PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS THAT HINDER ENGAGMENT OF

DISENFRANCHISED PARENTS OF SECOND DISTRICT ELEMENTARY

SCHOOL IN CRAWFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Doctoral Capstone Project

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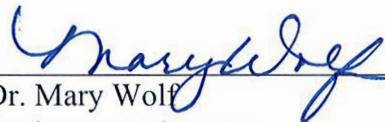California University of Pennsylvania

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Dedication

To my wife Monica René Washington, you are the best wife ever! To Corey,

Arria, and Adrienne, I love you.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Table of Contents

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

List of Tables

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

List of Figures

Abstract

Parental involvement in schools reaps many benefits for schools and families, yet disenfranchised parents often face barriers to participating fully in their children's academics and school activities. This study examined the parental engagement practices of one elementary school in the Crawford Central School District. Although Crawford Central School District (CCSD) has implemented several strategies to help low-income students and their families connect to school, parents were still finding it difficult to be fully engaged with the school. Because of this, the research questions focused on parents' perceptions of barriers that hinder engagement of disenfranchised parents. This action research study utilized a qualitative approach to identify the barriers to parental involvement in a rural school with a high free and reduced lunch percentage and low academic achievement. The researcher employed multiple data collection methods, including an electronic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The study revealed several barriers to parent engagement. These barriers include educational barriers, financial constraints, delayed dissemination of information, structural barriers in the community, and the importance of trust in the parent-school relationship. However, despite facing barriers, such as a lack of knowledge on how to participate or clearance-related issues, parents demonstrated a genuine interest in being deeply involved.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background

The Meadville National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Education Committee has been in conversation with Crawford Central School District about the lack of opportunities for meaningful involvement by families in the schools, an issue for low income students and other marginalized groups. A survey conducted by the NAACP Education Committee (October 2020) revealed a lack of family engagement, a powerful predictor of high achievement by students, as an issue facing schools. The lack of parental involvement in schools is recognized on local and national levels. For years, government legislation has encouraged school systems to promote parental involvement; however, parental involvement is still a concern among administrators and educators (Foley, 2015). Research indicates that students achieve greater success when their families take an active role in their education. In a response to the findings both by the NAACP Education Committee and research, Crawford Central School District (CCSD) has implemented several strategies to help low-income students and their families connect to school. Although a long-standing initiative of the school district, attempts to bring parents into the schools have been unsuccessful. The district understands that parent involvement is a shared responsibility in which schools must make a concerted effort to engage parents in meaningful ways.

Parents are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development; therefore, Crawford Central School District seeks to understand effective

strategies to increase parental engagement and remove barriers for disenfranchised parents.

The Crawford Central School District was formed in 1972 as part of a county-wide educational reorganization program. All school districts in Crawford County, including Erie and Warren Counties, make up Intermediate Unit #5 of the Pennsylvania Public Schools System excluding Titusville. Meadville is the Crawford County seat and offers the majority of public housing, social services, and medical facilities. A stable economic environment, fruitful cultural and recreational opportunities, and proximity to several metropolitan areas make Crawford County an appealing place in which to work, live, and educate children.

Crawford Central School District is the largest of four districts in the county with 3,166 students enrolled as of October 2022. The district consists of eight school buildings (five elementary, one middle, one junior-senior high, and one high school). The school district is divided into two major attendances areas, one serving Cochranton and the other Meadville. Cochranton students are housed in a K-6 elementary school and a 7-12 junior-senior high school. Students in the Meadville area attend one of four K-6 elementary schools, a 7-8 middle school, and a 9-12 high school. Students from both high schools may attend the Crawford County Career and Technical Center on a half-day basis. As of 2019, there were 84,629 people who lived and worked in Crawford County, which is 36% urban and 64% rural. The top three industries of employment in the county are Educational, Health and Social Services (26.9%), Manufacturing (21.0%), and Retail Trade (10.2%) (City-Data.com, n.d.).

Second District Elementary School is one of five elementary buildings in the Crawford Central School District. The school serves 328 students in grades Kindergarten-6. The student- teacher ratio is 12:1, which is lower than the Pennsylvania state level average which is 14:1. According to data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2022), 74.4% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. The ethnicity breakdown of Second District Elementary is 73% White, 9% Multi-Racial, 5% Hispanic, 12% Black and 1% Asian. Eighty-one percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Moreover, Second District Elementary School qualifies for Title I funds, which provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving students master challenging curriculum in math and reading. The Title I funds support two Title I reading specialists and one early childhood teacher at Second District Elementary School. The funds also provide supplies, staff development opportunities, and support parent engagement activities. A monumental event happened in September 1880 that catapulted Second District Elementary into the national spotlight. This event led to the end of segregation by race in Pennsylvania's public schools. Elias Allen tried unsuccessfully to enroll his two children at Second District Elementary School. He appealed to the Crawford County Court of Common Pleas, and Judge Person Church declared unconstitutional the 1854 state law mandating separate schools for Negro children. This law was amended, effective July 4, 1881, to prohibit such segregation (Burnett, 2012). Second District Elementary School became the first school in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to be integrated.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Capstone Focus

The purpose of this action research was to identify the barriers to parental involvement in a rural school district with a high free and reduced lunch percentage and low academic success. The research questions focused on parents' perceptions of barriers to parental involvement by using surveys/questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews.

Research Questions

The focus questions included:

1. What are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?
2. In what ways was parent involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary?
3. What are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?

Expected Outcomes

Participants in this action research study included parents of students who attend Second District Elementary School in the Crawford Central School District. All parents were invited to participate in the survey. The researcher used thematic analysis to identify themes of parental involvement barriers, experiences, and perceptions. For open-ended responses the researcher developed a coding system to track emerging trends and

themes. Strategies that emerged as effective strategies to parental barriers were developed and implemented. Additionally, best practices in parental engagement were apparent from the literature review and provided an additional source of information. These best practices, survey data, interviews and focus groups were used to develop interventions to remove barriers to parent engagement.

Bergman's Learning Heroes' survey was distributed to parents, teachers, and principals and found that educators overwhelmingly realize the benefits of family engagement for student success. Unfortunately, most parent-teacher interactions are short, infrequent, and negative (Bergman, 2022). Since many schools do not encourage or expect teachers to collaborate closely with their students' families, it is not surprising that 43% of teachers say creating strong relationships with parents and/or caregivers is difficult (Bergman, 2022; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Most educators agree that more support is needed to help staff members identify and work through biases they may have when trying to communicate with families (Bergman, 2022). Traditional family engagement events and activities often fail to connect families to what their children are learning in meaningful ways (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Therefore, an asset-based approach was needed that focuses on strengths. In the context of family engagement, this means understanding that caregivers can support student learning and are equal partners in the educational process (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Epstein's (2010) framework provided structure to categorize the ways in which parents participate in schools, classify the barriers under parental involvement types, and organize suggestions for improvement based on these types. While parental involvement

can take many forms, Epstein's (2010) framework outlines six types of parental

involvement:

- o Type 1 is parenting, which addresses establishing home environments to

  support students.

- o Type 2 is communicating, which focuses on designing effective

  communication regarding programs and student progress.

- o Type 3 is volunteering, which centers on recruiting and organizing

  parental support.

