

# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2023

Abstract

Secondary Teachers' Family Engagement Practices Targeting Academic Achievement

for Hispanic Students

by

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MA, Assumption University, 2003

BA, Boston University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Teachers' engagement practices with Hispanic families are contributing to the continuing disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and other students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. The conceptual framework guiding the study included Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Yosso's theory of cultural wealth, which together provided an ecological-social and critical race framework to ground the study's problem, purpose, and methodology. The key research questions revolved around participants' perceptions of (a) challenges in Hispanic family engagement, (b) family engagement practices improving student performance, and (c) family engagement practices demonstrating the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 15 secondary level general education teachers from a medium-sized urban school district in the Northeastern United States who participated in audio recorded semistructured interviews on the virtual Zoom platform. Braun and Clarke's 6-phase thematic analysis was used to guide the inductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts. The three final themes prevalent in the findings and that addressed the study's three research questions were obstacles in engaging Hispanic families, inconsistent and isolated family engagement practices, and teachers as experts and value setters. A potential positive social change implication is that the study may inform teacher-parent engagement practices found to be effective in improving Hispanic student performance in the areas of academics and social-emotional functioning.

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## Dedication

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my patient and supportive husband, Victor, who has always encouraged me to persevere and be the change agent and leader I aspire to be. Victor believed in my ability before I knew I was capable. I also dedicate this work to my amazing children, Loukas and Eva. Their unwavering patience and encouragement motivated me to continue to learn and make a difference. I hope that I have modeled the joy and benefits of being a lifelong learner. Most importantly, I want Loukas and Eva to realize that through persistence and hard work, they can accomplish their goals and excel. I am also grateful to my parents, who instilled in me a strong work ethic, humility, and a fighting spirit in the face of obstacles and adversity. They are immigrants who worked tirelessly to provide me a better quality of life with opportunities, such as an education. My upbringing and experiences working with students and families have inspired me to empower families to support our youth and future. My hope is that this work will bring about social change needed to build genuine partnerships between schools and homes in my community.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The partnership between families and schools is essential to students' school performance (Clarke et al., 2017). Family engagement is defined as a collaborative process between schools and families involving reciprocal, two-way communication focused on students' learning (Barton et al., 2021). The involvement of parents and caregivers in their children's schooling has been associated with improved student outcomes for various student populations (Rivera & Li, 2019). However, teachers applying traditional models of family engagement often struggle to engage Hispanic families, which is contributing to low student performance (Flores et al., 2019). Thus, the exploration of teachers' perceptions of Hispanic family engagement has the potential to address the persisting school performance disparities between Hispanic students and other groups of students (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019).

In this study, I explored secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families to improve family engagement practices linked to improved student academic achievement. It is hoped that the results of this study provide insights into teachers' perceptions of the challenges of engaging Hispanic parents, specifically the type of support and resources teachers need to effectively engage Hispanic families. Hence, this study addressed a gap in teachers' practice regarding the effective use of school-based interventions in engaging Hispanic parents to improve student performance. Potential positive social change implications of the study may be improved student performance in the areas of academics and social-emotional functioning, corresponding with the effective engagement of Hispanic families.

In Chapter 1, I examine the background of Hispanic family engagement and the problem that was the basis for this study. Further, the purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework that grounds the study are explored, along with the nature, significance, and limitations of the study. Additionally, definitions of terms, assumptions, and the scope and delimitations of the study are reviewed.

### **Background**

The role of Hispanic parents in their children's schooling is an important issue to consider when examining the educational outcomes of Hispanic students. Parent involvement has been found to correspond with improved educational outcomes for students of various populations (Alexander et al., 2017). However, Hispanic students in the United States have significantly lower attendance, standardized test scores, and graduation rates in comparison to other groups of students (Gaias et al., 2020). Further, the Hispanic student population has continued to increase across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Because parent involvement has been found to correspond with improved educational outcomes for students, Hispanic parent and guardian involvement needs to be examined, given the increasing number of Hispanic students and their persisting educational outcome disparities (Flores et al., 2019). The degree of parent involvement, which has been associated with students' educational outcomes, influences the quality of family-school partnerships (Alexander et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2017).

The 2020 U.S. Census Bureau (2021) reported that the population identifying as "Hispanic or Latino" grew by 23% in the past decade, whereas the rest of the population

grew 4.3%. U.S. schools have also observed an increase of Hispanic students as evidenced by the near doubling (8.8 million to 17.9 million) of enrollment in a 20-year period (1996-2016; NCES, 2019). It is important to note that the U.S. Census Bureau uses the ethnic category of “Hispanic or Latino,” which is considered separate from a racial category, while the NCES only uses the combined race/ethnicity category of “Hispanic.” According to the NCES (2019), the educational and behavioral disparities between Hispanic and other groups of students persist. For example, the White-Hispanic achievement gap for Grade 4 students in reading (24 points since 1992) and mathematics (18 points since 1990) has not been measurably different in a period of approximately 25 years (NCES, 2019). In addition, the rates of both retention and absences for Hispanic status students were reported to be higher than for students of White status. The most striking statistic was that the Hispanic status school dropout rate in 2015 was higher in comparison to White status and Black status dropout rates. These data on educational outcomes are concerning due to the short and long-term social, emotional, and intellectual impact on Hispanic students, who make up 25% of school-age students across the nation (NCES, 2019).

In an examination of immigration trends, the Hispanic population continues to increase and comprises 44% of U.S. immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020), Mexicans comprised 25% of U.S. immigrants. Also, five of the top 10 countries with the highest rates of immigration into the United States were Latin American countries (Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Brazil; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020). A substantial portion of

Hispanic students will comprise the future workforce and general populace of the United States given the current U.S. immigration patterns from Latin American countries.

However, while the percentage of Hispanic students increases and the educational disparity for Hispanic students persists, the Hispanic population's capacity to participate in the nation's economy and society is further constricted in comparison to other groups (NCES, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

When examining the academic and behavioral disparities of Hispanic students, an important matter to consider is the role and position of Hispanic parents in their children's education with respect to outcomes, such as achievement scores, attendance, and graduation rates. Parent involvement has been identified as a variable that positively correlates with student educational and behavioral outcomes (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019). This variable is described as parents' voluntary actions both in and out of school to support their children's educational success (Latunde, 2017). To be involved, parents and caregivers must be included and engaged by the school community consisting of teachers and administrators.

Traditionally, parent involvement has been limited to activities such as volunteering, participation in fundraisers, attending parent-teacher conferences, and providing homework help (Latunde, 2017). Many of these activities would be described as "doing to" where parents/caretakers are providing a service for students that is isolated and separate from school staff. Moreover, schools often invite parent involvement by employing unidirectional forms of communication, such as automated calls, notes/memos, and flyers for assistance with activities. These methods of communication



are not necessarily inviting input from parents but are instead one-way forms of communication. In contrast, invitations for parent engagement are the product of a conversation, which involves bidirectional communication where both parties work together to identify values and priorities related to students' educational and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, parent engagement is the process of inviting parents to take an active role in establishing a positive educational environment by participating in school-related decisions and consistently collaborating with school staff. Parent engagement indicates that a relationship focused on positive student outcomes and well-being is being cultivated between family and school (Clarke et al., 2017).

However, a gap in practice exists in teachers' use of effective school-based interventions in engaging Hispanic parents to increase involvement in their children's schooling (Clarke et al., 2017). Conventional models of promoting parent involvement applied by teachers do not consider the ethnocultural characteristics of Hispanic families; instead, conventional parent involvement approaches involve a deficit perspective of families, perpetuating power asymmetries with teachers positioned as experts (Gil, 2019). In turn, teachers often struggle to effectively engage Hispanic parents who encounter challenges with traditional methods of involvement in their children's schooling (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Furthermore, the ethnocultural differences in communication during interactions between teachers and Hispanic parents have been found to limit Hispanic parent and guardian involvement (Anderson et al., 2020; Gross et al., 2020). While teachers may recognize barriers to Hispanic family involvement in schooling, this recognition has not been found to shift teachers' expectations and practices regarding

Hispanic parent involvement in their children's schooling (Wassell et al., 2017).

Therefore, this study was needed to address family engagement strategies that are contributing to continuing disparities in the academic achievement of Hispanic students.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem addressed in this study was that many teachers' engagement practices with Hispanic families contribute to the continuing disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and other students. Parent involvement has been linked to improved educational outcomes for Hispanic students (Sheridan et al., 2019). López-Cevallos et al. (2020) identified the need for further investigation of Hispanic family engagement practices across the United States to develop a greater understanding of how teachers generate parent involvement given the persisting educational disparities of the growing number of Hispanic students. In addition, there was evidence of the problem within the local setting of a medium-sized urban public school district in the Northeastern United States where community leaders, local agencies, and parents have criticized the local school district administration for the lack of Hispanic family engagement in addressing the persisting disproportionate educational outcomes of Hispanic students in the areas of behavior and achievement. Evidence of the problem in the local setting was found in the urban city's local newspaper articles and school committee minutes, as well as the district's school 2019 climate survey assessing parent engagement.

Teachers often struggle to effectively engage Hispanic parents who encounter challenges with traditional methods of involvement in their children's schooling (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). This is because traditional models of promoting parent

involvement applied by many teachers do not consider the ethnocultural characteristics of Hispanic families; instead, conventional parent involvement approaches espouse White middle, upper-class values, and expectations that are unaligned with how many Hispanic parents engage in their children's education (Landa et al., 2020; Markowitz et al., 2020). Consequently, teachers' conventional parent involvement practices may not consider the value of Hispanic families' input in their children's schooling, resulting in a deficit perspective (Gil, 2019; Morales-Alexander, 2021).

Further, many teachers' fixed approach to navigating ethnocultural characteristics of Hispanic parents has been found to limit involvement in children's schooling (Anderson et al., 2020). Wassell et al. (2017) found that teachers recognized barriers to Hispanic family involvement in schooling. However, teachers' recognition of barriers was not found to shift teachers' expectations and practices regarding Hispanic parent involvement (Wassell et al., 2017). In conclusion, conventional methods of approaching Hispanic family engagement may be serving to maintain the existing disparities in educational outcomes for Hispanic students (Gross et al., 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. Teachers' perceptions about Hispanic family engagement practices were collected through semistructured interviews. The findings from this study could improve understanding of teachers' perceptions and potentially improve Hispanic student academic achievement. Teachers' input regarding challenges to Hispanic family

engagement may inform practices for generating Hispanic parent and guardian involvement, which is widely known to be a key variable in improving students' educational outcomes (Gaias et al., 2020).

### **Research Questions**

Research question (RQ)1: What are secondary teacher perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families in an urban district of the Northeastern United States?

RQ2: What family engagement practices do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive as improving student performance?

RQ3: How do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive that their family engagement practices demonstrate the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework that guided this study consisted of Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. Epstein's theory posits that the degree of overlap between students' social spheres of family and school influences student outcomes, while Yosso's theory presents a strengths-based perspective of the cultural capital, which communities of color, such as the Hispanic population, can contribute to various settings. The combination of both theories together provides an ecological-social and critical race framework to ground the study's problem, purpose, and methodology.

There are logical connections between the presented conceptual framework and the study. Epstein's (1987, 1992) theoretical work was included because it has been extensively applied to describe home-school interactions and practices corresponding with improved student educational outcomes. Additionally, Yosso's (2005) work on cultural wealth was applied because it challenges traditional models of parent involvement that perceive Hispanic families from a position of deficit, in which they lack the capacity to be engaged in improving students' academic achievement outcomes. The two theories provided a systematic explanation of what was observed within the conceptual framework, representing a paradigm that lay the foundation for research methodology and all other ensuing steps in the development of the research study.

The concept of a family-school partnership is aligned with Epstein's (1987, 1992) spheres of overlapping influence and Yosso's (2005) asset-based notion of cultural wealth. Epstein and Yosso provided a representation of meaningful and genuine partnerships between schools and Hispanic families that support student achievement. Most importantly, the conceptual framework provided a map in aligning and guiding the study's qualitative approach to methodology. For example, components of the conceptual framework, such as the representation of family-school partnership, provided a foundation for an examination of teachers' perspectives on the challenges of engaging Hispanic families. A better understanding of teachers' insights on Hispanic family engagement may inform steps in addressing the persisting disparities between Hispanic and other students.

In addition to the methodological approach, the conceptual framework corresponded with other aspects of the study, such as the RQs, the development of the interview protocol, and the data analysis. Moreover, the RQs guiding the study were aligned with elements of the conceptual framework, such as the overlapping home-school spheres and the activation of cultural wealth based on a strengths-based approach. Other conceptual elements addressed in the RQs included importance of family engagement, Hispanic family engagement barriers, teachers' family engagement expectations and practices, the family engagement intervention-population match, teachers positioned as experts, and asset versus deficit-based approaches to family engagement.

The conceptual elements present in the RQs also informed the development of the interview questions used to gather participants' responses in semistructured interviews. The data collected from the interview questions were analyzed using the conceptual framework as a lens. Specifically, the RQs aligned with the conceptual framework and served as guides when conducting an inductive thematic analysis of participants' responses. Chapter 2 provides a literature review with greater detail of the study's conceptual framework.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative methodology and basic qualitative research design aligned with the problem, purpose, and RQs of the study. A qualitative approach was appropriate because through it the researcher can explore and describe participants' perspectives to better understand the problem within the context of the conceptual framework (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A quantitative or mixed methods approach would have been appropriate if

the purpose of the study was to test a hypothesis about the relationship between certain constructs, such as specific teacher engagement practices and quantitative student performance data (e.g., attendance, suspension, dropout rates, and standardized test scores). Furthermore, statistical analyses and quantitative measures used in quantitative approaches were not fitting in addressing the RQs of teachers' perceptions of challenges in engaging Hispanic families. While quantitative and mixed methods are applied for inquiries focused on explanation or causation, qualitative research is exploratory and focused on building understanding and meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The purpose of a basic qualitative study involves an understanding of concepts and perspectives to gain greater insight into the problem, which, in this study, was teachers' engagement practices contributing to the continuing disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and other students (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A basic qualitative study was an appropriate qualitative research design because it involves the collection of information-rich descriptions of teachers' perspectives related to family engagement practices aimed at increasing Hispanic parent involvement. An understanding of teachers' perspectives can shed light on the multiple realities of engaging Hispanic parents and provide more information on the skills and strategies teachers apply or discard.

An inductive process of qualitative inquiry requires a systematic approach where the researcher responds to emerging meanings during data collection and analysis that are contextualized (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Semistructured interviews with teachers using a virtual platform served as the study's data. I used purposeful sampling to recruit

participants from a medium-sized urban district in the Northeastern United States.

Interviews were transcribed and digitally recorded with participants' informed consent.

An inductive, systematic approach in the thematic analysis of the data was conducted to identify prominent themes, which involved the use of coding strategies during cycles of analysis. The process of moving inductively from codes to categories to themes involved the detailed analysis of data sources and the documentation of emerging insights acknowledging the researcher's role (see Saldaña, 2016).

### **Definitions**

*Family school partnerships:* A family-school partnership is a collaborative relationship between family members and school staff that is child-centered and focused on the social-emotional, behavioral, and academic success of students (Clarke et al., 2017).

*Hispanic:* Hispanic is a term for an ethnicity category first used by the federal government in 1980 with the understanding that a Hispanic person (a) is Spanish speaking, (b) has origins in a country colonized by Spain, and (c) can be a member of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

*Parent involvement:* Parent involvement is a process whereby parents are the recipients of information while participating in activities and programs organized by other entities, such as schools and school staff (Barton et al., 2021).

*Parent/family engagement:* Parent or family engagement is a collaborative process involving reciprocal, two-way communication that is culturally competent



between schools and families (including parents, caregivers, and extended family members) focused on students' learning (Barton et al., 2021).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that teachers who were interviewed truthfully responded to interview questions. Given that the purpose of the study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families, it is essential to the integrity of the study that participants responded honestly. The data collected from interviews must be accurate representations of teachers' perceptions to understand their experiences and thoughts regarding family engagement practices. Then, the findings could be an accurate representation of participants' perspectives, and, in turn, appropriately address the study's RQs.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this section, the scope of the study is presented, along with the delimitations that influence the study's transferability. Delimitations are the parameters, such as participation criteria or sample size, that a researcher determines when designing a research study (Burkholder et al., 2020). The delimitations can limit the transferability of a study (Babbie, 2017). Transferability will be addressed in greater detail in latter sections, with a detailed description of the partner organization setting, data collection methods, and participants' responses to interview questions for readers to assess whether the study's findings are transferable to other settings.

The study's setting was in an urban Northeastern district in the United States. The site was selected because the largest ethnicity/ racial group identified as Hispanic (45%)

(Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022). In addition, there has been a low engagement of Hispanic families, especially at the secondary level, according to the partner organization's 2019 climate survey assessing parent engagement. The site location was appropriate for a basic qualitative study in exploring secondary level teachers' perceptions of challenges regarding the engagement of Hispanic families to improve students' academic achievement. However, the selection of the setting was a delimitation given that the recruitment of participants was limited to teachers from a total of 11 secondary schools in the partner organization district. Consequently, the data collected from this setting may not be representative of all other school districts across the country. To address the study's transferability, a thick description of the setting, participants, and research procedures will be provided for readers.

I established boundaries for identifying the inclusion and exclusion of populations. The study's participants were limited to secondary level teachers in an urban Northeastern district in the United States who were agreeable to participating in the study. Secondary teachers were identified as the population of interest given that parent involvement is lower across the secondary school level (see Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019; Landa et al., 2020). Hence, elementary level teachers were excluded in the study to focus on a population of teachers where family engagement may present greater challenges. Another established boundary was the exclusion of special education secondary teachers because of my role as a special education administrator in the partner organization during the time of data collection. The intent of this boundary was to mitigate any ethical concerns related to the recruitment and data collection from

participants overseen in the work setting. Lastly, the number of participants was limited to 15 for this basic qualitative study, which is slightly higher than 12 interviews needed for data saturation in a qualitative study (see Guest et al., 2006).

Other theories, such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, were considered for the study's conceptual framework but not selected. Despite these theories' relation to family engagement and social-racial inequity of capital, the theories were not pursued as part of the conceptual framework due to not being the best fit for the study's purpose. For example, Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres theory contributes to a more comprehensive framework for examining home-school partnerships than Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory. Additionally, Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital theory presents inequities, but Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth also includes the concept of a strengths-based perspective of marginalized populations despite inequities.

### **Limitations**

While delimitations are parameters the researcher sets in the research design that influence the study's transferability, limitations are weaknesses related to the credibility of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Credibility refers to the accuracy in which the intended purpose of the study is being examined in the research design. Anticipated limitations to the study include components that cannot be fully controlled, such as the small sample size or other methodological inconsistencies (Burkholder et al., 2020). For example, methodological inconsistencies in procedures may occur during participant

recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. In this section, I describe reasonable measures to address potential limitations of the study to improve the transferability and dependability of findings.

Dependability represents the reliability or consistency of the process and the product of a qualitative research study (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004). To enhance dependability of the qualitative study, a detailed description of the research design, including the data collection and data analysis processes, for the reader is necessary to assess for fidelity (Babbie, 2017). For example, a limitation of the study may be any inconsistencies in the application of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria for participation or inconsistent practices in the process of obtaining informed consent for participation. To address this concern, the step-by-step protocol for recruitment was followed consistently to ensure that recruitment occurred in a uniform manner. Another limitation of the study may be inconsistencies in collecting data from participants during semistructured interviews. To ensure dependability in the data collection process, raw data, such as digital recordings and transcripts of semistructured interviews, were examined in the data collection process for consistency in interview conditions across participants.

