 teacher volunteers and 12 family volunteers.

The research was collected using a pre-determined interview guide. The interview questions were limited to obtaining information on the impact of the Carson Family Engagement program on teacher evaluation and family self-efficacy. All interviews were recorded and occurred face-to-face on the school campus or using the digital interface, Zoom. The interview data were analyzed using methods that ensure trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, and dependability. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research investigates the narratives of individuals to apprehend insights from their perspective. I hope that the

experiences shared by teachers and families at Carson will have a lasting impact on the future of the family engagement programs throughout the district and the nation.

Chapter 4: Results

In 2016, the TEA issued Commissioner's Rule 102. 1003(f) guided Texas High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs to implement a Family Engagement Plan (TEA, 2014). One of the components embedded in this rule emphasized the evaluation of family engagement endeavors on each school campus. As part of this new legislation, adjustments were made to the methodology in which teachers are evaluated. Chapter 149.1001-Texas Teacher, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), authorized an evaluation system that assessed teacher competencies in engaging families (TEA, 2016b). Just two short years later, the TEA also released the new A-F State Accountability System (TEA, 2018). This system measures performance in three areas: (a) student achievement, (b) school progress, and (c) closing gaps, which are combined to produce the overall score (TEA, 2018). At the onset of this study, WISD's rating was a "D" (TEA, 2018). In the same period, the Carson Early Education Center (Carson) "Met Standards." However, four elementary schools and five middle schools in WISD were subsequently placed on the "Improvement Required" list (TEA, 2018).

I conducted a qualitative case study to explore the family engagement program at Carson. It was necessary to review the entire program to drill down to the specific goal of providing an understanding and awareness of teacher competencies and family self-efficacy. More importantly, the study aimed to provide insight that could promote change in how this district and others like it may design, evaluate, and improve their family engagement programs for school leaders, teachers, and families. This approach views family engagement as a strategy for school improvement, rather than an add-on or afterthought. The on-going struggle that teachers have to engage families, along with the barriers of engagement that families often encounter, made this study essential, particularly in light of this district's dismal accountability rating.

The purpose of this chapter is to convey the results of data analysis obtained from semi-structured interviews with 12 early childhood teachers, and 12 family members discussing teacher competencies related to family engagement, and the impact these competencies have on families. This chapter will begin with a summary of the research focus and provide an overview of field testing. I will then discuss the research and analysis processes. This will be followed by a presentation of the research findings. Next, I will convey the emergent themes captured in the data, and provide information on the methods that I employed for establishing trustworthiness. Finally, I will summarize the results of the research questions.

Summary of the Research Focus

On June 7, 2019, I received IRB approval (see Appendix G) from Abilene Christian University. This approval allowed for the commencement of this qualitative research case study. I chose a case study to provide a well-rounded, in-depth system look into the functions and perceptions of the individual and collective voices of teachers and families. This approach provided an opportunity to investigate the roots of the campus culture that ultimately uncovered conditions that promoted systemic integration. The central research questions that guided the research were: (a) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers? and (b) What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program? The first step of the research process began with field testing.

Field Testing Overview

To secure validation of the instruments that were used in the research process, I invited a small group of teachers and parents that were not a part of the research project to review and provide feedback on the instruments that would be used to collect data. It was essential to

address any concerns about the integrity of the interview instrument, any lack of rigor, or potential researcher bias through the field-testing. The field test took place before the beginning of the actual research. During the field-testing, I opened with an ice-breaker question, and followed the ice-breaker with the research questions and interview protocols, allowing for adequate time to record responses. Once validation, as described below, was procured, I began the study recruitment process.

Research Processes

I recruited potential participants (family members of students and teachers) by soliciting their participation through face-to-face contact at Carson. Once I had several names in each group, I purposefully selected 12 parents and 12 teachers. I communicated with each person through email and/or telephone, inviting them to participate in this study. All of the selected participants in each group agreed to participate. Once the agreements were established, I informed each person of the expected duration of the interview and set-up individual interview times that were convenient for every individual. In doing so, it was necessary to provide a choice to the parties of whether face-to-face or electronic interface using the Zoom platform would be preferred. Once the schedule was set, I began to conduct the research. The data collection took approximately 75 days to complete.

To ensure that I upheld ethical standards during the research process, I asked each voluntary participant to listen to and read an explanation of the informed consent agreement. During the verbal articulation and signing process, I clarified the importance of the research to WISD, discussed the overall purpose of the research, clarified the research process, and disclosed ethical considerations. After all the aforementioned was complete, each participant was asked to sign the informed consent document. After receiving the signed informed consent from each case

study participant, I provided them with a Likert-scale survey. These surveys were (see Appendix B & E) used only to establish baseline data. At the onset of each interview, I addressed confidentiality, the intent to record, awareness of transcription modality, and requested permission for note-taking.

For this case study, I considered the need to evaluate information from both teachers and families. As a result, it was necessary to collect data using contrasting baseline questionnaires and interview questions, one for participating teachers and the other for participating families. The teacher questionnaire was developed through an open sourced document. The purpose of the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnership* survey questions were to determine if the deliberate family engagement professional learning plan constructed by the campus principal contributed to their overall understanding and awareness of the value of family engagement (see Appendix B). The questions also established their perceptions on the implication of the learning in conjunction with their current T-TESS evaluation score. This, along with other anecdotal information, was gathered from the participating faculty's formal T-TESS evaluations. The questionnaire responses and the T-TESS evaluation scores were used as a foundation for the in-depth interviews that took place using a predetermined set of open-ended questions (see Appendix C).

The family questionnaire was constructed using a pre-determined set of questions from the 2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project - University of Washington (see Appendix E). Similar to the teacher questionnaire, the purpose of this questionnaire was only to collect baseline data. The questionnaire responses were used as a foundation for the in-depth interviews that took place using a predetermined set of open-ended questions (see Appendix F).

Each participant was allowed adequate time to respond. I provided clarification to the questions as needed. Upon the conclusion of each interview, I shared any written notes with the participants to ensure accuracy. I also notified them of the intent to inform them of the research results and thanked them for their participation. The next step was to analyze the research.

Analysis Process

Once the data were collected, I used the following process to analyze the data:

1. Interview transcription: Each interview that was not transcribed using Google voice was sent to a transcription service.
2. Review of the transcriptions: Once I received all of the transcriptions, I reviewed them, listening for accuracy. I made the necessary edits to ensure the precision of each transcript. I repeated that process twice in an effort to guarantee the correctness and familiarize myself with the transcripts.
3. Separation of the transcripts: I then separated each of the transcripts by question. This was done in order to be able to review all of the responses for each question in a collective, well-organized manner.
4. Data coding: On my first pass, I chose to employ in vivo coding to use the participants' language to identify exact words that stood out to me. On each transcript, I underlined the words and re-wrote them on the right-hand margin of the page. On my second pass, I used process coding to identify the patterns that emerged in the interviews.
5. Chunking the data: Once I completed both passes, I color-coded the data by identifying the re-occurring phrases from the process codes for each of the groups.
6. Developing a working framework: After I chunked and color-coded the data, I charted it using two separate coding matrices. One chart was created for teacher responses, while

the second chart was established using the responses from the families. Grouping the codes and categories assisted in forming the analytical framework.

7. Applying the analytical framework: The teacher interviews resulted in seven categories that ultimately merged into four themes (see Appendix H). The parent interviews led to nine categories that in the end, became four themes.
8. Interpreting the data: The final step in the data analysis was to interpret the data.

Presentation of the Research Findings

This qualitative research case study sought to provide an in-depth look into a prekindergarten campus's family engagement program. The research took place using 12 purposefully selected parents and teachers, for a total of 24 research participants. The data were gathered using distinctly different baseline questionnaires and interview questions, one for participating teachers and another for participating parents. My first research question was, "What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers?" The findings for this research question were gathered from responses from a subset of teachers who were employed at Carson during the 2018-2019 school year. My second research question was, "What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program?" The findings for this research question were assembled through responses from the parents who had at least one child attending Carson during the 2018-2019 school years.

Field-testing findings. The purpose of the field-testing was to support the validation of the baseline questionnaires and open-ended study interview questions. I purposefully selected a group of five parents and five teachers who would not be participating in the actual study. I recruited 10 parents and 10 teachers to participate. In the end, four parents and seven teachers

agreed and provided the necessary validation. I met with each of the individuals via phone after providing them with a relevant copy of both the baseline questionnaire and the open-ended interview questions.

Teacher questionnaire and interview validation. During the volunteer teacher field testing discussions, I explained that the questionnaire was chosen through an open sourced document that was provided for reproduction by Epstein et al. (2002) in conjunction with Northwestern Regional Education Laboratory. I declared that the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnership* survey questions were purposefully selected to determine the intentionality of family engagement professional learning, and uncover the teacher's overall contribution on topics including parenting, communication, and learning at home. There were no suggestions provided by the participating teachers. Two of the teachers asked where they could find the survey and commented that they would like to know more about family engagement.

During the interview question discussion, I spoke about the alignment of the family engagement program to the interview protocol. After that, I explained the importance of employing a well-rounded case study that would provide information on the depth of the program to accurately answer the research questions. Together, we then reviewed each question. The teachers gave no suggestions to make any changes to the interview protocol.

Parent questionnaire and interview validation. During the parent field testing discussions, I clarified and shared with the parents on the rational for choosing excerpts from the 2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project University of Washington (EPSC-UW). I detailed the fact that the questionnaire was authored by Paul Kuttner, who co-authored the *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*. I explained that the teachers had participated in a great deal of professional

learning using this publication and had received training in many other best practices in engaging families. I then provided background information on the publication letting the parents know that it serves as the United States Department of Education guidance to state-level leaders as part of education reform that prioritizes the roles of families in their child's education. I also informed the parents that teachers are "graded" each year using the T-TESS.