- o Type 4 is learning at home, which provides information and ideas to

  families on how to aid students effectively.

- o Type 5 is decision-making, which targets how to include parents in school

  decisions and developing parent leaders.

- o Type 6 is collaborating with the community, which identifies and

  integrates resources and service to strengthen stakeholder relationships (p.

  85)

Fiscal Implications

The budget developed to support this action research was designed to identify

effective methods to implement the removal of barriers to parental engagement and

increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School in the Crawford

Central School District. This researcher distributed surveys, conducted focus groups and

semi-structured interviews to collect data. As part of improving parent engagement, the

district has created a collaboration with Parents as Allies which is designed to identify,

share, and facilitate the use of promising new strategies to build stronger family-school

partnerships in school districts. A Second District Design Team which consists of parents, teachers, administrators, and the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) members helped develop and implement parent engagement activities over the course of the 2022-2023 school year.

The budget included teachers' stipends to serve on the Design Team at the contractual rate of $27/hour according to the collective bargaining agreement. The teachers on the Design Team were required to attend all scheduled events. The estimated cost was $1,620 (3 teachers x $27/hour x 20 hours = $1,620.) In addition, the budget set aside a stipend for any teacher from Second District to attend parental engagement events implemented during the 2022-2023 school year. The estimated cost was $1,620 ($27/ hour x 20). As a result of the parental surveys, the Second District Design Team developed and implemented activities to remove barriers to parent participation. Therefore, the budget incorporated a line item for hospitality ($1,500). Parent-school engagement and improved communication within the school community was also an aspect of this research, so the budget also included funding to pilot and implement alternative communications methods such as applications like Classroom DOJO, SEESAW, Remind or Zoom. The goal was to facilitate two-way communication between the parents and teachers to build trust and provide a vehicle for timely information sharing. The estimated cost was $1,500. Supplies, materials, and resources intended to support this research was an integral part of the budget. This budget line also included supplies for activities created by the Design Team. The estimated cost was $1,500. A total budget of $7,740 was secured.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Summary

The purpose of this action research was to identify the barriers to parental involvement in a rural school with a high free and reduced lunch percentage and low academic success. Crawford Central School District (CCSD) has implemented several strategies to help low-income students and their families connect to school. Although parent and family engagement is a district initiative, attempts to bring parents into the schools have been unsuccessful. The district understands that parent engagement in schools is a shared responsibility in which our schools are committed to reaching out to parents in meaningful ways. Additionally, parents are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development. Therefore, Crawford Central School District seeks to understand what effective methods are essential for schools to implement to increase parental engagement and remove barriers for disenfranchised parents. Parent engagement is an essential element in the education process and research studies have linked parental involvement to numerous positive outcomes (Foley, 2015). Therefore, this action research sought to identify barriers and to recognize, share, and facilitate the use of promising new strategies to build stronger family-school partnerships. "The climate is being created in the Crawford Central School District to support full partnership with families-to expand engagement opportunities" (A. P. Dixon, personal communication, January 21, 2023).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The negative implications of the lack of parental involvement support the need to examine the details associated with parent participation in schools. Some parents are disenfranchised by the educational system because they do not know how to become involved in the process (Foley, 2015). "Engagement practices vary from family to family, for reasons like culture, education, and due to time commitment, there are families who cannot fully engage whatsoever" (Ortiz-Leger, 2022, p. 14). There are basic beliefs, agreement, and disagreement about the importance of families and the benefits of parental involvement. But one thing is common, "Teachers would like families to assist, guide, and influence their children to do their schoolwork. Families want teachers to let them know how to help their children at home" (Epstein, 2018, p. 3). While family involvement can be defined as parents taking a part of their child's education by being involved in school events and activities, experts define family engagement as families and teachers sharing the responsibility to help their children learn (Ortiz-Leger, 2022). According to Epstein (2018), the partnership between home and school is a better way to engage families because they recognize the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community. "The implementation of better practices of family engagement in an educational setting and in the home has shown to be beneficial for children's academic success" (Ortiz-Leger, 2022, p. 14). When home, school, and community are actively engaged to solve problems and meet the needs of the community, schools become partners with parents.

Even when they do not come in person, families come in children's minds and hearts, and in their hopes and dreams. They come with the children's problems and promise. Without exception, teachers and administrators have explicit or implicit contact with their student's families every day. (Epstein, 2018, p. 4)

The relationship and trust between families and schools become distressed when families are not supported through the barriers of time constraints, language, and basic understandings of family difficulties and structure (Ortiz-Leger, 2022). The seminal researcher Joyce Epstein (2018) asked:

Whose dreams are these? Children will like school; work hard; do the best they can; graduate from high school; continue their education; gain employment; and become good citizens, friends, and members of their families. Countless surveys and projects with thousands of educators, families, and students reveal that these are common goals and dreams. Too often, though, these ideals are unattained by this nation's children. How can more students be helped to meet these goals? To answer questions about goals, we must ask questions about roles: What should families do, what should schools and communities do, and what should students do to reach their common objective for children's success in school and in the future? These questions are the reasons for studying, implementing, and improving school, family, and community partnerships. (p. 3)

Although studies over the last 30 years identify a strong link between parents' involvement in school and increased student achievement, enhanced self-esteem, improved behavior, and better school attendance, family involvement in U.S. schools remains minimal (Mapp, 1997). Historically, schools have not been designed to engage

families in the education of their children (Brookings Institution, 2021). American education had been a system that, at its foundation, was surrounded by bureaucratic practices. This bureaucracy indirectly led to decreased involvement by parents in their children's education (Bido, 2020). The hidden message implied families should bring their children to the schoolhouse and schools would take care of the rest. However, that has not always been the case. Families and schools are dynamic institutions; both have changed markedly in the last two centuries. Not surprisingly, family-school interactions have shifted as well (Epstein, 2018; Lareau, 1987).

Confusion and disagreement exist about which practices of involvement are important and how to garner family participation (Epstein, 2018). Some educators expect parents to become involved on their own, while some parents expect the school to tell them what to do and they will simply respond, but Epstein (2018) suggests that neither of the approaches, waiting for involvement or dictating involvement, is effective in family involvement.

Historical Evolution of Parental Involvement

Colonial schools were initially created to represent the religious beliefs of the community (Hiatt-Michael, 1994) and education of children was the primary responsibility of the parents, with little or no formal involvement from a structured educational entity. The first schools were created by religious leaders, and the curriculum was comprised of religion, reading, and writing and later placed under governance of townships (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). As governance became the focal point of townships, Hiatt-Michael (1994) also noted schools began to align along social class, which mimicked the class structure of Great Britain. This arrangement created schools that

accommodated to the social demand of parents and often operated in an authoritative manner reserved for the select few (Bido, 2020). By 1860, every state in the U.S. housed a public school system. Horace Mann, a pioneer in the public education system, established a vision of public education that was coming to fruition and, by default, would decrease the level of parental involvement (Bido, 2020).

