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### **School Leadership Initiatives: To Promote Equitable and Inclusive Family Engagement Practices for English Language Learners**

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**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES: TO PROMOTE  
EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE FAMILY  
ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS**

by

Lillian M. Holley, B.S., M. Ed., S.S.P.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared by

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entitled **School Leadership Initiatives: To Promote Equitable and Inclusive**

**Family Engagement Practices for English Language Learners**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative case study aimed to understand and document changes that coincided with a planned district-wide initiative, especially from the perspectives of the school system leadership team and families of English language learners (ELL). The following research questions were addressed in this study: How did school leaders experience the initiative to increase equitable family and inclusive family engagement practices for English Language Learners? How did the parents of ELL students experience change through the initiative? The findings of this study revealed that to work effectively with parents of ELL students, school systems must understand the experiences and needs of these families. Working with families of diverse backgrounds must be important to school system leaders to affect important change initiatives on their behalf. Increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices for ELLs requires that school systems understand the group's social, cultural, and linguistic needs and values, which requires training and open mindsets.

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Sam M. Haller  
4-3-23

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
APPROVAL FOR SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Significance of Study .....	5
Researcher Positionality.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	6
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
Theoretical Framework: Change Theory .....	13
Summary .....	18
Change Initiatives Within School Districts using CBAM .....	19
Summary .....	22
Engaging Parents of English Language Learners .....	23
Summary .....	26
Social Justice Leadership.....	27
Summary .....	30
Conclusions.....	31

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	36
Methodology .....	36
Design of the Study.....	37
Participants.....	38
Data Collection .....	40
Review of Existing Documents .....	44
CBAM Survey .....	45
Semi-Structured Interviews .....	45
Parent Focus Groups .....	46
Participant Observation.....	46
Data Analysis .....	47
Trustworthiness.....	47
Credibility .....	48
Transferability.....	48
Dependability and Confirmability .....	48
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS .....	49
Initial Perceptions and Interactions of the Researcher.....	54
First SLT Meeting.....	55
Changepoint #1 .....	55
Second SLT Meeting .....	58
Third SLT Meeting .....	60
Fourth SLT Meeting .....	61
Changepoint #2 .....	62
Fifth SLT Meeting .....	63
Changepoint #3 .....	63

Initial Perspectives and Interactions of Parents of English Language Learners .....	65
First Parent Focus Group .....	66
Changepoint #4 .....	69
Second Parent Focus Group.....	69
Changepoint #5 .....	72
Third Parent Focus Group.....	73
Changepoint #6 .....	75
English Language Learners Parent Interviews .....	75
Final Perspectives and Interactions of School Leadership Team .....	79
Final Perspectives and Interactions of Parents of English Language Learners .....	83
Final Perspectives and Interactions of the Researcher.....	84
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	87
Discussion of Findings.....	87
Limitations of the Study.....	91
Implications for Practice .....	91
Implications for Future Research.....	93
Recommendations.....	94
REFERENCES .....	96
APPENDIX A STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE .....	105
APPENDIX B ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER PARENT INTERVIEW.....	110
APPENDIX C HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER .....	113



**LIST OF TABLES**

**Table 1** *School Leadership Team Participants* ..... 39

**Table 2** *ELL Parent Participants* ..... 40

**Table 3** *Timeline of Case Study*..... 41

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

More needs to be known about change initiatives and planning efforts that are implemented by school leaders (Adelman & Taylor, 2007) and designed to engage families in school settings (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011), especially families of English Language Learners (ELL).

The benefits of engaging ELL students' parents include higher test scores and better grades (Thigpen et al., 2014), gaining insight into a student's home life and unique learning needs, and supporting academic gains and positive social integration for ELL students (Breiseth et al., 2011). Becoming partners with families in the education of ELL students is critical to their success. Understanding students' cultural issues and needs and discovering underlying strengths and talents will assist school staff in supporting ELL students and families. School systems are responsible for addressing and understanding the needs of every student in the school building, including those who are not English proficient. This country has promoted freedom and equity for all who come to her lands. The promise has often been empty for ELL students and their families in our school system.

When school systems want to implement meaningful change initiatives, they must have a clear framework for what they want to change and be able to gauge the change (Hord & Roussin, 2013). School improvement planning efforts have two primary

components which must be met for successful implementation: direct learning or instruction (instructional leadership) and governance/management knowledge (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). The first component includes having high-quality teachers, improved academic assessment systems, standards-based instruction, and staff development. The second component includes shared governance, improved data collection systems, increased accountability, and building-level budget control.

Effective instruction is, of course, primary to a school's mission. Schools should have teachers who are competent and have high standards and expectations. Sound governance and management of resources are essential. However, this two-component approach to school improvement planning has produced fragmented initiatives and service programs that do not provide a clear framework for systemic change (Adelman & Taylor, 2018).

Many change initiatives implemented by school systems are simply "time-limited demonstrations" (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). Time-limited demonstrations are those that are usually developed and implemented as pilot programs. School staff tends to view these initiatives as temporary, and this mindset does not contribute to the sustainability of a change effort.

Change initiatives to engage families of English language learners typically reflect a narrow vision of the role and functions of school-community collaboration for school improvement in general. District efforts to increase family engagement can include four types of activities: (1) contacting a broad range of community entities, (2) developing connections with community resources that can assist with critical intervention gaps at schools, (3) establishing a school climate that would support school-

community collaborative and (4) braiding school and community resources to help with system development (Adelman & Taylor, 2018). In practice, all four activities are rarely implemented, especially when focusing on connecting with parents and community resources. Community resources in many neighborhoods are sparse, and a school-by-school approach to engaging ELL families often leads to inequities (the first school to contact a community agency might use the available supplies or assets that the agency can bring to schools).

### **Background of the Problem**

The public education system in the southern state where the current study occurred is ranked as one of the lowest in the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). U.S. public schools continue to show limited gains in school performance and learning outcomes for ELL students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Although national and state agencies have initiated various educational reforms to affect the educational achievement gaps in students, these measures have not significantly increased academic outcomes (Ravitch, 2020), they have not produced significant gains for ELL students or produced programs to engage their families (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

Programs to engage ELL families have been ineffective because of the lack of principals' support for family and community engagement and district leaders' active facilitation of research-based structures and processes. These factors are important for establishing a basic family partnership program (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) lists parent and family

engagement requirements at the school, district, and state levels. However, it does not specify how to meet these requirements or improve its partnership programs' quality.

School systems need to be more strategic for meaningful change to occur for families. It is critical to have knowledgeable leaders, research-based structures and processes (a clear framework), and strategies in place at the school and district levels to establish and improve plans and practices that promote more equitable and meaningful partnerships with families.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This case study aimed to understand and document changes that coincided with a planned district-wide initiative, especially from the perspectives of the school system leadership team and families of ELL students. The perspectives of the school system leadership team and families of ELL students were critical to this study. This study will answer the following questions:

RQ1: How did school leaders experience the initiative to increase equitable family and inclusive family engagement practices for English Language Learners?

RQ2: How did the parents of ELL students experience change through the initiative?

The theoretical framework used for this study was change theory. A theory of change describes why a particular way of working will be effective, illustrating how change happens over time to achieve the intended goal. A change theory is a framework of ideas supported by evidence that explains some aspects of change beyond a single initiative (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Change theories also represent generalized

knowledge about how and why change occurs. Change theories or models can inform the reasoning behind change efforts and assist in the inquiry about the underlying assumptions of efforts, highlight the context and system in which change is sought, guide the selection of indicators used to measure outcomes, and inform the design of interventions (Dirksen & Tharp, 1997).

### **Significance of Study**

Families, especially those of low socioeconomic status and limited English proficiency, face multiple barriers to engaging in their children's education. These families often lack access to the school network and do not understand how the school system assists their children (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). For U.S. public schools, family engagement is increasingly becoming an area of education reform efforts (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Family engagement efforts have been mandatory at the federal level through Title I of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), requiring Title I schools to develop parental involvement policies.

There are strong connections between families' various roles in a child's education with positive indicators of student achievement, a decrease in drop-out rates, students' socio-emotional well-being, and students' beliefs about the importance of education (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Families play a significant role in their children's education. School leaders need help to develop effective family-school partnerships. As student populations become more diverse, effective, and sustainable programs are necessary to strengthen family engagement efforts. School leaders should begin planning for professional training and capacity building to improve family engagement efforts, which this study will examine through a district-wide initiative.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I recognized my bias towards the need of families with ELL students, as I have had personal experience with ELL family members (Hispanic). I have spent my entire academic career working in a southern state that has not been able to gain much ground in education for all students (Education Week, 2016). This study relates directly to my work as the school district's director of special education services. I recognized my bias towards equity, inclusion, and diversity for all students and families as I have dedicated my career to working towards these ideals. School leaders should create a school climate that fosters the inclusion of ELL families and have a clear vision of involving ELL families with careful attention to cultural diversity and equity. School leaders should be relational and encourage transparent dialogue that promotes reflection and respect for ELL families. School leaders should empower ELL families to be decision-makers in their children's education and build school capacity for creating strong school-family relationships. I also believe that school leaders must seek to understand the perspectives of ELL families and focus on *why* equitable and inclusive family engagement is necessary and *how* it can be implemented successfully.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Change Theory*: A change theory represents generalized knowledge about how and why change occurs (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020).

*Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)*: is a theoretical model for facilitating change that helps leaders and researchers understand, lead, and monitor the complex change process in education (Hord & Roussin, 2013).



*English Language Learner (ELL):* An English language learner (ELL) is a student whose primary language is not English and whose English proficiency or lack thereof provides a barrier to successful learning (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

*Social Justice Leadership:* Social justice leadership is the capacity to efficiently lead a heterogeneous group of people while respecting their uniqueness in an empathetic, bias-free manner. This type of leadership emphasizes the belief that all students can learn and that schools should promote equity for all (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2007).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this case study was to understand and document changes that coincided with a planned district-wide initiative, especially from the perspectives of the school system leadership team and families of ELL students. The problem and purpose of this study relate to issues or topics found in the literature. The problems or issues are called research pathways for this literature review. The four research pathways are (1) change theory, (2) leading change initiatives within school districts using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, (3) engaging parents of ELL students, and (4) social justice leadership.

The first research pathway is change theory. Change theory is a framework of ideas supported by evidence that explains some aspect of change beyond a single project. I have included six studies in this pathway to support its use in this study. Reinholz and Andrews (2020) illustrate that change theories represent generalized knowledge about how change works. While change theory is described as a subset of change research, Reinholz and Andrews (2020) recognized that change theory and change research focus on *how* to make change happen.

School leaders must understand how change occurs to implement effective change initiatives in schools. Kurt Lewin, a psychologist who developed a theory and model of change, recognized that change was an essential and dynamic process involving many

behavior levels. Lewin asserted that a theory or model of change must explain the actual learning and change processes (Schein, 1996). According to Lewin, a change could occur slowly when groups work together with democratic values to prevent social conflicts. For lasting change to occur, norms and rules also had to change so behavior would naturally change (Burnes, 2004). In education, sustainable change has been historically difficult to obtain. Theories of change and their practical application in educational settings have made the lasting change even more challenging (Meyer-Looze, et al., 2019). For successful change to occur in school settings, school leaders must understand the importance of using change models that are systematic and intentional.

Often, school systems have a vision for change but have yet to define the problem that needs to be addressed and needs to understand the structure of a change theory or model (Meyer-Looze et al., 2019). Understanding that change theory offers an approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating change can be very helpful to school leaders (Laing & Todd, 2015). Adelman and Taylor (2017) have supported the view that although school improvement or change initiatives are needed, school leaders often do not have the planning tools to create lasting change or understand change theory and how it works.

The second research pathway includes change initiatives within school districts using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). I have included several studies to describe this process. Hord and Roussin (2013) found that CBAM is used effectively for facilitating change, which helps leaders and researchers understand, lead, and monitor the complex process of change in education. Implementing a research-based model like CBAM will likely assist school systems in understanding the change process that a

district-wide initiative brings (Hord & Roussin, 2013). Shotsberger and Crawford (1996) reviewed the use of CBAM, specifically the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SOcQ) embedded in the model. The SOcQ is often used for measuring teacher/staff concerns during a change initiative. While CBAM is an effective model in measuring change, it has also been shown to support qualitative data from open-ended questions or journals to gather detailed information concerning change initiatives that teachers/staff may face (Shotsberger & Crawford, 1996). In measuring systemic change, CBAM has been used to evaluate the concerns of those faced with change and what level of implementation occurred because of the change (Dirksen & Tharp, 1997). The goal of using CBAM is to address three assumptions: participant concerns about change, how the change was implemented, and the adaptation of the change. Again, the SocQ measures the feelings and attitudes of those participating in a change effort. CBAM has also been viewed as an evaluative tool (Long & Constable, 1991). While CBAM has been supported in the research to be a tool to measure the process of change for those involved in it, it has also shown to be a valuable tool in identifying appropriate points for supportive interventions in response to the concerns presented through the SOcQ. In finding these supportive intervention needs; the change effort has a more substantial impact.

The third research pathway is engaging parents of ELL students. Six studies are included in the description of this pathway. For U.S. public schools, family engagement is increasingly becoming an area of education reform efforts (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Due to the increase in the ELL student population in U.S. public schools, school leaders must develop effective and sustainable programs to strengthen family engagement efforts. Families of ELL students often lack the social networks and resources to assist

their children in school (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). School systems that have been successful in building family engagement programs identified four factors that were needed: the school's commitment to learning, the school leader's support and vision of community involvement, the school's willingness to engage with families and community partners, and the school's receptivity to family involvement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Epstein and Sheldon (2017) found that although school systems rely on policy to affect change in this area, primarily since the release of the Equality in Educational Opportunity report in 1996, guidelines alone do not assist school systems in implementing successful family engagement programs.

The four factors identified by Sanders and Harvey (2002) were found to be needed in addition to the policy. In promoting ELL parental engagement, school systems have recognized the importance of parental engagement for improved student achievement, better attendance, and reduced dropout rates (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). To be successful, school systems must recognize the barriers to ELL parent engagement (language, unfamiliarity with the school system, cultural norms, and cultural capital) and plan to address each. Knowing the perspectives of the families of ELL students is essential. These perspectives can reveal the areas of need in a school system and the barriers to implementing a successful family engagement effort (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Conventional parent involvement activities like back-to-school night, checking daily homework assignments, and parent-teacher meetings do not engage families. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) found that the definition of engagement versus involvement was required to outline what activities were needed in schools to promote ELL family engagement successfully.