During my first discussion, I encountered a question on the term "Likert-scale." For the subsequent discussions, I incorporated the definition and further explanation on the "Likert-scale" at the onset of the discussion. Apart from that adjustment, parents had no changes to the questionnaire. When I reviewed the demographic survey, two of the four parents questioned the relevancy of the survey. Being that the demographic survey had no true relevance to the research questions, I decided to omit this portion of the survey from the research.

As a part of the interview question portion, I began by defining self-efficacy using the context provided by Bandura (1977). I went on to cite some information about existing research on the importance of parental self-efficacy, confidence, and family engagement on children's schooling. Together, we reviewed each question. Two of the parents asked questions concerning examples of what would contribute to a family engagement program. Although the parents seemed interested in family engagement, they had no suggestions on making any changes to the interview protocol.

Questionnaire analysis. Teachers completed a short demographic survey that provided information on the number of years they had been teaching, their degree level, and the number of parent/family engagement courses they completed throughout their degree program/s. The teacher questionnaire, used as a baseline for the interviews, was an open sourced document provided for duplication by Epstein et al. (2002) in conjunction with Northwestern Regional

Education Laboratory titled the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*.

Questions included excerpts from the areas of (a) parenting, (b) communication, and (c) learning at home.

The parent's questionnaire, used only as a baseline for the interviews, was from the 2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project University of Washington (EPSC-UW). Questions included selections from the topics of (a) parent/family knowledge and confidence, (b) responsive school climate, (c) parent/family influence and decision-making, and (d) parent-educator trust.

Teacher analysis. In order to establish baseline data and prepare for the teacher interviews, all of the teachers provided demographic information and answered a short Likert-scale questionnaire. The teachers returned both the demographic information and the questionnaire to me before the interviews. The information below provides (a) the number of years the teacher has been teaching, (b) the highest degree level completed by the teacher, and (c) the number of family engagement programs they received throughout their schooling. The demographic information provided indicated the majority of teachers interviewed had been teaching more than 10 years, held a bachelor's degree with certification, and had only one family engagement course throughout their degree program.

Teaching experience:

- 10 of the 12 teachers interviewed had been teaching for more than 10 years
- 1 of the 12 teachers interviewed had been teaching for 8-10 years
- 1 of the 12 teachers interviewed had been teaching for 1-3 years

Highest degree earned:

- 6 of the 12 teachers hold a bachelor's degree with certification

- 5 of the 12 teachers hold a master's degree
- 1 of the 12 teachers holds a bachelor's degree with alternative certification

Number of family engagement courses:

- Six of the 12 teachers had one family engagement course throughout their degree program
- One of the 12 teachers had four family engagement courses throughout their degree program
- One of the 12 teachers had five family engagement courses throughout their degree program
- One of the 12 teachers had two family engagement courses throughout their degree program
- Two of the 12 teachers indicated they had no family engagement courses throughout their program
- One teacher declined to answer, stating she could not recall

The demographics data revealed that the majority of the teachers that took part in the interviews have been teaching more than 10 years. Only one teacher had significantly less experience teaching. Fifty percent of the teachers are certified and hold a bachelor's degree, while five of them have a graduate degree in education. Although 92% of the teachers possess a degree in the education field, only two indicated that they had four or more courses in family engagement throughout their collegiate coursework.

The *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* questionnaire was provided to the teachers. This questionnaire was used only to gather baseline information in the areas of (a) parenting, (b) communication, and (c) learning at home. The results displayed that

the teachers felt that the school provided information and communicated with the parents often. However, the teachers indicated that they only sometimes provided information to the parents that supported learning at home.

Parent analysis. In an effort to establish baseline data for the parent interviews, information was gathered from the parents using the 2015 Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Research Project University of Washington (EPSC-UW). The questionnaire that included the topics of (a) parent/family knowledge and confidence, (b) responsive school climate, (c) parent/family influence and decision-making, and (d) family-educator trust. The parent questionnaire discovered that on average, the parents strongly agreed that they had knowledge and confidence when it came to knowing about their child's academic education and how to support them. They agreed that Carson offered a welcoming and culturally-responsive school climate. However, they were neutral when it came to being involved in influence and decision-making on the campus. Finally, they all strongly agreed that there is a great deal of family-educator trust.

Interview finding for teachers. Each teacher took part in a four-question interview. The interviews were all conducted separately, and took approximately 20-30 minutes.

Question 1. The first question interview question asked, "In your opinion, what are the major factors that contribute to the school's family engagement program?" This question allowed teachers to reflect on all of the elements of the family engagement program at Carson. All of the teachers interviewed indicated a "good relationship or connection with the parents" was a vital part of the family engagement program. Furthermore, they discussed the value of collectively being a "strong unit" that ultimately supports the children. Finally, it was evident that all of the teachers valued the parents and families at Carson. They were "very grateful" that families chose

to be as involved as they were. Fifty percent of the teachers commented on the number of families that continually participate in the “many opportunities” offered on the school campus.

Sixty percent of the teachers mentioned the importance of building capacity within the families that attend their program. They asserted the value of the new learning on the process and systems building approach used to erect the program at Carson. All of the teachers mentioned the introduction and execution of the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) conference model as being one of the biggest assets in the program.

As the teachers pondered on the factors that contributed to the success of the family engagement program at Carson, 33% of them mentioned the campus principal. Her level of leadership, ability to cast vision, and support were paramount in their program.

Question 2. The second interview question asked, “In your opinion, what are the major factors that limited the school’s family engagement program?” This question provided the teachers an avenue to discuss any limitations that they feel the Carson family engagement program has. The number one overarching concern was the limitation of time. Ninety percent of the teachers interviewed shared some concern about finding the right time for parents and time constraints in a prekindergarten program. The second most mentioned concern was the translation for bilingual families. Also, 25% of the teachers interviewed also mentioned that “lack of relationship with the parent” would be a factor that would limit the family engagement program. Another 25% of the teachers made mention of the need to be mindful of the extra cost of transportation to return to the school when there were evening events. Two of the teachers brought up the need to provide childcare for siblings during some engagement events, particularly APTT meetings.

Question 3. The third interview question asked, “What are your thoughts about the

family engagement professional learning that you participated in?” Due to the number of in-service hours teachers had spent in multiple professional learning sessions, it was necessary to gather anecdotal information from them on their learning. Each of the 12 teachers interviewed provided positive feedback about the family engagement professional learning that they had participated in during their time at Carson. Not only did they all mention building their skills, but every interviewee also mentioned the understanding of learning how to make better connections with parents and families. It was evident that their mindset was one that brought focus to the need to build positive relationships with parents and families. In turn, they emphasized that parents are viewed as partners.

Thirty-three percent of the teachers also mentioned that through the process of changing how they engaged families, a closer and stronger bond was built within the faculty. This new learning afforded the opportunity to build a stronger peer network where they could not only discuss ideas, but openly share their fears.

The follow-up questions provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their learning, and provide insight on the usefulness of the sessions. The follow up questions the teachers were asked were:

1. “Which training was the most effective? Why?” One hundred percent of the teachers who were interviewed claimed APTT to be the most effective training. They claimed that it had been the most impactful and most beneficial to their work as a whole in engaging families. One of the teachers went on to say as an educator that this new mindset and modality had been life changing. Although many of them professed fears in changing their conference style and truly doubted the approach initially, they had been proven wrong, and now had a new outlook and skillset.

2. “Which training was the least effective? Why?” After spending upwards of 50 hours over three years on skill building, specifically on family engagement, 100% of the teachers agreed that they could not pinpoint a single professional learning event that focused on engaging families as being ineffective.
3. “How effective were the professional learning opportunities in strengthening your overall skills to engaging families?” All of the teachers interviewed concurred that the professional learning had strengthened their skills in engaging families. Fifty percent of the teachers interviewed indicated that the family engagement professional learning brought them out of their comfort zone and provided them with more confidence to engage families. Forty-one percent of the teachers remarked on the opportunity this has had on the parents to build their capacity. They noted that there was a positive change in the children’s academic scores, and attributed this to the support and skill building that took place with their families.
4. “How effective were the professional learning opportunities in contributing to the score on your T-TESS relating to engaging families?” Eighty percent of the teachers interviewed claimed that not only their new skill set but also their change in mindset supported growth in their T-TESS scores related to engaging families. They agreed that it was a noticeable difference in the progress that they had been able to make from year to year. Learning this new skill “helps us change and grow.”

Question 4. The final interview question asked, “What additional information or support do you need to strengthen your family engagement skills?” This question provided the teachers with an opportunity to voice additional needs to further strengthen their skills in family engagement. Fifty percent of the teachers interviewed indicated the need to deliberate on the

timing of the multiple opportunities to engage families. Thirty-three percent of the teachers indicated that they had adequate support in the way of materials and that having support made it easier to implement engagement strategies. Twenty-five percent of the teachers suggested that more communication may be necessary to engage some harder to reach families. Two of the teachers mentioned more practice and perhaps would be helpful, as would visiting other schools that had an effective family engagement program to glean new ideas.

Interview findings for parents. Each parent participated in a six-question interview. The interviews were all conducted separately and took approximately 25-35 minutes.