According to Lareau (1987), at least three major stages of family-school interaction can be identified. During the early stage of education family life and schooling were integrated as parents in rural areas provided food and housing for teachers. In the second period marked by the rise of mass schooling, parents provided political and economic support for the selection and maintenance of school sites. As colonies continued to evolve and grow, the education landscape saw a shift in parental involvement in public education (Bido, 2020). In the third period, parents increased their efforts to reinforce the curriculum and promote cognitive development at home. Key players arose to bring about the birth of American education, such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. They found value in reading, writing, and rhetoric. Parents assumed that their role, in essence, was to educate their children in those areas of importance, but it became apparent that parents lacked the proficiency needed to adequately instruct their children (Bido, 2020).

In the 1850's unemployed immigrant children provided low-wage labor, which supplemented family income, but became competition for the average working male. To counter the influx of child labor and low wages, working men formed unions. Labor unions enlisted politicians to enact laws to limit the exploitation of children and ultimately remove them from the work force. Additionally, compulsory education laws

were passed (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). The author posits that the creation of child labor and truancy laws to keep kids in school actually were design to keep children from the workforce. A political maneuver cloaked in the best interest of children but designed to meet the needs of adults in society. These laws created a shift in the control parents held and caused a decline in parent involvement (Bido, 2020).

Parents began monitoring their children's education by becoming classroom volunteers and monitoring special education issues. Many factors such as educational attainment, work hours and social dynamics greatly impacted the level of parental-involvement (Lareau, 1987). American education had been a system that, at its foundation, was surrounded by bureaucratic practices (Bido, 2020).

As America entered the industrial era, an unintentional consequence of the child labor and compulsory attendance laws led to the decline of parents in the education of their children. These laws made it illegal for a parent to keep a child out of school without the permission of school authorities and carried stiff fines for noncompliance. Additionally, as educational systems went through the process of bureaucratization and professionalization, the educational system reduced parental influence in public schooling (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). This era legitimized the sentiment that education is to be implemented and controlled by professionals and administrators (Bido, 2020).

Currently, educational politics are occurring at school board meetings across the country. Parent and special interest groups are storming the schoolhouse to protest masking, vaccination, gender issues, book banning, and social-emotional learning disguised as critical race theory. Interesting, Senate Bill 996 in Pennsylvania, titled "Parents Bill of Rights" seeks to protect parental rights with the following rules:

(a) General rule.--The liberty of a parent to direct the upbringing, education, care

and welfare of the parent's child is a fundamental right.(b) Infringement.--Neither

a Commonwealth agency nor a non-Commonwealth agency may infringe upon

the right under subsection (a) without demonstrating that the law or ordinance is

narrowly tailored to meet a compelling governmental interest by the least

restrictive means. This legislation will make it clear in statute that the

Commonwealth or any of its political subdivisions may not infringe on the

fundamental rights of a parent to direct the upbringing, education, health care, and

mental health of his or her minor child without demonstrating that such action is

reasonable and necessary to achieve a compelling state interest, narrowly tailored,

and not otherwise served by a less restrictive means. The legislation will also

codify a parent's right to access and review all school records related to their

child, a right to review all instructional materials used throughout the school year,

and the right to opt out their child from certain curriculum that the parent finds to

be objectionable or harmful. (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators,

Legislative Committee Meeting, 2022)

This legislation is an example of how politics wrapped in the special interest of parents is

legitimately a battle between the political sides across the aisle. What is worth noting is

that Pennsylvania is a local control state and parents have always had the right to review

instructional materials and any other records. Historically, America education has always

been one of local parental control of school, governance, parental support of curriculum,

parental choice of teachers, and parental support of religious teaching of the school

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

(Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, Legislative Committee Meeting, 2022)

Another piece of legislation in Pennsylvania that drives a wedge between school and family engagement is the current regulation surrounding parent volunteers in schools. The events surrounding the Penn State University football program forever changed how educational institutions handle employees and volunteers across the Commonwealth. However, the administrative regulations regarding parent volunteerism have brought the process to almost a standstill. According to School Code – 24 P.S. Sec. 111, 510, 1418; State Board of Education Regulations- 22 PA code Sec 8.1; State Department of Health Regulations – 28 PA Code Sec. 23.44 and Child Protective Services Law- 23 Pa. C.S.A. Sec. 6301 all volunteers are required to:

1. Complete a volunteer disclosures sheet for each school that he/she wishes to serve as volunteer.

2. Provide a Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Report dated no more than one year prior to the date on the volunteer disclosure sheet.

3. Provide a Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Child Abuse Report dated no more than one year prior to the date on the volunteer disclosure sheet.

4. Provide a Federal Criminal History Report dated no more than one year prior to the date on the volunteer disclosure sheet.

5. Complete a PDE-6004 Arrest/Conviction Report and Certification Form dated no more than one year prior to the date on the volunteer disclosure sheet.

6. Complete a Volunteer Self-Reporting Commitment Form.

7. Obtain a written statement from a physician.

The legislation does allow for those deemed as visitors to bypass the demanding process. However, many districts in fear of litigation adhere to the rigorous requirements of the law. An interesting point to mention is what was designed as a shield to protect our students became a sword to keep parents from engaging in schools. Because of this, school buildings now have the perfect process to keep parents at bay.

As the separation between parent involvement and public school power grew, mothers sought more control and created the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) in 1987. The work of NCM led to the development of Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) in school today (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Parent involvement was supported by researchers whose work highlighted the positive influence of parental involvement. It pushed for the equity that was needed for all students to receive an education. With parents' assistance, researchers were able to highlight the gaps that existed in American academia (Bido, 2020). Additionally, four historical trends helped to explain the change of family and school interaction. First, more women over the past 40 years became educated by earning college degrees at all levels. Secondly, the work of Dr. Spock became mainstream knowledge. His work offered parents information about home environment, learning and health care. Additionally, family structures began to change, and this shift had an impact on family and school relations. Finally, communication and engagement shifted as working mothers and single parents needed alternative methods of communication from the school (Epstein, 2018).

Lareau (1987) suggested that most of the research around parent involvement focus on three major conceptual approaches: the culture of poverty approach, the institutional approach, and the cultural-capital approach. According to the culture of poverty approach, parental involvement varied because parents of different social classes have varying values that is working-class parents place less emphasis on the importance of schooling and maintain a greater separation between their roles and those of school staff than do middle-class parents (Sui-Chu & Willms,1996). In the institutional approach, the educational institutions themselves cause unequal parental involvement with discriminatory practices and often accommodate the needs of middle-class parents, which made them feel more welcome than working-class parents (Lareau, 1987). According to the culture capital thesis, schools are middle-class institutions with middle-class values, organizational patterns, and forms of communication. Children, who are raised in middle-class environments, have a form of cultural capital that enables them to adapt more readily to and benefit from school life. Similarly, middle-class parents are more likely to feel comfortable relating to teachers and becoming involved in school activities (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). It is important to note that in the latter approach working-class parents are neither perceived as having low aspiration nor are schools berated for discriminatory practices.

According to Ho and Willms (1996), the perception among educational researchers is that successful schools develop practices that foster greater communication with parents, encourage parents to assist children at home with schoolwork, and recruit parents to work as volunteers to participate in school governance. However, their findings suggest that such behavior in schools were uncommon. The results indicated that levels

of communication and levels of parental involvement in the home were about the same across all schools, so it was impossible to identify reliably schools that were particularly effective or ineffective in inducing higher levels of parental involvement. Moreover, the study provided little support that parents' socioeconomic status and two-parent family structure increased the involvement of parents. However, Epstein (2018) suggests that students achieve at a higher level when home, schools, and communities work together to support learning and development.