The fourth research pathway is social justice leadership. Six studies are included to define and emphasize what this type of leadership is. While the definition of social justice leadership is often used in educational reform efforts, there are variations to what this looks like in practice (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011). Literature has existed for decades about the meaning of social justice in education, with many references to John Dewey's work on stabilizing education with a vision of democracy (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011). Much of the current literature describes school leaders who embrace a social justice leadership style, understand the social and political aspects of the school climate, and make meaningful connections with diverse families and communities (DeMatthews, & Izquierdo, 2016). Relationship-building with parents and stakeholders is critical so all stakeholders can feel supported in transparent dialogue, thought, and mutual respect.

Often, school leaders who embrace a social justice mindset must address teacher bias and prejudice to achieve the equity goals they have in mind (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data suggests that gaps continue to exist for minority students. This is felt supported by the social injustice in school systems. Rivera-McCutchen (2014) also found that school leaders who have successfully promoted equity in their schools have had significant experience working with disadvantaged student populations and minorities. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) reported that social justice leadership is often supported when staff is engaged in professional development regarding ELL and when funding is combined to eliminate pullout ELL programs. In addition, they found that when school leaders reduce class size so that teachers can take responsibility for building relationships and instructing all students, ELL included, social justice is promoted in the school building and academic

outcomes for ELL students. Research that supports a social justice approach to education highlights that inequality in education is one of the most pressing issues in diversity. Educational leadership must encompass multiple perspectives and equity-based approaches to transform educational outcomes for all students (Santamaria, 2013). In the end, equity is what social justice leadership seeks for all students. In doing so, three approaches have been identified that assist in this effort: (1) Critical reflection, (2) Creating a shared vision of equity, and (3) being able to engage in transforming dialogue (Ward et al. 2015).

A comprehensive literature review search was conducted using the following databases: (1) Journal Storage (JSTOR), (2) Google Scholar, (3) the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), (4) the EBSCO Information Services (EBSCO). The literature is grounded in school leadership and the implementation of change initiatives. Research from peer-reviewed journals was used exclusively. Date parameters were limited to the past ten years, but seminal articles were essential to include outside the set parameter. The literature review presented many papers addressing school improvement efforts but not specifically addressing the change process. Articles that addressed educational reform were eliminated as they did not relate to my research problem. All relevant studies found through the literature review were used in this work to offer different ideas and viewpoints.

### **Theoretical Framework: Change Theory**

Change theory is a framework of ideas supported by evidence that explains some aspects of change beyond a single project. Change theories represent generalized knowledge about change (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Current change theorists, such as

Michael Fullan, assert that standard-based district-wide reform initiatives and professional learning community frameworks appear strong but need to consider the concepts of school and culture. Central to any change in a school system, according to Fullan, is the focus on changing the culture and setting in which people learn and work. Without this focus, the work will not be complete and will not accomplish its intended goals (Fullan, 2006).

Lewin (1947) asserted that a theory of change, or change model, must explain the actual learning and change processes. Lewin believed one could only understand a system once one tried to change it (Schein, 1996). In a change model, the researcher participates in the change or learning process to understand it. Progress monitoring, becoming cross-cultural learners, and transparency within a group were essential for change to happen (Schein, 1996). Lewin also recognized that change in culture required leadership changes at all levels of society. For change to occur, norms and rules also had to change so behavior would naturally change (Burnes, 2004).

Joseph and Reigeluth (2010) created a framework from six elements necessary for a successful change process. Those elements were described as: broad stakeholder ownership, learning organization, understanding the systemic change process, evolving mindsets about education, systems view of education, and systems design. Stakeholder ownership was reported to be the foundation of any change in a school system, including educational and family/community stakeholders (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010).

Intensive thinking and communication are required to create lasting change in public education discipline that will last over time. Creating a positive culture for change is necessary, along with school leaders understanding the problems that require change.



Engaging all stakeholders is critical to the success of a change initiative. Accountability measures and practices are also necessary to ensure that the needs of the students and stakeholders are met (Meyer-Looze et al., 2019).

Schein (1996) examines aspects of Kurt Lewin's change theory related to classroom application. Schein explains that planning change should be viewed as managed learning, expanding on Lewin's theory. Lewin believed that when working with groups of people to effect a change, the acceptance of making mistakes, using group encouragement, breaking learning processes into steps, and coaching should occur to reduce learning anxiety to create the motivation needed to learn change.

Lewin's change theory was based on change processes in human systems and attempted to explain the actual learning and what change mechanisms were in place. Whether at the individual or group level, Lewin used psychological processes to restructure the thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of those involved in change (Schein, 1996). In his three-step model (unfreezing, changing, and refreezing), Lewin utilized the consultation process to understand the interventions required for change and the essential dynamics of the system.

Schein (1996) designed a 14-week class based on Lewin's work for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Participants in the class were enrolled in the master's curriculum of the MIT Sloan School. Change projects were assigned (personal and group) to the students. Group projects focused on making an organizational change in the MIT environment. Consultation, mentoring, monitoring, and evaluation were implemented during the course to highlight the principles of Lewin's theory. Students in the class implemented changes to faculty feedback forms, student cafeteria

menus, student housing applications, and future student activities planning efforts. At the end of the class, Schein demonstrated that a change could happen quickly and have an impact using Lewin's theory. Working with others to create change, understanding the social dynamics of a group, and learning from others is the underlying premise of change theory (Schein, 1996).

Fullan (2006) echoes the need for the required elements for change theory to operate successfully. Fullan adds that while change theory can be a powerful tool for educators, it can only be powerful for those who understand the dynamics of the change process and how to reach desired goals. Fullan asserts that change theory should have been "theories of action" since change theory requires those involved to participate in the work actively. Fullan provides examples of change theory in action in several U.S. public school systems and why they failed or succeeded.

Burnes (2004) describes Lewin's background and beliefs, focusing on the main concepts of his planned approach to change. Lewin's three-step model (unfreezing, moving, and refreezing) has been considered his instrumental contribution to change theory. Central to Lewin's theory is the concept of group dynamics. Lewin's work stemmed from his concern about finding a practical approach to resolving social conflict through changing group behavior. Lewin understood the importance of the group in shaping others' behavior (Burnes, 2004) and believed that change's focus should be group behavior (Lewin, 1947).

Although it contributes significantly to change theory, Lewin's work has received criticism. Lewin's concepts remain relevant, although ideas of change are evolving. Lewin was particularly interested in resolving social conflict through change. Moral and

ethical beliefs strongly influenced his work regarding the importance of democratic values and institutions, which lends itself to a social justice lens to change (Burnes, 2004).

Fullan (2006) asserts that while change theory can be a powerful tool for school systems, it cannot work unless those involved understand the dynamics of change and accomplish desired goals. While theories are helpful, Fullan states that change theory must be action-directed. Examples of standard-based reform initiatives, professional learning community work, and qualifications theory demonstrate unsuccessful theories/models for change. Fullan provides a list of core premises that must be present for change theories to be successful: focus on motivation, capacity building, learning in context, changing context, reflective action, tri-level engagement (school/community, district, state), and persistence and flexibility. While school systems are implementing change, change is not happening at the desired rate, mainly because core premises are missing. More leaders are becoming system thinkers because of the need for change, a critical concept for change theory.

Joseph and Reigeluth (2010) examined how systemic change is needed to assist school districts in managing the change process. Six elements of systemic change are reviewed: broad stakeholder ownership, a learning organization, understanding the systemic change process, evolving mindsets about education, systems view of education, and systems design (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010). Broad stakeholder ownership is the foundation on which the other elements of systemic change are built. General stakeholders are those in a school community, including school staff, students, parents, clergy, and other civil servants. Developing a learning organization is essential to seeking

systemic change. This helps the organization reach desired goals by building the capacity to do so. Understanding the change process must occur to have broad stakeholder ownership and develop a learning organization. Significant changes cannot happen (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010). In addition, the mindset of “school” must change for the system to move beyond outdated educational processes. System design is the last change element that Joseph and Reigeluth (2010) highlight.

A systems view must understand that educational systems are complex and require that groups work together for continuous and sustained change. Laing and Todd (2015) used change theory in multiple case studies to demonstrate that this approach can articulate how intended outcomes can be achieved. They also found that the collaboration of those involved in a change initiative was essential to overcoming risks that may be affected. In addition, Adelman and Taylor (2017) strongly asserted that systemic change only happens when the climate and culture of those involved are enhanced for change. Findings demonstrated that a framework for systemic change is helpful for school leaders and systems. It provides an understanding of how to develop a successful change process that has lasting effects. Working with others to bring about lasting change is central to this framework (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010).

### **Summary**

Burnes (2004) found that although Kurt Lewin significantly impacted the theory of change, change theories have adapted to modern times. Change theories are essential for systems planning strategic change, but school leaders must understand the change process to be successful. Burnes (2004) also noted that Lewin’s three-step model to

change has basic tenets: action research, group dynamics, and field theory. The belief that social conflict must be addressed for change to occur was fundamental to Lewin's work.

Change theorists assert that those planning change must understand the change process and articulate the desired goals to be successful (Fullan, 2006). Many plans affect change, but many fail because they need to understand the dynamics. Outdated ideas of what works perpetuate failure (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010). Although change is a natural part of an organization's life, not everyone understands the critical steps to create lasting change. These authors agreed that while foundational work has been conducted (Lewin), change theories must adapt to the times and must have these aspects included: consultation, an understanding of group dynamics, an understanding of the change process, the inclusion of stakeholders (Fullan, 2006), evolving mindsets, systems view and design (Joseph & Reiguleth, 2010), and the desire to work through social conflict (Burnes, 2004).

### **Change Initiatives Within School Districts using CBAM**

Gundy and Berger (2016) examined educational change models, including CBAM, emphasizing the integration of innovations during the change process and how school leaders can use those innovations with fidelity. Olson et al. (2020) used CBAM in their study to evaluate the strategic plan implementation in a suburban school district. Roach et al. (2009) used CBAM in their research to assist change facilitators in supporting the implementation of research-based practices in the classroom. The instructional change was measured using CBAM in the study by Trapani and Annunziato (2019).

Gundy and Berger (2016) studied the use of change models in education, specifically in integrating innovations during the change process. In addition, how innovations would be used and implemented in classrooms was examined. Various models were identified, such as the Research Development and Diffusion Model, the Center-Periphery Model, and the Organization Development Model. A model that would address change initiated and implemented by teachers will demonstrate how teachers integrated innovations during the transition and how teachers used innovations was selected: CBAM (Gundy & Berger, 2016). CBAM has been identified as a model that could assist teachers in implementing innovations by helping develop effective classroom strategies. In addition, CBAM is a model that focuses on the perceptions and experiences of individual teachers as they work through change and implementation processes.

Findings regarding a change model that supports educational change revealed that CBAM is a grounded model that can focus on individual perceptions of change and whether innovations are being implemented (Gundy & Berger, 2016).

Olsen et al. (2020) studied implementing a school district's strategic plan using CBAM. A suburban school district implemented a strategic plan to increase more profound learning opportunities for students, increase expectations, and increase authentic classroom learning. To evaluate the changes occurring while implementing deeper learning strategies, the CBAM was employed to query the process (Olson et al., 2020). Olson et al. (2020) collected in two phases for a school year. From those responses, schools were eliminated by a set of criteria which included: (1) engagement in project-based learning activities, (2) sharing activities related to deeper learning on a district platform, (3) engagement with district curriculum and instruction team to

incorporate more profound learner practices, and (4) staff participation on committees related to implementing the strategic plan.

They found that using CBAM offered prompt feedback and decisions based on data that would support long-term improvement. CBAM also provided a variety of methods to report about the implementation of changes rather than relying only on data such as student outcomes, culture, or climate.

Roach, Kratochwill, and Frank (2009) examined the role of a change facilitator in promoting changes in education. In addition, a discussion of CBAM's three diagnostic frameworks (Stages of Concern, Levels of Use, and Configurations) is highlighted. Proposals for using CBAM data to support school use of research-based practices are suggested. Roach, Kratochwill, and Frank (2009), assert that change facilitators can significantly contribute to schools by supporting teachers and implementing research-based practices. CBAM is used in this study to assess and facilitate a change process and identify valuable areas to target for implementing research-based practices in schools.

They found that successful implementation of research-based practices requires that change facilitators be knowledgeable, have a systems-thinking attitude, and understand improvement goals. CBAM provided a guide to accomplish change, but it was not without significant investment. Roach et al. (2009) found that CBAM tools were lengthy and time-consuming for short-term projects (Roach et al., 2009).

Trapani and Annunziato (2019) examined the effectiveness of an instructional change by engaging teachers in deliberating on the change process using CBAM. Research questions included: (1) What concerns do teachers feel about Understanding by Design (UbD)? (2) To what extent are teachers using UbD in their instructional practice?

(3) What local interventions are needed to accelerate the pattern of adoption and effective use of the UbD instructional framework? Participants included twenty-seven secondary school teachers. Surveys, interviews, and observations were used to collect data on teacher concerns regarding UbD implementation. Findings demonstrated that teachers (85%) believed that they were using UbD in their instructional planning and making decisions regarding the quality of use of UbD and what modifications are needed to achieve the most significant instructional impact. However, only half of the teachers reported consistently collaborating with peers regarding their use of UbD. Teachers said they needed professional development or interactive workshops to guide UbD implementation.

### **Summary**

While change is a concept that has been introduced previously for school systems, it has proven difficult to implement successful change initiatives (Olson et al., 2020). Trapani and Annunziato (2019) found that most schoolteachers thought they implemented modifications needed to achieve the most significant instructional impact. However, only half of the teachers reported consistently collaborating with peers. With research-based change models, like CBAM, school leaders have articulated the goals for change and developed a roadmap to accomplish those goals (Roach et al., 2009). More importantly, CBAM has a foundation for understanding how individuals experience change. Their feelings and perceptions, their development of skill, and how they implement the change with fidelity are captured by CBAM (Hord & Roussin, 2013).

Change is a process that involves complex dynamics (Hord & Roussin, 2013). As much as the process can be complicated, facilitators of change must understand that the



personal dynamics of those involved will impact the work and how the strategies are implemented (Roach et al., 2009). In measuring systemic change, CBAM has been used to evaluate the concerns of those faced with change and what level of implementation occurred because of the change (Dirksen & Tharp, 1997).