Question 1. The first interview question asked, “In your opinion, what are the major factors that contribute to the school’s family engagement program?” This question allowed the parents to reflect on the family engagement program at Carson as a whole. Most notable, all of the parents who participated in this research study concurred that one of the major and most important aspects of the Carson Family Engagement program was the number of engagement opportunities offered by the school. Moreover, two of the parents commented about their past experiences with Carson and how their current experiences have been much more positive. In addition, 60% of the families commented on how much they had learned during the multiple engagement opportunities.

Forty-one percent of the parents provided details about their comfort level with the teachers, principal, and support staff, and their feeling of connectedness to the school. They saw themselves as equal partners in their child’s education. These comments directly linked to the relationship and connection remarks that surfaced during the teachers’ interviews.

Question 2. The second interview question asked, “In your opinion, what are the major factors that limited the school’s family engagement program?” This question provided a forum

for parents to express any concerns they have on the limitations of the Carson Family Engagement program. When this question was posed to the parents, 58% indicated their appreciation for the family engagement program, but went on to offer information about limitations. Two barriers, time and childcare, both rose to the top as and were raised by 33% of the parents.

In the responses concerning time, although 10% responded about the time of the day, the remaining individuals concurred that more time was needed to be spent specifically on the “Parent Leadership” opportunities. The consensus was that more sessions should be offered throughout the year. While the parents appreciated the four that had been offered during the school year, they would like to see additional topics and/or course extensions on some topics added in the future.

Three of the 12 families spoke about the need to provide consistent translation during all of the parent engagement activities. The translation was also a suggestion brought to light during the interviews with the teaching staff.

Lastly, the research proved an avenue for 16% of the parent population to mention staff, teacher, and principal affect. These parents cited not “feeling comfortable” if the school personnel’s affect was not inviting or welcoming.

Question 3. The third interview question asked, “What are your thoughts about the parent academy or academic parent-teacher team meetings that you have participated in?” This question provided parents the opportunity to discuss their feelings on the engagement activities that they participated in at Carson. All of the parents of parents’ interviewed remarked about the amount of knowledge they had gained from participating in the parent academy and academic parent-teacher team meetings.

In an effort to gather additional information on the effectiveness of the sessions, the parents and families attended, I asked three follow-up questions. These questions provided an avenue for the parents to indicate the effectiveness of the sessions in honing their skills to aide their children.

1. “Which session was the most effective? Why?” Ninety-one percent of the parents revealed that they had gained the most from learning about all topics and aspects tied to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and social-emotional support for their children. They provided insight into the need to re-evaluate their reactions to their children and the importance of “connections” with their child/ren. The remaining parent indicated the desire to learn more about communicating with school personnel.
2. “Which session was the least effective? Why?” All of the parents who participated in the research agreed that there were no parent leadership or academic parent-teacher team meetings that were least effective. However, 33% did mention the need for hands-on support that provides “easily understood, simple” instructions.
3. “How effective were the sessions in strengthening your overall skills in helping your child?” The interviews demonstrated that 100% of the parents who participated in strengthened their overall skills in helping their child. The families cited the importance of being a part of the learning process. Two of the parents disclosed their “bittersweet” sentiment concerning the change in the family engagement program since their older children attended Carson. They would have liked to have had the same opportunities offered in the past.

Question 4. The fourth interview question asked, “How effective were the sessions in contributing to your overall confidence in improving your child’s skills?” This question assisted

parents in indicating their confidence level in supporting their child's overall skills. Again, 100% of the parents who participated in the research agreed that the sessions that they participated in contributed to their overall confidence in improving their child's skills. Similar responses surfaced concerning their confidence in supporting their children's social and emotional well-being. Fifty percent of the parents mentioned that they had additional tools and were much more empowered to deal with their children's behavior.

Question 5. The fifth interview question asked, "What additional information or support do you need to strengthen your confidence in engaging with your child's school?" This question gathered anecdotal information from parents on needed supports to strengthen their confidence to engage with their child's school. Fifty percent of the parents who responded indicated they did not need additional information, though they specified the need to add other leadership trainings. Three of the parents gave accounts of their child's 2019-2020 kindergarten campus and the change in opportunities and communication offered at their child's new campus. Two of the parents reminisced about the connection they had with Carson. Notably, one mother became emotional when I told her that she could return to Carson and attend parent leadership trainings even if her child was no longer attending Carson.

Question 6. The final interview question asked, "Can you tell me about your overall feeling of trust with this school?" This question afforded the parents the opportunity to share their thoughts on their overall feeling of trust with Carson. When the last question was posed concerning the feeling of trust with the Carson campus, 91% of the parents made it clear that they had a high-level of trust with this school campus. One parent responded with her lack of trust for "everyone." Knowing that trust is an important element in parent-teacher relationships, I thought it necessary to ask a follow-up question. The follow-up question was, "What would you

say contributed to that feeling?” These families expressed information on how they were made to feel by the principal, teachers, and staff of the Carson campus. Many of them mentioned the connection and the personal effect of the staff as a contributor to their overall feeling of trust with the school. One parent noted that she could witness the transparency and true validity of the commitment that Carson staff had to the children through her many volunteer hours spent on the campus.

Emergent Themes Captured in the Data

After the process of *in vivo* and *process* coding occurred, common threads in the teacher and parent responses became evident. When forming the analytical framework for this research, the results of the teacher interviews brought forth five overarching themes, and the parent interviews resulted in four themes. There was one common theme between the two groups. The notion of “confidence” emerged with the teachers and the parents.

The themes that developed as the most dominant factors for teachers were: (a) cognition, (b) connection, (c) communication, (d) capabilities, and (e) confidence. The themes that arose as most central in the data to the parents were: (a) developmental, (b) collaborative, (c) relational, and (d) confidence.

Teacher interviews. The four common themes that emerged as the most influential factors that contributed to the Carson Family Engagement program, and ultimately teacher evaluations from the perspective of the teachers were: (a) cognition, (b) connection, (c) communication, (d) capabilities, and (e) confidence.

Theme 1: Cognition. Among the teachers, the first commonality that emerged was cognition. Analysis of the interviews of participating teachers indicated that they shared a worldview in which families are valued and seen as truly contributing to their children’s school

success. The teachers indicated this by expressing the common expression concerning the value parent engagement brings to the campus and through their belief that family engagement is critical to their success. This became obvious in their responses concerning the strengths of the family engagement program. Individual words such as, “valuable, important, grateful, strength, and positive” were reoccurring in the teacher interviews. Phrases like, “building a strong family,” “meaningful to my success,” “work together to support,” and “easier for me” were also visible throughout the teacher interviews.

All of the teachers indicated they believed that parents brought value to their campus through their engagement. Teacher #1 stated, “Letting parents have buy-in in their children’s education is valuable to all of us.” The majority of the teachers commented on how grateful they are that the parents “show-up.” Many of them referenced the importance of involvement. For example, Teacher #3 claimed, “Family engagement contributed to their child’s success.” Family engagement was described by Teacher #9 as, “A co-parenting kind of thing that will make us successful.” This was echoed by a statement from Teacher #10, when she said, “I can help them, and they can help me.” Academic success was also noted as a key outcome through admissions like, “I was able to see significant improvement; parents are very interested in learning, you can tell in their children’s scores, and I want my families to be engaged because I want them to see success in the classroom.” Finally, Teacher #7 summed up cognition when she said, “It’s the teachers’ willingness to participate and go out and seek parents.”

Theme 2: Connection. The teachers provided additional insight that building connections through positive relationships and strengthening social capital was imperative. One intriguing thread in the emergence of social capital was that teachers not only cited evidence of building stronger relationships with each other, but the evolution of peer networks that were built by

families through their participation in on and off-campus opportunities offered by the school. Individual words like, “partner,” “together,” “involve,” and “relationships” were frequent in the teacher interviews. Phrases like, “we are partners,” “work together,” “built a relationship,” “bonded with parents,” and “make them feel welcome” were stated throughout the teacher interviews.

One hundred percent of the interviews included sentiment about relationships and bonding. Teacher #2 stated, “I believe that having a good relationship with our families is the major factor for having good family engagement.” Teacher #1 noted, “I think the last one is that the teachers and the parents get a real close connection because they feel more like partners instead of the teachers as the boss.” Teacher #9 reported, “Sharing with them [parents] information about academic progress after you have built a relationship with them is key.” Two of the teachers mentioned other campuses that they had worked in as not having had good relationships and a dismal engagement program. Teacher #8 described this as, “I came from a campus where I don’t feel the parents were welcome. There was not an effort at all on any part of the teachers, staff, or administrators, and it was like night and day.” Teacher #3 defined that by saying, “If you don’t have good relationships, it is not going to work smoothly.”

Teachers also shared that the family engagement program had built stronger networks within the staff. Four of the teachers used the term “closer” to describe the bonding that had taken place through the family engagement guidance and professional learning. Two of the teachers described how they had more “conversations” as a team. Teacher #1 described the conversation about new professional learning by claiming,

I think at first it [APTT] scared us all. Introducing it the first time was really hard, but you know what? I think it got all us as teachers talking too. We had conversations about it at lunch, and it brought us all together.

Four of the teachers cited specific examples of building peer networks between families. This was displayed through comments such as: “Having them all together to build connections is so important. In our special education classroom, we use it (APTT meetings) as networking for our parents. Parents are becoming their own school family.” Teacher #1 tied this together by saying,

I felt that my families were excited about what we are doing. And they were talking about it with other parents within the school. They would come back to tell me, oh so, and so is with this teacher...we talked about what our group is doing too.