Limitations may also emerge in the data analysis process if there are inconsistencies associated with the lack of consideration for researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Previous and current roles within the partner organization, which have included student, parent, and employee, may present potential biases that influenced the study's analysis of data and findings. Furthermore, existing perspectives on Hispanic

family engagement may have influenced how data from interviews were interpreted during the thematic analysis process that in turn influenced the study's findings. For example, there may be bias against teachers if there were negative experiences as a student or parent, or bias in favor of teachers because of years in the field of education. A reasonable measure to address this limitation was the use of a reflexive journal to document any biases throughout the data recruitment, data collection, and data analysis processes. In a reflexive journal, researchers reflect on their experiences, perspectives, and assumptions as they go through the research process and make sense of the data using the conceptual framework as a roadmap (Babbie, 2017).

In summary, there are consequences for the transferability and applicability of the findings based on the anticipated limitations related to the credibility and dependability of the study's methodology. These methodological weaknesses were addressed through consistent research practices in participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, the application of transparency and reflexivity on the part of the researcher, evidenced by documentation, throughout the research process addressed research study limitations. Most importantly, the findings may lead to a greater understanding of teachers' challenges in engaging Hispanic families to address disproportionality despite the presence of limitations.

### **Significance**

This study is significant in that it contributes to a better understanding of teachers' family engagement practices aimed at promoting Hispanic parent involvement linked to improved student academic achievement outcomes. Specifically, I identified teachers'

current approaches and obstacles to generating Hispanic parent involvement. An analysis of teachers' perspectives produced insight into how prepared teachers feel in engaging Hispanic parents, and, therefore, informed the type of support and resources teachers need to effectively engage Hispanic parents in students' schooling. The audience of the study is teachers because the study's purpose is to explore teachers' perspectives on parent engagement practices focused on improving academic achievement for disproportionately underperforming Hispanic students. However, Hispanic parents and their children are also audiences and stakeholders indirectly addressed by the study. Additionally, this study addressed how the interpersonal interactions between teachers and Hispanic parents may contribute to student academic achievement outcomes given the existing research demonstrating a positive relationship between parent involvement and student educational outcomes.

The study's findings have the potential to inform educator professional development and policy on Hispanic family engagement in the educational field. Furthermore, the findings have the potential to lead to positive change by improving teacher-parent engagement practices found to be effective in increasing Hispanic student achievement. Hence, this study addresses a gap in many teachers' practices regarding the effective use of school-based interventions in engaging Hispanic parents to improve student performance. Potential positive social change implications of the study may be teachers' effective engagement of Hispanic families, leading to improved student performance in the areas of academics and social-emotional functioning.

## **Summary**

Chapter 1 of this study included an overview of the problem of teachers' family engagement practices contributing to the disproportionality of outcomes for Hispanic in comparison to other students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. The study lends greater insight into the improvement of practices aimed at improving Hispanic student achievement. In addition to the description of the problem and purpose of the study, the RQs, conceptual framework, nature, and the scope and sequence of the study were included. This study was accomplished through qualitative interviews with secondary teachers in a district composed mostly of Hispanic students. The second chapter is a presentation of the literature review related to family engagement focused on Hispanic student achievement.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

An abundance of literature has indicated that family engagement is associated with positive student outcomes and school success (Smith et al., 2019). However, the literature has also revealed that teachers often apply conventional family engagement practices that do not consider the characteristics and challenges of marginalized populations, such as Hispanic families (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Traditional family-school activities are not always accessible to Hispanic families, who may have economic barriers or differ linguistically and socioculturally (Alexander et al., 2017). Furthermore, the persisting academic and behavioral disparities of Hispanic students across the United States corroborate the need to examine teachers' engagement with Hispanic families (Clarke et al., 2017). In this, basic qualitative study, I explored secondary teachers' perceptions about engaging Hispanic families with the intention of providing greater information on family engagement practices that lead to student success.

This chapter includes a literature review of the conceptual framework and three major themes related to Hispanic family engagement. The conceptual framework consisted of Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. The three major themes explored are the history and evolution of family engagement, the family engagement intervention population mismatch with Hispanic families, and the power asymmetries between teachers and Hispanic families.



### **Literature Search Strategy**

A literature search was conducted on Hispanic family engagement in school settings and related subjects. Seminal resources, along with peer-reviewed articles and books written within the 5-year span of 2017 to 2022 were examined. The following search engines were used to obtain literature: Walden's academic search engine, Thoreau, Google Scholar, EBSCO, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE Journals, APA PsycINFO, ProQuest, Education Source, Academic Search Complete, and SocINDEX with full text. Keywords used in each database search were the following: *family engagement or parent involvement or parental engagement or parental support or family involvement or family-school partnerships, Latine or Latinx or Latino or Latina or Hispanic*, and *K-12 or elementary school or middle school or high school or secondary school*. A multitude of scholarly articles were examined in each of the above listed databases.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was framed using both Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. The combination of both theories provided a lens to explore teachers' engagement of Hispanic families aimed at the improvement of students' educational outcomes. In this section, I describe each theory individually and conjointly as it relates to home-school interactions and teacher engagement practices with Hispanic families. In addition, the creation and evolution of each theory are addressed. Finally, frameworks that were considered but not used are presented.

### **Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory posits that the degree of overlap between students' social spheres of family and school influences student outcomes. This theory has been extensively applied to describe home-school interactions and practices corresponding with improved student educational outcomes. Epstein (1987, 1992) asserted that constructive connections in home-school partnerships have the potential to positively influence learning, ranging from academic achievement, behavior, and overall skills associated with success. Therefore, the purpose of home-school partnerships is to support the learning of children who recognize the importance of school success when observing the collaboration between educators and family members.

### **Yosso's Theory of Cultural Wealth**

Yosso's (2005) theory presents a strengths-based perspective of the cultural wealth that communities of color, such as the Hispanic population, can contribute to various settings. Cultural wealth is conceptualized as an asset in comparison to the traditional interpretation of cultural capital where marginalized groups are not acknowledged and perceived from a lens of cultural poverty (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) theory challenges traditional models of parent involvement that perceive Hispanic families from a position of deficit, in which they lack the capacity to be engaged in improving students' academic achievement outcomes. For example, the knowledge and skills that Hispanic families possess can be tapped into in the promotion of student academic and behavioral success.

### **The Combination of Both Theories**

The combination of both theories provides a comprehensive conceptual framework by addressing both ecological-social and critical race facets of Hispanic family engagement focused on improving educational outcomes. In addition, the incorporation of both theories supported grounding the study's problem, purpose, and methodology. Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory does not speak to critical race issues facing the Hispanic community, while that is exactly what Yosso (2005) addressed. Yosso, on the other hand, did not consider the influence of relationships between environments on student success, which Epstein addressed. By using both theories to provide a framework for the study, the full range of parental involvement can be considered, so it was important to combine these two lenses to address the problem and RQs in this study. Epstein and Yosso's theoretical work conjointly explain the conceptual framework whereby all aspects of the research study's development are aligned in a systematic way. Hence, both theories lay the foundation for the development of the research study.

### ***Development and Evolution of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory***

Epstein (1987, 1992) developed the overlapping spheres of influence theory in response to theoretical perspectives that conceptualize family and school connections as separate, sequenced, or nested influences and interactions. Separate influence refers to the perspective that schools and families function effectively through the pursuit of objectives and activities that are independent of each other, and common goals are not considered unless there is a problem in one of the separate spheres (Epstein, 1992). Sequenced influence is the theoretical perspective that parents and schools have separate

responsibilities depending on the stage of development and education, resulting in individuals assuming responsibility for their own education in young adulthood (Epstein, 1992). Finally, the nested theoretical perspective developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) refers to an embedded system representing multiple environments that individuals belong to and interact within. However, the collective influences of the multiple environments across development are not considered within a nested theoretical perspective of influence (Epstein, 1992). Another concern is that studying the relationship between home-school partnerships and students' learning outcomes using the ecological model as a framework involves both separating and extending concepts studied in the research (Epstein, 1992).

In response to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of nested connections (1979, 1986), Epstein (1992) focused on interactions that have the potential to either pull apart or push together relationships between schools and families. The extent of the overlap in interactions between the environmental spheres of influence on children or individuals depends on variables, such as time and behavior (Epstein, 1992). Epstein's model of overlapping spheres takes into consideration the interplay between educational institutions' socialization and individuals' evolving skill development as a framework for examining the relationship between school-family partnerships and learning outcomes.

Building upon the overlapping spheres of influence theory, Epstein (1992) outlined six practices of parent involvement focused on developing school-family partnerships. The following six practices are focused on shared responsibility between schools and families: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision

making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 2019). The first practice involves parent training and education related to developing grade level skills. The second practice is communication regarding students' progress and school programs. The third practice involves schools providing various scheduled opportunities and locations for families to participate in activities and events as onlookers or volunteers. The fourth practice is teachers guiding families on how to support, reinforce, and monitor their children on learning activities at home. The fifth practice is schools providing training to families on how to be leaders in decision making related to school improvement. The sixth and last practice involves schools collaborating with organizations, agencies, businesses, and cultural groups to ensure families have equitable access to support services, such as childcare and health services, in the community. In assisting families with access to community resources, students' home conditions improve, supporting student development and learning. Each practice contributes to increasing the overlapping spheres of influence that characterize school-family partnerships (Epstein et al., 2019).

### ***Development and Evolution of Yosso's Cultural Wealth Theory***

Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth expanded upon Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) concept of cultural capital by unpacking the value-laden nature of culture in society. To account for educational outcome differences between White and students of color, Bourdieu and Passeron described the intersection of culture and education according to racial and social inequity between privileged and disadvantaged groups. They asserted that there are various types of knowledge of the middle and upper classes,

representing the cultural capital needed for the advancement of the lower class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Moreover, formal schooling in knowledge acquisition has increased the opportunity of disadvantaged populations for social mobility in a hierarchical society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Consequently, marginalized populations of certain races and class backgrounds, such as people of color, are often viewed from a deficit perspective, whereby they lack the cultural and social capital to advance in society (Yosso, 2005). For example, social institutions, such as schools, often assume that Hispanic students are disadvantaged and lack cultural capital and the required knowledge to succeed. To challenge the notion that certain classes were deficient and lacking cultural and social capital, Yosso (2005) introduced the concept of community cultural wealth to acknowledge the underused and often unacknowledged assets that people of color possess.

Furthermore, Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth uses a critical race theory (CRT) lens to empower marginalized groups and address the misconception of cultural poverty disadvantages for communities of color (COC). CRT provides the framework to theorize and analyze implicit and explicit racism present in structures, practices, and discourse in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In addition, a CRT approach in the field of education calls for schools to adopt a strength or asset-based perspective of COC to address racial and social inequities to promote justice. A strengths perspective involves acknowledging and valuing multiple types of capital that marginalized populations possess that are of value in society, specifically schooling (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Yosso (2005) identified six types of capital, which are aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant, when acknowledging the strengths of COC. Aspirational capital is the resilient maintenance of hopes and dreams despite existing and perceived barriers to their attainment. Linguistic capital involves both language and social skills developed through various communication experiences involving diverse language registers and styles with different audiences. Familial capital is cultural knowledge characterized by a broad sense of kinship and an allegiance to the community's welfare. Social capital is defined as networks that can include both people and resources in the community that have the potential to support the navigation of social institutions. Navigational capital is defined as the skills needed to traverse society's institutions. While navigational capital requires individual agency, it also draws upon the social capital to access networks facilitating the maneuvering of social institutions. The last form of cultural wealth is resistant capital, which involves the knowledge of oppressive structures and the skills to challenge social and racial inequity through opposition.

### ***Limitations of Each Theory***

Epstein (1987, 1992) and Yosso's (2005) theories contributed to the conceptual framework grounding the development of this study. However, each theory has limitations in addressing the engagement of Hispanic families in schools. For example, Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory describes a social-ecological approach to the establishing partnerships between educators and families through shared responsibility, but it does not consider institutional bias related to socioeconomic class,

language, or race that obstructs family participation (as cited in Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019).

Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth provides insight into how a deficit approach to engaging marginalized families may perpetuate institutional bias by esteeming White upper- and middle-class values (as cited in Gaias et al., 2020). However, Yosso (2005) did not outline specific practices as Epstein (1992) did in forming home-school partnerships. While there is an intent to transform educational institutions to empower COC, the specific practices are not identified. Instead, Yosso's theory of cultural wealth describes six forms of capital that should be acknowledged in interactions with COC (as cited in Gil, 2019).

#### ***Other Considered Frameworks***

The two theories considered, but not selected for the study's conceptual framework, were Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital theory. These considered theories led to the development of the theories that were selected for the conceptual framework informing the study. Despite the recognition of relevant and imperative concepts, both Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu's theories were found to be unfitting in the examination of educators' Hispanic family engagement practices. Instead, Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres theory and Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory were selected because each expanded upon concepts related to home-school partnerships and a strengths-based perspective of marginalized communities.



Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) concept of nested connections acknowledges that individuals are in a system, which consists of multiple embedded environments. However, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory does not account for how individuals' interactions between environments impact the quality of the relationships, which Epstein referred to as overlap. Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres theory can capture the push-pull dynamic of individuals' interactions between environments. The idea of overlapping influences, as opposed to nested influences, better corresponds with the conceptual framework informing an investigation of family engagement practices.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital introduced the notion that culture has value regarding social mobility. The concept of cultural capital was founded by Bourdieu to explain the disparity in scholastic achievement between social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). However, Bourdieu's explanation of cultural wealth placed value on White, middle- and upper-class cultural standards, which dismisses COC. For this reason, a deficit or subtractive perspective of Hispanic families was not selected for the study's conceptual framework. Instead, Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth was applied as a lens for examining Hispanic family engagement.

The conceptual framework and theoretical foundation section provided a rationale for the application of Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory. Both theories in conjunction grounded the development of the study on the examination of Hispanic family engagement. Further, the development and the evolution of each theory was described to provide context for

the selection of each theory. Lastly, other considered theories, such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital theory were described and examined but ruled out as viable theoretical perspectives for the study.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **The History and Evolution of Family Engagement**

To best understand the topic of Hispanic family engagement, it is first important to examine the history and evolution of family engagement in the United States. This will involve first unpacking the importance and relevance of parent involvement, specifically how it connects to student learning outcomes. To provide greater context regarding current practices in the field, the history involving the shift from parent involvement to family engagement will be described. In examining the shift, asset and deficit perspectives of minoritized families will also be considered.

#### ***Importance of Parent Involvement***

Parent involvement is a broad social and ecological concept characterized by multiple layered interventions in students' schooling across their development (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019). Interventions may include parents' provision of homework support and study space, parent participation in school programs and events, and parents' communication of high expectations related to school (López-Cevallos et al., 2020). The common focus of the interventions is on how parents can help initiatives and objectives established by schools (Latunde, 2017). Moreover, parent involvement involves parental school-based participation behaviors that assume that parental contact with schools

encourages home-based engagement (McWayne et al., 2018). Hence, schools have taken the lead in identifying how parents should be involved in their children's schooling.

Parent involvement is regarded as an essential aspect of school success across various learning outcomes. For example, the United States Department of Education (USDE) mandates that Title I schools implement a parent involvement policy outlining parent and school collaboration focused on the promotion of student achievement (Gross et al., 2020). Parent involvement is deemed important because it has been found to correspond with the increased achievement of students across diverse populations ranging in socioeconomic status (SES) and race (Alexander et al., 2017). Positive effects of parent involvement were also found across grade levels (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, there are academic, behavioral, and social-emotional benefits for students whose parents are engaged in their education and schooling (Sheridan et al., 2019).

Hence, the consistent engagement of parents in their children's education is imperative for their learning outcomes and overall success in school. Specifically, the support and engagement of parents in students' schooling have been identified as determinants of academic success (Clarke et al., 2017). In addition to enhancing students' academic performance, parent involvement has been found to positively influence students' attitudes and perceptions about school (Landa et al., 2020). Overall, increased parent involvement corresponds with greater communication between school and home, informing parental support in their children's schooling (Leo et al., 2019).

### ***The Shift From Parent Involvement to Family Engagement***

Parent involvement has been valued in the field of education due to its association with the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional success of students. Traditionally, parent involvement is based on the premise that partnerships between schools and families evolve from collaboration and consensus (Epstein, 1992). However, parent involvement has been perceived as school-centric and school-driven, whereby the needs of students and their families are not at the forefront of establishing partnerships (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019). For example, parent involvement prescribed by schools include activities focused on the school's priorities, such as homework help, volunteering, parent-teacher conference attendance, and fundraiser support. These activities are directed by staff and administrators and primarily founded on the objectives identified and targeted by schools.

The concern with traditional or conventional parent involvement is twofold. First, the parameters of parent involvement are dictated by schools' expectations of families (Leo et al., 2019). Second, schools' expectations of families endorse a culture and value system representative of the White middle- and upper-class (Markowitz et al., 2020). In both cases, there is reference to families with diverging cultures and values being dismissed as they support their children developmentally and academically. Furthermore, systemic inequities reflecting the historical and social condition of marginalized populations are perpetuated through home-school interactions, devaluing minoritized families (Yull et al., 2018).

The inequities in home-school interactions reflect larger inequities in society, serving to further limit parent involvement of marginalized families (Gaias et al., 2020). Characteristics such as poverty, immigration, and language, present barriers to the conventional conception of parent involvement (McWayne et al., 2018). In turn, the restrictive, value-laden definition of parent involvement presents minoritized families, such as Hispanics, as uninterested or unable to be involved in their children's education (Kayser et al., 2021). For example, an *involved* parent is depicted as someone who attends school events and activities, reinforcing the idea that parents who do not attend school sponsored activities due to obstacles are uninvolved. Consequently, the term parent involvement has been perceived as being one-sided where the school's standards represent the White middle-class culture and ideals that supersede marginalized families' values or goals for their children (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019).

Therefore, the sociocultural context of an educational institution influences the expectations of families' roles in schooling. In contrast to prescribed types of involvement, there is growing support for the development of partnerships between educators and families characterized by shared responsibility and decision making (Kayser et al., 2021). The acknowledgement that families' roles have been restricted to being in service to schools created a shift in thinking from parent involvement to family engagement (Hoffman et al., 2020). Family or parent engagement involves reciprocal, two-way communication that is culturally inclusive of family members and students' caregivers to promote learning and overall success (Barton et al., 2021). When there is

genuine family engagement, the input and culture of families is valued instead of being ignored or perceived as ignorant.

The practice of family engagement focuses on the formation of school-family partnerships, distinguished for collaborative child-centered relationships between family members and school staff (Clarke et al., 2017). A progressive approach to family engagement recognizes families' sociocultural context in the development of meaningful relationships, in turn, promoting family-school partnerships (Latunde, 2017). Family-school partnerships are characterized by collaboration rooted in equity, accessibility, and inclusivity for all families, including marginalized and minoritized families with varying cultures and beliefs (Leo et al., 2019). Hence, family-school partnerships involve engagement practices that differ from conventional family or parent involvement. The engagement of families in their children's schooling involves cultural openness and responsiveness where differences are explored, celebrated, and honored as strengths (Morales-Alexander, 2021).