CBAM provides a tool for school systems to evaluate how change processes are perceived and how the innovations are implemented. The Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ), based on the CBAM model, is a tool that can be used to measure the feelings and attitudes of those participating in a change effort. CBAM has also been viewed as an evaluative tool (Long & Constable, 1991).

While CBAM is an effective model in measuring change, it has also been shown to support qualitative data from open-ended questions or journals to gather detailed information concerning change initiatives that teachers/staff may face (Shotsberger & Crawford, 1996). CBAM is a grounded model that can focus on individual perceptions of change and whether innovations are being implemented (Gundy & Berger, 2016).

### **Engaging Parents of English Language Learners**

While school systems are mandated to implement legislation to improve school performance and student learning, they have yet to successfully maintain significant gains for ELL students or develop programs to engage their parents (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

Epstein et al. (2011) studied school leaders' impact on the quality of family and community engagement. Research questions were: (1) How do school factors affect implementing basic school programs of family and community engagement and advanced outreach activities to involve typically uninvolved families? (2) How do district factors

affect the quality of schools' basic program implementation and advanced program outreach? (3) What are the longitudinal effects of district leaders' direct assistance to schools developing school-based partnership programs? By using constructs from various learning theories, the use of quantitative methods is employed to determine this. Survey data from twenty-four school districts and 407 schools (selected in stages from sub-samples) were included in this study. The theoretical constructs of district assistance to schools and shared work on partnership program development were measured (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

Findings demonstrate that school leaders that received district support and evaluated progress for at least three years were more apt to have more family engagement strategies than those that did not. Surprisingly, those school leaders with district support also had the necessary funding to develop practical partnership activities (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011).

Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) studied school or community-based programs that received federal funding and had significant community support. In addition, the criteria used for program selection included: (1) The program should have a recognized track record of improved schooling for its intended participants, (2) The program should have representative and stable grassroots oversight, (3) The program should have demonstrated at least two years of intervention in the community and a committed non-paid group of parents and community volunteers in decision-making roles and (4) The program should mirror the characteristics of a project that is a community effort with an independent mission and purpose. Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) chose Latino immigrant families to

participate in open-ended interviews and focus groups. An ethnographic approach was used and guided by the families' narratives or testimonies.

Findings demonstrated that parent-school participation and engagement increased and became more meaningful as school staff began valuing and respecting the parent's roles, experiences, and knowledge. Families viewed the school partnership programs as building a sense of belonging and a need for community action (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) also viewed school partnership programs to promote new pathways to challenge families' cultural isolation.

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) presented a new framework for creating family engagement initiatives that build capacity with schools and families to become partners in students' success. They enumerated the dual capacity-building framework and its components as a description of capacity challenges, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and family and staff capacity outcomes. These components are implemented in three case studies. Three public school systems (Boston, California, & Washington) are highlighted. While each school system had difficulties forming school-home partnerships, they could use the framework to implement strategies specific to their needs.

Findings demonstrate that in each case study, school leaders were able to build capacity for home-school partnerships in a sustained manner. Each school leader implemented best practices in family-school alliances, such as home visits and academic parent-teacher teams. The development of outreach coordinators and community resource centers also created successful school-home partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

A study by Niehaus and Adelson (2014) examined relationships among school support, parental involvement, and academic/social-emotional outcomes for ELLs. The research questions were: (1) Is a higher level of school support for ELLs and their families associated with more positive academic and social-emotional outcomes at the student level? (2) Is parental school involvement mediating the relationship between school support and ELL students' academic and social-emotional outcomes? and (3) How do ELL children's perceived academic and social-emotional skills relate to their academic achievement? (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). The sample for this study was selected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) Cohort of 1998. Niehaus and Adelson (2014) collected parent interviews and teacher and school administrator surveys and reviewed reading and math achievement scores.

Findings demonstrated that schools that offered support services to families experienced higher levels of family engagement, and students experienced fewer academic and social-emotional issues. However, results revealed that most schools provided ELL support if the children were Spanish speaking. Other diverse student populations did not excel since the supports were not tailored to their language needs (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

### **Summary**

Family engagement practices are becoming a priority for school systems across the United States in addressing student success (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Existing literature has demonstrated that families play an integral role in their children's education, indicating that achievement and social-emotional skills are essential to family engagement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). School leaders that provide support

services to families have higher levels of family engagement and fewer academic and social-emotional problems with students, including higher achievement scores (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

School leadership and district support are required for family engagement strategies to be considered successful (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). District-level support is critical to program implementation and sustainability of programs (three years or more), depending on system support and district financial support. Home-school partnerships with this type of support also have quality programs to offer students and their families (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

In creating programs that increase family engagement, families must have a voice in the process (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Providing a voice for parents and caregivers allows school staff to learn about and understand the life experiences of families. The narratives provided by families enable school leaders to create programs that match family needs and increase the respect and value that parents feel when collaborating with schools (Jasis & Jasis-Ordonez, 2012).

School-family partnerships can provide a framework for school leaders to follow if they include critical components. (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). As schools experience more diversity in their student populations, family partnerships become vital for student achievement and wellness (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

### **Social Justice Leadership**

Current literature describes school leaders who embrace a social justice leadership style, understand the social and political aspects of the school climate, and make meaningful connections with diverse families and communities (DeMatthews,

& zquierdo, 2016). Research that supports a social justice approach to education highlights that inequality in education is one of the most pressing issues in diversity. Educational leadership must encompass multiple perspectives and equity-based approaches to transform educational outcomes for all students (Santamaria, 2013).

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2007) described school leaders' challenges in addressing educational inequities. School principals were the focus of the analysis. Data collection comprised multiple school observations of five school principals, teachers, and staff. Interviews were conducted with school principals, and existing documents were reviewed.

They found how school principals implemented social justice leadership through their decisions to address resistance to inclusion. The school principals showed commitment to providing inclusion school-wide, were aware of the marginalization of some student populations and had decision-making skills in the face of conflict (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2007). The school leaders in this study also had experience working in high-poverty schools and special education and taught in schools with a history of segregating students. District policies should align with and support school leaders in this work. Facing resistance to inclusion can be exceedingly difficult and requires collaboration (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2007).

Galloway and Isimaru (2019) examined the role of formal leaders in creating routines and practices to foster and sustain organizational leadership of equity-focused teams. In this study, one research question was posed: How do principals engage with groups of educators to build organizational capacity to identify disparities and develop equitable practices at their schools? Two leadership teams were selected in an elementary

school and another in a middle school. A comparative case study methodology was used. Data were derived from monthly team meetings, existing documents, and field notes.

They found that leadership practices promoted equitable outcomes, such as framing disparities and organizational routines for professional learning. Challenging existing biases, racial assumptions, and the understanding of power influenced the establishment of teams that fostered school equity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). These practices were able to set common language and norms to accomplish equity goals, albeit more challenging.

In a case study presented by Hoppey and McLeskey (2010), the examination of the role of one school principal in school change was highlighted. This school principal led an elementary school (grades 3-5) in a small rural community in the U.S. The research question was (1) How does a principal support school improvement during an era of high-stakes accountability? The principal was chosen by a purposive sampling method. Hoppey and McLeskey (2010) used qualitative methods to conduct the case study by implementing observations and interviews.

They found that central to the school leader's success was the commitment to improving the lives of teachers and students so that they could do their best work. Nurturing staff and students while protecting them from high-stakes pressures was a skill that this school leader demonstrated. Building relationships with staff and students was vital to creating a thriving, inclusive environment. Inclusive schools are characterized by a strong culture and shared commitment to improving educational outcomes (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010).

Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) reported on two urban elementary schools and the principals involved in school reform that resulted in inclusive ELL services. Research questions were: How do principals create asset-based, collaborative, and inclusive learning opportunities and benefits for ELLs? What do varying approaches to these services and the necessary leadership look like in practice? A cross-case analysis compares the cases of inclusive ELL reform (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

They found that social justice leadership is necessary to create more equitable services for ELL students and their families. Keeping the needs of marginalized students and families central to their vision and practice allowed these school principals to succeed in creating an inclusive school environment (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). They also found a sense of responsibility and agency to be instrumental in giving school leaders the courage and motivation to make necessary changes. These findings supported existing literature that school leaders who successfully created inclusive environments had personal and professional backgrounds working with ELL students and families (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

### **Summary**

School leaders with a social justice disposition look to improve educational outcomes for those marginalized and confront challenges when working with high-poverty communities and school districts that often continue the structures of inequality (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Unfortunately, these school leaders work through these issues with little school policy aligned to equitable education outcomes (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Leaders who have embraced the challenge to assist students and families of marginalized groups have had prior experience working with



high-poverty schools and communities had a unique educational background and have worked with ELL populations (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Using leadership practices that include framing disparities and action through organizational routines for professional learning, shifting power and constructing leadership as a collective activity, and having ongoing inquiry on equity-focused improvement, are critical to creating equitable school cultures (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). Advanced inclusive programs have strong leadership from school principals who foster a shared vision, create collaborative structures, understand policies that promote change, encourage teacher professional development, and use data to make decisions (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010).

### **Conclusions**

School systems are often required to implement changes to affect various outcomes. However, Adelman and Taylor (2017) found that school systems lack a strategic plan for meaningful change and have ineffective methods to implement the changes needed. While school systems are mandated to implement change to improve school performance and student learning, they have yet to successfully maintain significant gains for ELL students or develop programs to engage their parents (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Due to the increase in the ELL student population in U.S. public schools, it is essential for school systems to develop effective and sustainable programs that will strengthen family engagement efforts (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Implementing a research-based model like CBAM assists school systems in understanding the change process that a district-wide initiative brings (Hord & Roussin, 2013). CBAM has a foundation for developing an understanding of how individuals experience change. Their feelings and perceptions, their development of skill, and how

they implement the change with fidelity are captured by CBAM (Hord & Roussin, 2013). Galloway and Ishimaru (2019) found that leadership practices, such as framing disparities and organizational routines for professional learning, can build organizational capacity to promote more equitable school outcomes. School leaders are committed to the needs of marginalized student populations and their families. Having a vision and practice of creating an inclusive school environment allowed these school leaders to succeed in creating equitable educational opportunities for all (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

Implementing successful change includes taking into consideration how others perceive and understand the change process, which is supported by the research from Joseph and Reigeluth (2010), Schein (1996), Burnes (2004), and Fullan (2006). These studies found that successful change processes are built on participants' understanding. Hord and Roussin (2013) demonstrated that participants' feelings about change affect how they would implement a change initiative. Schein (1996) and Burnes (2004) describe the importance of the group and social dynamics involved in change. Finally, Fullan (2006) describes how a successful change process is a shared responsibility. One person can only create a sustained change initiative with the commitment and ideas of others.

Having a clear strategic guide for change will foster success in accomplishing goals, as has been supported by the research of Hord and Roussin (2013), Olson et al. (2020), Gundy and Berger (2016), Trapani and Annunziato (2019), and Roach et al. (2009). Hord and Roussin (2013) and Olson et al. (2020) describe the importance of having a research-based strategic guide to assist schools when implementing change. Hord and Roussin's extensive work with CBAM has provided school leaders with a concise guide to build the capacity to accomplish the work and ensure sustained success.

Gundy and Berger (2016) and Trapani and Annunziato (2019) also describe the importance of using a research-based model to affect change, especially those that classroom teachers would implement in their classrooms. Using CBAM, the model can focus on teachers' perceptions about change and has assisted in integrating and implementing with fidelity. Olson et al. (2020) and Roach et al. (2009) described using research-based practices to evaluate strategic change implementation. Without relying solely on student data, change can be implemented using the multiple methods CBAM provides to inform ongoing implementation.

School leadership is a significant variable for building school-family partnerships and implementing outreach programs to promote inclusivity and family engagement (Jasis & Jasis-Ordonez, 2012). Epstein et al. (2011) found that school leader support for school-family partnerships contributes significantly to program implementation and outreach efforts to involve families in their children's education. Niehaus and Adelson (2016) found that ELL families were more involved in their children's education when the school offered many levels of support to engage families (language, academic, and social-emotional). In providing a voice for families in the education of their children, school systems can provide school-family partnerships that are meaningful and effective (Jasis & Jasis-Ordonez, 2012). Finally, Mapp and Kuttner (2013) found that strong school leadership is critical to developing family engagement and community partnerships, a student-centered learning climate, and a culture of shared values. School leaders who create schools with equity in mind look for opportunities where collaboration with families is provided, build policies and programs that enhance capacity building, and respect and honor family experience and knowledge.

Hoppey and McLeskey (2010) found that the school leader is critical to setting the tone for practices and dialogue to promote educational equity and inclusivity and has been supported by the research of Galloway and Ishimaru, 2019; DeMatthews and Mawhinney, 2007; and Theoharis and O'Toole, 2011. Galloway and Ishimaru (2019) found that school leaders committed to educational equity for all demonstrated social justice practices. Practices common to these leaders were: creating routines and procedures that sought to develop and sustain organizational capacity for equity-focused teams of educators, parents, and students.

Hoppey and McLeskey (2010) found that school leaders who had effective inclusive schools believed in supporting teachers to meet the needs of all students and created collaborative structures that encouraged a shared sense of community for staff and families. Principals with effective, inclusive schools demonstrate leadership for marginalized student populations and families by promoting justice (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). It has been shown that school leaders who promote equity also raise issues concerning equity and support inclusive practices to meet the needs of all students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2007) revealed that social justice leadership was demonstrated by principals who made decisions that addressed resistance and challenges to inclusion. Although they face challenges in addressing inequity, they continue to take action to address policies and procedures that perpetuate inequalities (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2007).

The body of research that has been collected is essential to school leaders and school staff as they face the task of implementing frequent change initiatives and struggle to meet the needs of the increasing ELL student population. Research-based strategies

and programs can assist schools in implementing successful change initiatives and school-family partnership programs. For change to be sustainable, schools need specific guidance on how to reach their goals. They must also work collaboratively to understand the change process and each other.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this case study was to understand and document changes that coincided with a planned district-wide initiative, especially from the perspectives of the school system leadership team and families of ELL students. This chapter will discuss the methodology and instrumentation used to gather and analyze the data for the study.

RQ1: How did school leaders experience the initiative to increase equitable family and inclusive family engagement practices for English Language Learners?

RQ2: How did the parents of ELL students experience change through the initiative?