Theme 3: Communication. During the teacher interviews, the varied methods of communication were consistently mentioned. “Talking, meetings, notes, and phone calls” stood as reoccurring themes. Also, persistent positive affect during all forms of communication came through as clearly important. Some phrases corresponding with that were “checked in more with parents,” “constant positive communication,” and “making them feel supported.” It was evident that the teachers’ positive affect when communicating supported a stronger family engagement program. Teacher #7 posed, “I think a lot of the success had to do with the face-to-face meetings with them, and also I’m in constant communication building support.” Teacher #8 claimed, “The teachers have to put forth the effort to promote it (family engagement), but it has to have that positivity.”

In the theme of communication, there was one suggestion that was remarked on by half of the teachers interviewed. This suggestion was around the need for consistent bilingual communication. Although the campus provides written communication in English and Spanish, not all engagement activities have a Spanish speaking translator available. Teacher #7 was able to articulate the fact that,

We do have bilingual programs but we often have children in English-speaking classrooms, however, the parents are not English-speaking, and that makes them [parents]

feel uncomfortable, and that makes them confused, and they may not come because of the language barrier.

Teacher #6 echoed that concern when she said, “Some parents don’t understand a lot of the things in this country [United States].”

Theme 4: Capabilities. The categories of investment and skill-building comprised the fourth theme capabilities. From the voice of the teachers, capabilities were two-fold; first investment and skill-building with parents, and secondly, investment and skill-building within themselves as teachers. Some phrases that support capabilities were, “give and get information,” “build different strategies,” “now have a blueprint,” and “eye-opening professional learning.”

Five of the teachers remarked on the investment and skill-building of parents and families. Teacher #4 stated, “it’s building their family to be a strong family unit for when they go to the next level of school.” Teacher #6 said, “they came and learned about their child specifically and what we’re doing as a whole in the classroom.” Teacher #7 remarked,

The parents were really interested in learning everything that we had to say about what we were teaching, what they could do to help, and so it was a trial and an error and you can tell it in my scores.

Teacher #10 remarked, “It’s educating our parents about what we are doing in the classroom and not just having one meeting a year.”

The concept of strengthening the capabilities of the teachers was commented on by 100% of the teachers. Not only was capacity building mentioned by all of them, they were particularly noting ideas like,

The professional learning gave us the process to take to those families to engage them instead of, here just do it; when I sat down, I had a blueprint; we could see exactly what was expected of us; I need to see simplicity, and I did.

All of the teachers interviewed commented on learning about the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT). They found a lot of value in using that conference-style versus the traditional conference. Teacher #6 mentioned the value of this conference-style as,

I had always said it 44 times before, and this way I say it once and everybody gets it. I can now really focus on what we have worked on and talk more about other things than repeating the same thing over and over.

Although two teachers mentioned their preference for a variety of modalities to receive professional learning, none of the teachers felt any of the training they received about family engagement was ineffective.

Theme 5: Confidence. Among the teachers, the final theme that emerged was confidence. Confidence was categorized as parent empowerment, teacher empowerment, and teacher confidence. The teachers indicated this through similar speech regarding how teachers worked to empower families. Individual words such as “comfort,” “excited,” and “progress” were repeatedly voiced by teachers. Teacher #2 claimed, “We’ve seen a lot of progress, so we know that those meetings [APTT], and all the family engagement activities we have here are working. My scores really showed it worked!” Teacher #3 remarked, “those professional development classes coming into us made it easier to go above what you would normally do, so and then you see it in your score.” Finally, Teacher #4 brought to light the importance of a good family engagement program that builds the confidence of families in the early years. She said, “If we start at the preschool level getting them more involved, then they’ll feel more comfortable.”

The majority of the teachers remarked on their lack of skills in engaging families before the professional development that they participated in at Carson. Teacher #10 said, “I’m growing as an educator, and it just keeps going, and I learned that you need to just learn more.” Teacher

two argued, “I don’t know if I would have had the confidence, especially without the training.” The idea of continuous growth and life-long learning was heard when Teacher #5 mentioned, “It’s helped me grow, and it helped me build that confidence to talk to families.”

Finally, the Carson teachers demonstrated a high level of regard and respect for the family engagement vision cast by the campus principal. They indicated that her vision not only empowered them but also supported them by providing a sense of comfort while boosting their self-efficacy when engaging families. One teacher noted,

Our principal leads the school, and it trickles down to the teachers and then the families. I’ve been given this freedom and this idea that I could invite parents into the classroom. We are actually allowed to have fun doing things with them [parents].

Teacher #2 brought up the importance of the overall tone set by the campus leader when she claimed, “A major piece of family engagement is starting with the principal, she is the face of the school.”

These words, phrases, and statements reinforced that teachers’ cognition, connection, communication, capabilities, and confidence in their efforts to engage parents and families have a direct impact on the outcome of a family engagement program. The evidence presented by the teachers’ demonstrated the value of a systemic family engagement program. Teacher after teacher professed positive sentiments about the professional learning and the Carson family engagement program, and the value it has had on their profession. One teacher said, “The training was the most impactful and the most meaningful I think I’ve ever been to in my life. So much of what we have done has helped me engage families.”

The analysis indicated that training in positive family engagement is an effective strategy to support teachers’ T-TESS evaluation in areas about family engagement. One teacher summed it up by saying, “This has helped all of us. We have seen a lot of progress.”

Parent interviews. The four themes that emerged as the most influential factors that

contributed to the impact the Carson Family Engagement program had on parental self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program were: (a) developmental, (b) collaborative, (c) relational, and (d) confidence.

Theme 1: Developmental. In the research conducted with the parents, the primary theme that developed was developmental. The parents embraced engagement opportunities as a chance to truly become a part of the learning that was being offered as part of the Carson Family Engagement program. Their attendance brought to light successful exploration and emerged into capacity enrichment. This became apparent in the replies that were recorded regarding the strengths of the family engagement program. Individual words such as, “learned,” “re-watched,” “activities,” and “information” were continually voiced during the parent interviews. Phrases like, “learned so much,” “showed me the importance of,” “enjoyed learning,” and “amazing ideas and experiences” were discernable when interviewing the parents.

All of the parents specified that they believed their skills and confidence had been strengthened through their attendance in both the parent leadership trainings and the APTT meetings. The categories that supported this theme were (a) skill-building, (b) linked to learning, and (c) interactive. When it came to building skills, half of the parents remarked they felt more equipped to support their child emotionally through their own interactions. Parent #1 stated, “I’ve learned so much, how to, I guess you would say be more calmer.” This sentiment resonated with the majority of the parents, 91% confirmed that their understanding of social and emotional development and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have been an added “tool.” Parent #1 claimed, “I think it was great, the social emotional connections. I thought it was so cute, and it does help.” Parent #2 confirmed by mentioning, “In one of those meetings, we learned how the brain works so, now we can understand that to help our kiddos when they get those tantrums and

stuff.” Parent #6 supported this when she added, “I thought it was effective talking about ACEs, and I thought that showed the biology and scientific reasoning behind a lot of issues that are becoming more prominent in early childhood.”

“These skills are basic things you can do every day, you know?” This comment brought to light the need for simplicity when working with parents, and providing a hands-on approach where modeling is a part of their learning. Parent #10 revealed, “We had a chance to watch the teacher, and practice with other moms.” The modeling aspect of the engagement approach was an important step in learning what Parent seven called the “little tips.” “The more simpler tips are the ones that stick in your head.”

Theme 2: Collaborative. Communication and support comprised the categories that resulted in the collaborative theme. Although communication emerged during the teacher interviews as well, it took on a slightly different meaning for the parents who participated in the research. For the parents, the concerted efforts surrounding the differing modalities of communication was important, but it was the consistency and promptness that were repeatedly mentioned. “Constant reminders,” “always sending notes,” and “letters in their binders” were some of the forms of communications described during the parent interviews. It was obvious that the parents appreciate such consistency from the teachers. Parent #2 stated, “All these letters we get through the binders, there is this today, that tomorrow. I think it is working.” Parent #3 acknowledged the teachers’ collaborative efforts by saying, “The teachers and staff are willing to give information, and information is a good key.”

Because the research took place in the months following the children leaving the Carson campus, I was able to capture some comparative information on collaboration from families concerning their child’s new kindergarten campus. Parent #9 claimed,

Now where I am at, [her child's new school], I'm feeling like it's impossible to speak with the teacher. I have to request to talk to her; we don't work together. I don't feel like I have a direct line to speak to her, because they don't even let parents into the school at pick up and drop off. So, I really feel like I am disconnected. This is like black and white from last year.

It was obvious that the parents felt a strong sense of support at Carson. Parent #11 revealed, "They were supportive, they were straight forward, open arms. There was always clear communication. It was the clarity of support and communication."

A third of the parents who participated in the research remarked about the need for more collaborative support. They would like to see more parent leadership meetings and have the opportunity to have more time learning from the teachers. Parent #7 claimed, "I would've loved to know more and learn more from the teachers, but there is always a limited amount of time." Also, the same suggestion of consistent bilingual translation that was presented in the teacher interviews also arose with the parents. Three of the parent participants mentioned this need.

Theme 3: Relational. The parents provided an awareness of how important trust, respect, and connection are to building reciprocity that drives a solid connection. During the research, interviews covered parents' perception of how they were made to feel on the campus, which arose as a common thread. Individual words like "comfortable," "welcomed," and "connection" were recurrent in the parent interviews. Phrases like "they care for them," "it is a great atmosphere," and "families are made to feel comfortable" were exposed throughout the parent interviews.