### ***Asset Versus Deficit Based Views of Families***

While the acknowledgement of families' strengths is essential in building family-school partnerships, there is typically a focus on what marginalized families lack when examining school parent involvement (Gil, 2019). Specifically, racial or ethnic differences are perceived from a deficit model whereby membership in a particular group is automatically perceived as a risk or problematic (Gaias et al., 2020). A deficit perspective of minoritized families neglects to consider sociocultural context and counter systematic biases in schooling (Gross et al., 2020). Implicit and explicit systematic biases

may present as disparities in the social system demonstrated in biased curricula that ignore marginalized populations or exclusionary discipline policies that target marginalized populations (Gaias et al., 2020).

An asset-based perspective or strengths-based approach to parent engagement involves the nurturing of partnerships in culturally validated spaces (Gil, 2019). Hence, strengths and abilities, instead of deficits, are discerned in interpersonal interactions. This is a responsive parent engagement model that amplifies parent voice on critical topics, such as community needs, the coordination of supports, and the delivery of services (Landa et al., 2020). Furthermore, an asset-based family engagement approach serves to disrupt disproportionality and laud inclusivity (López-Cevallos et al., 2020).

Ultimately, parent engagement standards and practices have the potential to either maintain or dismantle social divisions related to culture, class, or language (Leo et al., 2019). Inequities persist in family engagement practices when historically marginalized populations are perceived by educators as lacking and unable to engage in their children's schooling (Rivera & Li, 2019). However, parent engagement practices also have the power to disrupt inequities in education with the inclusion of perspectives and values that may challenge social conventions and norms (Yull et al., 2018). Inclusive spaces for families, who are perceived as limited and restricted in their capacity to meaningfully participate in their children's schooling, requires the removal of barriers to ensure access (Leo et al., 2019). Thus, the implementation of an asset-based approach to family engagement of historically marginalized populations involves an examination of

sociocultural context, as well as a focus on inclusivity and accessibility, that ruptures inequitable parent involvement practices.

The process of recognizing strengths involves rethinking the concept of parent involvement so that engagement strategies are accessible and inclusive of all families. There are extensive opportunities to engage families when educators acknowledge that family support in schooling may vary and manifest in culturally specific ways (Zambrana et al., 2019). When families are perceived as valuable partners with the ability to meaningfully contribute to discourse regarding their children's education, school staff may develop a better understanding of students' backgrounds (Kayser et al., 2021). Additionally, educators may develop a greater insight of their own misconceptions and biases when utilizing a strengths-based approach to parent engagement (Wassell et al., 2017). In conclusion, the benefits to an asset-based approach to engaging families collectively contribute to supporting marginalized students in their school success.

An examination of the history and evolution of family engagement in the United States provides greater insight into how parent involvement is a socioculturally constructed concept that has the potential to improve student learning outcomes. However, traditional parent involvement strategies also have the capacity to perpetuate existing inequities in educational institutions by excluding communities that do not align with White, middle-class value systems and beliefs. As a result, there has been an ideological shift in the education field from prescribed parent involvement where COC are perceived from a deficit lens to an inclusive strengths-based family engagement



approach where COC are considered valuable partners in students' achievement of school success.

### **Family Engagement Intervention Population Mismatch**

After reviewing the history and evolution of family engagement, the process of engaging Hispanic families will be examined. Different obstacles that Hispanic families encounter with traditional family engagement will be described. Furthermore, the population-intervention alignment between conventional, school-centric parent involvement strategies and Hispanic families are considered. Teachers' family engagement expectations and practices with Hispanic parents are also examined. A comprehensive assessment of teachers' practices and Hispanic families' obstacles to conventional parent involvement will shed light on the landscape of Hispanic family engagement.

### ***Hispanic Family Engagement Barriers***

Hispanic families are often impacted by both structural and interpersonal barriers that challenge participation in their children's schooling (López-Cevallos et al., 2020). Furthermore, barriers often relate to economically influenced accessibility issues, such as transportation, work schedules, childcare, and language (Wassell et al., 2017). For example, lack of transportation and childcare, along with arduous work schedules, pose as barriers to school participation for Hispanic families of lower socioeconomic status. Furthermore, language can act as an accessibility issue when a school setting is primarily English speaking, presenting an obstacle to families with limited English skills or who are Spanish monolingual. Consequently, these families are not able to participate actively

or engage meaningfully with their children's schools, creating an accessibility issue in communication with school staff and the ability to help their children with schoolwork (López-Cevallos et al., 2020). Additionally, parents with limited English may be uncomfortable in helping their children with homework due to concern that they will negatively impede their children's acquisition of English (Leo et al., 2019).

Conventional family engagement strategies applied by school staff do not always account for these obstacles (Markowitz et al., 2020). Although educators recognize the obstacles Spanish speaking parents encounter with participation in their children's schooling, educators still contend that families should fulfill school directed activities (Leo et al., 2019). For example, teachers often contend that the parents should provide homework support and have increased communication with schools (Wassell et al., 2017). Oftentimes, teachers judge parents according to participation or lack of participation, while not accounting for obstacles in accessibility or Hispanic parents' beliefs about school participation (McWayne et al., 2018). In short, expectations and practices that maintain obstacles are implemented despite the acknowledgement of challenges, which is contradictory.

### ***Family Engagement Intervention-Population Mismatch***

Teachers often struggle to effectively engage Hispanic parents who encounter challenges with traditional methods of involvement in their children's schooling (Smith, 2020). For example, Hispanic families are often perceived by educators as uninterested or lacking the capacity to support their children's schooling (Anderson et al., 2020). Alternately, Hispanic families often report feeling unwelcome or unvalued by school staff

and in school settings (Gross et al., 2020). This pattern of educators avoiding the engagement of Hispanic families deemed unable or unwilling to participate reinforces Hispanic families' perception that they are unwelcomed and unvalued (Anderson et al., 2020).

Traditional models of promoting parent involvement applied by teachers do not consider the ethnocultural characteristics of Hispanic families (Yull et al., 2018). Instead, practices espouse White middle, upper-class values and expectations that are incompatible with Hispanic parents' engagement in their children's education (Morales-Alexander, 2021). Cultural differences may influence parent involvement, specifically how Hispanic parents encourage their children's performance in school and interact with teachers (Hoffman et al., 2020). For instance, Hispanic families with traditional values founded on respect may hesitate to request information from teachers, who are considered professionals and experts that should not be questioned (Gil, 2019). Consequently, the lack of Hispanic families' input in their children's schooling is interpreted as a lack of interest or capacity, perpetuating a deficit perspective of Hispanic families.

A deficit perspective is reinforced when Hispanic families' input in their children's schooling is dismissed (Landa et al., 2020). Educators' engagement of families involves the process of learning about their cultural values, which in turn influences their beliefs and expectations regarding schooling and education (Zambrana et al., 2019). In addition, the funds of knowledge of students and their families emerge from cultural values that shape experiences and skills sets (Baker et al., 2019). Applying a strengths-

based approach involves the acknowledgement of the Hispanic families' experiences and skill sets as assets in supporting students' success (Leo et al., 2019). Tapping into Hispanic families' funds of knowledge improves relationships and builds partnerships between families and educators that promote student achievement and well-being (Kayser et al., 2021).

### ***Teachers' Family Engagement Expectations and Practices***

Family engagement involves the understanding of families' conditions and community context, as well as a valuing of families' beliefs and perspectives with the purpose of building family-school partnerships (Leo et al., 2019). Zambrana et al. (2019) asserted that when Hispanic parents' beliefs and attitudes about school involvement are considered, then families' perceived barriers could be problem solved collaboratively to increase family engagement. For example, concerns may be about skills, time, and responsibilities regarding school involvement. However, educator interventions to engage Hispanic families include information sessions, translated documents sent home, homework hotlines, and the presentation of performance data online (Wassell et al., 2017). These are school-based and school-directed activities that are discernable to educators, as opposed to the home-based activities that cannot be observed and measured by school staff (Anderson et al., 2020).

Professional development in culturally informed family engagement practices has the potential to enhance partnerships (Clake et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2019). Culturally relevant teaching professional development addresses the marginalized families' sociocultural and economic concerns and tackles concepts, such as implicit bias (Kayser

et al., 2021). School leaders can effectively create culturally responsive family partnerships by designating a team focused on implementing culturally relevant teaching training across school staff (Kayser et al., 2021). Ultimately, the focus is to better serve students and families to promote the success of Hispanic students. This may involve teachers modifying their family engagement practices based on information presented during professional development workshops on culturally relevant teaching (Rivera & Li, 2019).

Many teachers experience a lack of guidance in applying nonconventional, culturally responsive family engagement practices that encourage the development of family-school partnerships (Smith, 2020). Consequently, teachers tend to apply superficial family engagement measures, such as cultural celebrations, to include marginalized families (Landa et al., 2020). These measures are superficial and ineffective because they do not elevate families as partners. Additionally, the lack of training in culturally responsive family engagement practices often results in educators avoiding contact with Hispanic families (Kayser et al., 2021). Teachers' avoidance in contacting Hispanic families has been found to be associated with negative assumptions about Hispanic families (Kayser et al., 2021). Teachers' avoidance in engagement has also been found to correspond with teachers' discomfort in their capacity to effectively engage families that are linguistically or culturally different (Kayser et al., 2021).

Many teachers' fixed approach to engaging Hispanic families deters involvement in children's schooling (Hoffman et al., 2020). Moreover, the perception of Hispanic families as lacking in their capacity to meaningfully contribute to their children's

education is a roadblock to establishing partnerships (López-Cevallos et al., 2020). When families are not perceived as equal counterparts in their children's education by schools, existing disparities associated with accessibility and socioeconomic status are intensified (Gaias et al., 2020). As a result, disproportionality in educational outcomes between Hispanic students and other students persists (Yull et al., 2018). Bidirectional communication with families, where they are recognized and validated as adept in providing feedback on their children's education and future, characterizes a partnership.

Hispanic families are often confronted with socioeconomic related barriers, which pose a challenge to fulfilling traditional school established expectations of parent involvement in schooling. A culturally responsive approach to family engagement is essential in managing the population-intervention mismatch characterized by conventional, school-centric parent engagement strategies for Hispanic families. Teachers oftentimes perceive Hispanic families as unwilling or incapable of supporting their children's school success. Greater training for educators in culturally responsive family engagement approaches would increase their comfort in engaging linguistically and culturally diverse parents. Furthermore, culturally responsive professional development has the potential to decrease teachers' avoidance of engaging families stemming from assumptions about Hispanic families' disinterest or inability to be involved in their children's education.

### **Power Asymmetries Between Teachers and Hispanic Families**

The perspective that families are unwilling or incapable of meaningfully contributing to their children's school success is influenced by the power asymmetry

between educators and Hispanic families. Power asymmetry refers to the notion that there is a power differential between the role of teacher versus parent (Durand & Secakusuma, 2020). In this section, power asymmetries will be described and unpacked. Specifically, the influence of imbalanced power dynamics on the development of genuine school-family partnerships will be explored. Finally, the disproportionality in educational outcomes for Hispanic students will be considered within the context of power asymmetries between families and educators.

### ***Teachers Positioned as Experts***

Teachers are often positioned as experts and knowledge givers, whereas parents are reduced to being limited recipients of information (Barton et al, 2021). Typically, school staff's family engagement practices involve the presentation of information during conferences, phone calls, online news feeds, newsletters, and presentations. These forums are unidirectional since teachers are the grantors of information while families are the recipients of the presented information (Sheridan et al., 2019). Durand and Secakusuma (2019) found that teachers perceived themselves as the most knowledgeable individuals and responsible for educating families. However, teachers' perception of being in a position of superiority regarding schooling is counterintuitive to the development of egalitarian relationships with Hispanic families (Leo et al., 2019).

Hispanic families are at an additional disadvantage regarding power imbalances with school staff due to being members of a marginalized population (Gaias et al., 2020). A more egalitarian approach to family engagement promotes equity and accessibility for marginalized families and combats existing power asymmetry in conventional parent

engagement interventions (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). In addition to promoting equity and accessibility, a progressive approach to family engagement involves collaborative advocacy for families established through partnerships that are not hierarchical (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Instead, educators stand alongside instead of up for families when advocating collaboratively in an equitable partnership. A progressive family engagement approach entails interactions between educators and families that are not bound by a prevailing belief system and power differential that positions teachers as experts (Rivera & Lee, 2019).

### ***Power Asymmetries Hinder School-Family Partnerships***

Teachers' conventional family engagement practices sustain their hierarchical authority and power differential with Hispanic families due to the imposition of teachers' values and beliefs (Yull et al., 2018). The imbalanced dynamic elevates teachers as authority figures in positions of power and influences the development of genuine school-family partnerships (Leo et al., 2019). Conventional family engagement practices persist despite the awareness that many Hispanic families experience challenges with traditional parent involvement (Markowitz et al., 2020). The lack of change in parent engagement practice despite the acknowledgement that Hispanic families are excluded indicates a resistance to shifting ideals to include the values of marginalized voices (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019).

Two-way communication and collaboration with input from all parties provides a balance in power where educators' beliefs are not tantamount to parents' values on schooling (Barton et al., 2021). The establishment of bidirectional communication pushes



the boundaries of conventional family engagement (Sheridan et al., 2019). For example, teachers expressed reservations about open-door school policies due to the concern that unknowledgeable parents would intrude on instructional related issues like curricula (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Durand and Secakusuma (2019) also found that teachers were concerned about doing home visits and being perceived as intrusive by families. Traditional approaches to family engagement are siloed where there is a separation between school and home, which serves to only deepen the divide in linguistically and culturally diverse families (Gil, 2019).

### ***Addressing Disproportionality Through Partnership***

Power asymmetries between families and teachers influence the quality of home-school partnerships (Morales-Alexander, 2021). Furthermore, the quality of these partnerships corresponds with students' educational outcomes (Latunde, 2017). For example, the existing disproportionality in academic and behavioral outcomes between Hispanic and other students is influenced by relationships between families and educators (Leo et al., 2019). An approach to addressing disproportionality in educational outcomes is through the development of balanced relationships where there is two-way communication.

Bidirectional communication involves families and educators working collaboratively to identify needs, goals, and next steps (Clarke et al., 2017). The process of maintaining two-way communication involves the validation of both the values and roles of each partner in students' education. Moreover, culturally responsive interventions create a space for families and educators to build trusting relationships fostering and

maintaining meaningful partnerships focused on making collective decisions around student outcomes (Kayser et al., 2021; Wassell et al., 2017).

In summary, educators express the need for families to be involved in children's schooling, but there is a resistance to changing practices that modify boundaries, which maintain the social hierarchy of teachers in positions of authority. In turn, marginalized families of a lower educational and socioeconomic echelon are imposed and acted upon according to the principles governed by individuals representing the educational institution. The underserved and marginalized voices of the Hispanic community need to be incorporated into decision making involving their children's learning to address power asymmetries between families and educators. A meaningful partnership may flourish when all parties' values and beliefs guide decisions influencing students' education.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature review consisted of an examination of the conceptual framework and key themes grounding the study. A combination of Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory provided the study's theoretical foundation. Additionally, the three main concepts found in the review of literature were described as corresponding to the study's problem, purpose, and RQs. The unpacked concepts included the family engagement's evolution, the family engagement intervention-population mismatch and power asymmetries with Hispanic families.

The application of Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres of influence theory and Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory in conjunction provide a framework for the

examination of Hispanic family engagement. Each theory's evolution and development were described as related to the study. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital theory were also explored. However, these considered theories were eliminated because of the disregard for the interplay between environments and the subtractive perspective of Hispanic families.

The sociocultural nature of parent involvement was described when unpacking the history and evolution of family engagement in the United States. While parent involvement is associated with improved student learning outcomes, traditional parent involvement strategies may perpetuate existing inequities in educational institutions by excluding marginalized communities. The evolution of parent engagement has been characterized by an ideological shift from prescribed parent involvement to an inclusive strengths-based family engagement approach. The ideological shift is a result of the acknowledgement that families of color are valuable partners in students' achievement of school success.

The socioeconomic-related barriers that COC, such as Hispanic families, are confronted with when attempting to meet traditional parent involvement expectations were considered. Moreover, the population-intervention mismatch, which involves conventional, school-centric parent engagement strategies for Hispanic families, was depicted. Educator training in culturally responsive approaches is needed to engage linguistically and culturally diverse parents who struggle with traditional parent involvement expectations. Most importantly, professional development in culturally

responsive parent engagement involves perceiving families and students from a strengths-based lens.

Although educators are aware of the connection between parent involvement and school success, there is a resistance to changing conventional family engagement practices that are ineffective for marginalized families. A culturally responsive approach to family engagement would involve the modification of boundaries where the social hierarchical system with teachers in positions of authority is dismantled. The inclusion of marginalized Hispanic families' voices in school-related decision making will challenge existing power asymmetries. In conclusion, meaningful partnerships develop between stakeholders when there is two-way communication to identify the values and beliefs of linguistically and culturally diverse families.

Chapter 3 will contain a description of a basic qualitative study that explores secondary teachers' perceptions around engaging Hispanic families. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. The chapter on research method will include a description of the research design and rationale, which will consist of the researcher's role, methodology, data analysis plan, and ethical procedures.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perspectives on the engagement of Hispanic families. The reviewed research literature supported the belief that partnerships between families and schools are an integral aspect of students' school performance (see Clarke et al., 2017). Furthermore, parental involvement has been associated with improved student outcomes for various student populations (Rivera & Li, 2019). However, teachers often struggle to engage Hispanic families when applying traditional family engagement models (Flores et al., 2019). The exploration of teachers' perceptions of Hispanic family engagement has the potential to address the persisting school performance disparities between Hispanic students and other groups of students (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019).

In this chapter, I describe the research design and the rationale for employing a basic qualitative design in the research study. Additionally, the role of the researcher is explored. The methodology in this research study is presented. The description of the methodology includes participant selection, recruitment, participation, as well as instrumentation and data collection and analysis. Lastly, a discussion on trustworthiness and ethical procedures ensues.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The three RQs addressed in this study relate to secondary teachers' perceptions of Hispanic family engagement. The RQs are the following:

RQ1: What are secondary teacher perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families in an urban district of the Northeastern United States?

RQ2: What family engagement practices do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive as improving student performance?

RQ3: How do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive that their family engagement practices demonstrate the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives?

The central concepts of this study were based on the theoretical work of Epstein (1987, 1992) and Yosso (2005). The first concept was the relationship between home-school interactions and students' educational outcomes (see Epstein, 1992). The second concept related to Yosso's (2005) idea of cultural wealth, specifically, how marginalized families' strengths are not tapped into when educators apply conventional parent engagement practices. Both central concepts corresponded with the purpose of exploring secondary teachers' perspectives on the engagement of Hispanic families.

The research tradition applied for this study was a qualitative approach. Qualitative methodology entails an inductive form of research inquiry involving the examination of participants' experiences and the perspectives or meanings assigned to these experiences (Babbie, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research inquiry is a recursive process where the researcher is both an interpreter and instrument in the investigation of emerging patterns and themes, which also involves the consideration of the researcher's positionality and social identity (Burkholder et al., 2020). The qualitative researcher investigates the narratives people have created through observation, interview, and examination of artifacts to explain phenomena in a systematic and holistic manner that

considers various worldviews (Creswell, 2017). In contrast, quantitative research paradigms demonstrate a deductive approach founded on the assumption that knowledge is based on an external, objective reality that can be tested through the collection and analysis of quantitative data (Booth et al., 2016). For this study, a qualitative approach was most appropriate and aligned with the study's purpose of attaining an in-depth understanding of a group of secondary teachers' perspectives on Hispanic family engagement.