Parent Involvement Policies and Accountability

Research points to the positive effects of parent involvement on student achievement, and as a result, many state and federal initiatives over the past 50 years have sought to compel schools to encourage parent involvement (Krage, 2018). Educational policy and educational research in the United States was dramatically altered during the 1960s and 1970s because of legislative and judicial action on behalf of disadvantaged populations (DeYoung, 1987). Various legislative programs shed light on supporting the role of families in the planning and education of their children. The federal government entered the public education arena in 1965 as a response to the social conditions of the time (Moles, 2001). In 1965, when Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as part of President Lyndon Johnson's 'War on Poverty,' ESEA contained Chapter 1, Title I's predecessor. The purpose of ESEA was to provide financial assistance to meet the needs of educationally deprived children with high concentration of children from low-income families.

The Family Engagement in Education Act of 2011 amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to strengthen families' engagement in

the education of their children. The Act authorized, among many things, each school's improvement plan to include a roadmap for strengthening family engagement in education. Additionally, the Local Education Association (LEA) and school receiving school improvement funds were required to develop policies and practices for family engagement in education that meet specified principles and standards, H.R. 1821(112th).

The federal government attempted to address the growing achievement gap by enacting policies to deal with the education students received. These policies not only impacted how students received an education but outlined and mandated parent involvement (Bido, 2020; Krage, 2018; Watson et al., 2012). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) caught the attention of many when the federal government mandated parental involvement. Not only did it identify shared responsibility, it also mandated developing parents' capacity to support their child's academic achievement. In addition, Title I aligned with NCLB and mandated parental inclusion in the school culture (Bido, 2020). Then, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) continued the focus on parental involvement. Under ESSA, the school district's purpose was to educate key stakeholders, especially parents, on what was needed to support rigorous instruction for each child (Bido, 2020). Thus, parent involvement remained the prevailing focus at the federal level to bridge the gap between home and school.

History of Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is an essential element in the education process. One factor that contributes to the involvement of parents is how they perceive their involvement in schools (Foley, 2015). Formal parent involvement in education can be traced back to the formation in 1897 of the National Congress of Mothers, the predecessor to the Parent

Teacher Association (Watson et al., 2012). NAFSCE endorses the family engagement

definition developed in 2010 by the National Family, School, and Community

Engagement Working Group (now the NAFSCE Policy Council):

- Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.

- Family engagement is continuous across a child's life and entails enduring commitment but changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.

- Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn- at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in after-school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

The Learning Heroes' 2021 national survey of parents, teachers, and principals

found that educators overwhelmingly see the benefits of family engagement for student

success. Unfortunately, most parent-teacher interactions are short, infrequent, and

negative (Bergman, 2022). Since many schools do not encourage or expect teachers to

collaborate closely with their students' families, it is not surprising that 43% of teachers

say creating strong relationships with parents is not easy (Bergman, 2022; Mapp &

Bergman, 2021). Traditional family engagement events and activities often fail to

meaningfully connect families to what their children are learning (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Rural Parent Engagement

Poverty is not limited to urban areas alone. According to Duppong-Hurely and Huscroft-D'Angelo (2018), support for families in rural settings can be a challenge as well and strategies to help connect schools and families is of upmost importance, but barriers do exist. Barriers could include geographical challenges, financial means, and a stigma of being perceived as poor and less than. Like the literature on poverty and inequality that emerged in urban America during the 1960s, there was also a rediscovery of poverty and inequality in many rural regions of the country (DeYoung, 1987). Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth (1993) noted regardless of race, gender, or culture there are factors that are instrumental in producing a highly at-risk class of students in rural settings. In many rural areas, minorities have been overlooked (Fitzgerald & Bloodsworth, 1993). According to DeYoung (1987), poverty and low-socioeconomic status have affected the achievement of many rural students.

Many students living in rural areas of the United States have lower achievement levels than their suburban counterparts. Rural schools often resemble rural families and their degree, or lack thereof resources (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). That is schools in rural areas with low achievement often have less resources. Legislation like Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires schools to engage families in academic matters in the school despite socioeconomic status or access to resources. According to Coady (2019), Local Educational Agencies (LEA) are required to communicate with parents by

eliminating obstacles to increase participation in school planning, review, and improvement. However, family engagement is particularly challenging for rural school when families are geographically distant from each other or from community resources, centers, or the school. The rural nature of schools brings challenges to the actual physical presence of families in schools and to the relationship-building process between schools and home (Coady, 2019). Most family engagement initiatives, particularly those aimed at nondominant families, are designed with a deficit-based lens (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Models of Parent Engagement

When the pandemic caused schools to close, parents suddenly had a front row seat to their children's education. The concept of schools partnering with families is not a new development, but the pandemic brought the importance of family-school partnerships to center stage (Brookings Institution, 2021). Suddenly, parents and teachers were tossed into a non-traditional learning environment that required cooperation from homes and schools. The new normal requires a different framework that moves away from parent committees, one way communication, and compliance. The new norm will have to involve families in education that is meaningful and impactful for their children (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). The authors from Brookings Institution (2021) also stressed that the new norm must dismantle the barriers to family engagement that are created by unjust power structures. These unspoken and often ignored dynamics influence how families are seen and treated by educators, irrespective of their intentions (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Parents, caregivers, and family members are knowledgeable about their students and should be drawn upon to support their learning and growth.

Epstein's Framework

One of the most influential frameworks for family engagement was developed by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues in the early 1990's (Brookings Institution, 2021). Epstein's (2010) framework for parent involvement focuses on the combination of family, school, and community as influencers in a parent's degree of participation in their child's learning. Epstein described six types of parent involvement: Parenting, which involves supporting families in their parenting skills; communication between school and home, which encompasses parent-teacher conferences as well as face to face and electronic methods of communication; volunteering or parent participation in supporting school activities; learning at home; family participation in decision making in regards to school practices and policies; and collaborating with the community for the benefit of the school and the student.

Parent Involvement Continuum

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) presented a model of progression for parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with children's learning. The first point on the continuum is characterized by the agency of the school. The school is in control of the relationships and the flow of information. Information is given to parents but not sought from them. An example of this point of the continuum would be parents' evening in which parents move from teacher to teacher with short times to have meaningful interactions. The second point on the continuum is characterized by an interchange of information between parents and school staff. At this stage the relationship is supporting children's learning between the parents and the school. More importantly, parents and staff would share control of the flow of information: parents would have the chance – and

time – to ask questions and provide answers. The third point on the continuum involves parental engagement with their child's learning. In this stage the parents' actions are informed by the school or based on the information provided by the school, but the choice of action remains with the parent. Graham-Clay (2005) noted on a parental level, a parent's own negative school experience may impact positive relationships with teachers, or parents may simply not understand how to effectively interact with the educational system. Families face many personal, cultural, and structured barriers to engaging in productive partnerships with teachers (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Research has shown that educators have a desire to partner with families, particular these from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and teachers often want to establish stronger home-school partnerships of shared responsibility for children's outcomes but lack the skills on how to accomplish it (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Dual Capacity Building Framework

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships revised by Mapp and Bergman (2021) provides conditions for effective family-school engagement. The framework suggests that families and schools must play an important role in supporting students. The goal is to build the capacity of educational personnel and families in four areas: capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (shift in beliefs and values) and confidence (self-efficacy) (Brookings Institution, 2021). If effective educational partnerships between home and school are to be implemented and sustained, engagement initiatives must include the following components:

- Meaningful family engagement must be linked to learning. Too often events held at schools for parents have little to do with the school or district academic and developmental goals for students.