Although one parent indicated that she persistently mistrusts all people, she, along with all of the others interviewed, remarked on the relational aspects of the Carson family Engagement program. Her words were, "I love [the name of the school], they are so lovely, they are so open to you that you do feel that everything is clear and you can walk in and ask

anything.” Parent #2 noted, “the staff made me feel at ease; they took time to get to know me.” The work that the teachers put into building this relational environment was noticed by the parents. Parent #4 described this as, “They just do a great job making me feel like I could engage with them and be a part and learn.” Parent #5 expanded on that sentiment, saying, “It was a great atmosphere. It is very welcoming from the moment you walk in.” One parent summed up the meaning of relational by claiming, “I felt like the teachers, and everyone really did a great job in his first experience at school. They are very trustworthy; they took the time to earn my trust.”

Like the teachers, the parents also made mention of the campus leader and her leadership style. It was evident that it was not only the teachers who distinguished themselves with their relational efforts, but the principal also extended herself as well. Parent #6 recalled her experiences as “welcoming.” She cited that, “The principal would stand out there and talk to me and not treat me like she had better things to do.” Another parent recounted her “private meeting” with the principal where she was told, “We’ll take care of him. I promise you that!” These were the accounts that built the foundation for respect, trust, and connection on the Carson campus.

Theme 4: Confidence. Among the parents, the concluding theme that arose was confidence. Theme four confidence was the only theme that emerged exactly as defined by both the parent and the teacher interviews. Like the teachers, parents categorized confidence as empowerment and courage. The parents signaled through comparable language that after participating in the family engagement program, they felt more empowered to support their children. Words such as “understand” and “helped” were repeatedly uttered by parents. Parents consistently claimed that they were empowered and felt most confident, supporting and understanding their children’s need for strong social and emotional development. “I was so

effective, I feel that I have more of the power to stop those arguments with him and take control of the situation, and that helps me feel more confident.” Parent #3 concurred when she said, “It made me feel like I was given more tools that I didn’t have, and that made it easier not only for me, but for him also.” The sentiment of empowerment continued with when Parent #9 remarked, “I’m equipped to do better. I would say that this program was very effective in strengthening my overall skills and feeling like I can help my child better.”

Due to the reciprocal nature of the program, parents had the courage to confidently approach the school campus. Parent #1 brought this to light when she said, “Families feel comfortable to ask about any question and how they can get involved.” It was evident that this was the feeling among others when parent ten said, “There is so much passion with parents. Now, I see how you confidently get your voice heard.”

Finally, the Carson parents acknowledged the opportunities and importance of having experiences to build their skills and expand their funds of knowledge, which promoted their courage and confidence. Their display of words, phrases, and statements supported that the development of parents, through cooperative, interpersonal, and developmental opportunities, can have an impact on their overall confidence. In turn, this supports the notion that positive engagement of families can increase their self-efficacy. The evidence presented by the parents confirmed the significance of a fully executed and systemic approach to engaging families as a powerful tool. Like the teachers, parent after parent declared encouraging sentiments about the Carson Family Engagement program and the self-esteem that it ultimately created for them. The analysis indicates the likelihood that positive family engagement is an effective strategy to promote parental self-efficacy.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

As a researcher, I was aware of the need to establish trustworthy and credible data. This was always kept in the forefront during the process of coding, categorizing, and identifying emerging themes. I was conscientious in my search for alternative themes, opposing patterns, and opposing explanations. Doing so reinforced the integrity of the data during the analysis process. Throughout the interview process, I employed member checking.

As a part of the analysis phase of this study, I used a widely recognized strategy to determine the internal validity; this is known as triangulation. To triangulate the data, I referenced the teachers' T-TESS scores, the established WISD Carson Campus 2018-2020 Goals/Performance Objectives/Strategies that are mandated by TEA, and the County Independent School District Improvement Plan 2018-2020 Goals/ Performance Objectives and Strategies.

To acknowledge the importance of transferability that will further strengthen the trustworthiness of this case study, I employed the following steps as suggested by Shenton (2004):

1. provided the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based;
2. gave information on restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;
3. listed the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;
4. discussed the data collection methods that were used;
5. reviewed the number and length of the data collection sessions; and
6. provided the time period over which the data were collected. (p. 70)

Summary of Research Question Results

The purpose of this chapter was to deliver the results of data gained from 12 early childhood teachers, and 12 family members, who discussed teacher competencies associated to family engagement, and the effect these competencies have on families. The chapter began with a summary of the research focus and provided an outline of field testing, which was succeeded by a discussion of the research and analysis processes. This led to the presentation of the research findings, which captured emergent themes. I provided evidence on the methods that were used to establish research and data trustworthiness. For this research, it was imperative to conduct a case study that provided an in-depth analysis of this program where I could gather and evaluate testimonials associated with explicit and detailed accounts.

Also, this chapter discussed the four themes that emerged during the study from the perspectives of the teachers, and the four themes that arose from the perspectives of the families. The final chapter, Chapter 5, provides a discussion of the summary of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In recent years, the significance of the engagement of families in their children's education has been emphasized by both federal and state governments. In 2018, The Global Family Research Project confirmed that "family engagement is one of the most powerful predictors of children's development, educational attainment, and success in school and life" (p. 1). Scores of researchers have uncovered information on the value of investing in family engagement (Larcoque et al., 2011). These investments are apparent in school-based engagement opportunities, such as occasions to expand parental learning, supporting parental peer connections, and allowing families to contribute to decision making (Morrison et al., 2011). This type of engagement was spelled out in 2013 when the United States Department of Education, in conjunction with the Southwest Education Development Laboratories (SEDL), released *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Contained within this publication is a competency-based framework.

During the 85th Texas Legislative session, the Legislature and Governor Abbott passed the General Appropriations Act, Article III, Rider 78, which provides assurances that state-funded prekindergarten programs carry out High-Quality Prekindergarten program requirements as defined by the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.167 (TEA, 2017c). A portion of this legislation mandated the use of a high-quality curriculum aligned with the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines, provided for more robust requirements for prekindergarten teachers training and/or qualifications stipulated children's progress monitoring, and presented information on program evaluation and the promotion of a family engagement plan (TEA, 2017c).

The portion of the legislation that now mandates the implementation of a family engagement plan was also highlighted in the Texas Administrative Code Chapter 149.1001-

Texas Teacher (2016b). This code provided guidance on changes in the teacher evaluation system. For the first time in Texas' history, portions of the T-TESS rubrics work to quantify teachers' competencies in family engagement (TEA, 2016b). Due to these recent changes, there has been little research that identifies teacher competencies related to family engagement. For WISD, such information was imperative, as they received a "D" rating in the Texas Education Agency A-F State Accountability System (TEA, 2018). The accountability structure measures performance in three areas: (a) student achievement, (b) school progress, and (c) closing gaps (TEA, 2018). At the onset of the research, the Carson Early Childhood Center "Met Standards;" however, four elementary campuses and five middle school campuses within WISD were categorized as "Improvement Required" (TEA, 2018).

There are over 550 children enrolled at Carson each year and until now, there has been no formal evaluation of the Carson Family Engagement program. The purpose of this case study was to assess teacher competencies and family self-efficacy so district leaders may use the findings to aid in determining the effectiveness of the family engagement approach used across the district. This study was specifically designed to provide insight into the perceptions of the family engagement program from both teachers and families. There were two research questions that guided this study:

1. What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers?
2. What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program?

I employed a qualitative research case study, which entailed collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from a sample of Carson teachers and the parents. The research participants

received a questionnaire to gather baseline data, and then interviews were conducted with participants (12 teachers & 12 parents). The teachers responded to five interview questions that were designed to gather insight on the family engagement program as a whole, and parents responded to seven interview questions also designed to gather specific information on the Carson Family Engagement program as it pertained to their experience. The qualitative data were then coded to categories that ultimately emerged into themes.

In this chapter, I convey my interpretation of the research findings for each of the research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications of the themes that arose. Next, I will address the limitations of the research and provide recommendations for future research. Finally, I will offer a reflection and conclusion of the research.

Interpretation of the Research Findings

Research Question 1: What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers? This question was answered using data collected from the semi-structured interviews of 12 teachers employed at Carson during the 2018-2019 school year. All of the teachers interviewed indicated that a “good relationship or connection with the parents” was a vital part of the family engagement program. The idea that family engagement supported their success arose when 12 of the 12 teachers interviewed agreed that the professional learning that they had participated in strengthened their skills in engaging families. Ultimately, 80% of the teachers interviewed claimed that their new skills, along with their change in mindset, supported growth in their T-TESS scores related to engaging families. They agreed that it was a noticeable difference in the progress that they had been able to make from year to year.

The data that were collected from the teachers generated five overarching themes: (a) cognition, (b) connection, (c) communication, (d) capabilities, and (e) confidence. These themes coincide with the policy and program goals that are embedded in *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). In the two years before this research study, the participating teachers had completed over 50 hours of professional learning in family engagement. Theme one, cognition, was partially derived from the core belief about family engagement that the teachers possessed. They believed that family engagement was an important asset to their success and, ultimately to the success of their students. One of the teachers identified this as co-parenting.

The link between cognition and connection was supported by 100% of the teachers, suggesting that relationships and bonding are crucial to successfully engage families. Not only did positive connections between teachers and parents arise, but stronger social networks between the teachers also resulted. Thirty-three percent of the teachers used the term “closer” to describe the bonding that had taken place through the family engagement guidance and professional learning. However, the final themes of capabilities and confidence were the two strongest themes that best answered Research Question 1: What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers?