Qualitative researchers use various designs for data collection, which may include the following: basic qualitative study, case study, phenomenology, grounded, and narrative (Babbie, 2017). A basic qualitative study design was selected for the study because the intent of the qualitative study was to develop an in-depth understanding of an issue while considering the context of a group of participants (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Moreover, the study involved the collection of descriptive data of participants' subjective perspectives on Hispanic family engagement. In summary, this basic qualitative study provided an opportunity to explore the complex topic of secondary teachers' engagement of Hispanic families.

Specifically, teachers' perceptions of their experiences with Hispanic family engagement were explored through data collection and analysis to develop a better understanding of the topic of Hispanic family engagement. A group of teachers were individually interviewed to provide rich and descriptive data of their views on the topic of Hispanic family engagement. Participants' perspectives can also be understood as nested within various layers of their social identity and their social interactions with others

(Creswell, 2017). Finally, participants' meaning provides the qualitative researcher with a perspective that may have not been considered due to the researcher's position and identity.

When considering the study's rationale, other qualitative research designs, such as grounded, narrative, and phenomenology, were found to be unsuitable for understanding teachers' perspectives of Hispanic family engagement. The objective of grounded theory design is the development of theory emerging from the analysis of a process consisting of steps or phases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In the study, the unit of analysis is not a process, but instead a group of secondary teachers attempting to engage Hispanic parents in an urban school district. A narrative qualitative research design would have also been unsuitable for the study because the objective of this qualitative design is to collect one or two individual participants' stories about their lives and the underlying meanings assigned to their stories (see Creswell, 2017). The purpose of the study was to understand a group of teachers' perspectives, as opposed to collecting the narrative of less than a handful of teachers. Lastly, a phenomenological research design was deemed inappropriate for the study because it deals with participants' experiences with a phenomenon and the essence of a collective experience (see Babbie, 2017).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research is interpretive and constructivist in nature because the inquiry process of data collection and analysis is influenced by the researcher's worldview (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to demonstrate reflexivity where participants' thoughts and feelings are represented, and



any power balances are addressed. Reflexivity was used to reduce bias that may emerge because of current and previous professional roles within the partner organization district. Ravitch and Carl (2021) defined reflexivity to be a horizontal value regarding the continuous self-reflection of researchers throughout the inquiry cycle. For example, the use of field notes and analytic memos are protective measures that researchers use to identify and unpack researcher bias related to social identity and positionality. Although all researchers inevitably possess bias based on experiences and context, the practice of reflexivity and transparency throughout the study's process has the potential to decrease the influence of researcher bias (Babbie, 2017).

When exploring potential researcher bias, it is important to consider the researcher's role as an observer, participant, or observer-participant when conducting interviews. The role of observer occurred during semistructured interviews when collecting data in the form of responses to interview questions from the recruited study participants. However, interaction with recruited participants occurred during the process of collecting data from study participants. For example, follow-up questions to either clarify or further explore a participant's response during the semistructured interviews are a form of interaction. This back-and-forth dialogue of a semistructured interview mimics the open-ended format of a typical conversation placing the researcher in the role of an observer-participant (Burkholder et al., 2020).

In this study, secondary teachers' perceptions of their experiences with engaging Hispanic families using semistructured interviews were collected and analyzed. At the time of data collection, I was a central office special education administrator responsible

for systemwide department heads overseeing special education itinerant services and programming for half of a medium-sized urban district in the Northeastern United States. However, this administrative role did not include the supervision or evaluation of school-based secondary teachers, who were recruited for this research study. In addition to being an employee, I had experiences as a student and parent within the district of interest. Furthermore, employment positions within the study's setting included school-based clinician, school adjustment counselor, and systemwide department head prior to serving as a central office administrator.

Biases were addressed by being aware and reflective of various roles, experiences, and beliefs. Experiences as a student, parent, and professional within the study's setting were considered throughout the study to monitor for researcher biases. A potential ethical issue in qualitative research is the researcher's bias in reporting and analyzing findings, which are based on subjective judgments according to the interpretive approach to inquiry (Babbie, 2017). Reflexive practices were applied throughout the data collection and data analysis process, such as member checking and audit trails (see Burkholder et al., 2020). These reflexive steps were a part of managing any existing bias stemming from previous experiences regarding the topic of study within the district setting.

A power differential with participants is an ethical issue that may arise due to conducting the study within a work setting. Potential participants may perceive a researcher's administrative position as one of authority, which may incite concerns among participants regarding their employment status and security. Power relationships

within the study setting were managed by providing participants a description of my professional role, as well as the nature and purpose of the study, to assure that potential participants were aware of my intent. Further, the secondary school-based teachers recruited for the study participated in semistructured interviews on a voluntary basis, where their right to cease participation at any point in the study was stressed. As a protective factor, a trusting relationship was established through transparency. Confidentiality was ensured to allow for participants' comfort and authentic responses.

To receive honest and authentic data from participants, rapport was established by ensuring participants fully understood their role in the research study, as well as their rights as voluntary participants (see Babbie, 2017). The process of obtaining informed consent from participants entails participants consenting to voluntary participation after a complete understanding of mechanisms used to collect data and any possible risks of participation in a study (Babbie, 2017). Informed consent also involves participants being made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. This practice ensured that the participants and the data they provide are protected, ultimately creating a sense of security and trust for participants in the research process.

In addition to safeguarding participants and data, it is essential that the researcher also ensures credibility and dependability through the accurate representation of participants' responses whereby bias is acknowledged, and reflexivity applied (Creswell, 2017). While the building of rapport is necessary for obtaining authentic responses from participants, establishing boundaries between the researcher and participant to maintain objectivity is also imperative for reliability (Creswell, 2017). For example, the qualitative

researcher can use the interview as a means of better understanding how individuals make sense of experiences, events, and phenomena. However, the key difference between an interview and a conventional conversation is that the purpose of conversations is sociability while interviews aim to answer RQs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research is founded on the assumption that methods of inquiry are inductive and influenced by the researcher's experience (Babbie, 2017). A basic qualitative study was deemed the most appropriate approach for attaining a thorough understanding of secondary teachers' perspectives regarding the engagement of Hispanic families. The focus of basic qualitative studies is on how individuals construct and interpret their experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). This basic qualitative study consisted of secondary teachers in an urban school district in the Northeastern region of the United States. Secondary general education teachers in the district were invited to participate in semistructured interviews. The RQs were addressed by collecting data from semistructured interviews with secondary level teachers. The methodology section delineates participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Participant Selection**

This section includes a description of the study participant selection criteria, population, target population, sample, and sampling method. Participant selection was conducted once approval was received from both Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the setting's school district director of research and accountability. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 02 20 23

1078646. Participant selection involves predetermined criteria based on the purpose of the research inquiry or inquiries, leading to nonprobabilistic, purposive samples (Guest et al., 2006). Furthermore, purposive sampling entails the selection of individuals based on specific characteristics or criteria that meet the objective of the study in yielding information-rich data (Patton, 2002). The criteria for participation in the study required that participants were employed as secondary general education teachers and that they could commit the time to take part in interviews outside of their work hours. Further, the study was open to secondary educators of any gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural background.

I used purposeful sampling to identify participants for the study. Participants were recruited by sharing study participation information with the district's 11 secondary level principals via email (see Appendix A), as well as the director of research and accountability, to distribute to general education teachers in their buildings. Specifically, secondary level principals were requested in an email (see Appendix A) to forward the study's information to their general education teachers via email. The study information emailed to principals (see Appendix A) included an attachment of the invitational letter (see Appendix B). A professional, collegial relationship had been established with many of the secondary level principals as a department central office administrator in the district. To clarify any questions or concerns regarding the request of principals to share study information with their staff, I followed up by phone with the principals after sending the email.

Potential participants contacted me to express interest in the study using the email address and phone number provided on the invitational letter (see Appendix B) and the forwarded email to principals (see Appendix A). When potential participants made contact to express interest in the study, they were screened to ensure they met inclusionary criteria for participation. If potential participants fulfilled the criteria of being secondary general education teachers in the participant organization, I sent the informed consent form via email for potential participants to review for understanding. Specifically, the following sections of the informed consent form for the study were reviewed: purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, risks and benefits, payment, and privacy. The informed consent form was reviewed according to potential candidates' preferred method of communication, and potential participants were provided the options of a phone call or Zoom meeting.

If potential participants were still interested in volunteering in the study, they were requested to send an email stating "I consent" to ensure their interest in volunteering in the study. After receiving informed consent to participate via email, I contacted potential participants to schedule a date and time on Zoom meeting platform outside of work hours for both parties. Once a mutual agreed date and time was decided upon, the potential participant was sent a meeting link via email. During this time, participants had the opportunity to ask questions or respond to concerns regarding participation in the study.

### ***Population***

The district of interest was a medium-sized urban district in the Northeastern United States. The district consists of 35 elementary schools, four middle schools, five high schools, and two school buildings housing both middle and high school students. Elementary schools consist of students in kindergarten through grade 6. Middle schools in the district service students in Grades 7 and 8, whereas high schools in the district service students in Grades 9 through 12. The state's department of education website reported that there were approximately 4,000 teachers, consisting of 80% females and 20% males. The reported race and ethnicity of teachers were over 80% White and about 10% Hispanic. Approximately 60% of the reported age range of teachers was between 33 to 56 years old.

### ***Target Population***

The target population was between 10 to 15 secondary general education teachers drawn from across the district's four middle, five high schools, and two middle-high schools. Approximately, half of the total number of teachers in the district were secondary teachers based on the state's department of elementary and secondary education website. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with secondary level teachers until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation refers to a point or a milestone in data collection and analysis where there is thematic exhaustion, meaning the researcher is not finding further information contributing to a constructed, emerging theory (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The semistructured interviews with secondary teachers yielded rich data in response to this study's RQs.

### ***Sample***

The sample consisted of 15 secondary teachers from the medium-sized urban district described in the population section. Teachers were recruited from all the district's secondary schools. Guest et al. (2006) found that data saturation in a qualitative study occurred after analyzing 12 interviews. To be prepared for participant attrition, 15 interviews were proposed to be above the number of interviews recommended for data saturation. Fifteen secondary teachers were considered an appropriate sample size for attaining a greater understanding of Hispanic family engagement in the setting.

### ***Sampling Method***

As described in the participant selection section, purposeful sampling was used in identifying participants for the study. If purposive sampling did not yield the requisite number of participants, snowball sampling was to be utilized as a backup plan. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where the researcher asks existing participants to identify candidates for participation (Creswell, 2017). It is a recruitment technique used when a population of interest is difficult to reach or rare. The process of current participants nominating or referring other potential participants leads to the sample size increasing. Snowball sampling can be applied to locate interested participants who fulfill the criteria for participation.

In summary, participants were recruited through an invitational letter (see Appendix B) describing the study's intent with the researcher's contact information (e.g., cell phone number and email address) that was emailed to them. If the required number of participants was not reached, the researcher intended to ask existing participants to



identify potential participants, who meet the participation criteria. The consent form for participation was also attached to the invitational letter for potential participants' review prior to making a commitment to participate. Once participants were selected, the researcher called and sent an email message to participants to confirm participation.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviewing is the preferred data collection tool for exploring personal experiences while establishing rapport because interviews provide deep, rich, and contextualized data, providing insight into participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Data collection for the study required the use of an interview protocol to guide semistructured one-to-one interviews with participants (see Appendix C). The semistructured interviews also consisted of follow-up questions. The purpose of the follow-up questions was to solicit in-depth responses from participants where the researcher was able to clarify or further explore a response to an existing interview question with a follow-up question (Burkholder et al., 2020). The data collection sources from interviews included the Zoom platform digital audio recordings and the transcriptions of the semistructured interviews. Data collection sources, such as recordings and transcripts, provide accurate representations of semistructured interviews that can be examined thoroughly after the interview (Babbie, 2017). Overall, the objective of semistructured interviews is to facilitate a rich dialogue regarding participants' perspectives and experiences to answer the study's RQs (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The interview protocol was researcher produced. The questions were self-created based on the established RQs and the guiding conceptual framework consisting of Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres (1987, 1992) and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. Furthermore, the interview questions were informed by the conceptual elements identified in the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Conceptual elements informing the development of questions included: (a) overlapping home-school spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987, 1992); (b) activation of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005); (c) importance of family engagement (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019); (d) Hispanic family engagement barriers (López-Cevallos et al., 2020); (e) teachers' family engagement expectations and practices (Hoffman et al., 2020); (f) asset versus deficit-based approaches to family engagement (Gaias et al., 2020); (g) teachers positioned as experts (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019) and (h) the family engagement intervention-population match (Yull et al., 2018).

The alignment across the study's conceptual framework, the RQs, and the interview questions increased the interview protocol's content validity (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The representation of conceptual elements, which frame the study, were included within the research and interview questions. Hence, the interview questions, which were intended to collect data in the form of participant responses, were aligned to the conceptual framework. This demonstrates content validity where the interview questions in the protocol capture the constructs of interest related to Hispanic family engagement. In summary, the interview protocol as a data collection instrument was appropriate and sufficient for answering the RQs.

## **Interview Protocol**

Interview questions were aligned to the RQs generated from the literature review. Demographic information regarding participants' current position, education level, and experience were collected. There was a total of 14 questions that related to the conceptual framework elements identified in the literature review. How each interview question connected to a RQ or element of the conceptual framework may be found in Appendix C. The alignment between RQs and interview questions increased the content validity, meaning the extent to which the interview questions represent all aspects of teachers' engagement with Hispanic families (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained how interview questions should be worded in a manner that is not leading or contributing to bias to improve dependability in participants' responses.

RQ1 is addressed in the interview questions (Questions 6-8, 10, 12-14), which relate to potential challenges that secondary teachers may come across when engaging Hispanic families. Specifically, Questions 12 through 14 target participants' perspectives of professional development in family engagement to potentially handle identified obstacles. Several interview questions (Questions 1-4) align with the second RQ, which focus on teachers' identification and understanding of family engagement practices tied to student performance outcomes. Lastly, RQ3 is addressed in Questions 3, 5, 8, 9, and 11, which touch on the concepts of activating Hispanic families' cultural wealth and increasing the overlap of home and school spheres for students. A few interview questions address more than one RQ. Question 8 connected to both RQ1 and RQ3, whereas Question 3 connected to both RQ2 and RQ3.

The conceptual framework elements aligned with each question were also noted for each interview question in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). For example, the conceptual framework element connected to RQ1 is Hispanic family engagement barriers, which was targeted in 7 of the interview questions (Questions 6-8, 10, 12-14). The interview questions aligned with RQ2 (Questions 1-4) addressed various elements, which included (a) teachers' family engagement expectations and practices, (b) importance of family involvement, (c) asset versus deficit-based views of families, (d) family engagement-intervention match, and (e) teachers positioned as experts. All the interview questions aligned with RQ3 (total of 5 interview questions) corresponded with elements of the theory of culture wealth or the theory of overlapping spheres, as both theories formed the study's conceptual framework.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

An email (see Appendix A) was sent to the 11 secondary level principals in the district after receiving approval for the study from Walden University's IRB and the district's director of research and accountability. The email (see Appendix A) provided the purpose of the study and contact information, all of which were included in the informed consent form. The email also included an attachment to the invitational letter (see Appendix B) as reference. The secondary level principals were also invited to forward this email with research study information to the general education teachers in their schools. The research study invitational letter (see Appendix B) provided a description of the study's intent and the researcher's contact information. Follow up phone communication was made to each secondary principal after the email was sent to

check for understanding or respond to any clarifying questions regarding the study. When potential participants reached out to the researcher, the informed consent form was sent via email to the potential participant's personal email address. The informed consent form for participation provided the following pertinent information regarding the study: description, purpose, procedures, sample questions, risks and benefits, right to withdraw, payment, privacy, and researcher's contact information.

When potential participants contacted the researcher, the researcher either called or sent an email message to confirm interest in participation. After initial communication with potential participants, an email was sent to potential participants that included the following electronic attachments: the invitational letter (see Appendix B) and the informed consent form. Criteria for study participation was reiterated in the email with the above attachments to potential participants. In the email, potential participants still interested in participating in the study were requested to respond back "I consent." via email after reading the informed consent form. If potential participants had any clarifying questions or concerns regarding the study or informed consent, they were encouraged in the email to contact the researcher. A follow up phone call or email was then made to potential participants based on their preferred method of communication (phone call or email).

Once selected participants provided informed consent via email, three potential dates and times outside of work hours were shared with participants, with the request to select one date and time for the semistructured interview. A Zoom meeting was scheduled, and the Zoom meeting link was sent via email to the participant when a

mutually agreed upon date and time was determined. In the beginning of the Zoom meeting session, the informed consent form was reviewed with participants. This procedure ensured each participant completely understood what participation entailed and there was a continued interest in participating.

Semistructured interview sessions with participants were digitally audio recorded on the researcher's computer utilizing the Zoom platform after receiving participants' informed consent. Specifically, the interview recordings were saved on a password protected digital memory storage device, which was secured in a safe location in the researcher's private office. Participants were informed of the digital audio recording. Participants were also made aware of how data collected from the semistructured interviews, which included the digital audio recordings and semistructured interview transcripts, were stored in secure, locked locations within the researcher's private office. Additionally, participants were informed that all data collected for the research study would be destroyed five years after the study ends.

The interview dialogues were transcribed verbatim after the conclusion of each interview. The purpose of having interview data in multiple forms (transcriptions and audio recordings) was to allow the researcher to fully listen and observe during the interview (see Burkholder et al., 2020). The presentation of interview data in multiple modalities allowed for the researcher to objectively reflect on collected data after the interview process and triangulate data sources (see Burkholder et al., 2020).

Each participant's interview transcript was shared with them via email once transcription was complete to check for accuracy of the collected data. Member checking

took place during the semistructured interview on the spot to ensure clear understanding of a participant's response. Follow-up questions to interview questions served as a check for understanding where the participant had the opportunity to clarify their responses. Once interviews were completed, each participant was provided an opportunity to address any concerns or ask any questions related to the study.

Participants were treated with care and respect throughout the interview process. The semistructured interviews were conducted in the researcher's private, secured office using the Zoom platform at a time that was both outside of participants' work hours and convenient for them. Alphanumeric pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2, P3...) only known to the researcher was used to identify participants and ensure confidentiality for each participant. One hour was allotted for each interview; however, the time for each interview varied depending on the length of each participant's response. At the conclusion of the semistructured interview, the participant was asked by the researcher what the best way to receive a \$20 Visa card as payment for participation. The Visa card was sent via email to participants.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

To better understand secondary teachers' perceptions of Hispanic family engagement, data was collected from participants utilizing an interview protocol. The digital recording of each interview was manually transcribed after completion of the interview on the virtual Zoom platform. Once all the interview transcripts were completed, saved as Microsoft Word files, and stored on a password protected memory stick, the interview transcripts were checked against the digital audio recordings. The

process of transcription familiarizes the researcher with the data and informs the initial steps of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The purpose of the data analysis was to develop an increasingly detailed knowledge of secondary teachers' Hispanic family engagement while simplifying data to address the study's RQs. Specifically, data analysis led to the identification of concepts, patterns, and themes through the organization of the interview transcript data (Patton, 2002). Since qualitative research is an inductive, evolving form of inquiry, data analysis of qualitative data involves the organization and reorganization of data (Saldaña, 2016). Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase thematic analysis was used in the study to guide the inductive thematic analysis because it is a flexible approach that can be applied across various epistemological and ontological orientations. The six phases include (a) familiarizing oneself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report.