- Meaningful family engagement cannot be established until relationships of trust and respect are established between home and school. A major focus of the framework is building a trusting relationship between the home and school.

- Meaningful family initiatives must focus on building the capital of the stakeholders involved in the process. This pillar empowers participants to be active, knowledgeable, and informed stakeholders in the transformation of the schools.

- Meaningful family initiatives will need to bring families and staff together for shared learning. Which fosters a shared learning environment and create communications networks among family and friends. (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

The framework further outlines the challenges, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and family and staff capacity outcomes when engagement efforts are purposeful designed. The challenges involve educators not exposed to examples of family engagement, a lack of professional development in family engagement, and educators' deficit mindset towards parent engagement. Families face challenges such as negative experiences with schools, feeling unwelcomed, and feelings of disrespect and distain (Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Opportunity conditions include process and organizational conditions and must be linked to learning, relationship-building, empowerment, collaboration, and interaction. Organizational conditions must be considered and must be systemic and integrated across the organization while remaining sustainable (Krage, 2018). Building and enhancing the capacity of educators and families in the "4C" areas include capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. Using the Dual-Capacity Framework educators are empowered to connect family engagement to learning and development, engage families as co-creators, and develop a welcoming environment. Families are engaged to serve in multiple roles (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Family engagement at every level is important as it does impact the success of the student and the success of the engagement is contingent upon the quality of the programs that are offered (McDowell, 2014).

Parent Engagement

Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 studies and determined the influence of parental involvement on the educational outcomes of urban students reveled enlightening results. First, these findings support the notion that parental involvement has a significant and substantial effect across various populations. Second, not only does voluntary parental involvement have an effect on engagement but parental programs do as well. Third, the author suggests that the most important aspects of parental involvement are subtle facets such as parental style and expectations. Fourth, although the influence of parental involvement holds across academic variables, it appeared to produce statistically significant effects slightly more often for grades and other measures than for standardized tests. The impact of parental engagement cannot be understated.

Olmstead (2013) categorized parent involvement activities as either reactive, which includes attending meetings, family activities, and volunteering, or proactive, meaning activities intended to engage families, such as parent-teacher communication, helping children with homework, and staying abreast of student progress. The author noted that when teachers take actions to cultivate instructional partnerships with parents, those parents are more likely to support their children's learning at home.

Parental engagement with their child's learning does not always entail parent involvement in school (Lightfoot, 2004). Racial and ethnic minorities from a low socio-economic status (SES) may struggle to become involved in their child's schooling and often do not receive the support they need from the schools. Moreover, Yoder and Lopez (2013) determined that families with low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds face many barriers to participating in school events, including financial constraints, lack of transportation, little access to technology, and language or cultural obstacles. Other barriers include inflexibility with meeting times and they report they often feel unwelcomed to participate in school events. Additionally, a lack of staff training to work with parents can exacerbate this matter (Brookings Institution, 2021). Because schools in rural areas are a distance from family's residence, transportation can become a major hinderance to parent engagement. Furthermore, Duppong-Hurley and Huscorft-D'Angelo (2018) reported that some barriers that are specific to rural settings include high rates of parental substance abuse and poverty. However, Watkins and Howard (2015) added an interesting spin to the research by suggesting that school-based parent involvement does not affect student academic achievement. Teachers and parents alike viewed busy schedules as the greatest barrier to involvement.

Hiatt-Michael (1994) highlighted the fluctuations in parent involvement over the decades and noticed changes in both the level and type of parent involvement in education. According to Trotman (2001), parent involvement was designed to create a partnership that allowed for greater collaboration between home and school for the expressed purpose of improved student outcomes. It was intended to enhance the school's capacity to understand and appreciate values and cultures of families and be more effective in meeting student needs.

As the Brooking Institute (2021) noted, the impact of tailored family-school engagement programs is far-reaching. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) review of successful family-school engagement research led to six guiding principles for effective involvement of parent in their children's education:

- **Decision-making**. Invite families to actively participate in decision-making and goal setting via collaboration with teachers.

- **Communication**. Employ strategies that encourage timely and continuous two-way communication between parents and teachers.

- **Teaching practice**. Work closely with families with the goal of gaining deep and genuine understanding of students' lives, families, and communities to integrate parents' unique knowledge and skills into the curricula and teaching practices.

- **Home learning**. Provide practical ways to support parents' efforts to enhance their children's learning at home and in the community outside of school.

- **Design.** Invite families to actively participate in the decision making

process of the engagement program itself.

- **System change**. Institutionalize engagement practices and polices such

    that teachers have the support necessary to fully engage families. (para. 2)

According to NAEYC, teachers need to invest in developing and maintaining

authentic relationships with the families of their students to create suitable engagement

opportunities tailored to families' desires and needs. Parent/family engagement can be

defined as a family-centered and strengths-based approach in which schools and families

collaborate in decision making, setting goals, and developing academic outcomes

(National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement [NAFSCE],

2016).

Henderson and Mapp's (2002) meta- analysis of 51 studies revealed the evidence

is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's

achievement in school. The researchers noted that when schools, families, and

community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school,

stay in school longer, and have a positive attitude toward school. Many studies in this

synthesis of research found that students with involved parents, regardless of income

and/or background, were more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in high level programs.

- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.

- Attend school regularly.

- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school

    (p. 29)

Several other studies discovered teachers' outreach to parents was related to gains in student performance in both reading and math (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The effective outreach practices included meeting face to face, sending materials home, and keeping in touch about student progress. Additionally, workshops for parents on how to assist their children at home were linked to higher scores.

The analysis by Henderson and Mapp (2002) revealed schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds focused on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members. They also recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences. One overarching conclusion is that family involvement in the schools ultimately benefits students.

In today's global society, schools and parents are responding to increased expectations, economic pressures, and time constraints (Graham-Clay, 2005). According to the Brookings Institution (2021), schools which are not only social organizations but also products of society's beliefs in any given era or context, have often operated with a missing tool in their toolbox of effective family-school engagement strategies. Engagement is this push-pull force of inclusion of all students and the pressure from elite parents to keep their children on top (Brookings Institution, 2021). The transformation from parental involvement to parental engagement starts with understanding the barriers. Outlined in *The Playbook* the authors shared several overarching barriers to parental engagement. Because working with families had not been at the heart of school design, education personnel have received limited professional development in family engagement. Navigating the demands of the elite and working with parents of the

marginalized requires a skill set not often understood by most educators (Brookings

Institution, 2021).

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) posit that without the training and skill set to effectively

build trusting relationships, miscommunication and misunderstanding between home and

school is to be expected, and this often results in marginalized families feeling excluded.