All teachers who participated in the research remarked on how their skills about engaging families had been strengthened. They particularly commented on their learning involving the implementation of the APTT meetings. The engagement blueprint that was provided to the teachers supported their increase in skills. This modality of engaging parents and families directly supports the measured T-TESS Dimension 1.2 and 4.4 (TEA, 2016b). Through their enhanced capabilities, the teachers were also able to increase their confidence, which ultimately

could have broader implications on other T-TESS Dimensions. Admittedly, the teachers professed they lacked some of the necessary engagement skills before the onset of the intentional professional learning planned by the campus principal. Finally, family engagement was an imperative part of the research because both the campus *2018-2020 Goals/Performance Objectives/Strategies* and the *District Improvement Plan 2018-2019 Goals/Performance Objectives/Strategies* mention engaging families as a goal, strategy, and part of their mission.

Research Question 2: What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program?

This question was answered using data collected from the semi-structured interviews of 12 parents who had children attending Carson during the 2018-2019 school year. All of the parents who participated in the research concurred that there is a robust family engagement program at Carson. Not only did they conclude that the program is robust, but also 41% of the parents commented on the connectedness they had experienced on the Carson campus. These parents saw themselves as equal partners who ultimately worked together with campus staff to enhance their child's education. Notably, 100% of the parents who participated in the research acknowledged the skills and knowledge they had acquired from their participation in the parent academies and academic parent-teacher team meetings. They went on to agree that there was a learning opportunity in each of the academies and APTT meetings offered by Carson.

The four themes that arose as the most significant factors contributing to the impact that the Carson Family Engagement program had on parental self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program were: (a) developmental, (b) collaborative, (c) relational, and (d) confidence. In my opinion, all of these themes contributed to supporting Research Question

2, What impact does the Carson Family Engagement program have on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families involved in the program?

Firstly, the Carson Family Engagement program worked to offer opportunities that helped families to develop skills that were directly linked to the learning that was taking place in the classroom. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) defined linked to learning as an alignment of school outreach with the campus and district social and academic goals to promote family knowledge and self-efficacy that will, in turn, support the learning goals for each child. The research revealed that 100% of the participating parents strengthened their overall skills in helping their child. This was achieved through multiple interactive program opportunities that enabled families to grapple with new information where modeling took place, and then they were offered time to practice the classroom skills. Secondly, a collaborative program that included multiple means of communication and support to the families aided in building parental self-efficacy. The parents recognized the multiple modalities used to connect with them, and they seemed to genuinely recognize the staff's willingness to provide the on-going support they needed. The parent participants cited value in being a part of their child's learning process. Thirdly, it is my opinion that the success of the Carson Family Engagement program can be attributed to the relational theme that emerged from this research. The campus, led by the principal, worked to build an environment that promoted reciprocal trust and respect between the faculty and the families. This was obvious, with 91% of the parents citing they had a high level of trust with the Carson campus. The research demonstrated that faculty at Carson was able to make real, meaningful connections with their families, and the program offered the opportunity for parents to also build connections with each other, thus building their social capital.

Finally, Theme 4, confidence, was marked as empowering. One hundred percent of the parents who partook in the research agreed that the sessions that they participated in contributed to their overall confidence in improving their child's skills. Similar responses surfaced concerning their confidence in supporting their children's social and emotional well-being. Fifty percent of the parents mentioned that they had additional tools and were much more empowered to deal with their children's behavior. All of this worked in tandem to demonstrate that the parents experienced Bandura's definition of self-efficacy: believing in your abilities to improve a particular outcome (Bandura, 1977). Through participation in the Carson Family Engagement program, parents were able to raise their level of self-efficacy.

Implications for Practice and Research

Prior to this case study, there had been no formal evaluation of the Carson Family Engagement program. Family engagement has been defined by The National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement (2013) as schools that support families and promote family well-being, as well as positive and secure parent-child relationships that work to optimize learning and development in both families and their children. The results of this case study reflected evidence found by many researchers as best practices in engaging families. This is particularly true when considering the guidelines provided by the United States Department of Education and the practices adopted by the Texas Education Agency.

Implications for practice. Carson's program will undoubtedly meet the measurements that have been established by TEA Commissioner's Rule 102.1003 (f) (TEA, 2017c). This rule mandates the campus principal to lead a family engagement plan which includes strategies that:

1. Facilitate family-to-family support;
2. Establish a network of community resources;

3. Increase family participation in decision-making; and
4. Equip families with tools to enhance and extend learning.

The findings of this case study resulted in the following implications for campus leaders, teachers, and staff choosing to use family engagement as a strategy to improve their campus. Firstly, considering that confidence was a theme that emerged with both the teachers and the parents it goes without saying that each of these groups need support in order to raise their confidence level in an effort to interact with one another. According to Reaves and Cozzens (2018) there is a “connection among a teacher’s perceptions of elements of a safe and supportive school climate to motivation, and self-efficacy” (p. 59). For the teacher, this support comes from the campus principal. In fact, the results point to a broader conversation of how confidence plays a role in the T-TESS. Because the T-TESS is the new form of teacher evaluation in Texas, it would be imperative for future researchers to consider the implications confidence plays in supporting teachers to become distinguished educators on behalf of the students and families they serve. For the parent, the support emerges from the teacher and the campus. Understanding this may raise the question for future researchers, does the confidence of the teacher to engage parents directly impact how connected a parent may feel to the school?

Secondly, the importance of the relationship between the faculty and parents cannot be underestimated. According to Mapp (2003), it is the responsibility of the school staff to work to establish a relationship with the parents. The connections formed through the positive relational efforts and environment on the part of the entire campus make an observable difference in how parents perceive their role on the campus. Through this research, we now have a deeper understanding into over-arching models and definitions have family engagement. This is highlighted not only in The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

(2013), definition of family engagement, but also in the guidance provided in the *Partners for Education: A Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships* (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This research brought to light the significance of the relationship between the teacher and the parent. The need for future research to be conducted on the relationship of teacher confidence and parental self-efficacy will further add to the literature which may result in a significant impact on future generations. Such research should explore consider *The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Version 2)* recently released by Karen L. Mapp and Eyal Bergman in 2019.

Thirdly, developing families alongside their children is valuable. Viewing families through the lens of development offers an opportunity to increase their knowledge base while working to build the skills of parents. This research supported parental self-efficacy in multiple strands could be achieved. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is believing in your abilities to improve a particular outcome. It was proven that parents increased their self-efficacy in parenting, academic support, and in their willingness and confidence to participate in school related events.

The majority of the parents who participated in this study revealed that they had acquired learning that contributed to parenting skills. They pin-pointed ACEs and social-emotional support for their children as being the most influential in changing some of their parenting behavior. Future researchers should continue to explore parental understanding of ACEs and social emotional development. In addition, school leaders should work to understand and implement engagement strategies that link parents to the learning on the school campus. These strategies include: (a) vision and understanding on behalf of the campus leader, (b) willingness to provide the needed resources to execute an optimal family engagement program, (c) support for

optimal professional learning that meets best practice for teachers, and (d) developing parents alongside of children using a developmental lens that links learning to the home environment. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) coined the idea of linked to learning. This phrase describes how the school's outreach promotes the social and academic goals of each child while simultaneously working to support family knowledge and build self-efficacy within the family (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). It is important to remain mindful of the methodology in which this is carried out on the school campus. The Academic Parent Teacher Team model is another methodology to consider when supporting the development of families. Future research should strive to continue to support the connection between parental engagement and the potential for raising academic achievement particularly in underachieving schools and districts.

Next, this case study has established a solid foundation for how other campuses in WISD and school districts everywhere can work to establish and implement a strong family engagement program. Carson began with a well-executed family engagement professional learning plan that ultimately led to the implementation of APTT meetings where parents were engaged in learning and goal setting. This plan was coupled with the integration of parent leadership academies where families could join each other in furthering their knowledge on a variety of topics that were based on the needs of the community and the campus. The idea that parents and teachers came together to jointly set goals for their children is nothing new. However, the impact that has a raising academic achievement score is a topic that has not been studied to the fullest.

Moreover, the campus leader sets the vision and the tone for the campus. It was recognized by both the teachers and the families at Carson that the campus principal promoted a shared leadership style that reflected servant leadership. Servant leadership is defined as one who serves first (Greenleaf, 1991). This leadership style promoted a positive sense of security to all

those who walked the halls of the Carson campus. In this case, the leader set the tone that created an atmosphere where staff and families alike could thrive with the different levels of support; they each needed. Future researchers may want to study the relation between campus leadership and family engagement.

Finally, the interview protocol used in this study should be considered for use in future research. The established protocol for both teachers and parents will provide the information needed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the inner workings and systemic structures of family engagement programs on school campuses across the nation. This is particularly important when using family engagement as a strategy to support students' success, which is a proven strategy (Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the inability to seek information from Carson's Spanish-speaking families. Because I am a monolingual English speaker, it was difficult to engage these families. The second limitation of the study was that this case study was conducted on only one prekindergarten campus in a large urban area. Choosing to include elementary, middle, and high schools would further contribute to the research. The assurance that the voluntary participants were honest in their responses was the third limitation in this case study. Lastly, researcher bias was always something that I had to consider. It was important that I was able to separate my understanding and promotion of positive family engagement to gather the evidence needed to satisfy each of the research questions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, I have the following recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to investigate the perceptions

of families of all home-languages represented on the school campus. This would provide an opportunity for future researchers to possibly discover additional information. Although this study has set a foundation to promote a positive family engagement plan, other cultural considerations may bear great significance to this topic.

Secondly, future researchers may want to explore the effects of expanding this study to campuses other than those working with young children. If a district has written goals that include family engagement as a strategy, it would be important to recognize the needs of the faculty and the families of school campuses where learning is taking place with older students.