#### **Methodology**

An instrumental case study was developed because of the interest in the interaction of others, how they interpret their experiences, and the meaning they would attach to that experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers have used this approach to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of various educational contexts. I chose a case study approach to understand how those involved in the planned change initiative experienced and interpreted the change process. Specifically, to understand and document the experiences from the perspectives of the school system leadership team and families

of ELL students. An instrumental case study was the most appropriate method to examine the acquired information. I was an active participant in the planned district initiative and was a participant observer in district planning meetings and parent focus groups. The initiative began in 2021 and is in its final year of a three-year pilot program. As a participant observer, I did more than participate in the observation process but also included my observations and field notes, conversations, interviews, questionnaires, and a review of existing documents.

### **Design of the Study**

This study employed a qualitative case study design using The Stages of Concern Questionnaire (Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). The post-questionnaires were utilized to examine the feelings and thoughts of the school leadership team previously expressed on the pre-questionnaire, identify any new attitudes, and gauge any changes that may have occurred through the initiative. The first interview was conducted after the initial focus group so that they understood the purpose of this study. The second interview was conducted as a follow-up once the parents could participate in all scheduled focus groups.

Observations of participants in school leadership training meetings and parent focus groups were also conducted. This approach will allow for an understanding of the change process of the school leadership team as they implement the initiative to increase equitable family engagement practices for ELL students. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was employed to gather data to measure change. CBAM was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by researchers at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin. CBAM facilitates change and

helps leaders and researchers understand, lead, and monitor the complex process of change in education (Hall, 1977). District leaders, including school principals, were selected as participants. Participants were those who actively participated in the chosen initiative. Parents of ELL students were also participants in scheduled focus groups. Descriptive methods will create a deep understanding of the work the school leaders will try to accomplish. Descriptive studies are designed to relate what is going on or what exists (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Understanding the participants' perspectives before and after the plan's implementation will be essential. This will allow for an understanding of the growth or change that occurred.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was employed in this study. Purposive sampling is based on the belief that meaning and understanding can be derived from the study based on selected participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on the conditions of the initiative, eight school leaders were chosen to participate: the school superintendent, the assistant superintendent of curriculum, the current school board president, and two school principals. Two curriculum supervisors and I were also added to the team. These participants were comprised of five females and three males, all Caucasian. Table 1 identifies the grouping for leadership team participants.



**Table 1***School Leadership Team Participants*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Years in Current Leadership Position</u>	<u>Experience</u>
SL1	4	educator for 35 years, high school teacher, assistant principal, school principal, assistant superintendent, then moved to current superintendent position
SL2	7	educator for 28 years, high school teacher, assistant principal, school principal, then moved to current assistant superintendent position
SL3	8	served on school board for two terms, business owner
SL4	5	educator for 25 years, elementary teacher, assistant principal, then moved to current school principal position
SL5	7	educator for 27 years, middle school teacher, assistant principal, then moved to current school principal position
SL6	3	educator for 25 years, elementary teacher, assistant principal, school principal, then moved to current supervisor position
SL7	4	educator for 30 years, elementary teacher, counselor, assistant principal, school principal, then moved to current supervisor position
SL8	7	educator with 29 years, school psychologist, pupil appraisal supervisor, then moved to current director position

Nine parents of ELL students who participated in the focus groups were also determined (Table 2). The parents were representative of the following countries and languages: Germany (German), Honduras (Spanish), Jamaica (Patois), Mexico (Spanish), Philippines (Tagalog), Portugal (Portuguese), Syria (Arabic), and Ukraine (Ukrainian). All spoke English, except for the parent from Honduras, who used a computer translator application.

**Table 2***ELL Parent Participants*

<u>Parent</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Years Lived in the United States</u>	<u>Language of Origin</u>
P1	Jamaica	5 years	Patois
P2	Germany	7 years	German
P3	Ukraine	3 years	Ukrainian
P4	Syria	3 years	Arabic
P5	Mexico	10 years	Spanish
P6	Honduras	1 year	Spanish
P7	Philippines	2 years	Tagalog
P8	Mexico	30 years	Spanish
P9	Portugal	10 Years	Portuguese

The public school system that will participate has thirty-four schools, educating students in preschool through twelfth grade. Approximately 22,529 students attend the school, of which 918 participate in an ELL program (Public School Review, 2021). To promote change in parent engagement practices, the school system created a district-wide initiative to address these issues.

### **Data Collection**

Several methods were used to collect data for this case study. A review of existing school reports and surveys was conducted. In addition, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were administered. I utilized my field notes and observations to supplement the data for this qualitative work. A timeline of this study is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Timeline of Case Study*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>My Role</u>
1-28-21	Invitation from state department to participate in three year initiative pilot program	Letter of commitment from school district to participate	School superintendent	None
2-17-21	Identification of school leadership team to work on the planned initiative	Email from school superintendent to be part of the school leadership team	School leadership team	Participant observer
3-11-21	Initial school leadership team meeting with seven other school districts who were asked to participate	Development of group norms and roles for the team	School leadership team	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
3-31-21	School leadership team meeting with Attuned Partners; Introduction of template to use for documentation of initiative priorities and action steps	Strategic plan template	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
4-15-21	School leadership team meeting to review executive summary developed by Attuned Partners	Executive summary report: Demographics of school district and student outcomes data	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
4-21-21	School leadership team meeting to review the work of John Hattie (visible learning) and Mike Mattos (poverty)	Personal notes	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>My Role</u>
5-19-21	School leadership team meeting to refine mission measures and finalize system-wide priorities (curriculum, teacher retention and recruitment, social-emotional learning, and family engagement practices); Identify those who will be responsible for deliverables for each initiative priority	Calendar developed to create timeline of the five initial phases of the planned initiative	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
6-2-21	School leadership team to discuss social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools due to Covid-19	Workgroup Agendas to address parent and school staff concerns; Develop district-wide vision and mission statement about SEL	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
6-17-21	School leadership team meeting to progress monitor the work towards priority deliverables; Priority #4 deliverables identified as expanding opportunities for families to participate in school and system governance and publish resources and provide trainings that enable parents to support their students in developing academic and social-emotional skills; Review diagnostic report compiled by	Strategic plan template: Focus group responses and SWOT of each school that participated; Review of progress towards action steps for each identified priority	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator; Deputy assistant superintendent from the state department	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>My Role</u>
	Attuned Partners after conducting focus groups at nine schools			
6-30-21	Parent Focus Group: to address priority #4 (increase family engagement) on planned initiative *No ELL families in attendance	Agenda of activities for focus group; Transcribed notes of meeting to include the responses of parents and school staff about parent-school interactions	Select school leadership team members: assistant superintendent and myself; Selected parents and school staff	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
7-14-21	Parent Focus Group: to address priority #4 (increase family engagement) on planned initiative  *ELL families in attendance	Agenda of activities for focus group; Personal notes	Select school leadership team members: assistant superintendent and myself; Selected parents and school staff	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
8-4-21	School leadership team meeting to review progress monitoring of each identified priority in the initiative	Strategic plan template; progress monitoring report	School leadership team and Attuned Partners facilitator	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
8-4-21	Parent focus group: to address priority #4 (increase family engagement) on planned initiative *No ELL families in attendance	Agenda of activities for focus group; Personal notes	Select school leadership team members: assistant superintendent and myself; Selected parents and school staff	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
10-21-21	Parent focus group: to address priority #4 (increase family engagement) on planned initiative *No ELL families in attendance	Personal notes; copy of Academic Recovery and Acceleration Plan	Select school leadership team members: assistant superintendent and myself; Selected parents and school staff	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
11-1-21 to present	School leadership work on individual priorities in initiative	Strategic plan template; progress monitoring report	School leadership team and school staff	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>My Role</u>
8-1-22	Administration of Stages of Concern Questionnaire (CBAM tool) to school leadership team	Initial questionnaire and responses; Stage of Concern Profile to identify concerns and attitudes about ELL family engagement practices	School leadership team	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
8-1-22	Review of ELL student list to contact families for a parent interview; Contact ELL families that participated in focus group on 7-14-21	School district ELL student list	ELL Families	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
8-9-22 to 8-18-22	Initial ELL parent interviews begin; Send out consent form to participate	Human subjects consent forms; Parent interview form	ELL Families	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
11-1-22 to 11-15-22	Post questionnaire administered to school leadership team	Post questionnaire and responses; Stage of Concern Profile to determine if changes in concerns or attitudes about ELL family engagement practices had changed; Member-checking conducted	School leadership team	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal
12-1-22 to 12-15-22	Follow-up parent interviews	Parent interview form; Member-checking conducted	ELL Families	Participant observer; use of field notes and personal self-reflection journal

### **Review of Existing Documents**

To understand the purpose of the planned initiative, I reviewed existing district surveys and diagnostic reports. The surveys were conducted by Achievement Network (ANET) as part of the initiative to gather preliminary data for the initiative. ANET wrote several diagnostic reports for the district after they conducted nine focus groups with

teachers, students, and parents. This information helped determine current areas of need and identify action steps for the initiative.

### **CBAM Survey**

During the second year of the planned initiative, I administered pre and post-questionnaires to the SLT using the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, a CBAM tool (Appendix A). These questionnaires were administered to the SLT in the Spring and Winter of 2022.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with ELL families. Initial interviews were conducted by telephone with seven of the nine families participating in the study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the two remaining families (Appendix B). Pilot interview questions were developed with two ELL families that attended the first scheduled focus group as part of the initiative. With input from these families, I developed a predetermined set of interview questions for ELL family participants (Stake, 1995).

The interview goals were for the families to describe their experiences in our schools and their thoughts and feelings about school family engagement practices. I began each interview by reviewing the planned initiative and telling the families why I thought that their interview responses would be important to initial planning efforts. I also reviewed the purpose of this study with each family and had them sign a consent form to participate. The families were also told that their responses would be confidential, and that participation was voluntary.

A follow-up interview was conducted to determine if the families experienced change through the initiative to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices. This second interview allowed the ELL families to elaborate on issues addressed in the initial interview and answer RQ2. These interviews provided additional information that clarified and deepened my understanding of the collected data.

### **Parent Focus Groups**

ELL families were invited to participate in monthly focus groups to document their concerns about ELL family engagement practices in the schools. These focus groups lasted for approximately an hour and a half with participation from selected ELL families and school staff. Parental feedback regarding community connections, articulating a family-focused mission and vision, achieving a customer-centric culture, creating a focus on learning with families, cultivating a collaboration with families, and fostering a culture of growth was elicited.

### **Participant Observation**

I was an active participant and participant observer in district planning meetings for the planned initiative and parent focus groups. My observations of the SLT occurred in each of the scheduled district planning meetings during the first and second years of the planned initiative pilot. These observations helped me understand the interactions of the SLT while they worked together to identify initiative priorities and action steps.

My observations of the SLT also occurred in focus groups where families were invited to participate. My observations of ELL families during these focus groups allowed me to measure the implementation of the identified action steps for priority #4.



My observations of the planning meetings and parent focus groups were documented. Reviewing the observation documentation helped me triangulate the data with the interviews and questionnaires administered. It was important to keep field notes and a self-reflective journal to record my learning experiences and document information not captured by the observations, questionnaires, or interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using a constant comparative method. This process is where data is sorted and organized into groups according to attributes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As information is obtained, it is compared with previous information to fit all the pieces inductively together into a larger puzzle. Patterns emerge from the data set and are coded or placed in a category (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I accessed data from the existing documents and surveys, along with the questionnaires and interviews. After conducting the initial analysis, I sought other data sources for ongoing analysis and compared one data segment with the next to help establish developing patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, internal validity and reliability are addressed by triangulation, member-checking, prolonged engagement, asking others to review emerging findings, and clarifying researcher biases and assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). These methods are employed since a qualitative approach to research is based on different assumptions than traditional research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In triangulating data and overlapping the results from interviews and observations, I was

able to employ each criterion of trustworthiness to ensure that reliability and validity were addressed for this study

### **Credibility**

Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member-checking were utilized in this study to increase the credibility of the data that was derived (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

### **Transferability**

Narrative was developed to provide a thick description of the case study. Details have been provided about the participants and methods used to collect data. Random sampling was not utilized in this case study, and generalizability to other contexts cannot be asserted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, some details of this case study allow for some generalization to other school systems.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

An audit trail was used, in addition to field notes, to provide details of the steps I took to analyze the data. I shared my data with school leaders who were not participants in the initiative to confirm that the data accurately represented the information the participants provided and that the interpretations of those data were unbiased. Triangulation methods were also implemented to review multiple sources of data. To be sure that no new data was needed for this study, I reviewed the data with each participant (member-checking) until it was evident that saturation had occurred (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

This study aimed to understand and document changes that coincided with a school leadership initiative to address equitable and inclusive parent engagement practices for ELLs. Two research questions were studied:

RQ1: How did school leaders experience the initiative to increase equitable family and inclusive family engagement practices for English Language Learners?

RQ2: Did the parents of ELL students experience change through the initiative?

In this study, my role was twofold: I served as the researcher and actively participated in a district-wide planned initiative. The initiative comprised four priorities, one of which was to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices. I added the perspective of parents of ELL students to this work.

As a participant observer, I documented the case study through field notes, an analysis of existing documents associated with the initiative, semi-structured interviews, observations, participation in parent focus groups, and the CBAM Stages of Concern Questionnaire.

Participants' initial perspectives are detailed through the observations that I conducted and participated in, such as the SLT meetings and parent focus groups. I also captured these perspectives from the pre-questionnaires that were administered and initial

semi-structured interviews. Participants' final perspectives are also detailed through post-questionnaires and follow-up interviews.

The district-wide planned initiative began as an invitation from the assistant superintendent of system relations at SDOE and the deputy assistant superintendent at SDOE. The invitation included a commitment by the school district to participate in a three-year pilot initiative with seven other school systems in the state. The assistant superintendent in our school district related to the SLT that we received this invitation because our school system had shown a willingness to participate in grant opportunities in the past to enhance teaching and learning. State officials wanted to support school systems with strategic planning, implementation, and progress monitoring by providing facilitation assistance, professional development, participation in a network of peer leaders, and access to tools and resources.

After a brief meeting with the assistant superintendent of system relations at SDOE and the deputy assistant superintendent at SDOE, the school superintendent accepted the invitation and formed a school leadership team (SLT) to participate. The SLT was not consulted about the initiative until after the SLT had been selected.

Based on the conditions of the initiative, the assistant superintendent of curriculum in our district, who also was tasked by the school superintendent to lead the initiative, selected the SLT. To represent the various grade bands and subgroups, the following members were selected: the school superintendent, the assistant superintendent of curriculum, the school board president, and five district leaders: the supervisor of elementary curriculum who had previously served as an elementary school principal, the supervisor of high school curriculum who had served previously as a middle school and

high school principal, an elementary school principal, a middle school principal, and the director of special education (myself).