The second overarching barrier identified is families feeling unsure of how to engage or

feeling unwelcome due to lack of clarity or information from the school or teacher on

how to do so. In 2008, a report that was released by the U.S. Department of Education

found that family engagement was the weakest area of compliance in many states (Mapp

& Kuttner, 2013).

When including parents in their child's academic life, there are differences

between family involvement and family engagement (Ortiz-Leger, 2022). Moving from

parental involvement to parental engagement involves relational trust and

communication. Relational trust is an important factor underlying family-engagement.

Relational trust is built when people are willing to go above and beyond what their role

dictates, and when people do what they say (Brookings Institution, 2021).

Communication is essential to building and maintaining these relationships. However, a

recurring theme from the parental data were that rarely had anyone asked them for their

beliefs about the purpose of school or how they envisioned what a quality school

experience would look like for their child (Brookings Institution, 2021).

While family involvement is defined as playing a participatory role in their child's

education by being involved in school events and activities, it is the first step to family

engagement (Ortiz-Leger, 2002; Waterford, 2018). Involvement includes family

participation in school events or activities, while teachers provide learning resources and information about the students' grades. Teachers relate to families as academic advisors rather than partners in learning. However, family engagement is the home and school working together as a team (Waterford, 2018). The essential component in family engagement is the empowerment of families and providing them with ways to actively participate (Waterford, 2018). Moreover, children with families engaged in their education are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores. Children with engaged families are more likely to graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education. In addition, children with engaged families developed self-confidence and are more motivated in the classroom. These students also demonstrated better social skills and classroom behavior.

However, engagement practices vary from family to family and some cannot fully engage due to cultural differences, educational level, and/or time. According to Waterford (2018), researchers found strong connections between family engagement and student academic achievement across fifty different studies. The research documented the following findings: the earlier educators establish family engagement, the more effective they are in raising student performance. Furthermore, family partnerships formed during the elementary school years help to build a strong foundation for future student success and continued engagement.

The research also mentioned that families encounter different obstacles to school involvement such as language, work schedules, family situations, and mistrusting relationships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2012; Ortiz-Leger, 2022). Additionally, scheduling and transportation issues make volunteering or attending parent/teacher conferences difficult.

Parent engagement has been amplified because of the requirements at the national, state, and local levels. It is clear that the legislation for various programs of the U.S. Department of Education devotes considerable attention to the supporting role of families (Moles, 2001). At Crawford Central School District, the Board recognizes the vital role parent/guardians and family members play in the education, welfare, and values of their children in Board Policy 917- Parent/Family Involvement.

The policy defines parental and family involvement as an ongoing process that assists parents /guardians and families to meet their basic obligation as a child's first educator, promotes clear two-way dialogue between home and school, and supports parents/guardians as leaders and decision-makers concerning the education of their children at all levels.

The guidelines of the policy further clarify staff should communicate and seek parental input throughout the school year because parents/guardians are familiar with the needs, problems, and abilities of their children. The parental and family involvement program should include the following as outlined in the policy:

1. Support for parents/guardians as school leaders and decision-makers, in addition to serving in advisory roles.

2. Promotion of clear two-way communication between the school and the family about school programs and student progress.

3. Assistance to parents/guardians and families in developing parental skills to foster positive relationships at home to support children's educational efforts, and to assist their children with learning at home.

4. Involvement of parents/guardians with appropriate training in instructional and support roles at school.

    (https://go.boarddocs.com/pa/craw/Board.nsf/Public#)

State, districts, schools, and their communities need to make family engagement a priority for improving a child's education (Frans, 2018). Techniques for improving the partnership between stakeholders should be specific and developed to deepen relationships between families, schools and communities to support student learning. Frans (2018) further noted that educators know what family engagement looks like from their perspective but have little insight about what parents want their role to be in their children's education. Parents often want to know that they have the tools and resources they need to raise their children to the best of their ability. When schools make sure that parents have everything they need, parents feel empowered and are more likely to be engaged in the education of their children. The researcher mentioned that families quickly learn the written and unwritten rules of the school, and if schools want families to be engaged in their children's education, school leaders need to make sure that family engagement is a focus and part of their school-wide plan (Frans, 2018). Being intentional about engaging families is crucial because family and school structures have changed over the last fifty years, and there is a need for communication between home and school to transform to meet the needs of varies stakeholders (Frans, 2018).

As established in the research, parent involvement and parent engagement has been characterized differently by researchers with each having a specific parent behavior associated with each construct (Baker et al., 2016). Parent involvement includes demonstrable actions that are school-centric, such as attendance at school events whereas

parental engagement involves engaging families to become partners with the school. Baker et al. (2016) discussed findings from focus groups with parents and school staff during which participants were asked about involvement at school. The researchers found that questions about involvement led to identifying barriers to engagement and thus a course of action to improve parental engagement.

An analysis of data identified five themes common to both families and staff. Parents in the focus group noted providing opportunities for involvement included providing childcare, having weekend activities, and improving communication. Parents viewed providing opportunities for involvement as a responsibility of the school.

When identifying barriers, families felt that opportunities for family involvement were hindered by several issues such as having other children which made it difficult to volunteer and finding time to feed their family prior to a school event. Other barriers mentioned included conflict with parents' schedules thus some parents proposed weekend activities.

Parents and staff both expressed the critical need for effective communication. When asked, parents identified barriers to communication to include timeliness of the communication, the quality of the communication, and the clarity of the communication. On the contrary, the staff identified communication issues such as language barriers and not having correct contact information to communicate with families. The researchers made a note to mention that poor communication is a significant barrier that seems to make parents perceive a school is less family friendly.

Their respondents noted how school actions and attitudes send a clear message that parents are or are not welcome in school. The third theme that emerged was

welcoming families into the building. A major barrier expressed by the parental focus group was the level of comfort parents felt in coming to the school which has a profound impact on parent involvement.

The fourth theme that surfaced was that time affects involvement. Conflicts with other events, and conflicts with parents' work schedules were the two greatest barriers in this area. Parents in the focus group suggested that parents' involvement in the school should be viewed in multiple ways that move beyond and differ from traditional methods.

In contrast the staff held the perception that parents did not want to be involved in the education of their children. This thought characterized concepts such as, parental devalue education and/or parents may have had a negative school experience. The authors suggest that to move from parent involvement to engagement, schools need to embrace a more expansive view of parent engagement which includes multiple constructions of how parents are involve.

The work of Boone and Wellman (2019) at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center at the Ohio State University offered justification for school-family partnerships. Moreover, the evaluation of research provided a guide for leaders to develop family engagement. Again, the distinction between family involvement and family engagement emerged from the analysis of the research. Systematic collaboration with families based on strong personal relationships serve as the most impactful ingredients to family engagement. The authors defined "Systemic as intentional strategies that are sustainable over time and aligned with learning and the development needs of children" (Boone & Wellman, 2019, p. 2). These relations are not seen as supplemental but central to the development of family engagement. Family-involvement is

characterized in their research as supplemental, sporadic, and problem-focused. Whereas family-engagement is categorized as a partnership built of a trusting relationship. It is at the center of the school planning. Family-engagement is thought about in a systematic way and is proactive.