The third recommendation for future research would be to delve deeper into the leadership style of the campus principal. Although this aspect surfaced during this study, it was not examined to its fullest potential. Understanding the specific leadership traits that lead to optimally supporting staff to engage families could be exceptionally beneficial in understanding this work.

Finally, the last recommendation for future researchers to consider includes other topics of intentional professional learning that may impact T-TESS scores. Considering that there were 362,193 public school teachers in Texas in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019b) and the current evaluation system for all of the teachers in Texas is the T-TESS, it would be important to gain further insight on other professional development topics that may be incorporated and carried out in an effort to raise their scores.

Reflection

As an educator and a parent, it has taken me many years to understand the value of life-long learning in all aspects of my life. As a society we cannot and should not underestimate the value that both educators and families bring to supporting children who hold the future of the

United States in their hands. Working together in an environment to promote opportunities to develop positive reciprocal relationships on behalf of building a strong future for children is an effort that every school should not only consider, but work towards. The reciprocity and genuine respect for the differing funds of knowledge that both the families and the Carson campus valued that made this research so impactful. It was humbling to witness firsthand the changes that took place on the campus. The vision that was cast by a leader who was so passionate about making a change in the education system in her community, was what drew families into the campus to connect and ultimately learn, grow, and thrive.

I spent many hours with both the families and the teachers to gain an understanding of the systems that made up the family engagement program at Carson. Through this research, each group graciously offered information that aided in the development of this research project. The knowledge that I was able to acquire while working with each group not only helped me to grow professionally but also undoubtedly will contribute to the success of other programs. The participation of the teachers and the parents in this study was very much appreciated, and I will be forever grateful for their effort to provide open and honest feedback.

My hope is that this case study is used as a foundation for many school campuses and districts nationwide to explore and promote a well-executed family engagement program. For me, it has been a personal triumph that should not have been possible to achieve by someone who could not read in the third grade. Learning to overcome obstacles and beating the odds is just one of the joys that this research has brought to my life.

Conclusion

This research study sought to add to the literature on the competencies that teachers possess when engaging families, and the necessary components of engaging families that

ultimately contribute to an increase in parental self-efficacy. Employing the case study methodology afforded me the opportunity to look into the systemic roots of the Carson Family Engagement program. Data were collected from two populations, teachers and parents, on one prekindergarten campus.

The findings indicated that it is possible for a well-executed family engagement program to have a positive impact on teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers. In addition, intentional family engagement on the part of a school campus can have a positive impact on family self-efficacy from the perspective of the families. Ultimately, the insights gained from the parent and teacher participants in this study demonstrated the overall positive impact of Carson's Family Engagement program, which may serve as a model for districtwide improvement.

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Appendix A: Teacher Demographic Survey

Teacher Demographics

This section is optional. Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential. You will not be individually identified.

1. What is the highest degree you completed? (Mark only one)

| Bachelor other than teaching | Bachelor with alternative teacher certification | Bachelor with teacher certification | Master's other than education | Master's related to education | Doctoral | Other |
|------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| | | | | | | Name: |

2. Number of parent/family engagement courses received throughout your degree program/s (Mark only one)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

3. Number of years teaching (Mark only one)

| 1-3 | 3-5 | 5-8 | 8-10 | 10+ |
|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
| | | | | |

4. What is your race/ethnicity? (Mark as many as appropriate)

- American Indian
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Chinese
- European
- Filipino
- Japanese
- Korean
- Latino
- Hispanic
- Mexican
- Southeast Asian
- Vietnamese
- White

Appendix B: Teacher Survey Questions

The following questions were chosen from *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* Joyce Epstein and Associates

Parenting:

Please mark to the response that comes closest to describing how the activity is implemented the school:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Frequently |
|---|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Our school: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Conducts workshops or provides information for parents on child development. | | | | | |
| Provides information to all families who want or need it, not just to the families who attend workshops or meetings at the school building. | | | | | |
| Produces information for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school. | | | | | |
| Provides families with age-appropriate information on developing home conditions or environments that support learning. | | | | | |

Communicating:

Please mark to the response that comes closest to describing how the activity is implemented the school:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Frequently |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Our school: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Has clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home. | | | | | |
| Provides clear information about the curriculum, expectations, school and student results. | | | | | |
| Trains teachers, staff, and principals on the value and utility of family involvement and ways to build positive ties between school and home. | | | | | |
| Builds policies that encourage all teachers to communicate frequently with parents about the curriculum, expectations for learning and how parents can help. | | | | | |

Learning at Home:

Please mark to the response that comes closest to describing how the activity is implemented the school:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Frequently |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Our school: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home. | | | | | |
| Provides information to families on required skills. | | | | | |
| Provides specific information to families on how to assist student with skills they need to improve. | | | | | |
| Assists families in setting academic goals. | | | | | |

This is an open-sourced document.

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

1. We will first review your individual responses from the previously answered survey.
2. In your opinion, what are the major factors that contribute to the school's family engagement program?
3. In your opinion, what are the major factors that limited the school's family engagement program?
4. What are your thoughts about the family engagement professional learning that you have participated in?
 - a) Which training was the most effective? Why?
 - b) Which training was the least effective? Why?
 - c) How effective were the professional learning opportunities in strengthening your overall skills to engaging families?
 - d) How effective were the professional learning opportunities in contributing to the score on your T-TESS relating to engaging families?
5. What additional information or support do you need to strengthen your family engagement skills?

Appendix D: Family Demographic Survey

Family Demographics

This section is optional. Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential. You will not be individually identified.

1. What is the highest grade you completed? (Mark only one)

| Middle school | Some high school | Graduated high school | Some college/trade or technical school | Graduated college/trade or technical school | Graduate/Professional | None apply |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|--|---|-----------------------|------------|
| | | | | | | |

2. What is your race/ethnicity? (Mark as many as appropriate)

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or American | <input type="checkbox"/> European | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino | <input type="checkbox"/> White |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Latino | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Mexican | |

3. Does your child qualify for free or reduced lunch? (Mark only one)

- Yes No Unknown

4. What is the primary language spoken at home? _____

5. What is your relationship to the child at this campus? _____

Parent/Family Influence and Decision-Making

Please mark to the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:

| | Strongly Disagree | | | Neutral | | | Strongly Agree | I don't know |
|---|-------------------|---|---|---------|---|---|----------------|--------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| I am involved in making the important decisions in my child's school. | | | | | | | | |
| I have opportunities to influence what happens at the school. | | | | | | | | |
| My school or helps me develop my leadership skills. | | | | | | | | |
| My school involves me in meaningful ways improving the school. | | | | | | | | |

Family-Educator Trust

Please mark your response to each of the following statements:

| | Not At All | | | Neutral | | | To A Great Extent | I don't know |
|--|------------|---|---|---------|---|---|-------------------|--------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| To what extent do you feel respected by most of your child's teachers? | | | | | | | | |

Please mark to the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:

| | Strongly Disagree | | | Neutral | | | Strongly Agree | I don't know |
|--|-------------------|---|---|---------|---|---|----------------|--------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Teachers and/or staff at this school treat parents as equal partners in educating children. | | | | | | | | |
| I feel my input is valued by my child's teachers. | | | | | | | | |
| Teachers and/or staff at this school work hard to build trusting relationships with families. | | | | | | | | |
| Teachers and/or staff at this school really try to understand families' problems and concerns. | | | | | | | | |
| I feel my questions or concerns are resolved in an appropriate and fair way. | | | | | | | | |
| This school year, I feel that my child's teacher is available when I need to talk to him/her. | | | | | | | | |

Did you participate in any of the parent academy workshops? (Mark only one)

Yes

No

If yes, how many? _____

Did you participate in any of the academic parent teacher team meetings? (Mark only one)

Yes, If yes, how many? _____

No

Used with permission

Appendix F: Parent/Family Interview Protocol

1. We will first review your individual responses from the previously answered survey.
2. In your opinion, what are the major factors that contribute to the school's family engagement program?
3. In your opinion, what are the major factors that limited the school's family engagement program?
4. What are your thoughts about the parent academy or academic parent teacher team meetings that you have participated in?
 - a) Which session was the most effective? Why?
 - b) Which session was the least effective? Why?
 - c) How effective were the sessions in strengthening your overall skills in helping your child?
5. How effective were the sessions in contributing to your overall confidence in improving your child's skills?
6. What additional information or support do you need to strengthen your confidence in engaging with your child's school?
7. Can you tell me about your overall feeling of trust with this school?
 - a) What would you say contributed to that feeling?