Each stage of thematic analysis requires the researcher to consistently engage with the data set to determine the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase of data analysis involves the researcher familiarizing themselves with the data by actively reading, rereading, and engaging in the data through the lens of the study's conceptual framework. The second phase of the thematic analysis involves generating initial codes, which is a list of ideas that represent manifest and latent content from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The objective of coding in qualitative research is to systematically categorize and organize data to discern relationships between concepts and identify overall themes related to the RQs (Saldaña, 2016). The



third phase of generating themes involves sorting and organizing the initial codes and collated data into possible overarching themes. Thematic mapping techniques were applied during this phase to create a visual representation of the identified and evolving themes.

The 6-phase approach to thematic analysis is a reiterative process where each phase flows into the ensuing phase of theme development and pattern identification (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fourth phase of thematic analysis consists of two levels of reviewing and refining themes so that themes are clear and distinct (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first level, the collated data extracted from the data set for each identified theme is reread and examined for coherence. If a coherent pattern is found for each theme, then the researcher engages in the second level of the fourth phase, which involves reading through the entire data set to determine if the researcher's thematic map accurately represents all the data based on the conceptual framework. The fifth phase of thematic analysis consists of the researcher considering each theme in isolation and in relation to other themes by revisiting the collated data extracts and reorganizing as needed to ensure coherence and consistency among themes. Additionally, the researcher defines and names each theme in a narrative format, while also describing how the themes interconnect into a cohesive whole. The last phase of thematic analysis involves the researcher producing a report whereby an argument or story is told in response to the RQs. Data extracts are included in the report to support the prevalence of themes that tie into the researcher's narrative account.

Throughout the 6-phase thematic analysis process, the researcher continuously labors with the data set. The data set is manually coded after highlighting, underlining, and annotating text. All text is coded and then collated with each code in an Excel spreadsheet organized as tabs. Themes identified during phase three and later refined and named are also organized in an electronic spreadsheet along with the corresponding collated data extracts. The information on the electronic spreadsheet is organized in tabs by data sources, codes, themes, and collated data extracts to allow for recategorization and sorting. Narratives for each theme are also included in the spreadsheet.

A journal of reflexive notes was kept throughout the course of the research study. Reflexive notes included impressions, insights, and reflections throughout the coding process, which also informed data analysis (see Saldaña, 2016). The reflexive notes served as documentation of the rationale behind data interpretation decisions. Finally, the journal of reflexive notes is available for an audit trail to assess the trustworthiness of the basic qualitative study, which will be described in the next section.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research designs refers to the researcher's degree of confidence in the study's findings (Babbie, 2017). The concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research correspond with trustworthiness in qualitative research (Burkholder et al., 2020). However, trustworthiness also addresses ethical concerns related to political context or power dynamics, distinguishing trustworthiness from validity and reliability (Babbie, 2017). Trustworthiness involves transparency with participants, colleagues, and readers regarding the objectives and processes of a study, as

well as the researcher's role in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The four criteria for evaluating trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility is like the concept of internal validity in quantitative research because it considers whether a research study is measuring what it intends to measure or study (Shenton, 2004). In establishing credibility, qualitative researchers are expected to accurately capture participants' realities and explain complexities in research findings with confidence (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Shenton, 2004). Credibility was ensured in the study through member checking to verify understanding of participants' thoughts and experiences. Member checks involve the researcher checking in with participants for accuracy of collected data either at the end of data collection or on the spot during the interview to assess for credibility of findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Shenton, 2004).

Member checking occurred on the spot during semistructured interviews in any instance where understanding or tentative impressions of participants' words in their responses needed to be checked. Member checking first involves the researcher's restatement or summarization of participants' responses during an interview (Creswell, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher then questions the participant about the accuracy of the researcher's restatement or summarization. This process of paraphrasing and questioning for accuracy allows for participants to either endorse or reject the researcher's restatement or summary (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants validate the researcher's paraphrasing of a response if it is perceived as representative of the participant's perspectives, experiences, and feelings. Furthermore,

member checking increases transparency on the part of the researcher and provides participants an opportunity to clarify their responses (Creswell, 2017). In short, the process of member checking supports the study's credibility because the accuracy of tentative findings is confirmed or disconfirmed on the spot based on participant verification and validation (Birt et al., 2016).

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the generalizability of research findings, which is like external validity in quantitative research (Babbie, 2017). The reader can determine transferability of qualitative research results through the examination of detailed information regarding setting, participants, climate, and the data collection methods (Babbie, 2017). When the researcher uses thick description, the reader can determine the applicability of findings to other conditions (Babbie, 2017). The researcher will provide descriptions of teachers' experiences and perceptions of Hispanic family engagement at the selected district site in the next chapter. These descriptions of teachers' experiences provide a detailed and clear picture of the study's context and transferability of findings.

The qualitative criterion of dependability mirrors reliability in quantitative research given the examination of instability or inconsistency (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, dependability ensures transparency because the research design is described in detail, allowing the reader to assess whether research practices were implemented with fidelity (Shenton, 2004). The researcher establishes dependability by providing an in-depth description of the data collection and analysis processes. For

example, the researcher will reference digital recordings and transcripts of interviews to ensure that interview conditions were uniform across participants.

Confirmability relates to the extent to which a qualitative research study represents the participants' perspectives as opposed to the researcher's interpretations, which may be a potential source of bias (Babbie, 2017). Babbie (2017) asserted that a strategy to establish confirmability is an audit trail. An audit trail involves the collection of documents on the decision-making process of analyzing and synthesizing data (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004). An audit trail was conducted in the study to ensure confirmability whereby a detailed description of the research process was provided. Specifically, reflexive notes were taken throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Reflexive notes document the researcher's rationale for interpretations, as well as the consideration of how social identity and positionality may have influenced interpretation of data.

In conclusion, the implementation of strategies to meet the four criteria of trustworthiness is essential in strengthening the value of the qualitative research study. Trustworthiness is a systematic approach to inquiry driven by a professional code of ethics. The next section will unpack the significance of ethical procedures in the study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Researchers must be conscious of biases that may influence the study's results (Burkholder et al., 2020). Moreover, researchers must anticipate ethical issues related to bias by following transparent and consistent procedures during the research study (Babbie, 2017). Ethical procedures exist to protect against researcher bias when

developing and carrying out all aspects of a research study, ranging from research design to publication (Burkholder et al., 2020). Qualitative research requires the researcher to reflect during data collection and analysis, as well as prior to the study when determining the research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The purpose of researchers reflecting on biases is acceptance of results that may not align with personal beliefs or expectations, providing greater context of the study for the reader (Babbie, 2017).

### **Ethical Principles**

Ethical procedures in research are guided by the principles of respect, justice, and beneficence identified in the Belmont Report (Babbie, 2017). Respect refers to the idea that all individuals' dignity and autonomy is protected, especially for vulnerable populations (Babbie, 2017). For example, respecting the shared experience of others requires that participants be represented accurately as possible without judgment or bias in a deficit-oriented manner. Justice refers to the idea that the researcher is fair in the distribution of benefits and risks to participants in promoting equity (Babbie, 2017). Lastly, beneficence refers to the idea that the researcher has the duty to minimize harm, while maximizing the benefits for participants (Babbie, 2017).

Ravitch and Carl (2021) asserted that harm to participants can be multifaceted. For example, harm can be described as a lack of transparency or coercive language where participants' consent is not informed. Harm may also be relational where researchers engage in implicit or explicit interactions with participants that may maintain marginalization and prejudice towards participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A lack of respect for boundaries regarding time commitments or expectations of participation (as

outlined in the informed consent form) may also be considered harmful (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Further, a lack of commitment to ensuring confidentiality, as outlined during the consent process, is considered harmful to participants (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The three ethical principles were addressed in the study by obtaining participants' informed consent. The process of obtaining informed consent involves voluntary participation after a complete understanding of possible risks and potential benefits; participants must also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Babbie, 2017). Respect and care for participants was demonstrated in the study by ensuring privacy. Privacy refers to the confidentiality of participants, meaning an explanation of what data will be shared and how data will be shared about participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Participants in the study were provided an explanation of how their identifying information will be handled throughout the study, including the report of findings. For example, all the collected data was stored in a secure, locked location, while participants' identifying information was secured in another location accessible to only the researcher. Collected data will be destroyed five years after the study ends to protect participants' confidentiality.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption of the research study was that participants will be honest by providing authentic, candid responses to interview questions. Participants were reminded throughout the study that the researcher's administrative role in the district was not supervisory, as it was not connected to their performance evaluation. Furthermore, participants were informed of all the measures related to confidentiality of data

collection, data storage, and the reporting of results so that participants were comfortable in providing candid responses. The researcher promoted participants' candidness through transparency by sharing interview transcripts, member checking, and sharing the study's results where the confidentiality of all participants was maintained. The boundaries of confidentiality must be made clear at the outset of the study when attempting to obtain informed consent from participants.

### **Limitations**

The basic qualitative study may have limitations or drawbacks. First, there may be too small of a sample size to achieve data saturation if not enough participants were recruited, or if several participants withdrew from the study. A very small sample size may be problematic in adequately exploring secondary teachers' perspectives on Hispanic family engagement practices and answering the RQs. Selection bias is also a limitation of the research design if there is a lack of adherence to predetermined criteria for participant selection (Guest et al., 2016). Purposeful random sampling is an approach recommended for reducing selection bias when doing an in-depth study involving a small sample size (Guest et al., 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2021) posited that the goal of purposeful sampling is to thoughtfully answer RQs related to a construct and context while considering multiple, contextualized perspectives.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries established by the researcher to meet the objectives of the study (Babbie, 2017). A delimitation of the study is focusing specifically on secondary level teachers in a particular medium-sized urban district in the Northeastern



United States. This participant criteria were selected because there was evidence of a problem of practice in Hispanic family engagement within the selected district.

Additionally, there was research literature evidence that family engagement practices with Hispanic families are a problem of practice within the education field in the United States. Another delimitation of the research study are the presented RQs, which also align to the study's conceptual framework. The RQs limit the scope of the study to teachers' perceptions of family engagement practices that improve student performance and challenges in engaging Hispanic families. Moreover, the RQs are bound to explore teachers' engagement of Hispanic families through a lens of Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth and Epstein's (1987, 1992) overlapping spheres of influence.

### **Summary**

A basic qualitative study at a medium-sized urban district in the Northeastern United States was conducted to explore the perceptions of secondary teachers in engaging Hispanic families. Applying both Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory of overlapping spheres and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth, semistructured interviews were completed with secondary level teachers to obtain in-depth descriptions of their perspectives regarding engagement practices with Hispanic families that improve or deter student performance. A greater understanding of teachers' thoughts and feelings surrounding Hispanic family engagement may provide insight into improving the school performance and trajectory of Hispanic students. The next chapter will present the results of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The overall purpose of this study was to gain greater insight into the problem of how teachers' family engagement practices contribute to the continuing disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and other students (see Sheridan et al., 2019). Moreover, this basic qualitative study addressed secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. Fifteen secondary level teachers in an urban school district in the Northeastern region of the United States were interviewed to collect information-rich descriptions of teachers' perspectives related to family engagement practices aimed at increasing Hispanic parent involvement. A deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives provided information regarding their approaches to engaging Hispanic parents to improve student educational outcomes. Three RQs were formulated to guide the study:

RQ1: What are secondary teacher perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families in an urban district of the Northeastern United States?

RQ2: What family engagement practices do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive as improving student performance?

RQ3: How do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive that their family engagement practices demonstrate the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives?

In the fourth chapter of this study, I summarize the results of the data analysis driven by the three RQs. The RQs were answered using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-

phase thematic analysis. A detailed analysis for each identified theme is provided in the examination of each RQ. The chapter is organized in six sections. The first section is the study's setting, which also provides descriptions of the sample size of 15 secondary level teachers. In the second section of the chapter, I describe the data collection processes, while the third section illustrates the approach used for data analysis. The fourth section represents the study's results derived from the 6-phase descriptive thematic analysis, along with tables and figures of representing participants' responses. Finally, in the fifth section, I consider evidence of trustworthiness, and the last section is a concluding chapter summary.

### **Setting**

The target population was a medium-sized urban school district in the Northeastern region of the United States. The focus of the study was secondary level (seventh to 12 grade) general education teachers. After university IRB approval was obtained, the district's 11 secondary school principals were sent an email (see Appendix A), which requested the email be forwarded to all the general education teachers in their buildings. The email also included an invitational letter (see Appendix B). All participants who reached out to me were then screened based on the inclusionary criteria for study participation in alignment with the procedures approved by the university IRB. Three potential participants who initially reached out after receiving information from their principals did not participate. One of the three participants did not meet the criterion of being a teacher, while the other two participants did not reply with consent to participate. All the other participants who received the forwarded email from their

principals and the consent letter from me replied “I consent.” After consent was obtained via email, virtual interview dates and times were scheduled with participants using Zoom. All interviews were audio recorded for later transcription.

During the time of data collection, the district of study hired two family and community engagement codirectors. The family and community engagement director position was a newly created position by the superintendent, who entered the district in July of 2022. This was an organizational change that occurred during data collection. This may have influenced participants’ responses if they were aware of these new roles. However, this change in the district’s organizational structure was not mentioned by any participants during their interviews.

### **Demographics**

All 15 participants were secondary level teachers at an urban school district in the Northeastern region of the United States. Seven of the 11 secondary schools were represented in the sample of participants. Five of the seven represented secondary schools were the district’s comprehensive high schools. Demographic information provided by participants can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

Participants	Total years teaching	Total years teaching in district	Level of education	Grade level
P1	10	9	2 MA	9-12
P2	16	16	MA	7-8
P3	15	15	MA	7-8
P4	12	12	2 MA	9-12
P5	9	9	MA	7-8
P6	13	10	MA	9-12
P7	3	3	MA	7-8
P8	4	4	BA	7-8
P9	15	15	BA	7-8
P10	17	17	MA	7-8
P11	5	5	MA	9-12
P12	24	20	MA	7-8
P13	1	1	BA	7-8
P14	20	16	2 MA	9-12
P15	15	17	Ed.D.	7-8

**Data Collection**

A total of 18 people expressed interest to participate in the study. However, three of the 18 people were not interviewed. Of these three people, one person did not meet the criterion of being a teacher, whereas the other two people never responded back with consent to participate after being sent the informed consent form via email. Interviews were scheduled with 15 teachers based on their availability outside of their work hours. Email messages with the response “I consent” were collected from all 15 participants after they were sent the informed consent form via email. An individual Zoom meeting link was sent to each participant after an agreed upon meeting time outside of both the participant and my schedules was established. All 15 interviews were conducted from February 22, 2023 to April 10, 2023.

The interviews were all conducted via the Zoom platform in my private home office. The interviews were semistructured and consisted of 14 open-ended questions and four demographic questions related to roles, experience, and education. Interviews ranged in time from 36 to 60 minutes. The average time of each interview was approximately 46 minutes, and an average of seven pages of transcripts in 12-point, single spaced Times New Roman font was obtained (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Participant Interview Date, Length of Interview, and Number of Transcript Pages*

Participants	Interview date	Length of interview (minutes)	Number of transcript pages
P1	2/22/23	50	8
P2	2/23/23	43	6
P3	3/4/23	55	9
P4	3/4/23	60	10
P5	3/8/23	45	7
P6	3/14/23	45	7
P7	3/16/23	45	8
P8	3/19/23	43	6
P9	3/22/23	41	6
P10	3/27/23	39	6
P11	3/28/23	40	5
P12	4/3/23	54	9
P13	4/5/23	44	7
P14	4/7/23	44	7
P15	4/10/23	36	5

All participants were familiar with Zoom and appeared comfortable in using this platform to interact during the interview. There was no difficulty experienced in either hearing or seeing each other during the interviews. The internet connection for each interview was stable.

There were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in the previous chapter. Digital audio recordings were collected during the interviews using the Voice Memos application on my device. All interviews were conducted in my private office in my home. At the start of each interview, the study's purpose and procedures for informed consent and confidentiality were reviewed to check for understanding. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study and discontinue the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. A transcript of each digital audio recording was completed after the interview and sent via email to the participant for review. Participants were provided 1 week upon receipt of the electronic transcript to respond back regarding any inaccuracies. None of the participants responded back to express that their transcripts were inaccurate or to offer corrections.

Digital and hard copies of data were securely stored in locked cabinets in my private office, which only I have access to. All digital data, including interview audio recordings, were saved on a password protected digital memory storage device. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric pseudonym to ensure confidentiality for each participant. After 5 years, the digital audio recordings, interview transcripts, and any other electronic and hard copies of communications or documents identifying participants will be destroyed in accordance with university protocol.

### **Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-stage approach to data analysis was the process used to code participants' responses into larger representations of categories and themes to answer the study's RQs. The stages involved deeply engaging with the data through the

lens of the conceptual framework and identifying codes. Next, themes were generated, reviewed, and refined so that they may be considered in isolation and in connection to other themes. Lastly, a response was produced for each of the study's three RQs. This section includes a description of the codes and themes that emerged from the data.

### **Phase 1: Familiarization With the Data**

The first step of analysis involved becoming familiar with the data through active reading, rereading, and engaging with the data through the lens of the conceptual framework to address the study's three RQs. Each line of each interview transcript was read and reread after transcription to increase familiarity with the data. The data were also organized in a spreadsheet where analysis could occur for each interview question across participants' responses, as well as all the interview questions across each participants' interview.

### **Phase 2: Generate Initial Codes**

The second stage of thematic analysis was the systematic coding of the data set, involving the generation of initial codes after increasing familiarity with the data. During this stage, critical phrases were highlighted to prepare for coding. After reviewing highlighted and bolded phrases in the data set, 111 initial codes were generated by the responses from the participants (see Appendix D).

After generating the initial codes, common phrases and recurring words were bolded to systematically categorize data and identify patterns. This resulted in 33 secondary codes or categories (see Appendix E). The study framework was reviewed to



provide a frame of reference used in the consolidation of initial codes into secondary codes, sometimes referred to as categories.

### **Phase 3: Search for Themes**

The 33 categories were reviewed for common elements in the context of the framework. After an extensive review of the framework, and revisiting participant responses, 12 initial themes were identified (see Appendix E and Appendix F). These categories, which are outlined in Appendix E, were consolidated into 12 initial themes based on the overlap of recurring concepts presented in participants' responses. Sample participant responses representing both the categories and initial themes can be found in Appendix F. This section provides a narrative description of the categories that were consolidated to form initial themes (see Appendix E).

The categories labeled lack of importance of family engagement and lack of interest in family engagement were condensed into the initial theme of bigger priorities than family engagement. Both these categories represented responses indicating that there were competing demands, along with a lack of motivation to engage families. The categories of little family engagement and lack of proactive follow up were condensed into the initial theme of inconsistent family engagement practices, representing a lack of practices or activities focused on family engagement. The categories of annual family events and recommended family engagement practices were condensed into the initial theme of isolated family engagement given that annually occurring and recommended events, such as orientations and multicultural and awards nights, are isolated and unconnected to an overall family engagement approach.