Through the initiative, we worked collaboratively with state representatives in representing the thirty-five schools: 21 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and six high schools in our school district. Approximately 22,529 students attend these schools, of which 918 participate in an ELL program (Public School Review, 2021).

During the initial planning meetings, the SLT identified four priorities in the initiative, including the focus on family engagement (priority #4). Specifically, the following description was developed to support priority #4: *We aspire to engage, communicate, and provide guidance to families to support students' academic, social, and behavioral success in our schools. We also aspire to provide an inclusive environment for all students.*

To gauge the perceptions and feelings of the SLT members about increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices, I administered the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ), a CBAM tool, to the eight members of the SLT in August 2022. The SoCQ allowed for an examination at the school leadership level to determine the group's concerns.

On the questionnaire, Stages of Concern were represented as Stage 0-Awareness, Stage 1- Information, Stage 3-Personal, Stage 4-Management, Stage 5-Consequence, Stage 6- Collaboration, and Stage 6-Refocusing (Roach., et al., 2009). Responses gathered through the initial administration of the questionnaire demonstrated that most SLT members felt they were aware of inclusive and equitable family engagement practices and were interested in what others were doing in this area; this was also

observed during our SLT meetings. Participants' comments primarily fell within three of the six Stages of Concern: Informational (Stage 1), Personal (Stage 2), and Management (Stage 3).

Stage 1 responses indicated that most team members did not want the responsibility of coordinating the efforts to increase family engagement practices but were willing to help others. Typically, individuals in this stage are aware of the change initiative and are beginning to seek information about the change (George et al. 2006). None of the members were concerned about their ability to manage these efforts endorsing statements like, "I am concerned about my ability to manage all that family engagement requires (not true of me now) but were concerned about how their work would change because it "I would like to know how my teaching or administration is supposed to change (very true of me now)." One team member responded honestly that they were not interested in helping others in family engagement or how this change would impact their work. In addition, they indicated that they did not want to coordinate their efforts with others to maximize family engagement efforts.

Stage 2 responses were more personal, with team members indicating from their responses that they wanted more information about what was involved in revising current family engagement practices and what resources were available to assist in the effort. Individuals at this stage are aware of the change initiative but are unaware of their role in the process. They may consider personal conflicts (values, morals, beliefs) or feel they cannot implement the change initiative (Roach et al. 2009). Although most members indicated that they were observing changes to family engagement practices already, they were interested in what others were doing in this area to gauge if this was a worthwhile

effort. “I am concerned about revising the implementation of family engagement (not true of me now)” was the belief system of most of the team members.

Stage 3 responses revealed management concerns about family engagement practices. Individuals at this stage focus on the process and the tasks involved in proposed changes. They also try to understand how to use the resources and information to implement the changes (Hall, 1977). Although most of the team indicated that they knew what family engagement practices were and would be willing to help others promote them, concerns about what the effort would require of them in the future were indicated by their responses on the SoCQ. “I would like to know what the implementation of family engagement practices will require in the future (very true of me now)” and “I would like to know how revising parent engagement practices is better than what we have now (very true of me now)” were statements that mostly endorsed.

From the initiative’s beginning, I observed that the SLT was preoccupied with Covid-19 school protocols and the lack of student attendance (because of Covid-19). School systems across the country were not prepared for virtual and hybrid learning platforms and managing Covid-19 protocols to gauge the health of students and staff (Louisiana Department of Education, 2023). With the other demands of their respective jobs, stress was apparent in the interactions between team members when generating the priorities of the initiatives. The initiative created more work and time constraints between meetings and scheduled initiative measures. Suggestions for initiative measures were met with opposition by the school principals and curriculum supervisors on the team if it was perceived that school staff would be given more responsibility during this time. For

example, the elementary principal strongly asserted her feelings about the time spent planning meetings for the initiative.

The school superintendent acknowledged that while everyone was managing Covid-19 protocols and other issues, he wanted the team to be committed to the work we were asked to do. While the team understood the task, I observed that some members were unwilling to speak openly in consequent meetings about the work. Conversations with team members revealed that many did not want to openly express thoughts and feelings about the initiative's work to avoid appearing noncommittal or an opposing team member.

The assistant superintendent encouraged the group norm of transparency in our conversations. To further strengthen the leader norms for the group, the assistant superintendent emphasized that equity (having a voice and being treated fairly) and collaboration (among all) were required for this group work.

If the SLT could not share their opinions and ideas with the entire group, she reminded us that we would be unable to create a strategic plan or accomplish the initiative's goals for our students and families.

### **Initial Perceptions and Interactions of the Researcher**

Working with various school leaders to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices in the schools was initially a frustrating experience. While other priorities in the initiative had several strategic priority measures, I observed that only two measures were identified for family engagement. I certainly believed the list of strategic priority measures could have been more exhaustive. In addition, two team members, myself and the assistant superintendent were tasked with overseeing priority #4. As



indicated by the initial responses on the SoCQ, collaboration for this initiative was among the lowest-endorsed areas.

While I wanted to participate in this team effort, my hesitancy to voice opinions came from my experience with some team members. In the past, my views about diverse student populations were only sometimes accepted by the school principals on the team. My previous conversations with the team members led to their strong statements regarding school staff use (special education teachers and paraprofessionals) and intervention practices for students with challenges.

### **First SLT Meeting**

The first SLT meeting was held on March 11, 2021. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the team met on a video platform for three hours to discuss an outline for the strategic plan. Through these meetings, we had conversations about the current needs and practices of the school system. At the beginning of the meeting, the school principals on the team commented about the challenges made more difficult by Covid-19. They were concerned about the amount of work expected through the initiative. The elementary principal on the team often expressed frustration with the initiative's work and asked the team, "who has three hours during the school day to devote to this when we need to be sure that students are coming to school and are healthy enough to learn"?

### **Changepoint #1**

Because of the commitment made by the school district, the school superintendent and assistant superintendent told the SLT that they did not want to rescind our participation in the initiative, especially since the school district was asked to collaborate by the state department of education officials. While COVID-19 presented a challenge to

all school employees, the school superintendent felt that the school district needed to recognize this opportunity for the leadership team. With this in mind, the school principals, who voiced concerns that the initiative would burden their workday, told the SLT that they understood the importance of the initiative and the priority the school superintendent had given it.

Since March 2021, the SLT has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the school system. The elementary and high school supervisors had been tasked with creating virtual and hybrid platforms with the appropriate curricula. The superintendent and the assistant superintendent were focused on supporting staff during this pandemic. Still, they were also concerned about the number of students who needed to be enrolled in school due to COVID-19 or who were chronically absent and needed to take advantage of the virtual programs. During this meeting, the elementary and middle school principals reported to the SLT that they were consumed with contact-tracing efforts and supporting teachers who supported hybrid learning. Extra staff was required to keep the contact-tracing steps and to implement the virtual learning programs. Although monies were provided to support virtual learning programs with staff and technology, it appeared to the SLT to be insufficient for the learning curve that was required to address new teaching platforms, the technological skills of teachers and students, creating new master schedules to accommodate hybrid school schedules, and managing the stressors that came with the pandemic for teachers, students, and parents.

In the meeting, we discussed what must be included in the initiative's strategic plan. Since COVID-19 had preoccupied the time of most school employees, social-emotional learning (SEL) was discussed as a potential priority (eventually became

priority #3), and increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices would have to wait. There were differing ideas on what SEL would look like in the schools and, most importantly, who would be responsible for implementing the program.

Since most of the SLT was focused on Covid-19 and SEL, I felt I had to delay the work on the family engagement until this issue was resolved within the SLT. I was especially concerned about how the SEL programs would be implemented. In the past, the school system relied on the special education department (my department) to implement these well-being efforts. It was important to me that the schools take ownership of the programs. In addition, I wondered if each school could tailor their programs to the specific student issues they were experiencing. Could classroom teachers incorporate the programs into their daily routines? Could the school counselors meet with students who would benefit from the agenda? Could the programs be shared with parents at home?

Although I could share my opinions, I felt immediate resistance from the elementary and high school curriculum supervisors. Being protective of teachers, they related that they felt that incorporating these programs in the classrooms would place an extra burden on classroom teachers. While I understood that teachers were being asked to teach on virtual and hybrid platforms during Covid-19, I expressed that many teachers were already implementing social-emotional activities without it being identified. I provided examples of how teachers use the first five minutes of class to give students time to prepare for the class. Many teachers ask the students questions about their day, homework, and extracurricular activities. By doing this, teachers become aware of how their students feel and cope with the day. I did not believe that the program needed to be

very extensive in the classroom; however, if a student required more attention, the school counselor should address social-emotional and well-being issues with the student.

I could share with the SLT the names of teachers who were already successfully doing this in their classrooms. They asked if those teachers would be willing to attend a focus group to discuss this with their school principals and parents of students who participated in those schools. We determined that a focus group was required to discuss SEL programs with school principals and parents and would be identified as a priority in the strategic plan due to Covid-19. The high school curriculum supervisor, who was also tasked with supervising high school counselors, and I were charged with scheduling the first focus group. I recognized that my strong opinion led to this nomination, but I was glad I could continue this conversation with others, especially parents.

### **Second SLT Meeting**

A second SLT meeting was held on March 31, 2021. All team members were present for the meeting, which was conducted through a virtual platform. During this meeting, we were asked by the assistant superintendent of system operation and the deputy assistant superintendent at the SDOE to review a survey developed by Panorama Education for parent, teacher, and student use. The survey aimed to determine the school system's strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of parents and students. Survey measures included family engagement, school fit, family support, family efficacy, learning behaviors, school climate, school safety, demographic questions, and barriers to engagement.

In reviewing the various survey measures, the SLT had significant concerns about the questions presented in the survey. Survey questions for students were complicated

and hostile, as assessed by the SLT. Survey questions for students were: *How good is this teacher at ensuring students do not get out of control during class? How much have you learned from this teacher? How often does your teacher seem excited to be teaching your class? How pleasant or unpleasant is the physical space at your school? If you walked into class upset, how many of your teachers would be concerned? In school, how possible is it for you to change your level of intelligence?* school? Most SLT members reported to the assistant superintendent that they thought these survey questions would confuse students, and I agreed.

Survey questions proposed for teachers were also a concern for the SLT. A review of survey questions revealed less concern about school climate, learning behaviors, and professional learning and more concern about the personal issues that teachers may have present. Survey questions for teachers were: *How well do your colleagues understand you as a person? How much respect do colleagues in your school show you? How connected do you feel to other adults at school? How much do you matter to others at your school?* After meeting with the school superintendent and assistant superintendent, the SLT decided, as a group, not to endorse the student or teacher surveys by Panorama Education.

While I felt that the family survey was appropriate for parents to complete, the SLT could not use the survey since the district did not endorse the others. Although we declined the use of the surveys, the school superintendent and the assistant superintendent told the SLT that data would be required to make several decisions through the initiative. In response to our refusal to administer the Panorama Education survey they suggested, the state representatives gave us a list of other companies we could consider. On that list

was a company the school district had previously worked with regarding curriculum decisions. The school superintendent asked to meet with that company to express our district goals through the initiative and told the SLT that the priorities that had been identified should be “experienced consistently across our schools.”

### **Third SLT Meeting**

The third SLT meeting was held on April 15, 2021. The team met with Attuned Partners, a company the assistant superintendent had worked with in the past, to determine school curriculum needs. An executive summary was provided to all of us that contained school demographic information and student outcome data. This information was reviewed, and a basic outline of data needed to be obtained was created. During the meeting, spreadsheets and progress monitoring tools that were complicated to use and share with others were introduced. Timelines were set to accomplish priority measures. The high school curriculum supervisor said, “I am going to spend more time entering data in these spreadsheets than doing the actual work.” Unfortunately, we wholeheartedly agreed with that statement.

Based on the discussion that day and from the recommendation of the assistant superintendent, it was decided by a unanimous vote by the team that the company would initially conduct focus groups with schools, parents, and students. The school sites would be chosen from those that volunteered to participate in the focus groups. Team members, especially the school principals, felt that this would be less controversial than the survey offered by the state representatives and would offer the school leadership team authentic information instead of the survey.

For our next meeting, we wanted to review the information gathered from the scheduled focus groups and have that information compiled into a diagnostic report. Based on this report, we would begin identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school system (from the viewpoint of teachers, students, and parents) and identify additional strategic priorities for the initiative. This would be an ideal opportunity to hear what families were reporting before I scheduled my interviews and focus groups with them.

#### **Fourth SLT Meeting**

The fourth cohort-based training meeting was held on May 19, 2021. All team members were present via a virtual platform in anticipation of the diagnostic report. Attuned Education Partners compiled the diagnostic report containing focus group interview data (teacher, student, and parent), a SWOT analysis per school, and school and district recommendations. Nine schools volunteered to participate in the focus groups (third through twelfth grade): one high school, one middle school, and seven elementary schools. From these schools, 210 participants were interviewed and participated in focus groups.

After reviewing the information from the diagnostic report, the SLT, in collaboration with the lead facilitator from Attuned Education Partners, discussed the following ideas: *how are we doing based on the results from the diagnostic report? What is working? What needs to be fixed? How do we address the needs that have been identified in the report? What are the areas that we need to look at first? How do we work together to accomplish the work?* Information from the diagnostic report affirmed

that we had begun identifying strategic priorities representative of focus group feedback. I was delighted that we had strong family participation in the focus groups.

This discussion produced the following priorities in order of importance:

(1) Provide equitable instruction that is grounded in the use of rigorous, high-quality curriculum and assessments; (2) Recruit, develop, and retain a talented, caring, diverse, and highly-effective team of leaders, teachers, and support staff; (3) Provide ongoing, intentional development of competencies and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion of all students, and (4) To have a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for families and staff. If we could sustain the ideas of equity and collaboration established in our leader norms for the group, I was hopeful that all families, including those of ELL students, would be able to share their own experiences about the challenges they have faced in our school system.

While we were focused on families, I wanted the ELL families to be explicitly included. If the identified norms of the group: listening to one another, respecting differing points of view, being honest about the work (even when the Superintendent was present for meetings), and demonstrating collaborative decision-making practices were honored, I believed that we would be able to include diverse students and their families in our conversations.