Boone and Wellman (2019) provided nine principles revealed in the research for improving schools approach to partnering with families.

1. **Start Early**. Effective strategies for partnering with families are positive and proactive, rather than reactive or problem focused. Beginning in the early years of a child's life, early in the school year or early in the relationship will help set the tone for future interactions.

2. **Relationships Matter.** The relationship professionals have with families is an important factor in achieving both behavioral and academic outcomes for students. Relationships are built on a strong foundation of communication and respect. The goal of these relationships is trust. Professional must first demonstrate care for a child, respect for a family, professionalism, and responsiveness to family concerns.

3. **Understand and Value Families**. Communication between professionals and families is more positive and effective when the professional believes that a family's cultural practices and beliefs are important, the family has strengths, they care for their child, and they have expert knowledge about their child.

4. **Link to Learning.** Many traditional activities for parent involvement do not impact student achievement or behavior. Professional in planning

family engagement activities should intentionally link activities to supporting outcomes for children.

5. **Share Progress.** Families want information about their child's progress in school and about how they can support their child's learning and positive behavior at home. When parents understand what their child needs and how to help, they act.

6. **Listen and Inform.** Ongoing two-way communication between professionals and families, in which professionals give and take in information, has a positive impact on family-engagement.

7. **Multiple Opportunities.** Families can bring knowledge and expertise about their children, but their can also bring many challenges, including limited time, differing roles and expectations and various levels of confidence and desire to interact with professionals. Not all family-engagement activities fit every family. Provide multiple ways for families to interact and communicate with the school community.

8. **Expectations.** When families and professionals communicate high, positive expectations to children they motivate them to hold high expectations for themselves. These high expectations lead to improved behavior and greater effort in school.

9. **Persist.** Sustained focus and effort over time by schools result in more family engagement. High-performing schools cite family engagement as a consistent practice that contributes to their ability to support positive

behavior and high achievement for all students. Probably want to cite if

any of this was verbatim

Summary

This chapter served as a literature review to understand and identify parents'

perceptions of barriers to their involvement in school. Although many studies identified a

link between parents' involvement in school and increased student achievement, family

involvement is minimal. American education, at its core, has created bureaucratic

practices that has driven a wedge between families and schools.

The research provides a clear distinction between family involvement and family

engagement. Family involvement finds its roots in the history of the colonial period

where families were expected to drop their child at the schoolhouse door and the school

would do the rest. The removal of parents or the lack of involvement is steep in the fiber

of American education. On the other hand, the new wave of parental engagement can be

traced through the legislative language of acts passed, organizations created to enhance

parental engagement and frameworks developed by research.

Family engagement frameworks developed by researchers such as Epstein (2010),

Goodall and Montgomery (2014), Mapp and Bergman (2021) and others have greatly

influenced family and school engagement. Their work has developed pathways for

parent interactions to move from involvement to engagement. Additionally, legislation

such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the Family

Engagement Act of 2011 provided directives to states, schools, and districts on the

importance of family engagement. However, parental engagement remains at a minimal

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

level. The shift of moving away from parental compliance to engagement can be found in

understanding the barriers to parental involvement.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Parent engagement refers to the involvement of parents in their children's education both at home and at school. As revealed in the examination of the body of literature in Chapter II, parent engagement has a positive impact on student achievement, behavior, and overall well-being. By encouraging parent engagement, schools can help create a supportive environment for student success. However, some parents are disenfranchised by the educational system because they do not know how to become involved in the process (Foley, 2015). Additionally, teachers acknowledge the benefits of family engagement but understand that traditional family events such as parent-teacher conferences fail to meaningfully connect families to school. Unfortunately, most parent-teacher interactions are short, infrequent, and negative (Bergman, 2022). The literature has suggested there are several ways that schools can encourage parent engagement, including:

1. Communication: Schools can provide regular updates to parents about their children's progress, upcoming events, and school policies. This can be done through newsletters, emails, phone calls, or parent-teacher conferences.

2. Volunteer opportunities: School can offer opportunities for parents to volunteer at school events, in the classroom, or on school committees.

3. At-home involvement: Schools can provide resources and support for parents to help their children with homework and encourage their involvement in their children's education.

4. Community events: Schools can host events such as open houses, family nights, and cultural fairs to bring families together and foster a sense of community.

Purpose of the Research Study

Although studies over the last 30 years identify a strong link between parents' involvement in school and increased student achievement, enhanced self-esteem, improved behavior, and better school attendance, family involvement in U.S. schools remains minimal (Mapp, 1997). This action research study utilizes a qualitative approach to identify the barriers to parental involvement in a rural school with a high free and reduced lunch percentage and low academic achievement. Parent engagement is an essential element in the education process. One factor that contributes to the involvement of parents is how they perceive parental involvement (Foley, 2015). Most recently, the shift to remote learning and the heightened attention to social injustices have created a sense of urgency in how we engage and treat families, specifically those that are the most disenfranchised (Rebora, 2022). Not only did family engagement become a critical area of focus, but it also became a potential growth area for schools around the nation. Rebora (2022) noted that the last three years have impacted the ways in which education is delivered to students and allowed school officials to reimagine family engagement. Real partnerships with families are concerned with building reciprocal relationships, shared responsibility, and active listening to stakeholders (Dugan, 2022). According to the literature review, educators want to create a strong relationship with families but acknowledge the relational blind spots within the structural design of the typical back to school night or traditional parent- teacher conferences. When investigating a school's approach to family engagement, it is essential to note that families such as low- income,

rural, and black and brown families have been marginalized and have little reasons to trust educators (Dugan, 2022).

The research questions focused on parents' perceptions of barriers to parental involvement. The focus questions used to guide the research were:

1. What are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?

2. In what ways was parent involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary?

3. What are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?

Setting and Participants

This action research study was conducted in Crawford Central School District. It is the largest of four districts in the county with 3,166 students enrolled as of October 2022. The students are housed in five elementary, one middle, one junior-senior high school, and one high school. The school district is divided into two major attendance areas, one serving Cochranton and the other Meadville. Cochranton students are housed in a K-6 elementary school and a 7-12 junior senior high school. Students in the Meadville area attend one of four K-6 elementary schools, a 7-8 middle school, and a 9-12 high school. Students from both high schools may attend the Crawford County Career

and Technical Center on a half-day basis. As of 2019, there were 84,629 people who lived and worked in Crawford County. Crawford County is considered 36% urban and 64% rural. The top three industries of employment in the county were reported as Educational, Health and Social Services (26.9%), Manufacturing (21.0%), and Retail Trade (10.2%) (City-Data.com, n.d.).

Second District Elementary School is one of five elementary buildings in the Crawford Central School District. The school serves 328 students in grades Kindergarten-6. The student-to-teacher ratio is 12:1 , which is lower than the Pennsylvania state level of 14:1. According to data from the PA Future Ready Index (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022), 74.4% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. The ethnicity breakdown of Second District Elementary is 73% White, 9% Multi-Racial, 5% Hispanic, 12% Black and 1% Asian. Eighty-one percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch.