The categories of competing initiatives and multiple teacher responsibilities were condensed into the initial theme of lack of time to engage families, given that both categories represented teachers' expression of lacking the capacity to engage families. The categories of job embedded time to engage families and teachers' boundaries in family engagement were combined to form the initial theme of lack of compensation to engage families outside of school hours. Ultimately, participants expressed that they were not paid to do work that engaged families, implying that family engagement was not their role or priority. The categories of district's lack of structure, lack of professional development, and perceptions of administrators' family engagement overall represented the initial theme of lack of training and support. The common thread among these three categories was that the district lacked the structure and support for teachers to engage families.

The categories of language challenges for teachers and issues with interpretation and translation services comprised the overarching initial theme of language as a barrier, given that both categories portrayed a block to communicating with Hispanic families in Spanish. The initial theme of obstacles in reaching families was developed from the following six categories: family obstacles to being engaged in students' schooling, family SES, lack of confidence in reaching out to families, lack of parental support, reluctance to reach out to families, implicit bias, and teachers' concerns about engaging families. All these categories represented participants' perceived obstacles in doing family outreach for their Hispanic students. The three categories of family engagement as a greater priority at the elementary level, focus on student engagement over family engagement,

and students' greater responsibility were consolidated into student responsibility on the secondary level. All the categories convey the idea that family engagement is not as much of a priority at the secondary level in comparison to the elementary level due to the students' older age.

The initial theme of teachers setting expectations was represented in the categories of low expectations of students, expectations of parents, student outcomes, teacher directed parent involvement, teacher directed outcomes, teachers as value setters, and universal versus culturally responsive family engagement. The common pattern between all the categories is that teachers establish and enforce the expectations for students and families around schooling and related functions. The last initial theme of welcoming families and forming relationships evolved from the categories of partnership and relationship building. Generally, participants all defined family engagement as involving a relationship where teachers welcome all families.

#### **Phase 4: Review Themes**

As noted, 12 initial themes were condensed from the secondary codes/categories.

They were as follows:

- language as a barrier
- obstacles in reaching families
- lack of training and support
- lack of time to engage families
- lack of compensation to engage families outside of school hours
- teachers setting expectations

- acknowledging importance of family engagement
- bigger priorities than family engagement
- student responsibility on the secondary level
- isolated family engagement activities
- inconsistent family engagement practices
- welcoming families and forming relationships

There was overlap among some of the codes. The themes of language as a barrier (Theme 1) and obstacles in reaching families (Theme 2) both represented challenges in communicating with Hispanic families and were combined after review. The obstacles described by participants included inaccurate interpretation and translation services, challenging caregiver work schedules, or nonworking phone numbers. Themes 3 - lack of training and support, 4 - lack of time to engage families, and 5 - lack of compensation to engage families outside of school hours all related to the participants' perceptions of systemic limitations within their district to engage Hispanic families and were likewise condensed.

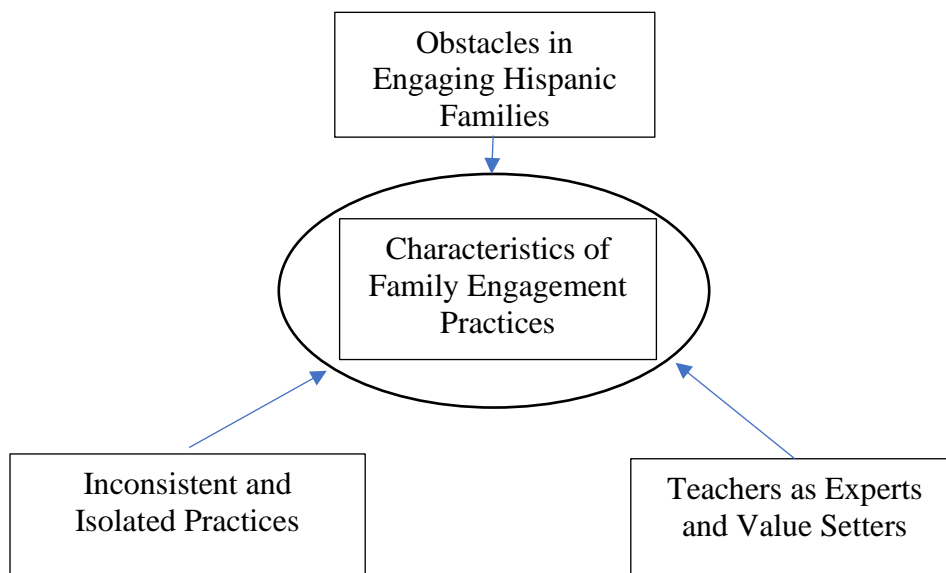
Themes 10 - isolated family engagement activities and 11 - inconsistent family engagement practices both represented participants' responses related to their efforts in engaging Hispanic families. Themes 7 - acknowledging importance of family engagement and 12 - welcoming families and forming relationships, overlapped given that both themes conveyed the concept that family engagement was a teacher's responsibility. However, themes 8 - bigger priorities than family engagement and 9 -

student responsibility on the secondary level, provided an opposing perspective to family engagement being a teacher responsibility.

The framework guided the development of codes, and codes were examined for patterns to generate themes. The elements of Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth were used to create a thematic map to identify connections between themes as they related to the conceptual framework. (See Figure 1.)

### Figure 1

#### *Thematic Map*



### Phase 5: Define Themes

After the 12 initial themes were reviewed, three overarching final themes emerged, which were labeled as follows:

- obstacles in engaging Hispanic families
- teachers as experts and value setters

- isolated, inconsistent family engagement practices

Each of the final themes will be defined below.

***Final Theme 1: Obstacles in Engaging Hispanic Families***

The first final theme was obstacles, which included challenges in engaging families due to language barriers and establishing connections with Hispanic families. The first theme also included obstacles in engaging families due to the district's systemic limitations, such as the lack of professional development, support, and job embedded time for family engagement. A deeper discussion of this theme, along with supporting responses from participants, will be shared later in this section.

***Final Theme 2: Teachers as Experts and Value Setters***

The second final theme to emerge was teachers as experts and value setters. This theme was evident in responses conveying one way communication informing families what they needed to know or do. Further, the theme of teachers as experts or value setters represents the notion that teachers are in a position of authority to deem what is best for students' success. A deeper discussion of this theme, along with supporting responses from participants, will be shared later in this section.

***Final Theme 3: Isolated, Inconsistent Family Engagement Practices***

The third theme was isolated, inconsistent family engagement practices, which were portrayed in participants' descriptions of family engagement practices and activities in their schools. For example, Participant 8 stated,

I think the Know Your School Night that we do in the beginning of the year is really good, just so families get to know the teachers that their child is going to be working with and just get to know the school better in general.

Isolated family engagement practices represent teacher led activities or events that occur infrequently, such as annual parents' night or awards ceremonies. Inconsistent family engagement practices represent outreach to parents that lacks regularity or consistency, such as phone calls or meetings when there is a student concern.

This fifth phase of thematic analysis involved describing each theme in isolation and in relation to the other themes. The collated data extracts were revisited, reorganized, and refined to ensure coherence and consistency among themes as part of the ongoing analysis. Each theme was named and defined in a narrative format. This process involved consideration of what each theme revealed about teachers' perspectives of Hispanic family engagement, as well as how each theme fit together to illustrate the topic. The definition of each theme addressed how each theme interconnects into a cohesive whole to provide an overall narrative. The research literature and conceptual framework were considered when determining alignment between the data set and RQs.

### **Phase 6: Producing the Report**

The sixth and final stage of the thematic data analysis is producing a scholarly report where a narrative is provided in response to the RQs. This process of generating a rich description involved analyzing data extracts in response to the RQs with support for the prevalence of themes while considering the conceptual framework. Direct quotes from participants' responses were used to capture the prevalence of themes. The

identified themes represented participants' perspectives, while addressing the study's three RQs. Excerpts of participants' responses will be presented as supporting evidence for themes.

***Theme 1: Obstacles in Engaging Hispanic Families***

The first theme of obstacles is double faceted, because it includes two sets of obstacles: (a) communication with Hispanic families and (b) systemic shortcomings within the district. Communication with Hispanic families was perceived as a challenge by participants due to language barriers and parents' ability to connect. Examples of these obstacles included difficulties with using translation and interpretation services, along with issues in reaching parents due to work schedules or nonworking phone numbers. Participant 8 said,

I've had instances, in the past, where if we have a concern about a Hispanic student, but we know that the parent only speaks Spanish, and then that can cause some barriers with like using the interpreter line if you're doing a phone call home or in parent meetings and you need an interpreter there. It's obviously doable, but I think it causes people to be less motivated to engage with that parent because they see that barrier and they're like oh it's just easier to not have to jump through all of those hoops.

Also, over half of the participants referred to nonworking numbers or parents not returning phone calls. For example, Participant 6 stated, "And it's very rare that I actually have to call home because one, you try to call home, and no one picks up the phone. They don't get back to you."



The first theme of obstacles also included challenges in engaging families due to systemic district limitations. Systemic district issues included competing demands, such as initiatives and tasks that took precedence over family engagement practices. For example, two thirds of participants referred to not having time to engage families due to being assigned coverage for absent teachers or doing duties during their preparation times. Participant 3 shared, “I wish I was doing more, but again with the limited time I have, I don’t have time to do any more.” Similarly, Participant 12 expressed, “I think we can use more time...I'm all for extra days [in the contract]...We still have to do the work, but now we have to do it on our own time.” Constraints on time during the workday was commonly endorsed as a barrier in proactively reaching out to Hispanic families. In addition to the lack of job embedded time in engaging families, systemic district issues included a lack of professional development and support. The lack of professional development and support refers specifically to training in family engagement within the district.

Every participant expressed that there was a lack of family engagement training offered by the district. Interestingly, teachers with five years or less experience indicated greater apprehension about engaging families, while teachers with more than five years’ experience expressed confidence in their ability to engage Hispanic families if they were provided with more time and less demands. To illustrate, Participant 10, who was a more veteran teacher, shared, “I feel prepared to do it, but not really supported because of the other demands on my time.” Whereas a participant with five or less years’ experience, Participant 8, stated,

It can be kind of difficult sometimes navigating those difficult conversations that you have to have with families. So, I think providing more opportunities for educators to like, see those difficult conversations or have tips for how to navigate those conversations would be very helpful.

Responses from other participants with under 5 years' experience also demonstrated uneasiness with Hispanic family engagement. These comments included Participant 13's statement: "I'm not sure if I'm going about the right way or, you know, would be a lot different if I knew, you know, Spanish or something to fully engage them [Hispanic families]" and Participant 7: "Sometimes I do shy away from engagement because I don't want to develop any bad relationships." Overall, there was a concern among participants newer to the field regarding how they should approach families.

### ***Theme 2: Teachers as Experts and Value Setters***

The second theme was teachers as experts and value setters. While the importance of engaging families was prevalent across participants, there was an emphasis on steps that families should take or information they ought to know to support their children's success in school. Participant 1 stated,

I think a lot of immigrant parents in particular don't necessarily understand the way the United States college and career and high school systems work ... in some communities, in some cultures, you trust the experts...what other choice do you have, if you don't know how to navigate the system.

Other participants also endorsed the idea of unidirectional communication, where educators set the expectations and are the source of valuable information needed by

parents. For example, Participant 15 described their role in engaging families as to “provide feedback to the parents, and be able to communicate my expectations, and student needs, and achievement, and their challenges,” placing teachers as experts. Participant 12 stated, “I think many parents want to know how to be more involved...it's not often clearly defined how they can get involved.”

The aforementioned statement indicates that families are not provided with a platform to participate in their children's schooling actively and meaningfully; however, the expectation for parents to be involved was emphasized. Participant 4 stated,

The communication has to go out to the parents that you have an obligation to support your kid's education here in the United States. And part of that is to make your presence known to the school... You have a right to it. It's your obligation, right.

Lastly, participants placed themselves as value setters when referring to secondary students' responsibilities outside of school, which related to financially supporting their families and caring for younger siblings. For instance, Participant 2 expressed,

They're [parents] almost too comfortable letting their kids work crazy hours.... And I'm not going to criticize someone for teaching the lesson of hard work, but there's a cost when I have kids tell me I'm not going to be in tomorrow. I'm working with my mother tonight until 1:00AM.

To summarize, how and when parents should engage in their children's schooling was perceived as a function of participants' professional assessment and cultural perspective.

### ***Theme 3: Isolated, Inconsistent Family Engagement Practices***

The third overarching theme was isolated, inconsistent family engagement practices. All participants described similar family engagement activities and practices, which included either one-way communication to families or annual activities. One-way communications to families included any of the following mediums used by schools and teachers: text messages, emails, phone calls, and newsletters. Approximately one third of participants expressed that family engagement evolved during the Covid-19 pandemic due to virtual meetings and increased communication in general. Participant 10 stated, “It seems like it [family engagement] kind of increased a little bit because teachers were kind of forced... into interacting with families and caregivers.” Annual activities or presentations included mandatory parents’ night events in the beginning of the school year, orientation evenings for students transitioning to middle school, awards ceremonies, or multicultural nights showcasing students’ cultures. All events referred to by participants, apart from the multicultural night, were district-mandated events. Further, the described family engagement practices were all teacher directed, as opposed to parent led, conveying the impression of family engagement being “done to” as opposed to “doing with” Hispanic families.

### **Discrepancies**

While there were overarching themes across the data set, there were also discrepant responses that need to be factored into the analysis. Most participants attributed challenges in engaging Hispanic families to their socioeconomic status. For example, work schedules and nonworking phone numbers were consistently flagged as

obstacles in participants' ability to engage Hispanic families. However, there were three participants, who described subcultures and varied socioeconomic statuses among Hispanic families. These participants stated that often their colleagues assume that Hispanic students live in poverty or that their families are not able to engage in their schooling due to working or being uneducated. For example, Participant 1 stated,

So, I think that a lot of teachers just assume everyone's poor and living in the valley, which isn't true. And I think there's a lot of feeling or assuming like, oh, well for so many of kids there is no one at home to force them to do this.

Participant 4 recounted a scenario where colleagues made an assumption about a Hispanic parent's level of education due to being an immigrant with limited English-speaking skills, which ultimately led to the student and family being offended. These few participants provided another perspective when considering socioeconomic status in the engagement of Hispanic families.

There were also discrepant responses related to the need for family engagement on the secondary level. Participant 6 and Participant 14 expressed that family engagement is unnecessary on the secondary level, specifically in high school. They expressed the perspective that students at high school age need and want to take the lead on their education. For example, Participant 14 stated high school students "become very reactive... like what are you doing" when teachers attempt to reach out to parents. Participant 6 described their approach to upperclassmen when stating, "You're going into the real world, mommy and daddy can't save you anymore. So, I feel like the age you teach or the grade you teach has a huge effect on parent engagement." This perspective is

in contrast with other participants, who spoke to the importance of Hispanic families being informed of high school requirements, as well as college and career readiness.

An outlier response was from Participant 9, who spoke to implicit bias. This participant endorsed the theme of obstacles in communication with Hispanic families. However, this participant also spoke greatly about how their perceptions of Hispanic families' abilities and skill sets may be biased. For example, technology and language were referred to when Participant 9 described their implicit bias. They said,

I think one thing that certainly influences me, and I think it's really kind of like implicit bias, is my perception of their communication, whether it's through the actual language itself or, you know, their ability to have the physical ability to communicate... I feel like there's, there's not so much a disconnect, but a block between my ability to communicate with those families and my perception that they're going to be able to receive that.

While this participant endorsed all the overarching themes, they were an outlier because they challenged their own perceptions in their responses.

## **Results**

This section will delve deeper into the study's data analysis and results. The final themes of obstacles, teachers as experts and value setters, and isolated, inconsistent family engagement practices will be considered when addressing the study's RQs.

### **RQ1**

RQ1: What are secondary teacher perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families in an urban district of the Northeastern United States?

The final theme of obstacles addressed RQ1. Secondary teachers identified obstacles in communicating with families due to parents' language and accessibility. The perceived challenge of communicating with families often related to language. Participants, who were not fluent in Spanish, expressed that many steps were involved in communicating with families through the district's contracted interpreting and translating services. Participants also responded that some families may not feel comfortable including a third party unfamiliar with their child. The following statement was made by Participant 2 about using interpreting services. "It doesn't feel like you're authentically connecting with the family. I feel removed, and I really think it would be different if I spoke Spanish." Two thirds of the participants referred to the ability to speak Spanish as being an advantage and beneficial to engaging families. However, there was one outlier, Participant 4), who stated,

You can fill the building with people that speak Spanish.... Just having more Spanish speakers is not going to do it. And we have Spanish speakers who are coming from another socioeconomic background. They're not looking at these kids' families as equals.

Secondary teachers' also identified obstacles in communicating with families due to families' availability to engage. Participants spoke mostly about Hispanic parents not having working phone numbers or being unresponsive to phone calls or messages. Parents' work schedule was also referred to as presenting an obstacle to communicating during the school day. Other obstacles that were identified by some participants, but not across all participants included transportation, childcare, and educational experience.

Most participants endorsed that Hispanic families' socioeconomic status presented challenges to families' ability to engage in their children's schooling.

While the obstacles of language and Hispanic parents' availability to engage in their children's schooling correspond with the presentation of Hispanic families, other challenges relating to systemic characteristics of their secondary schools and the district were identified by participants. These identified challenges included time, support, and training in family engagement. Participants' responses to interview questions, which targeted RQ1, focused on finding the time and having the skills to effectively communicate with Hispanic families. Participants consistently described the lack of job embedded time to proactively engage families due to competing demands and initiatives that took precedence over family engagement practices. For example, competing tasks during preparatory periods included the assignment of classroom coverage or duties.

Additionally, every participant stated that they never received training on family engagement as teachers from the district. A few participants attended workshops or training on family engagement strategies outside of the district at some point in their careers. The lack of professional development was described as an obstacle by all participants, who have been teaching less than five years. These participants expressed not knowing how or what they were supposed to do to engage Hispanic families. There was reference to feeling nervous and "shying away" or avoiding communication and interactions with families in case parents became upset. Participants with five or more years of experience also alluded to the notion of potential conflict. Participant 13, who had 20 years' experience, stated, "There's just so much wiggle room for



misinterpretation. You want to keep the relationship between parents and teachers, in my opinion, kind of generic.”

The lack of support from the district and building based administrators on the secondary level was also described as an obstacle. None of the participants described anything specifically that their principals and assistant principals were doing to support them in their implementation of family engagement practices. Half of the participants stated that their administrators themselves had difficulty in engaging families. Participant 5 stated,

Sometimes I think the teachers feel more comfortable than the administrator doing that... I just don't think they have as much contact with the families as teachers do... there's not that much comfort with administrators to reach out to families in positive ways.

While all the participants identified more that administrators could be doing with both families and teachers related to family engagement, two thirds of the participants expressed that principals were too busy for family engagement. For example, Participant 3 stated, “And so the administrators, I know that they are overwhelmed too. So, I don't know how, without hiring another level of a person to do that [family engagement].” Further, Participant 12 expressed, “They're [administrators] in a tough spot too. They have to worry about the numbers in many different ways.”

## **RQ2**

RQ2: What family engagement practices do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive as improving student performance?