## **Changepoint #2**

I spoke with the assistant superintendent about including ELL families to clarify this priority. Priority #4 needed to specify that families of diverse backgrounds would be included. She readily agreed that while we would keep priority #4 as it was in the initiative, we would intentionally include ELL families in the work conducted. I wanted



to be sure that our work reflected the state goals of (1) families being our partners and (2) equity matters. This last priority will be highlighted in this case study and the one I was primarily engaged in (Attuned Education Partners, 2021).

In working with Attuned partners, I observed that the lead facilitator of the focus groups conducted at the school was African American. During our subsequent meetings with this facilitator, I wondered what her thoughts were about our all-white SLT working towards equity, inclusion, and embracing diversity. In her conversations with the SLT, she commented on school reports of low family engagement and the need for diversity training for school staff.

### **Fifth SLT Meeting**

The fifth SLT meeting was held on June 17, 2021. Team members except for the school board president, were present for the virtual meeting.

#### **Changepoint #3**

During this meeting, we began to outline the action steps that correlated to each priority developed in the initiative. Each team member was assigned to one of the four priorities based on their current roles and expertise and was allowed to collaborate with others in the schools if needed. For example, the middle school principal was assigned priority #1: Equitable instruction uses rigorous, high-quality curriculum and assessments. To achieve the goals of this priority, he felt that he needed to include the ideas and expertise of the district 504 Coordinator (to address tiered support structures to meet students' diverse needs). The 504 Coordinator was included in the administration of the SoCQ.

The assistant superintendent asked me to work with her to outline the action steps for priority #4: To have a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for families and staff. She knew from the work that we have done together over the years that I had a strong desire to work with families, especially those with ELL backgrounds. We identified the following action steps to welcome, engage, and include families:

(1) expand opportunities for families to participate in school and system governance, (2) publish resources and provide training that enables parents to support their students in developing academic and social-emotional skills. Although I would have preferred more action steps for this priority, it was felt by the SLT that the two action steps that were identified would take more time to accomplish.

In working with the assistant superintendent on priority #4, we decided that in expanding opportunities for families to participate in school and system governance, we needed to create a focus group of families that included a diverse group of participants, schedule these focus groups, discuss the initiative with the families, and eventually make 3 to 4 research-based practices for family engagement after we had the opportunity to analyze current school practices with the group.

Some SLT members struggled to begin work for the identified priorities. In planning meetings to gauge the work accomplished, some members did not have action steps to report to the group. Deadlines set by the assistant superintendent were not met because of this. I felt that team members were falling behind because of the amount of work they reported they were doing in the schools. The middle school principal reported that he was incredibly overwhelmed by the Covid-19 protocols the school had to follow

and that “these protocols and contact-tracing is taking up most of our time, and we cannot get to real instruction. The students are not at school to teach.”

### **Initial Perspectives and Interactions of Parents of English Language Learners**

In the initial stages of planning for the initiative, it was determined by the assistant superintendent that Attuned Partners would initially conduct focus groups with schools, parents, and students. The participants for these focus groups were chosen from schools that volunteered. The majority of the initial focus groups were conducted in elementary schools.

In the parent focus groups, Attuned Partners formulated the following questions to ask parents: (1) How would you describe your relationship with the school? (2) How often do you engage with teachers and the school principal? (3) How comfortable do you feel about reaching out to teachers and the school principal with questions? (4) How do you get information about your child’s progress? Homework? (5) How welcome do you feel at your child’s school?

Parent responses to these focus group questions were “we feel connected to the school” and “schools need to have an open house or parent night at least twice a year so that we can get to know the teachers.” In addition, parents indicated that they would like the schools to “include training for parents so that we can understand computer applications and homework” and “provide more feedback to students on their strengths and weaknesses other than grade reports. This will build a stronger relationship with parents.” Parents in the focus groups also had several recommendations for schools to improve family engagement practices: (1) consider more school-community events, (2) require all schools to host a back-to-school night or Open House, (3) identify school

staff who could assist in orientation for new families, (4) advertise services that are available to families, (5) have a vision and mission statement that addresses a parent connection to the school, (6) have translated materials, (7) offer training opportunities in the curriculum for parents, (8) consider using the school's active parents to mentor other parents.

The parent feedback from the focus groups helped identify initiative priorities and action steps. From the focus group data, priority #4 was developed to include families in the district and school-level meetings so that parental input could be documented and utilized. In addition, priority #4 would include training opportunities and published resources that would be helpful to families in their children's education.

Once the SLT established priority #4 to address inclusive and equitable family engagement practices, focus groups were scheduled by the assistant superintendent, who would facilitate the groups. Their child's school principal chose parents, mainly those who were engaged in their child's school events or the most vocal.

### **First Parent Focus Group**

The first parent focus group met on June 30, 2021. This focus group was held face-to-face at a centralized school location. In attendance were selected school principals, the assistant superintendent, selected families, and myself. At this first meeting, the assistant superintendent reviewed the diagnostic report that was conducted by Attuned Partners, which included information from the initial parent focus groups and a SWOT analysis of each school.

This meeting often became contentious as the discussion reviewed current school policies and procedures. Parents that were known to be outspoken often argued in the

meeting about restrictive school policies that do not support students or families, like not allowing outside providers onto school campuses if needed. While the issue of school safety was discussed in response to this, it was not a topic that was easily assuaged. The group facilitator allowed for the parents' voices in attendance but had to redirect the conversation once it became apparent that we had lost the focus of the meeting: to engage in dialogue that would assist the school system in increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices.

After a short break, participants returned to the group for discussion regarding the following questions that were posed to the parents: (1) When do parents hear from their child's school? (2) What happens when parents walk into their child's school? (3) What happens when parents call or email their child's teacher or school principal? (4) What happens after a school meeting? How do parents know whether action steps have yielded positive results?

Parent responses to these questions were varied. It was obvious to me that some of the parents in attendance were angry and had negative experiences at their child's school. For example, a grandparent in attendance, who was taking care of her grandchildren, said she felt unsupported by her grandchildren's teachers. She said many emails and phone calls are unreturned, and there often was no follow-up to parent-teacher conferences. However, she did feel respected by the school's leadership team when she was on campus. Other parents reported that they did not want to communicate with their child's school because it is often bad news about their child's progress or behavior. "I do not want to hear from the school about behavior since I take care of problems at home,"

was one response. Another response was an emphatic “I want to hear some good news about my child when the school calls, not just the bad news.”

School principals in attendance responded to these parent concerns by stating that while they felt they were doing their best job, they needed to hear the feedback given. One high school principal stated, “I think parents need more information about what is available to them to help their children in school. The Parent Center is open to any school or parent that wishes to hold parent-teacher meetings to reinforce the alliance between school staff and parents.” To my surprise, many of the parents in the group did not know what the Parent Center was and where it was located (the school system has a parent center that offers materials, training, tutoring, and supplies for students and their families).

An elementary school principal raised the issue of trust between schools and families in attendance. This generated more discussion regarding the relationships that needed to be built among schools and families. All recognized the need to increase school-community events to foster these much-needed relationships.

The following ideas were generated from this first parent focus group: having a dropbox for parents to write about concerns, becoming proactive in addressing student problems, finding new ways to communicate with parents other than email, creating a calendar of events and a Facebook page for the parent center, hold open houses at the schools, create a parent appreciation award, provide training for parents so that they can help with their child’s schoolwork, and work on parent inclusive environments.

To conclude the first parent focus group, the facilitator asked each parent to identify at least four best practices for the schools to increase parent engagement. In

addition, group participants received a copy of the book, “Community Connections and your PLC at Work: A Guide to Engaging Families” (Provencio, 2021). This book discussed research-based practices for school systems to increase family engagement for all students.

#### **Changepoint #4**

Although the participants were engaged in discussion and ideas were generated, the school principals did not invite any parent with a diverse background. I was very disappointed that while we did not have ELL parents in the focus group, no one seemed to notice the lack of diversity in the group. I did not believe we were being honest about the action steps created for this priority #4. I wondered, how can schools address diversity when we do not have it represented? How can we understand what diversity is when we have yet to experience it? To include ELL parents in the second focus group, I asked the assistant superintendent if I could contact ELL parents to participate. She readily acknowledged the oversight, and I collaborated with the ELL coordinator for the school system to invite several ELL parents to our next focus group.

#### **Second Parent Focus Group**

In collaborating with the district ELL coordinator, we contacted ELL teachers to provide the names of parents they believed would benefit from the focus groups. From the list provided by the ELL teachers, the ELL coordinator contacted the parents and invited them to participate in the focus groups.

A second focus group was scheduled on August 4, 2021. Again the meeting was held face-to-face at a centralized school location. Selected school principals and parents (including parents of ELL students) were in attendance.

The group facilitator began the meeting by reviewing priority #4 and its goals for the school district. A review of what occurred in the first parent focus group was presented, and the parents of ELL students were welcomed. The group facilitator reiterated that equitable and inclusive family engagement practices were to become standard practice in the schools.

At this meeting, participants were asked to work on a jigsaw activity (an activity used in classrooms to help students understand and retain information while they develop their collaboration skills) and brainstorm in groups. Each group was given a poster board with varying titles, such as customer-centric culture, collaboration/PTO, supporting ELL families, collaboration/economically disadvantaged families, collaboration/middle class, and collaboration/business community. Each group was given thirty minutes to prepare and present their work to the whole group.

When presenting their responses to the activity, I was struck by how well the groups worked with one another and provided thoughtful and insightful answers for the group. The group that addressed supporting ELL families provided answers that we had heard from the Attuned Partners focus groups. However, participants wrote words on their posters like respect, human connection, trust, and translation. Several group members mentioned language barriers as an impediment to creating the family engagement practices and relationships they wanted.

During this second parent focus group, I met with the mothers of children from Honduras and Syria. Our conversation was the highlight of my group experience that day. While the Syrian parent spoke English, the parent from Honduras did not and used a translation application to communicate. I found the parents to be honest, thoughtful, and



interested in school system practices. I also found that these parents had concerns about the language barriers we had spoken about in the whole group. They also were concerned about the need for more cultural awareness among school staff. I asked these parents to elaborate on these issues with the group, and they readily agreed.

When presented with the opportunity to share with the focus group, I asked the parents to first share their experiences with the group in their native language because I believed this would address the language barrier issue for everyone in attendance and make the most initial impact. Secondly, because many of the group members would not understand what the parents were saying, it would reinforce what these parents were experiencing with school staff who did not understand them.

I introduced the parents and told the group what I had asked them to do. The parents shared their views in Spanish and Arabic with much confusion from the group. When asked how the group felt after the parents shared their experiences in their native language, some group members reported that they thought the parents were angry. Others reported being frustrated because they did not understand what they were saying. I then asked the parents to relate their concerns and experiences to the group in English. While this was easier for the group to comprehend, concern and frustration were still present.

ELL parents could share that they felt their children's teachers were helpful and supportive. Their children are experiencing success in learning English and have friends at school. While the parents shared how they and their children felt included at their schools, they also shared that school leaders needed more information about diversity. For example, the parent from Syria related that her children were not excused from school during their religious holidays and had been contacted by the truancy office on a

few occasions. This particular school had a high enrollment of Muslim students. This meant that there were many families affected by this. Upon hearing about this experience, the leadership team contacted the school leader. It referred her to school district policy regarding religious holidays and the excusal of students from the school who celebrate them. This discussion alone was critical because it highlighted the need for a discussion about diversity.

### **Changepoint #5**

Based on the work in prior parent focus group meetings, parents identified four best practices to increase family engagement, which were incorporated into the outcomes for Priority #4. The four best practices identified were: for families to participate on school committees to assist with decisions made that affect their children, participate on district committees to help with decisions made that affect their children, receive training to be able to work with their children at home, and improve communication between schools and parents. A transparent dialogue between school staff and ELL parents offered insight into fundamental problems that schools and families encounter. During this parent focus group meeting, parents could relate that they have experienced many misunderstandings based on the tone/volume of their language alone (as evidenced in this particular meeting). School principals in the focus group reported that not understanding the parent's language was frustrating and made them feel defensive. Parents were able to share the same feelings and described their frustration with the lack of understanding of diverse cultures and languages in the schools.

The group was able to list several challenges that parents may have with interacting with the schools. These identified challenges prompted several parents to offer

strategies to resolve these issues: using translation tools in the schools. providing materials in native languages and having an open mind to cultural differences.

### **Third Parent Focus Group**

A third parent focus group was held face-to-face on October 21, 2021, at a centralized school. The assistant superintendent served as the group facilitator and warmly welcomed all who were in attendance. I observed that all focus group members were present except for school principals. In addition, several curriculum coordinators from the school district were in attendance to discuss the district's academic recovery plan from Covid-19, in addition to best practices for family engagement that the school district could implement. I also observed new family members who had yet to participate in the meeting. I wondered if these new group members would understand the planned initiative and what was outlined in priority #4. It took a little while to find that adding new members to the group created confusion in the conversation. The group facilitator often had to backtrack on issues that had been addressed in previous meetings.

I was disappointed that this particular focus group meeting did not address more of the action steps for priority #4 but rather spent an inordinate amount of time presenting the district academic recovery plan. The review included issues like attendance and well-being, school performance scores, and the monies received by the state to address unfinished learning from Covid-19.

Discussions in the group became stuck on the school district's recovery from Covid-19. Parents and school staff engaged in conversations about providing technology to students attending school on a virtual or hybrid platform, whether the internet was

provided to homes for technology use, and if tutoring services were available to students with unfinished learning due to Covid-19.

Unfortunately, as the group discussion focused more on Covid-19, we lost the group focus for priority #4. New parents to the group were argumentative and had very strong feelings about school system policies regarding academic recovery post-Covid-19. For example, when reviewing the guidelines for tutoring services that the schools provide, a parent wanted to know how her children could access the services. In response, another parent replied, "You keep pushing until it's done. The squeaky wheel gets the grease." School staff shared with parents in attendance that the monies provided for these services could not affect all students who wanted it. Still, they could address academic problems through an individual academic plan. Hearing this, parents in the group only became more defensive, and discussions about the monies school systems received for student services ensued. Comments like, "we need more money for school tutoring than we can provide," and "why doesn't that academic recovery plan cover the costs of what students need?" were heard.

In observing the group dynamic, I noticed that parents were confused about why we discussed the academic recovery plan when they were invited to participate in the planning for priority #4. "Does the academic recovery plan include diversity?" The group facilitator addressed the group by saying, "no, the plan does not include diversity, not that it is not important, but the funding source for the plan has intentional purposes." She continued, "the school district is embracing equity and diversity. We can only spend the monies we receive according to the state's permission." To this statement, a parent

replied. “do not tell me that you did the best you could do when unfinished learning still exists and student/family issues are not addressed.”