Appendix G: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



Dear Melissa,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 19-053) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>It is a teaching co-parenting kind of thing that will makes it successful.</p> <p>I know parent involvement is very important.</p> <p>Teachers' willingness to participate and go out and seek parents.</p> <p>At other campuses I came from, there was not an effort at all on any part of the teachers.</p> <p>We are having conversations about what we can do to help our parents with.</p> <p>We need to get parents involved.</p> <p>I want my families to be engaged because I want them to see success in the classroom.</p> <p>I was able to see significant improvement.</p> <p>We want kids to be successful and their parents to feel like they are successful with their kids.</p> <p>Parents were interested in learning;</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|---|---|
| | | | <p>you can tell in the scores.</p> <p>I can help them and they can help me.</p> |
| Connection | Relationships | Teachers worked to build relationships with families. | <p>We're a partner</p> <p>I believe that having a good relationship with our families is a major factor for having good family engagement.</p> <p>Teachers and parents get a real close connection.</p> <p>They feel more like partners.</p> <p>If you don't have good relationships, it is not going to work smoothly.</p> <p>The principal and secondly the teacher's willingness to seek the parents and bond with parents.</p> <p>They know we want to make a connection with them.</p> <p>We make them feel comfortable.</p> <p>Sharing information about academic progress after you have built a</p> |

| | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| | <p>Build Social Networks</p> | <p>Teachers built stronger relationship with each other which in turn supported the family engagement program.</p> <p>Parents built peer networks through opportunities provided at the campus.</p> | <p>relationship with them.</p> <p>If you haven't built a relationship with those families, they don't come.</p> <p>We came closer to being a more cohesive group.</p> <p>I think it brought us closer.</p> <p>We had more conversations as a team.</p> <p>Introducing it (APTT) that first time was really hard. But you know what? I think it got us as teachers talking</p> <p>We had conversations at lunch and I think it brought us closer together.</p> <p>They got to learn from each other.</p> <p>I think anything that gets teachers talking to each other is a good thing.</p> <p>Parents are becoming their own school family.</p> |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | <p>Having them together to build connections together is so important too.</p> <p>When you model for them, they try it with each other knowing they are in a space where they are supported.</p> <p>In our special ed classroom, we used it as almost a networking for our parents</p> <p>They were talking about it with other parents in the school.</p> |
| Communication | Affect | The teacher's positive affect when communicating supported a stronger family engagement program. | <p>It is like day and night here; I came from a campus where I don't feel parents were welcomed there and there was no effort all on any part of the teachers or administration.</p> <p>I'm in constant communication building support.</p> <p>Teachers have to put forth the effort to promote it, it has to have positivity.</p> <p>I think talking to parents is like having coffee with a friend.</p> |
| | Various types of communication | The teachers used a variety of modalities | |

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| | | to communicate with families. | <p>We had APTT face-to-face meeting.</p> <p>We had individual meetings.</p> <p>There were notes.</p> <p>If their phone is not working, we reach out in other ways.</p> <p>We translate notes.</p> |
| Capabilities | Investment and skill building in parents | Teachers provided and modeled effective instructional strategies to build the families skills. | <p>I also want them to see areas where their child may have strengths and where their weaknesses are and show them how to build up their strengths and face their weaknesses.</p> <p>It is building their family to be a strong family unit for when they go to the next level of school.</p> <p>The activities we have for the parents can be used at home to help the kids so, we are in support together.</p> <p>We do a lot of activities to get our parents involved.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|--|
| | Skill building in teachers | On-going professional learning provided informational and instructional support to teachers | <p>They came and learned about their child specifically and what we're doing as a whole in the classroom.</p> <p>We know it is not just about academics, it is about getting kids socially and emotionally ready for the next step.</p> <p>They (the parents) are learning.</p> <p>Just having one thing that they can help with every night makes it easier for them.</p> <p>It's educating our parent about what we are doing in the classroom and not just having one meeting a year.</p> <p>Helping me understand how to engage families.</p> <p>I have taught from preschool to college and I definitely did not have as much parent engagement training.</p> <p>I really like that it (the training) is not just thrown at us.</p> |
|--|----------------------------|---|--|

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | <p>The training gives us a process.</p> <p>I really liked the APTT training. We have never done anything similar. I learned a lot.</p> <p>We've seen so much growth in our students, so I really, really, enjoyed all the training.</p> <p>I definitely think this has been an effective tool.</p> <p>I was hesitant about (family engagement), but when I sat down and actually had a blueprint it made sense.</p> <p>The APTT training was a kind of a guide for me in the right direction. My scores really showed this works.</p> <p>This has helped all of us. We have seen a lot of progress.</p> <p>The training was the most impactful and the most meaningful I think I've ever been to in my life. So much of what we have done had helped me engage families</p> |
|--|--|---|

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| | | <p>self-efficacy when engaging families.</p> | <p>classroom. We are allowed to do fun things.</p> <p>New skills help you change build, and grow.</p> <p>At first, it scared all of us. Just talking to each other about those fears helped.</p> <p>We were all freaked out about it and not that we've actually seen it, and were videotaped that helped a lot.</p> <p>It really made an impact on me.</p> <p>The more we do it, the better I get.</p> <p>I don't know if I would have had the confidence to do it without the trainings.</p> <p>The blueprint in front of me, and that agenda made it a little less scary.</p> <p>Confidence in myself is getting better and the training is helping me get better and accolades.</p> <p>The more you get to see other people you</p> |
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| | | | <p>get more confidence in yourself.</p> <p>I built my confidence again.</p> <p>It's helped me grow, and it helped me build that confidence to talk to families.</p> |
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Appendix I: Parent Coding Matrix

| Theme | Categories | Description | Supporting Evidence |
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| Developmental | Skill Building/Linked to Learning | The family engagement program offered opportunities that helped families develop skills. These skills were directly linked to learning in the classroom. | <p>I love going to their activities.</p> <p>I really like participating because I am open to learning new things.</p> <p>She is doing much better socially.</p> <p>The parent leadership opportunity classes are the best thing.</p> <p>It was not what I expected. I expected it to be typical, one of those reinforcement things, instead I learned a lot.</p> <p>The classes were awesome; I learned so much.</p> <p>I re-watched the media about how the brain works.</p> <p>It was effective because it was always talking about ACEs and I thought that it showed the biology and reasoning behind a lot of issues I think are becoming more prominent in early education.</p> |

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| | Interactive | <p>The family engagement program offered interactive opportunities for families to build and extend their social network.</p> | <p>I learned amazing ideas from social emotional and most of all adverse childhood experiences.</p> <p>I've learned quite a bit.</p> <p>When we worked in the library, we got to do activities with the moms, the "Twinkle, Twinkle" social emotional. That was great.</p> <p>In the classroom we'd be engaged with the teacher.</p> <p>Getting to play the games on the table with each other helps us to know how to help our students.</p> <p>They offered neat things, interactive things.</p> |
| Collaborative | Communication | <p>The family engagement program had concentrated efforts surrounding multiple modalities of communication.</p> | <p>All the letters we get through the binders, I think it is working.</p> <p>The constant reminders of things to do.</p> <p>A major factor is communication, getting the information out there.</p> |

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| | Support | The parent engagement program provided support to families. | <p>When there is something going on, they just sent a reminder, a little sticky note or something like that.</p> <p>There are a lot of Spanish speakers, they feel a little bit more intimidated. There always has to be a Spanish speaker.</p> <p>Learning how to communicate with teachers, and the principal is important.</p> <p>I could always talk to the teacher through that app, and I always had an immediate response. They are very straight forward, open arms. There was always clear communication in multiple forms. This was my first experience with school and I don't know that it could have been better.</p> <p>Now, it is great there!</p> <p>It's convenient for a lot of parents. A lot of people participated.</p> <p>I think it is the constant pushing of today there is this and</p> |
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| | | | <p>tomorrow there is that.</p> <p>I had to now re-evaluate my parenting techniques.</p> <p>I would've loved to know more, but there was a limited amount of time.</p> <p>They need to do it more often. I think it is awesome.</p> <p>We need more consistent because those meetings are once every so often.</p> <p>It really helped me know how to help him.</p> <p>I was able to know exactly where she was at and where I needed to help.</p> |
| Relational | Trust/Respect | The campus has an environment that reciprocally promotes trust and respect. | <p>Teachers and staff are willing to work with parents.</p> <p>Families are comfortable with everything there concerning their all together as a family. I love the staff, from the principal to the custodian.</p> <p>I just really feel comfortable leaving my child there,</p> |

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| | <p>Connection</p> | <p>The family engagement program was intentional and modeled building connections within families, and social networks.</p> | <p>walking away and feeling secure.</p> <p>It is a great atmosphere from the moment you walked in.</p> <p>I felt very welcomed and very important she (principal) made me feel like my questions were worth answering.</p> <p>The school took the time to earn my trust. I have confidence in them.</p> <p>The school is so lovely, you can go in and ask anything.</p> <p>I think family is very important.</p> <p>I am a stay at home mom, and I feel that participation in your child's life, questioning about their day is important.</p> <p>I like meeting new people.</p> <p>I like the fact that I get to meet other parents, and find out that they feel the same way I do.</p> |
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| | | | <p>I am now more involved in the school.</p> <p>(The teacher) She does choose love; she takes care of them. That is what is important because when they're at school they don't have us.</p> <p>I really felt like they did connect the kids and the parents, and they tried their best.</p> <p>I don't have a direct line to my new teacher and I'm completely disconnected.</p> <p>The staff made me feel at ease.</p> |
| <p>Confidence</p> | <p>Empowerment</p> | <p>The parent engagement program provided a foundation that empowered families to support their children.</p> | <p>Families now feel confident to go to the school.</p> <p>We can now understand that to help our kiddos when they get tantrums and stuff.</p> <p>It was so good. It helped me understand why my son sometimes gets mad and frustrated. I remember that now and understand that I have to be patient.</p> |

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| | | <p>opportunities to build their skills and expand their funds of knowledge.</p> | <p>There is so much passion with parents. Now, I say how you can confidently get your voice heard.</p> <p>It made me more confident to help because I am more educated.</p> <p>It (the school) was way different this year than when my daughter attended.</p> <p>I don't know who is pursuing this parent engagement here, but there was more activities. That's a chance for other parents to experience what I've experienced.</p> <p>I was interested in being active in pretty much anything that was going on in the school.</p> <p>It was bittersweet, I had two older Sons that went to Carver and they didn't offer any of this at that time.</p> |
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