When considering the second RQ, it was apparent that the theme of isolated, inconsistent family engagement practices was common across participants' responses. Similar family engagement activities were described across all participants. These activities included annual events, such as Parents' Night or Know Your School Night (KYSN), Jump Start orientations meetings for students entering middle or high school, and awards ceremonies. All these events are district-mandated events. Some schools also described annual multicultural nights where students and parents were provided with the opportunity to showcase their culture through art and food. The common element among all events was that they were all isolated events that occurred once a year without an opportunity for further engagement within the same school year. While many participants described the success of these events, nearly two thirds of participants described the need for more regular events or "family nights" to engage families.

The types of events that participants suggested would promote student academic achievement fell into two categories. One category was nonacademic, social events focused on coming together around food, music, and art. Participants who described these types of events expressed that these events make families feel welcomed and less intimidated. For example, Participant 6 expressed the need for more social family nights, when they stated, "Maybe more family night events where you could maybe make something more cultural, where people would be engaged to come." Participant 5 also described the importance of social events "where they [parents] can come in and we have food, we have performances, and, you know, they kind of get to show off a little bit about themselves, teach others about themselves." The other category of events was described

as parent training or orientations for families to become more familiar with school expectations and post-secondary considerations. For example, Participant 1 said, “I think there needs to be a tiered, hierarchical approach. I think they need to do those orientation things and sort of like let parents know the expectations, as well as the resources.”

Participants’ support for parent training or orientation based on expectations begs the question of who and how expectations are established. Responses endorsed the theme of teachers as experts or value setters. Only two of fifteen participants spoke of parent surveys to receive input from families on their children’s education. All other responses regarding family engagement practices described unidirectional communication, such as texts, emails, newsletters, and phone calls, where expectations and other information deemed important by educators are communicated to families. For example, Participant 1 shared,

With ELs if they don’t have parents that know they are expected to drag them [students] over the line, or how to drag them over the line, then it just doesn’t happen. So, I think that developing that infrastructure is very important.

The perception that educators are responsible for determining and conveying standards for students and parents alike was demonstrated. However, there was also an acknowledgement and an understanding across participants that parents need access to information and resources. For example, all participants, who did not speak Spanish fluently, spoke about the importance of translating documents into the parents’ native language and using available interpretation services for meetings and phone calls.

**RQ3**

RQ3: How do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive that their family engagement practices demonstrate the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives?

***Activation of Cultural Wealth***

All three overarching themes were evident in addressing the RQ of whether teachers perceived their family engagement practices as activating Hispanic families' cultural wealth. The themes of obstacles in engaging families, isolated family engagement practices, and teachers as experts and value setters were weaved into participants' responses when considering their perceptions of Hispanic families' cultural wealth activation in their family engagement practices. Overall, there was little acknowledgement of the strengths that Hispanic families can bring to partnerships with schools or their children's academic success. While a few participants acknowledged the commendable work ethic of Hispanic families, the underlying sentiment was that more support was needed at home for student success. For example, Participant 6 stated,

They go home to a home cooked meal. Parents can be working two jobs, and they still cook. They're not studying with them, but they're trying to keep the house clean, make the food, wash the laundry, and provide the life that they can provide to the best of their ability. But what happens when your parent is not even educated and you're sitting down to do high school level?

In this response, there is acknowledgement for Hispanic families' assets, but there is also the expression of a deficit where families are perceived as not being able to provide academic support to their children.

Participants, who recognized the work ethic of Hispanic families, also spoke to how Hispanic parents' expectations of their children to work and care for younger siblings was detrimental to their academic success. For example, Participant 4 stated,

Some kids are working too many hours a week, and I know it's a problem... what communication is going to the families that says, hey, time out, your daughter should not be working 40 hours a week? It's a violation of federal law, right, or whatever, after 10:00 p.m. on a weeknight, whatever those laws are. I don't think these kids' parents are aware of those laws, as a whole.... there's no criticism there, but how can you balance a 40-hour work week, being in a new culture, and also learning a new language? You know... it's a lot.

This participant, along with others, expressed how Hispanic families were not placing enough value on their children's education by ensuring more time was devoted to their schooling. This finding supported the theme of teachers as experts and value setters, whereby participants deemed what was appropriate or inappropriate in meeting students' educational outcomes. Consequently, participants' knowledge and experiences set the standard for Hispanic students' school success.

Additionally, participants identified a variety of obstacles in their ability to engage Hispanic families, espousing a deficit perspective of the families. Consequently, a deficit perspective of Hispanic families was not conducive to activating cultural wealth in

family engagement practices. For example, parents' work schedules were described as a barrier to communication. Also, language was perceived as a deficit by participants who were not able to communicate directly with families. Other obstacles, which were related to the systemic issues of time and professional development dedicated to family engagement, indicated that an overall understanding of how to leverage families' cultural wealth was lacking.

Participants described isolated, inconsistent practices, such as annual multicultural nights, as evidence of activating the cultural wealth Hispanic families. For example, Participant 4 described these events as opportunities for Hispanic families to "share a little about themselves and their culture." Multicultural events presented as disconnected in the sense that they did not provide continuity in family engagement across the school year. Interestingly, half of the participants acknowledged the need for more efforts beyond isolated cultural events. For example, Participant 1 expressed frustration with the culture and climate of their school as it related to family engagement. This participant stated,

Like everyone has just had this attitude, this circle the wagon attitude, like if you're trying to do something, you're getting above your station, and you're going to rock the boat, and you're going to cause trouble. But no one wants to do anything...I guess I'll just sit here and not do anything and we'll just never help anyone.

While there was an understanding that more should be done with engaging families, most participants could not describe specific, ongoing actions that they were doing to activate the cultural wealth of families.

However, three participants spoke to representation of Hispanic culture in the curriculum, and how they assigned their students projects where they were expected to involve their families to explore the immigrant experience or cultural background. Though, the purpose of these class projects was to acknowledge and celebrate families' cultural wealth, the assignments did not involve direct interactions or communication between teachers and families. And so, it is questionable whether class projects assigned to students would constitute as family engagement practices. Yet, it was evident in many participants' responses that actions specific to instructing students were perceived as family engagement. For example, Participant 7 stated, "I think family engagement in the field of education is definitely incorporating families' experiences and culture into the curriculum." Also, Participant 13 stated,

And I think engaging students in such a way that they're going to want to go home, and their parents are going to be interested in what they're learning, like that would be my goal in terms of family engagement, having those parents be just as interested as the students.

Although student engagement and representation in the curriculum are presented in participants' responses, there is not an explicit reference to directly engaging parents to activate cultural wealth.

### *Activation of Overlapping Spheres of Influence*

RQ3 also included whether participants perceived that their family engagement practices demonstrated the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives. There was little evidence for overlap of spheres, mostly due to the obstacles depicted in participants' responses. While participants described the importance of family engagement as leverage for improving student performance, genuine, bidirectional partnerships were not presented as actually happening. For example, Participant 1 stated the following when asked to define family engagement:

What it is? Or what it's supposed to be? I'm gonna go with what I would like it to be .... so, I think both parents and teachers are supposed to see each other as like partners in raising these kids and getting them ready to be a part of society. And that we both play a role and are supposed to be helping each other.

This participant distinguished what should be happening for family engagement from what is actually happening in practice. The theme of obstacles, which was prevalent across participants' responses, can account for deterrents in establishing partnerships characteristic of overlapping spheres of influence.

Moreover, few participants described family engagement as involving two-way partnerships. Most of the participants described family engagement as "imparting knowledge" and "being accessible," as well as "welcoming" and "inviting families into school" or "bringing parents to be more involved in the education process." All these phrases from participants' responses insinuate that family engagement is the responsibility of the teachers, where teachers are responsible for initiating and



determining the parameters of parents' participation in their children's schooling. Teachers were perceived as the experts and value setters, who establish communication on what families need to know and what they need to do to best prepare and support their children. Consequently, communication with families described by participants did not connote overlapping spheres of influence, as the practices were not bidirectional or consistent.

Participants did not describe how they perceived their family engagement practices as activating overlapping spheres of influence or cultural wealth. This may be because they never received training on how to engage Hispanic families as secondary teachers in their district. Across the board, participants described the importance of there being communication between home and school. However, the participants generally did not express that their practices were effective in activating the overlap of spheres between home and school. Instead, they spoke to the challenges in being able to activate overlapping spheres of influence due to constraints in time or simply not knowing how to do so.

Overall, the themes of obstacles, inconsistent, isolated family engagement practices, and teachers as experts and value setters were prevalent when considering the activation of cultural wealth and overlapping spheres of influence in participants' responses. Regarding the activation of cultural wealth, participants spoke about isolated and inconsistent family events. Many participants expressed that they wish they had the time to do more outreach, but the outreach that was described was unidirectional and for informational purposes. When considering the activation of overlapping spheres of

influence in family engagement practices, obstacles were also referred to by participants in their capacity to move beyond inconsistent, isolated family engagement practices and one-way communication.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The four criteria of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability will be considered as evidence of trustworthiness of this qualitative research study's results. The degree of confidence in the study's findings, which relates to the concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research, will be examined in this section. Specifically, the implementation and adjustment to strategies related to each criterion of trustworthiness will be described.

Credibility refers to whether a research study measures what it intends to measure (Shenton, 2004). The implementation of credibility involved the interpretation of data through the lens of the conceptual framework, which consisted of Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1987, 1992) and Yosso's theory of cultural wealth (2005). Interview questions were aligned to both RQs and specific concepts from the framework. And so, the interpretation of participants' responses captured their realities. The implementation of credibility also involved member checking to verify participants' responses. On the spot clarifying phrases to interview questions, which are included in the interview protocol (see Appendix C), were utilized as needed to confirm understanding of participants' responses. Additionally, participants were provided with typed interview transcripts to ensure accuracy of their responses after their interviews.

None of the participants disconfirmed the accuracy of their responses. Participants' verification and validation of the data demonstrated credibility of the study.

Dependability relates to whether the study's protocol was implemented with fidelity, which is considered reliability in quantitative research (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004). The strategies utilized to ensure dependability involved providing an in-depth description of the data collection and analysis processes. For example, the procedural steps used to collect data were outlined in detail in the data collection section of this chapter, confirming that interview conditions were uniform across participants. Further, excerpts from participants' responses were provided as evidence of interpretations in the data analysis section. In summary, a step-by-step approach was utilized for data collection and analysis, which was described in detail for the reader to ensure transparency in the assessment of whether research practices were implemented with fidelity.

The criterion of confirmability relates to the extent to which a qualitative research study represents the participants' perspectives, instead of the researcher's interpretations that may be a potential source of bias (Babbie, 2017). A strategy that was implemented to ensure confirmability included an audit trail, which involved a detailed description of the decision-making process of synthesizing and analyzing data (Babbie, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Another strategy that was implemented to ensure confirmability was the creation of reflexive notes throughout the data collection and data analysis process, whereby the rationale for researcher interpretations and the consideration of researcher positionality was documented.

Transferability involves the generalizability of research findings to other contexts, which is like external validity in quantitative research (Babbie, 2017). The implementation of transferability strategies involved the thick description of the study's setting, participants, and the data collection methods (Babbie, 2017). Use of thick description allows for the reader to determine the applicability of findings to other conditions (Babbie, 2017). Furthermore, the descriptions of school district setting, and teachers' experiences and perceptions of Hispanic family engagement provides a detailed and clear picture of the study's context and transferability of findings.

### **Summary**

Three themes were prevalent in the findings, which addressed the study's three RQs. These themes included obstacles, inconsistent and isolated family engagement practices, and teachers as experts and value setters. The theme of obstacles addressed the first RQ about participants' perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families. Both the themes of inconsistent, isolated family engagement practices and teachers as experts and value setters addressed the second RQ of what family engagement practices participants perceived as improving student performance. The third RQ related to participants' perception of family engagement practices that activated cultural wealth and overlapping spheres of influence was addressed by all three themes. While participants did not explicitly use the terms of "cultural wealth" and "overlapping spheres of influence" in their responses, the researcher interpreted responses through the lens of the conceptual framework to identify representation of these concepts. Overall, a deficit perspective of families was represented, where teachers were positioned as experts in the

schooling of Hispanic secondary students. The next chapter, Chapter 5, consists of the interpretation of the study's findings, limitations of the study's trustworthiness, recommendations for future research, and the implications for research, social change, and practices, followed by the conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' perceptions about the challenges of building engagement with Hispanic families. Moreover, the purpose of the study was to gain greater insight into the problem of teachers' engagement practices contributing to the continuing disparities in academic achievement between Hispanic and other students. Semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom with 15 secondary level, general education teachers in a medium-sized urban school district in the Northeastern United States. The three RQs addressed in the study were as follows:

RQ1: What are secondary teacher perceptions regarding the challenges of engaging Hispanic families in an urban district of the Northeastern United States?

RQ2: What family engagement practices do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive as improving student performance?

RQ3: How do secondary teachers in an urban district of the Northeastern United States perceive that their family engagement practices demonstrate the activation of Hispanic families' cultural wealth or the overlap between spheres of influence in Hispanic students' lives?

Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase thematic analysis was the approach applied for the inductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts. The three final themes that emerged in the findings were obstacles, inconsistent and isolated family engagement practices, and teachers as experts and value setters. These key findings conveyed an overall deficit perspective of Hispanic families' ability to be genuine partners in their

children's schooling. In addition, the findings shed light on the skills and strategies teachers apply or discard, as well as the multiple realities of engaging Hispanic parents.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The systematic thematic analysis of 15 interviews generated three final themes, which represented secondary level teachers' perceptions of engaging Hispanic families. The three final themes were prevalent across the data set of participants' responses. Participants consistently referenced various obstacles in engaging Hispanic families. One category of obstacles related to Hispanic families' challenges in physically participating in their children's school events due to work schedules or socioeconomic status, which affected childcare support, transportation, and level of education. The other category of obstacles related to participants' work environment, specifically the lack of time in genuinely engaging any families, including Hispanic families. Further, language was described as an obstacle despite district resources, such as translation and interpretation services.

#### **Theme 1: Obstacles in Engaging Hispanic Families**

The first theme of obstacles in communicating with Hispanic families included language, as well as factors related to socioeconomic status, such as access to technology, transportation, childcare, and flexible work schedules. These barriers are often associated with characteristics of Hispanic families and imply a deficit perspective where Hispanic parents are unable or incapable of participating in their children's schooling (Kayser et al., 2021). Participants' perceived obstacles in communicating with Hispanic families confirmed peer-reviewed literature research findings where characteristics, such as

poverty, immigration, and language, were identified as barriers to the conventional conception of parent involvement (see McWayne et al., 2018). Additionally, participants' perception of how families should engage in their children's schooling aligned with conventional, unidirectional approaches to family engagement (see Gil, 2019).

The notion that Hispanic parents cannot meaningfully participate in their children's education due to sociocultural characteristics counters Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. Hispanic families' cultural wealth is not acknowledged or underutilized as an asset when engaging them (Yosso, 2005). Hence, the focus is on how Hispanic families are not able to participate in conventional forms of parent involvement. Racial and ethnic differences are perceived from a deficit perspective, representing the reinforcement of implicit and explicit biases towards COC where they are considered at-risk and challenging (Gaias et al., 2020).

The study's findings also extend knowledge of Hispanic family engagement because participants delved into systemic obstacles to engaging families within their work setting. For example, the lack of time to engage families was prevalent across participants' responses. This finding was particularly interesting because while most participants expressed the importance of family engagement, they also spoke of how competing demands resulted in family engagement taking a back seat. Family engagement was presented as an afterthought or a practice to consider if time permits, but not a priority in improving the educational outcomes of Hispanic students. This disconnect between the rhetoric of family engagement's importance and the reality of practice has been confirmed in the literature (see Wassell et al., 2017).



In addition to the lack of job embedded time, the gap between rhetoric and reality was attributed to little or no training in how to approach families. The peer-reviewed literature confirmed that professional development in culturally informed family engagement practices has the potential to enhance family-school partnerships (Clarke et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2019). Specifically, training in culturally relevant teaching addresses implicit bias and acknowledges marginalized families' sociocultural and economic presentation (Kayser et al., 2021). Participants in the study had not received training in the district on how to engage diverse families to promote student success. However, professional development in culturally responsive teaching provides the opportunity for teachers to modify their family engagement practices (Rivera & Li, 2019).

## **Theme 2: Teachers as Experts and Value Setters**

The second theme of teachers as experts and value setters mirrored the peer-reviewed literature, identifying power asymmetry in the interactions between teachers and parents. The power asymmetry stems from the power differential in which educators are positioned as experts tasked with the responsibility of imparting knowledge and setting expectations (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). For example, imbalanced power dynamics are represented by unidirectional communication where parents are reduced to solely being recipients of information (Barton et al., 2021). Participants described family engagement practices, such as report cards, newsletters, emails, texts, phone calls, conferences, and ceremonies, where teachers provide information and set the parameters for parents' involvement.

These unidirectional forms of communication place teachers in a position of power, authority, and expertise among families. This finding has been confirmed in the existing literature, where teachers perceived themselves as the most knowledgeable individuals and responsible for educating families (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). When considering the engagement of Hispanic families, an additional layer of power imbalance comes into play due to the obstacles these families may experience due to socioeconomic status. Hispanic families are at an additional disadvantage regarding power imbalances with school staff due to being members of a marginalized population (Gaias et al., 2020). Participants described Hispanic parents as being unwilling or incapable of meaningfully contributing to their children's school success.

Furthermore, the notion of teachers as experts is contradictory to the foundation of family-school partnerships promoting equity and accessibility (Leo et al., 2019). While participants referred to partnerships in their responses, they also described situations, such as students working to support their families, where they considered parents' actions or decisions as inappropriate or not in the best interest of the students. These responses represented a value judgment of the Hispanic families. Consequently, this approach to family engagement is founded on the belief system of teachers positioned as experts, perpetuating the existing power differential (Rivera & Lee, 2019).

The theme of teachers as experts and value setters confirmed the notion that teachers' expectations of all families support a White middle- and upper-class value system and culture (see Markowitz et al., 2020). The study's findings support the existence of systemic inequities reflected in home-school interactions, which further

perpetuates the socioeconomic challenges of marginalized populations (see Yull et al., 2018). However, the study's findings also extend knowledge in the sense that three participants expressed that little is expected of Hispanic families. This finding conveys the possibility that while teachers' expectations are based on White, middle- and upper-class culture, teachers may not hold Hispanic families to this standard because they view them as limited or incapable. Again, a deficit perspective of Hispanic families is perpetuated due to diverging cultures and values (see Yosso, 2005).

### **Theme 3: Isolated, Inconsistent Family Engagement Practices**

The theme of isolated and inconsistent family engagement practices was prevalent across participants' responses. The family engagement activities and practices described consisted of unidirectional communication and the presentation of isolated events disconnected from day-to-day schooling. These study findings have been confirmed by the research in the peer-reviewed literature that conventional parent involvement is limited to one-way forms of communication and activities where parents are the recipients of information (Latunde, 2017). Unidirectional communication, such as automated calls, notes/ memos, and flyers, describe interactions where staff are "doing to" instead of "doing with" families. Parents are presented as passive receivers of knowledge and expectations.

Input from families is not invited with conventional and traditional parent involvement (Gil, 2019). The examples of family engagement practices provided by participants portrayed instances of sending information to parents, which participants deemed necessary and useful for supporting their children. While participants spoke to

the need for more time to provide families with workshops focused on how to best support their children, there was no consideration for bidirectional communication where both parties collaborated to identify values and priorities related to students' educational and behavioral outcomes. The word "partnership" was used by participants, but a genuine partnership where both parties have genuine input was not described. Instead, the term partnership was described by participants as being parents' support for teachers' efforts in the classroom at home.