The meeting concluded with more questions from parents and school staff needing to provide answers. Because I had developed relationships with parents in the group, they approached me after the meeting to discuss their continued frustrations about not being heard and feeling like the school system has an agenda that really does not include their input. As one parent stated, “My child cannot access these services because of the time the school has scheduled them. It is more convenient for school staff than it is for parents.”

### **Changepoint #6**

School staff began to recognize that scheduling meetings with parents must be intentional and not about providing information that has no relevance to them. The academic recovery plan is a document that school systems must create and implement. Including parents in the development of that plan would have been the best way to accomplish that, not presenting the plan to parents in a meeting after it had been submitted and finalized. In scheduling a parent focus group to address priority #4, the agenda for the meeting did not include any of the action steps for increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices.

### **English Language Learner Parent Interviews**

To better understand how our ELL parents felt about parent engagement practices in our school system, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with parents whose children were enrolled in an ELL program in the school district (See Appendix B). These interviews were the highlight of my work. I spoke to four Hispanic families, one Syrian

family, one German family, one Ukrainian family, one Jamaican family, and one family from the Philippines. All of these families had to learn English as a second language. Most of the parents that I spoke to were able to speak English but not fluently. Only one Hispanic family required a translator, which was provided during the interview.

The families I spoke to were friendly and talked openly about their native countries. Interestingly, when I shared my diverse background with the families, the conversation seemed less formal, and the families seemed more engaging. I shared with them that I was participating in a planned initiative to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices and that I was interested in their experiences in our public school system. I asked about their language, culture, and the schools where their children were enrolled. Many of the issues experienced in the focus groups were related to the parent interviews (school leaders needing to become more familiar with the culture, language barriers, and homework matters). I asked the families about their participation in school activities, how the teachers communicate with them about their children, and what their children like about the school. Most importantly, I asked the families if they experienced any challenges or barriers at the school and what ideas they could share with other families from diverse backgrounds. The responses were honest and thoughtful.

The parents expressed that the classroom teacher was the one person at school that made a difference for their children, “I can tell that my child’s teacher likes him and is interested in his education.” Most parents reported that the teachers were interested in their children, cared about them, and supported their learning. While the parents reported that they would like more communication with the schools in their native language, they receive information via a teacher telephone call, scheduled face-to-face meetings, and

school newsletters in the mail. Some parents reported that school-supported systems, like Google Classroom, could be used more efficiently for posting grades or parent communication, “I do not always see my child’s grades posted right away. I must ask the teacher to tell me what the grades are.”

Parents said that participating in their children’s education was important. When asked how they participate in their children’s education, they responded with statements like, “I help with homework and additional schoolwork,” “I reach out to teachers to see what can be done on our side of things,” and “I volunteer at school and participate in fundraising activities.” Although some said that the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) was new to them, “We are not familiar with parent engagement. We did not have PTO in my country.” Parents said they liked participating and volunteering at school because “we want to be visible at school to support our children” and “my children are excited to see me at school.”

In addressing the barriers or challenges they have experienced, parents responded that language differences were a primary problem, “sometimes the communication is lacking” and “teachers are not familiar with our language, and I cannot communicate with them to know what help is available.” Some parents felt that their children were underserved in school or referred for special education services because the school staff did not understand them, stating, “some of the programming was wrong for my child. He was put in a room with other students who could not learn.” When working with homework assignments, it was often difficult to determine the assignment since it was written in English and not their native language. This was a repeated concern by the parents I met in the focus groups and the parents I interviewed. Parents felt they could not

adequately help their children with school work and did not want to be perceived as not caring about the outcome, “we want to help at home, but we do not understand the work.” Learning English was a priority for many of these families since they felt that this would decrease the challenges that their children were experiencing at school and build self-confidence in their skills to help their children.

During the interviews, parents shared ideas that they thought would be helpful to the schools in helping them and other parents. For teachers, they listed the following ideas: (1) use an interpreter for meetings, (2) understand and consider cultural norms, (3) seek to understand the cultural differences, do not assume that you know, (4) invest in relationships with families, (5) have high expectations for their child, (6) prepare flashcards for student use at home, (7) send home assignments in the native language so that the parent will understand how to help their child, (8) immerse the students in all activities, (9) find creative ways to teach, (10) have community events so that they can meet other parents, (11) ask them questions about their children so that they can understand them better, (12) help them to understand the expectations of the school/classroom “so that we feel like we have some power.” Parents reported that being part of a school community was new since their respective countries did not promote family engagement. Schools in their countries had “more of a formal system and had the sole responsibility of educating children,” they said.

Ideas for other parents were also offered. These ideas were generated from their own experiences: (1) ask for help when you need it, (2) get to know your child’s teacher and the school principal, (3) participate in school activities and volunteer in the school if possible, (4) attend PTO, (5) obtain information about the school your child attends,



(6) challenge your children and help the teacher to teach your child, (7) be open to the idea of preschool. Get your child involved in school early.

Lastly, I asked the parents to describe equitable parent engagement practices. Some replied that equitable practices meant that their children “were successful and would become better citizens.” In contrast, others reported that it was “feeling included in the school community” and having a voice in their children’s education. Parents reported that being visible at school was essential to support their children and teachers. Parents reported that their children “see me engaging with staff, and this builds community with the school and the other families.”

### **Final Perspectives and Interactions of School Leadership Team**

The Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) was administered for a second time to measure change after the SLT meetings had concluded in 2021, and the SLT began work on the various priorities that were identified in the initiative. The post-questionnaire data were analyzed and yielded various levels within the Stages of Concern (Appendix A). Stages of Concern were represented as Informational (Stage 1), Personal (Stage 2), and Refocusing (Stage 6) on the post-questionnaire (Roach., et al., 2009). Responses were endorsed on a Likert scale on the questionnaire that ranged from 0 to 7 (0-2 not true of me now to 3-4, somewhat true of me now, and 6-7 very true of me now.)

Post-Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses on the SoCQ did not change significantly. Post-Stage 1 responses continued to indicate that most team members wanted to avoid the responsibility of coordinating the efforts to increase family engagement practices but were willing to help others in doing so. Statements made by most of the team members were “I am concerned about my ability to manage all that family engagement requires

(not true of me now)” but were concerned about how their work would change by stating, “I would like to know how my teaching or administration is supposed to change (very true of me now).” I observed these attitudes throughout the work that we did together.

Post-Stage 2 responses indicated that the team continued to want more information about what was involved in revising current family engagement practices and what resources were available to assist in the effort. “I would like to know what the implementation of family engagement practices will require in the future (very true of me now)” and “I would like to know how revising parent engagement practices is better than what we have now (very true of me now)” were statements that mainly were endorsed. Post-Stage 6 responses were endorsed in the “somewhat true of me now,” indicating a lukewarm interest in family engagement practices. Team members were interested in finding a better way to address family engagement efforts rather than revise them, stating, “I would like to modify the implementation of parent engagement based on the experiences of our students.” Typically, Individuals at this stage are beginning to understand the universal benefits of the change. They now understand that the change was needed and why it was needed. Individuals at this level may begin to want to implement changes to achieve better outcomes (Roach et al., 2009). However, none of the team members offered ideas or new perspectives on how they would do this. Post-Stage 6 responses also revealed that many were preoccupied with other things and had no time for the work involved to increase family engagement practices, “I am completely occupied with other things and do not have time for a new initiative (true of me now). These concerns were often expressed during the SLT meetings.

Statements endorsed on the post-questionnaire were almost identical to pre-questionnaire statements, revealing that while awareness of family engagement practices was high, schools should build community partnerships to establish strong family-school relationships; no significant move toward that goal was made through the initiative. Existing research has shown that change can be difficult and slow for some people (George et al. 2006). Most participants were not concerned about making significant changes to current school practices for diverse families. Responses such as “I would like to develop working relationships with others about family engagement” and “I would like to change how we approach family engagement practices for diverse families” were marked as “somewhat true of me now” and endorsed by most of the participants. After a year and a half of working on planning and executing the planned initiative, most SLT members needed to be more committed to increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices, experiencing little change in perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs and remaining resistant to change.

While CBAM has been supported in the research to be a tool to measure the process of change for those involved in it, it has also shown to be a valuable tool in identifying appropriate points for supportive interventions in response to the concerns presented through the SOcQ (Long & Constable, 1991). However, this planned initiative did not investigate what supportive intervention needs may be required for this change effort to have a more substantial impact.

The post-questionnaire results revealed that the planned initiative did little to provide an opportunity for the SLT’s own reflection and growth. Opposing ideas were not seen as opportunities to expand thinking and provide different points of view. For the

most part, the SLT acted as leaders of change, not change agents. My observation through the planning meetings and in analyzing the questionnaire data showed that no fundamental transformation was experienced through our conversations since the team held to their ideas, beliefs, and territory. Dysfunctional system practices hindered meaningful conversations. Although it was attempted to be established by the assistant superintendent in the beginning stages of the initiative, a culture of transparency was hard to create because of compliance mindsets. Adelman and Taylor (2007) have demonstrated that many change initiatives implemented by school systems have been considered “time-limited demonstrations” and do not make the necessary plans to implement them.

Although the initiative is ongoing through the 2023 school year, the SLT completed the post-questionnaire to gauge the feelings, attitudes, and knowledge about family engagement practices after most of the action steps for priority #4 had been completed. Results yielded minor changes in awareness and information about family engagement practices. Data and organizational processes primarily drove changes. Post-questionnaire results revealed that while family engagement was felt to be necessary, other issues took precedence (staffing and curriculum issues), as evidenced by the order of the priorities and action steps to be taken. Team members responded that they could see that positive changes had been made to increase equitable family practices by making statements like, “I currently see changes to how our schools address family engagement practices for diverse families,” but did not believe revisions to current rules were needed with statements endorsed like “I am concerned about the time spent working on nonacademic problems related to family engagement.” Only two of the eight SLT

members remained committed to priority #4, as evidenced by scheduling additional parent groups and actively participating during this school year.

### **Final Perspectives and Interactions of Parents of English Language Learners**

To gauge whether parents of ELL students were able to experience change through the planned initiative, a follow-up interview was conducted with the families that participated in the initial interview.

Follow-up interviews revealed that many parents experienced minor changes. A review of the literature has shown that this experience is not unusual, and school systems have yet to successfully maintain significant gains for ELL students or develop programs to engage their parents (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Although some were invited to participate in parent focus groups and school-based meetings, most did not feel that their input did much to make significant changes. For example, a parent commented that “having a voice did not move the needle much” and “I am suspicious of the schools’ motives because the principal does not share information or appreciate input from parents.”

When asked about training opportunities for families and published resources, the parents reported that they were unaware of them, as noted in priority #4. Instead, they reported that “family engagement libraries” and “literacy at-home programs” were advertised at their schools for parent use. The libraries did not have books that included the ELL population in our schools. Books were written in Arabic, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese only. Some of the families I spoke to could not utilize these at home. While these libraries were the school districts’ attempt to address the literacy issues that schools were experiencing, they did not seek to increase equitable and diverse

family engagement practices. To be successful, school systems must recognize the barriers to ELL parent engagement (language, unfamiliarity with the school system, cultural norms, and cultural capital) and plan to address each (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

The follow-up interviews also revealed that most families did not have the information to help their child's education (published resources, school information). Families, especially those of low socioeconomic status and limited English proficiency, face multiple barriers to engaging in their children's education. These families often lack access to the school network and do not understand how the school system assists their children (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Several follow-up interviews included responses such as, "What school options do I have for my child if I am dissatisfied? Whom do I talk to?" and "I do not have enough information about my child's homework to help him at home." They reported that they depend entirely on what their child's teacher shares with them or what information they can gain from the school principal. In providing a voice for families in the education of their children, school systems can provide school-family partnerships that are meaningful and effective (Jasis & Jasis-Ordonez, 2012).

### **Final Perspectives and Interactions of the Researcher**

Since 2021, I have participated actively in the planned initiative and parent focus groups. I also observed these events to determine if changes could or did occur through initiative efforts. I was also the primary researcher and gathered additional data by administering questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Through conversations in the SLT meetings, it was evident to me that other issues were more important than those of current family engagement practices, such as

providing a high-quality curriculum to support school scores and student outcomes (priority #1) and the hiring of and retention of teachers (priority #2). This was the prevalent mood of the team based on the current events the school system was facing, like COVID-19.

While some changes have been made to include families in school decisions and district meetings, the work could have been faster. Based on the SocQ questionnaires that were administered, it is evident that district leaders need more information about family engagement practices and how to implement them effectively. For example, I was disappointed that priority #4 included an action step to provide training opportunities and published resources that would be helpful to ELL families. These opportunities have yet to be scheduled, and resources have not been published to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices. The literacy libraries established at each school were one attempt to assist families in assisting their children, but in my opinion, they missed the mark of the goal of priority #4.

Through the work I completed in the initiative and the observations I conducted, it is evident that training is required to highlight why family engagement is essential to a school system for families of diverse backgrounds. However, more than training may be required to change strong mindsets about what inclusion and equity should look like (or are). The initiative did not provide significant growth or learning opportunities for the SLT. I observed that the initiative became a process for others rather than for the ones implementing it. Real change could not occur because most SLT members held steadfast to old practices and needed to identify new behaviors that were appropriate for the work of change.

The follow-up interviews that I conducted with families revealed that some were able to see improvement in including families in school and district meetings. However, while they were allowed to have a voice in the various meetings, they needed to see significant changes to current practices. For example, one parent was reasonably adamant that while families are included in school and district meetings, they are not provided with enough information to make decisions on behalf of their children.

This planned initiative was a three-year pilot program that began in 2021. One year remains in the pilot, and I am hopeful that continued discussions can produce the needed results for ELL families to feel included in their child's education, the school community, and equitable resources can be provided that they are asking for. To realize these goals, those who feel strongly about the need for equitable and inclusive family engagement practices for ELL families will need to speak loudly and continuously for change to occur like me.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to understand and document changes that coincided with a school leadership initiative to address equitable and inclusive parent engagement practices for English Language Learners.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

RQ1: How did school leaders experience the initiative to increase equitable and inclusive family engagement practices for English Language Learners?

The SLT was more concerned with the practical challenges of managing the school district, especially with the added challenges presented by the pandemic than with increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices. From the initiative's beginning, the SLT felt that inclusive and equitable family engagement practices were important, but they were comfortable with current family engagement practices. For the team, attitudes and beliefs mostly stayed the same over time. Sustainable change has been historically difficult to obtain in education. Theories of change and their practical application in educational settings have made the lasting change even more challenging (Meyer-Looze et al., 2019).

Although working towards priorities on the initiative, the SLT was reluctant to engage in new ideas to meet the initiative's goals. Feeling overwhelmed by current school problems (pandemic issues), the SLT did not want to give school personnel additional responsibilities. Teacher complaints about new virtual and hybrid learning platforms and technology use made them reluctant to pursue new strategies. In addition, the SLT team was hesitant to voice opinions and ideas, mainly because the school superintendent was present at the meetings. Because of this, the SLT was motivated by the desire to be compliant rather than to be proactive.

Change is a challenging and complicated process that involves the thoughts and perceptions of those involved (Hord & Roussin, 2013). While most of the team members had expressed that family engagement was valued, they needed to demonstrate commitment to the process of developing inclusive practices for ELL families.

While the team experienced several key change points, these change points had little effect on challenging the attitudes and beliefs of the team members. Central to any change in a school system is the focus on changing the culture and setting in which people learn and work. Without this focus, the work will not be complete and will not accomplish its intended goals (Fullan, 2006).

For lasting change to occur, norms and rules must also change so behavior would naturally change (Burnes, 2004). Mindsets and belief systems have been ingrained in this conservative school system which would be difficult to change quickly. While school systems are mandated to implement reform initiatives to improve school performance and student learning, they have yet to successfully maintain significant gains for ELL

students or develop programs to engage their parents (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

RQ2: How did the parents of ELL students experience change through the initiative?

Knowing the perspectives of the families of ELL students can reveal areas of need in a school system and barriers to implementing a successful family engagement effort (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). The initiative included the priority of the school district to have a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for families. Families felt that although welcomed at their child's school and invited to some school meetings, they felt that this effort was insincere and was made primarily to allow the district to support the initiative without taking significant action. While providing a voice in focus groups and other scheduled meetings, parents experienced little change in school policy or operations. Epstein and Sheldon (2017) found that although school systems rely on policy to affect change, guidelines alone do not assist school systems in implementing successful family engagement programs.

To be successful, school systems must recognize the barriers to ELL parent engagement (language, unfamiliarity with the school system, cultural norms, and cultural capital) and plan to address each. Knowing the perspectives of the families of ELL students is essential. These perspectives can reveal the areas of need in a school system and the barriers to implementing a successful family engagement effort (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). However, families participating in this study believed that their involvement in their child's education was very important, yet they persistently experienced barriers to becoming involved.

Although ELL families were invited to planned focus groups and meetings to participate in school and system governance, a lack of training opportunities and published resources was evident. These training opportunities were to be developed for ELL families to support their children in school. Still, they were only actualized in “family engagement libraries” at each school and “family engagement literacy programs in the home.” These resources were not accessed by the parents I spoke to; many were in English.

Parents felt that while they understood work was being directed to promote positive family engagement; they still experienced bias directed towards them within their local school. Parents recommended cultural diversity training for school staff. Language barriers remained, and families expressed that the schools do not really know their communities.

The findings of this study revealed that to work effectively with parents of ELL students, school systems must understand the experiences and needs of these families. Working with families of diverse backgrounds must be important to school system leaders to affect important change initiatives on their behalf. Increasing equitable and inclusive family engagement practices for ELLs requires that school systems understand the group’s social, cultural, and linguistic needs and values, which requires training and open mindsets. This study found that school systems often lack clear objectives and goals on how best to engage ELL families. When school systems implement change initiatives without considering family voices, it becomes a one-size-fits-all plan and misses the mark for meaningful change.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the nature of case study research, conclusions made from the study are isolated. The limited application of the case study is reflective of qualitative research, which attempts to understand the human experience (Stake, 1995). Additional limitations of this case study are (1) the number of participants who answered questions on the SoCQ and semi-structured interviews was small; (2) because the study is qualitative, there are no cause-and-effect relationships established; (3) no statistical analysis will be conducted; therefore, no correlational relationships will be established; (4) change in leadership perspectives about family engagement was challenging to quantify (5) because of the qualitative nature of the study, only naturalistic generalizations will be made, (6) not all parent who participated in the study are representative of the ELL population in the school district.

### **Implications for Practice**

In developing a school-wide initiative for change, gathering data to identify needed areas of change is critical. The SLT in this case study was able to survey teachers, students, and parents before identifying initiative priorities. Initial data gathering will assist school systems in identifying priority areas instead of brainstorming ideas that sound good (Hord & Roussin, 2013).

School districts must plan how schools will process the change initiative rather than implement changes immediately (Adelman & Taylor, 2018). The planned initiative that the SLT formulated did not plan for the process but rather approached the work as a checklist of action steps to complete. A successful change plan should consider the following: (1) identifying why we want to change, (2) emphasizing active participation in

the change, (3) examining the readiness for change, and (4) knowing the stakeholders and identifying their needs for the plan (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

To ensure the implementation of a change initiative, these initiatives should be supported in the schools by a person trained to facilitate the initiative. The SLT needed to have training in the change process and elect to provide a facilitator for implementing change strategies in the schools. A change facilitator can assist in identifying roadblocks and moving the process forward (Fullan, 2006). In addition, this could allow for the observation of implementation with fidelity.

Time and resources should be allocated for change initiatives to succeed. A successful change process will require technical assistance, materials, and professional development (Hord & Roussin, 2013). While action steps were formulated to realize the identified priorities of the initiative, only some materials and professional development opportunities were dedicated to the work the SLT was engaged in. School staff will require extra resources and time to observe, share, plan, and evaluate how the initiative works (Fullan, 2006). Leveraging funds and resources from various funding sources can assist schools in implementing successful family engagement programs. Instead of relying on school budgets to provide these funds, collaborating with community-based organizations could provide additional funds to support school programs and assist families in the school community (Wood et al., 2014).

Finally, and most importantly, groups that work together for the benefit of diverse families must be able to engage in authentic dialogue, regardless of held mindsets. A roadblock the SLT faced from the beginning was the need for more transparent conversations to implement change. If school-wide planned initiatives are to be effective,

those working on them must be willing to take part in the difficult work of making connections, building relationships, and developing support systems that would assist in establishing equitable and inclusive practices in the schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2012).

### **Implications for Future Research**

Teachers were not included in this study, and their perceptions of change and the implementation of new strategies would be helpful to school leadership teams. In addition, studies examining the change process among school teams would assist in implementing successful planned initiatives.

Working with the SLT in this study, I found that they focused primarily on procedures and compliance rather than the change process. Future studies that examine compliance mindsets and how this hinders meaningful change would be impactful for educational settings.

Findings also imply that research is needed about what programs and factors support the development of relationships between parents and school staff, as the SLT needed to establish a stronger connection between them.

To gain a comprehensive perspective of a change initiative in the schools, a study that uses the CBAM tools in sequence, from the Innovations Stages of Concern, the Levels of Use, to the Innovation Configurations Map, would be informative and impactful. This study used one CBAM tool and provided a one-dimensional view of a change process. CBAM would assist schools in understanding how change is experienced

by the participants (Stages of Concern) to their development of expertise (Level of Use) and the way that the change is implemented with consistency (Innovation Configurations Map).

### **Recommendations**

Structures should be created at the school district level that requires individual school sites to engage families, school leaders, and teachers. These social structures and opportunities could assist in creating a shared responsibility for change (Hord & Roussin, 2013). In this process, parents of ELL students should be asked how they want to be engaged rather than develop a global district-wide statement without their input.

Change is a process that involves complex dynamics (Hord & Roussin, 2013). As much as the process can be complicated, facilitators of change must understand that the personal dynamics of those involved will impact the work and how the strategies are implemented (Roach et al., 2009).

Change is a slow process, which was undoubtedly evidenced through this work. However, any change in a positive direction should be celebrated, and change efforts should continue to improve family engagement practices. School systems will need to invest in professional development for those involved in any change initiative. It is critical that those involved in a change process understand the why and how of that process and how they will be supported in implementing the changes (Hall & Hord, 2011). The use of Innovation Configuration Maps, another CBAM tool, would be helpful before any change initiative is launched. These maps would offer schools a description of the changes and how to identify progress (Hord & Roussin, 2013).



Family engagement initiatives should focus on system improvement rather than procedural compliance. For family engagement practices to last, existing research supports integrating family engagement standards and measures into school evaluation systems (Wood et al., 2014). Family engagement should be an area of practice for school systems, not a strategy in a time-limited change initiative.

Change initiatives usually include data to inform decisions. Sharing this data with families and community partners would allow for meaningful conversations about family engagement practices (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). School systems should move beyond using data for compliance purposes and instead see it as an opportunity to leverage families and community partners in meaningful ways.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Stages of Concern Questionnaire

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire aims to determine what people who are using or thinking about using various programs are concerned about at multiple times during the adoption process.

The items were developed from typical responses of school and college teachers who ranged from no knowledge at all about various programs to many years of experience using them. Therefore, **many of the items on this questionnaire may be of little relevance or irrelevant to you now.** Please circle "0" on the scale for the completely irrelevant items. Other items will represent those concerns you do have, in varying degrees of intensity, and should be marked higher on the scale.

For Example:

This statement is very true of me at this time.            0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

This statement is somewhat true of me now.            0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

This statement is not at all true of me at this time.    0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

This statement seems irrelevant to me.                0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please respond to the items in terms of **your present concerns** or how you feel about your involvement or potential involvement with the initiative of providing an equitable and inclusive environment for all families (family engagement). We do not hold to any one definition of inclusivity for all families, so please think of it in your own perception.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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0            1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Not true of me now                      Somewhat true of me now                      Very true of me now

---

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I believe that our schools have a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for diverse students and their families.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I believe that our schools need to address family Engagement practices for diverse families.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I believe our schools should promote inclusion, diversity, and equity for diverse students and families.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I do not know what family engagement practices are.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I have very limited knowledge of family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I would like to help others with family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I am concerned about revising the implementation of family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I would like to develop working relationships with others About family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I am concerned about how family engagement affects students.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I am not concerned about family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I would like to know who will make the decisions about Family engagement.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I would be willing to make changes to current practices to Ensure that diverse students and families feel welcomed and engaged.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I would like to know what resources are available if we decide to implement family engagement practices.
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7            I am concerned about my ability to manage all that family engagement requires.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not true of me now			Somewhat true of me now			Very true of me now		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to know how my teaching or administration is supposed to change.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to familiarize other departments or persons with the progress of family engagement.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I currently see changes to how our schools address family engagement practices for diverse families.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to change how we approach family Engagement practices for diverse families.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I know of some other approaches that might work better for inclusive family engagement practices.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am completely occupied with other things and do not have time for a new initiative.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to modify our implementation of family Engagement based on the experiences of our students.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Although I do not know about family engagement, I am Concerned about things in this area.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to excite my students about their part in family engagement.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am concerned about the time spent working with Nonacademic problems related to family engagement.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to know what the implementation of family engagement practices will require in the future.
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I would like to coordinate my effort with others to maximize family engagement effects.

---

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not true of me now			Somewhat true of me now			Very true of me now	
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to have more information on time and energy commitments required for family engagement.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to know what others are doing in this area.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			At this time, I am not interested in learning about family engagement.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to determine how to supplement, enhance, or Replace family engagement.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to use feedback from the students to change the practice of family engagement.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to know how my role will change when implementing family engagement practices.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I believe that family engagement efforts are worthwhile and should be a priority of the schools.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to know how revising family engagement practices are better than what we have now.				
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7			I would like to determine how to supplement, enhance, or replace family engagement.				

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The Stages of Concern Questionnaire [Measurement Instrument]. SEDL

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER PARENT INTERVIEW**

**ELL Parent Interview**

1. Tell us about your background:

A. What country are you from? \_\_\_\_\_

B. What is your primary language? \_\_\_\_\_

C. How many years have you lived in the USA? \_\_\_\_\_

D. How many of your children are enrolled in a public school? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you like about your child's school? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does your child like about school? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How does your child's school communicate with you about your child's education?

5. How do you participate in your child's education? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What types of school activities do you like to attend? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are there any challenges or barriers you have experienced at your child's school?

8. What ideas do you have for your child's teacher? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What ideas do you have for other parents? \_\_\_\_\_

## Formulario de Entrevista para Padres

Gracias por tomarse el tiempo para completar estas preguntas. Es importante para nosotros saber como se siente acerca de la educacion de su hijo.

1. Cuentanos sobre tus antecedentes.

¿De que pais eres? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Que idioma hablas en casa? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cuantos anos has vivido en los Estados Unidos? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cuantos ninos tiene matriculados en escuelas publicas? \_\_\_\_\_

2. ¿Que te gusta de la escuela de tu hijo? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Que le gusta a su hijo de le escuela? \_\_\_\_\_

4. ¿Como se cominca la escuela de su hijo con usted acerca de la educacion de su hijo?

5. ¿Como participa usted en la educacion de su hijo?

6. ¿A que tipo actividades escolares te gusta asistir?

7. ¿Hay algun desafio o barrera que haya experimentado?

8. ¿Que ideas tiene para la escuela o el maestro de su hijo?

9. ¿Que ideas tiene para otros padres EL?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. ¿Que significa para usted la participacion de los padres en las escuelas?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. ¿Tiene algun otro comentario que la gustaria agregar?



**APPENDIX C**

**HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER**



LOUISIANA TECH  
**UNIVERSITY**

Office of Research and Partnerships

MEMORANDUM

TO PI (s): Dr. Bryan McCoy and Lillian M. Holley (Student Researcher)

FROM:  Dr. Walter Buboltz, Professor/Elva L. Smith Endowed Professor  
[buboltz@latech.edu](mailto:buboltz@latech.edu)

SUBJECT: Human Use Committee - Review  
DECISION

DATE: May 5, 2022

To facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been completed for your proposed study:

HUC No.: 1419, 22-092

TITLE: School Leadership Initiatives and the Concerns Based Adoption Model: Measuring the Process of Change to Promote Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity for English Language Learners and their Families.

HUC DECISION: APPROVED

The proposed study's procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined. Projects should be renewed annually. This approval was finalized on May 5, 2022 and this project will

need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project continues beyond May 5, 2023. ANY CHANGES to your protocol procedures, including minor changes, should be reported immediately to the IRB for approval before implementation. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of Sponsored Projects.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Research and Partnerships or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.

P.O. Box 8597 | Ruston, LA 71272-0034 | O: 318.257.2871

A member of the University of Louisiana System and an equal opportunity university