There was an absence of an invitation for parents to take an active role representing a genuine partnership. An active parent role in a partnership involves establishing a positive educational environment where parents participate in school-related decisions and consistently collaborate with school staff (Clarke et al., 2017). A genuine partnership, which involves both schools and families working together to cultivate positive student outcomes and well-being, represents an overlap of spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987, 1992). Participants did not describe this type of overlap of spheres characterized by collaboration between home and school. The lack of overlap may be attributed to the obstacles referenced in the first theme; however, the lack of overlap can also be attributed to a lack of understanding or district training regarding the nature and approach to engaging families.

The study's findings of isolated, inconsistent family engagement activities also confirmed the finding that there is a lack of understanding and acknowledgement for the cultural wealth that COC can contribute (see Yosso, 2005). This deficit perspective of Hispanic families was reinforced in many participants' responses whereby Hispanic

families were perceived as unwilling, unable, or ill-prepared to participate in their children's schooling actively and meaningfully. Instead, Hispanic families were presented as needing information to valuably contribute to their children's educational trajectory and overall success. Most participants were not able to identify assets or values that Hispanic families offered to their children. Furthermore, the few participants who did acknowledge the value of a strong work ethic among Hispanic families did not expand on the development of a genuine school-family partnership to build on this value.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations. The study's limitations included components that are typical of qualitative research and cannot be fully controlled, such as the small sample size and the sampling method (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for the study across the district's 11 secondary level schools. However, participants represented only seven of the 11 secondary schools, which is roughly 64% of the comprehensive secondary schools in the district of study. A methodological inconsistency may have been that not all principals forwarded the original email I shared. While there was follow up communication to my email sent out to principals, there was no way to confirm and enforce that my original email was forwarded to building staff.

Another consideration is that participants who had an interest in the topic of family engagement volunteered to be participants in the study. While there was a small monetary incentive for study participation, participants were expected to use their personal time outside of work hours to participate. This indicates that they had an

invested interest in sharing their experiences or perspectives of family engagement, so results may have been skewed because self-selection bias could not be controlled. For example, participants who felt strongly that there should be more family engagement coordinated by the district or their school administration may have been more inclined to participate. On the other hand, participants who felt that family engagement was another demand of teachers may have wanted to participate to share their perspectives on limited time and increasing responsibilities. Either way, participants self-selected to be participants.

Another limitation of this study was the research design. A basic qualitative research study did not allow for the examination of any other documents to confirm or disconfirm participants' responses of family engagement practices and activities in the district. For example, artifacts of family engagement activities were not examined to validate family engagement practices. While participants' responses were not investigated for accuracy, I was familiar with the district as a past student, parent, and employee serving in different capacities. This leads to a final limitation of the study, which is my own bias.

This final limitation of my own interest in family engagement practices and inclination towards building genuine partnerships with families may have influenced data collection and analysis. An investment and proclivity towards families who have immigrated to the United States and endured multiple challenges in their adjustment was considered throughout data collection and analysis. Participant recruitment and interview protocols were followed to minimize bias. However, there is the possibility that

researcher bias may have influenced the interpretation of data due to multiple roles and experiences within the district over the span of almost 40 years.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research in family engagement emerged from this study. For example, one recommendation is that the study be replicated in suburban and rural areas in the region or in urban settings outside of the Northeastern United States in which Hispanic families reside. Exploring other settings may either confirm or disconfirm aspects of this study's findings. If teachers in other settings express similar experiences with engaging Hispanic families as this study's participants, the findings may be generalizable beyond the district of interest.

While the study was focused specifically on secondary level, general education teachers' perspectives of Hispanic family engagement, a recommendation would be to replicate the study with academic support staff, such as school adjustment and guidance counselors, or school-based administrators, on the secondary level. It would be informative to investigate whether these support and administrative roles have similar perspectives and experiences with Hispanic family engagement. The study's participants identified the lack of time as the biggest obstacle to engaging families. This, it would be interesting to see if support and administrative staff, whose responsibilities are more focused on family communication, would present perspectives that vary from this study's participants. Additionally, the replication of the study with administrators and counselors would yield data on support and administrative staff's perceived skillset in genuinely

engaging Hispanic families in their children's schooling, which has the potential to inform professional development in family engagement.

Another recommendation to explore Hispanic family engagement practices would be to interview Hispanic families about their perspectives and experiences with family-school engagement. For example, Hispanic parents could provide their perspectives of challenges in engaging in their children's schooling within the district. Also, parents can identify what family engagement practices applied by teachers improve student performance. The Hispanic parent lens yields valuable insight into current family engagement practices. Also, examining Hispanic parents' perspective of family engagement has the potential to identify gaps and areas in need of improvement in specific schools and across the district.

Further research could also explore the perspective of secondary level Hispanic students in the district. Middle and high school students can provide their perception of what type of family engagement practices increase the overlap between home and school. Students can also identify specific practices they perceive to support their academic and overall well-being. Secondary level students may also have insight into the obstacles and challenges that their families and teachers encounter when it comes to collaboration and establishing partnerships. Similar to how Hispanic parents may provide another perspective to family engagement practices, secondary students may also provide insight on the connection between family engagement and their overall success in school.

Finally, researchers interested in family engagement may find it helpful to define family engagement for participants at the onset of the interview. An interview question in



this study was for participants to define family engagement in their own words. A few participants asked if they were expected to explain what family engagement “should be” or what it “actually is.” One cannot help but wonder if family engagement was defined by the researcher during the interview, whether more targeted data would have been generated, specifically teachers’ perceptions of how their family engagement practices activated cultural wealth and the overlap between spheres of influence. Given the lack of family engagement professional development provided by the district, there may have been a limited common language and understanding of concepts related to family-school partnerships and family engagement practices. Explicit professional development in family engagement for educators in the district is essential to addressing this study’s findings.

### **Implications**

The potential impact for positive social change arising from the study ranges from individual teacher practices to district policy in family engagement. While the study’s findings capture teachers’ family engagement practices and challenges with engaging Hispanic families on the secondary level across the district, there is also the potential to inform best practices in family engagement and ultimately remove barriers to reaching all families. For example, participants identified challenges to engaging Hispanic families that are embedded into the system. These challenges included the lack of time within the workday and the lack of compensation outside the workday to engage families. Another systemic challenge was the lack of training and professional development in how to appropriately engage families.

The identification of these challenges within the system is a jumping-off point from which to approach family engagement in the district. The study provides evidence that there is a need for clearly and collaboratively defining family engagement to establish common language and consistent objectives across the secondary level district wide. Furthermore, there is evidence for the need to outline specific family engagement responsibilities and carve out time dedicated to these priorities so that teachers' individual efforts are coordinated and impactful. However, the creation of objectives and coordination of efforts around family engagement requires the onset of meaningful training and ongoing support. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that professional development in family engagement is needed.

Specific recommendations for practice include professional development for all teachers and administrators on establishing genuine, bidirectional family partnerships, where all families' values are acknowledged and respected when collaborating to support student success. An additional recommendation is that time is scheduled for teachers to engage with families to reinforce that family engagement is a priority and contributing component to student success. This is imperative given that all educators in the district are evaluated on the standard of family and community engagement. To improve family engagement practices, training and coaching is essential. Lastly, teachers' practices should be supported by administrators and counselors on the secondary level, as coordination of efforts is necessary for positive systemic change to occur.

While most participants acknowledged the importance of family engagement to students' success, the underlying implication was that Hispanic families were lacking in

their capacity to appropriately engage with schools. Obstacles related to Hispanic families' socioeconomic status and language were referred to in most participants' responses regarding their ability to engage. Consequently, this finding supports a deficit perspective of families that does not represent mainstream culture espoused by White middle and upper-class values. A greater understanding of how to engage minoritized families is needed to promote positive social change.

### **Conclusion**

The term partnership is often referred to when describing family engagement. A partnership indicates a reciprocal relationship where there is collaboration often involving joint decision making. However, the conventional perspective of family engagement and partnership between students' schools and homes involves families supporting teachers' efforts. This disconnect between genuine partnership and the conventional practice of family engagement can be attributed to an asymmetrical power imbalance between educators and parents, which is more pronounced when families are marginalized and facing various challenges related to socioeconomic status and language differences. While teachers want the involvement and support of parents, the type of involvement is prescribed and based on mainstream values and traditional, ineffective practices.

The mainstream values influencing family engagement represent White middle and upper-class values. Consequently, when families do not fit the mold to be involved in a prescribed manner, educators make judgments about families. These judgments can range from the perception that parents do not want to be involved to parents not being capable of being involved. In either case, there is a deficit perspective of families,

especially families of different cultures and backgrounds, who may not comply with educators' expectations of family involvement. In these instances, there is a lack of recognition for the cultural value families of diverse backgrounds may bring to the school environment to develop a true partnership. The process of overlapping the home and school spheres of influence involves a genuine effort to receive and apply the input of all families.

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## Appendix A: Email to Secondary Level Principals

Dear Principal,

I am conducting a study to increase our understanding of how secondary level teachers engage Hispanic families, for which I have approval from the district's Office of Research and Accountability. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding Hispanic family engagement. Overall, the objective of this study is to benefit society by providing greater insight into engaging families with the purpose of improving educational outcomes for Hispanic students.

I have attached an invitational letter for potential participants to this email message. Please forward this email with the attached invitational letter to the general education teachers in your building.

I can be contacted at XXX or XXX@waldenu.edu with any questions regarding the proposed study.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully,

Triada Frangou-Apostolou

## Appendix B: Invitational Letter

### “Exploring Secondary Teachers’ Family Engagement Practices Targeting Academic Achievement for Hispanic Students”

Dear Secondary Level Teacher,

I invite you to participate in a research study interview to increase our understanding of how secondary level teachers engage Hispanic families. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers’ experiences and perceptions regarding Hispanic family engagement. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a secondary level teacher of seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade students in this district.

As a secondary level teacher, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview will take no more than 60 minutes outside of your workday. The interview will be conducted via the Zoom platform and audio recorded. The interview questions will be focused on your thoughts and experiences with engaging Hispanic families. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to ensure that personal identifying information is not revealed during the analysis and write-up of findings.

A \$20 dollar Visa gift card will be provided as compensation for participating in this study. Your participation will be a valuable addition to research and could lead to greater understanding of family engagement practices in the field of education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may choose to discontinue participation at any time. Please feel free to contact me at XXX or XXX@waldenu.edu with any questions. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Triada Frangou-Apostolou

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to explore secondary level teachers' perceptions regarding Hispanic family engagement and how it relates to students' school success. Furthermore, the purpose of this interview is for me to better understand your experiences with engaging Hispanic families.

### **Informed Consent:**

I will be recording this interview on the Zoom platform so that I may transcribe our conversation. Once I create the transcript, I will share it with you for your review. Please contact me via email or phone call if there is anything on the transcript that needs to be changed or added.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary where you can withdraw from the study at any point.

I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Digital and hard copies of data collected for this study will be kept secure in locked cabinets in my private office, which only I will be able to access.

If you do not have any questions or concerns regarding the study or the interview process, I will begin by asking the interview questions.

### **Questions:**

QA. What is your current position with the school district? (subject and grade/grades)



QB. How long have you been teaching?

QC. How long have you been teaching in this district?

QD. What is your highest level of education?

1. How do you define family engagement in the field of education? (RQ2: teachers' family engagement expectations and practices; teachers positioned as experts)
2. How would you describe the importance of family engagement to you, your students and their families? (RQ2: importance of family engagement; teachers positioned as experts)
3. What do you see as your role in supporting your students' learning at home? (RQ2: teachers' family engagement expectations and practices, and RQ3: conceptual framework element of overlapping spheres of influence; teachers positioned as experts)
4. What types of family engagement activities do you feel are effective in promoting student academic achievement among secondary level Hispanic students? (RQ2: asset versus deficit-based views of family; family engagement intervention-population match)
5. How would you describe your school's activities that focus on family engagement for Hispanic students? (RQ3: conceptual framework elements of activating cultural wealth and overlapping spheres of influence; family engagement intervention-population match; asset versus deficit-based views of families)
6. How would you describe your motivation to engage Hispanic families at your school? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)

7. What elements influence whether you are able to engage Hispanic parents' in your students' learning as much as you would like to? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)
8. How does the socioeconomic status of Hispanic parents influence family engagement at school? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers and RQ3; conceptual framework element of activating cultural wealth)
9. What efforts do you make to engage your Hispanic students' parents at your school? (RQ3; conceptual framework elements of activating cultural wealth and overlapping spheres of influence)
10. How prepared do you feel in engaging Hispanic families? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)
11. How could you as an educator improve efforts to engage Hispanic families at your school? (RQ3; conceptual framework elements of activating cultural wealth and overlapping spheres of influence)
12. How would you describe your district's professional development involving family engagement? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)
13. What kind of training, if any, have you received involving family engagement with culturally diverse families? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)
14. How do you think administrators could prepare teachers to engage culturally diverse families at your school? (RQ1: Hispanic family engagement barriers)

**Clarification Phrases to Interview Questions if Needed:**

Can you tell me more about...?

Can you give me an example of ...?

What did you mean when you said...?

**Conclusion:**

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. I will email a copy of the interview transcript with you once it is completed. If you have any corrections you would like to make to the transcript, please email me back the corrections within 7 days of receipt. Please do not hesitate to contact me to share any reflections about your experience.

## Appendix D: Initial Codes and Secondary Codes/ Categories

open communications  
 two-way communications  
 open form of dialogue  
 being accessible  
 need more regular parent communication  
 equal and fair accessibility for families  
 parent resources for contacting teacher  
 trying best to engage families given time and competing demands  
 focused on priorities other than family engagement  
 lack of staff and district interest in family engagement  
 unmotivated colleagues  
 degree of passivity among staff  
 need more consistency in reaching out to families  
 sporadic family activities  
 workshops and meetings for parents  
 parent surveys  
 nonexistent family engagement activities  
 multicultural event  
 Know Your School Night  
 Jump Start Orientation  
 awards ceremonies  
 need for more school-wide activities  
 lack of compensation for staff's family engagement  
 expected to play multiple roles when engaging families  
 no time for family engagement  
 expectation to use personal time for family engagement  
 absence coverage and bathroom duties take time away from engaging families  
 need for infrastructure from district  
 need for additional support staff to engage families  
 professional development in engaging different cultures needed  
 nonexistent in-district professional development  
 lack of administrative support  
 lack of diverse administrators  
 teachers are more comfortable than administrators in engaging families in positive ways  
 difficult conversation on diversity not happening  
 language barriers  
 unable to communicate in every language  
 challenge of not speaking Spanish  
 use of interpreters and translation  
 challenges with interpreting services  
 very rarely reach out to parents  
 nervous about engaging families

family engagement as unpredictable  
family engagement as intimidating  
teachers forced to engage during Covid  
parents' work schedules as obstacle  
parents working two jobs  
families' lack of childcare and transportation  
parents unavailable to attend events  
families' limited access to communication devices  
parents' negative school experiences  
parents' education level  
implicit bias and perceptible obstacles when engaging Hispanic families  
families not understanding the importance  
parents don't know how to be involved  
parents don't have support or resources to be involved  
no one picks up phone  
nonresponsive families  
parents are unaware  
ensuring parent understanding  
teachers assuming everyone is poor  
families' financial challenges  
worry about forming bad relationships with parents  
unsure of how to engage families  
comes more from teacher on secondary level  
greater family engagement for younger students  
family engagement more important on elementary level  
holding students accountable  
students' responsibility to advocate  
setting expectations for students  
strategies, techniques, and expectations on what students need to be doing  
teacher responsibility to make students aware of world  
student family projects  
highlighting student background during multicultural night  
opportunities for students to showcase work  
nonacademic clubs and activities for students  
celebration of student growth and expression  
incorporate students' backgrounds into instruction  
incorporating families' experiences and culture into the curriculum  
inspiring students in the classroom  
homework  
parents' attendance at events  
things that should be happening at home  
parents as leverage in student outcomes  
parents responsible for showing students the importance of education  
helping students achieve potential

working together and striving to achieve good grades  
keeping families informed  
outreach in form of phone calls, mailers, emails  
opportunities for parents to be more involved in the education process  
ability of the teacher to remain in contact with parents  
having the right tools for family outreach  
teachers as experts  
providing parents with grades  
parents as participants in students' learning  
ability of the teacher to remain in contact with parents  
making sure families understand students' needs  
parents' expectation that children work  
school is secondary for families due to more pressing basic needs  
families' cultural expectation for teachers to handle school issues  
reasonable demands for students outside of school  
low expectations for families to support students  
low expectations for students  
no distinction between communicating with Hispanic families compared to other families  
partnership  
community working together to raise their children  
need for community connections  
building better relationship with parents  
parents need to feel welcomed  
parents need to feel understood  
making families comfortable at school  
making an effort to invite families

## Appendix E: Categories and Initial Themes

Categories	Initial Themes
need for communication, outreach	acknowledging importance of family engagement
lack of importance of family engagement, lack of interest in family engagement	bigger priorities than family engagement
little family engagement, lack of proactive follow up	inconsistent family engagement practices
annual family events, recommended family engagement activities	isolated family engagement practices
teachers' boundaries in family engagement, job embedded time to engage families	lack of compensation to engage families outside of school hours
multiple teacher responsibilities, competing initiatives	lack of time to engage families
district lack of structure, lack of professional development, perceptions of administrators' family engagement	lack of training and support
language challenges for teachers, issues with interpretation and translation services	language as a barrier
family obstacles to being engaged in students' schooling, family SES, lack of confidence in reaching out to families, lack of parental support, reluctance to reach out to families, implicit bias, teachers' concerns about engaging families	obstacles in reaching families
family engagement as greater priority on elementary level, focus on student engagement over family engagement, students' greater responsibility	student responsibility on the secondary level
low expectations of students, expectations of parents, student outcomes, teacher directed parent involvement, teacher directed outcomes, teachers as value setters, universal vs. culturally responsive family engagement	teachers setting expectations
partnership, relationship building	welcoming families and forming relationships

## Appendix F: Initial Themes and Sample Responses

Initial Themes	Sample Responses
language as a barrier	P8: the parent only speaks Spanish, and then that can cause some barriers with like using the interpreter line
obstacles in reaching families	P6: They [families] don't have time, you know, to take off, maybe to attend a meeting
lack of training and support	P11: More professional development training on how to fully engage parents, you know, who may not be first generation Americans, and like learning different tools and different apps we can use to reach out to them
lack of time to engage families	P7: We don't have enough time as teachers in the school year or the day to actually focus and actually sit down and talk about how can we create a welcoming school environment for these families and kids.
lack of compensation to engage families outside of school hours	P1: it doesn't make sense to like put that on a teacher who's not getting paid for it
teachers setting expectations	P15: to provide feedback to the parents, and be able to communicate my expectations, and student needs
acknowledging importance of family engagement	P2: in open communications to be involved in getting the most and helping students to achieve their potential
bigger priorities than family engagement	P6: So you know there's only so many hours in a day, right. They want miracles.
student responsibility on the secondary level	P3: Family engagement at the elementary school is definitely more important than it was in the middle school.
isolated family engagement activities	P5: I would say it's sporadic, like, I don't think there's a lot of activity, specifically directed towards Hispanic families.
inconsistent family engagement practices	P10: I don't know of the school doing anything in particular for Hispanic students. I know they're having a multicultural night coming up. But it doesn't seem like they do enough...