At Second District Elementary School, schoolwide Title I funds provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula. The Title I funds support two Title reading specialists and one early childhood teacher at Second District Elementary School. The funds also provide supplies, staff development opportunities, and parent engagement activities. Second District Elementary has a diverse student body and a dedicated staff. The school offers a variety of academic programs and extracurricular activities such as music, art, physical education, and library. The school also provides various resources and services to support the academic and personal growth such as counseling, special education, and schoolwide programs such as B.A.R.K. which serves as the positive behavior program.

The staff at Second District Elementary School is comprised of one building administrator, one secretary, three kindergarten teachers, two first grades teachers, two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers, two fourth grade teachers, two fifth grade teachers and two sixth grade teachers. In addition, the staff includes a librarian, physical education teacher, art teacher, and music teacher. Also included in the staffing is a full-time nurse, school counselor, two Title I reading specialists, and a host of full-time/part-time paraprofessionals.

Participants in this study included all parents that had a student(s) enrolled at Second District Elementary during the 2022 – 2023 school year. This action research study utilized a qualitative approach, including participant questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups as the primary data collection methods. Participants in this action research also included administrators, central office management members, and teachers in the district including those on the Design Team and teachers from Second District Elementary School. All participants in this study were volunteers and could elect to discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Intervention

At Second District Elementary School, a Design Team was established consisting of four parents, three teachers, a guidance counselor, a central office administrator, coordinator, and the Second District Elementary School principal. The team participated in a 2-day human-centered design experience. According to Rice (2011), design thinking aims to implement systemic change through innovation with particular emphasis on new mindsets. This includes an empathy mindset which breaks down traditional walls among

stakeholder groups and focuses on the experiences and needs of the clients. In the case of

this research the focus was on the experiences and needs of the parents at Second District

Elementary School and how to implement strategies to remove barriers to parental

engagement. Design thinking emphasizes thinking outside the box, progress through trial

and error, and a commitment to changing traditional polices, structures, and practices.

The process relies on prototyping and recognition that failure is valued as part of a

continuous cycle of improvement (Rice, 2011). The Design thinking session started with

members completing Identity Maps. Identity mapping is a helpful tool for building

connection and trust within a Design Team. Identity mapping involves members of the

team defining and sharing aspects of their personal identity, such as their values,

experiences, and emotions. This is done so team members develop a better understanding

of each other's perspectives and background, which can help to build empathy. The team

completed a one-hour design challenge to practice the steps of human-centered design.

The first step is *empathize* where the Design Team learned more about the people for

whom a solution is being designed. With data gathered through stakeholders' interviews,

observations, and other research activities, the team created a character sketch to

represent the target user. The second step is *define* where the Design Team synthesized

the findings from their inquiry and clarified end goals, including specific client needs.

Next, the Design Team engaged in the third step, which is *ideate*, a brainstorming stage

that is grounded in a deeper understanding of the clients' needs and practices. The Design

Team explored a wide range of actions and solutions for addressing the needs of the

clients. Next, the *prototype* stage allowed the Design Team to visualize potential

solutions, which included drawings, models, videos, and role-playing. The design then

engaged in the *test* where the prototype was tested and members documented the failure

and success to inform the next steps in the cycle, *iterate,* which was to share. Each team

member then conducted a 30-minute interview with parents and teachers (outside of the

Design Team) about their experience with family-school connection. At the second

session, the team shared their interview data and synthesized the data to identify key

needs and insights.

After the initial training, the Design Team embarked on brainstorming barriers to

parent engagement based on the results of the empathy interviews. The intervention and

research idea came from the August 22, 2022, summer meeting with the Parents as Allies

Steering Committee. It is important to note that the Steering Committee is comprised of

parents, teachers, and administrators. The meeting was held at the Meadville Public

Library and was facilitated by a coordinator with experience in design thinking.

The Design Team brainstormed ideas for interventions. There were many ideas shared.

The team decided on both short and long term interventions.

The short-term intervention had two goals. The first goal was to help parents learn

more about the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system in place at

Second District. The second short-term goal was to use the "email guardians" feature

of Google Classroom to communicate more frequently with parents.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based

three-tiered framework designed to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and

practices affecting student outcomes every day. Second District Elementary School has a

robust PBIS system, known as BARK Bucks, in place. Through the empathy interviews

and the work of the design team, it was discovered that parents knew very little about the

system. The intervention that was agreed upon was a triad of methods designed to inform anyone interested about BARK Bucks.

One huge barrier that was identified was that of obtaining background check clearances. The team agreed that would be the "long-term intervention." The design team reached out to the staff at Second District Elementary School to share information about the intervention idea and solicited interested staff members. Several teachers agreed to work on the project. The goal of the intervention was to have parents obtain the proper clearances to become a volunteer at Second District Elementary School.

Volunteers are defined as adults serving in unpaid position who is responsible for the welfare of one or more children or has direct contact with one or more children. Volunteers are persons who are responsible for child's welfare or who wish to visit the school regularly to serve as volunteers and to provide for the care supervisory, guidance or control of children would be required to have background check. On the other hand, visitors are individual whose actions do not rise to the level of volunteer. Visitors are not responsible for children's welfare or are visiting the school irregularly and not providing for the care, supervision, guidance, or control of children. However, Pennsylvania requires the following to be a School Volunteer:

- o Act 24- Completion of the Arrest/Conviction Report and Certification Form
- o Act 34 – Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
- o Act 114- FBI Criminal Background Check
- o Act 151- Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
- o TB Test

Some key insights identified through the brainstorming session: the cumbersome process of getting required clearances was a barrier for getting parents into the school, communication with parents remains one-way and they desire two-way communication, the need to celebrate positives (not just focus on negatives), and methods of communication are inconsistent. This research seeks to identify and remove the identified barriers.

An additional method to address the lack of two-way communication included Pastries with the Principal. This special event invited moms, dads, aunts, uncles, or any special person in the life of a Second District Elementary School student to get to know the elementary principal and for the principal to learn more about the families in the school community. Another strategy designed to help PreK students to transition to Kindergarten was a Getting Ready for Kindergarten event where families visited the school. The Second District staff invited families to visit a Kindergarten classroom to help make the kindergarten transition easier for the child. While at the school, families engaged in a movement activity, a read aloud, a craft activity, and even receive a take-home healthy snack. Arrangements were made for the students to take a bus ride, too. While the staff saw this as a transitioning event, they also acknowledged it as an opportunity to provide a method of meaningful two-way communication between home and school.

Finances are an important facet of research. Parents As Allies provided funding to partially support the events outlined in this study. The Parents as Allies project was encouraging and funding new ideas for real engagement between parents and schools. The Get Connected Events at Second District used Parents as Allies resources to provide

a dinner for all participants. The estimated cost for the dinner was $400. Funding also supported the involvement of the several people within the community, including but not limited to teachers, notary, school nurse, an honorarium for parents who were part of the Design Team, the physician assistant, and the director of the Family and Community Christian Association (FCCA). Funding covered the cost of meeting supplies and materials, T-shirts for participants, and cost of the TB tests for the participating parents. The total cost for the Get Connected at Second District events was approximately $5000. Parents as Allies funding supported the Pastries with the Principal event as well as the Getting Ready for Kindergarten initiative. Refreshments, including pastries and beverages and the healthy take-home snack, was supported by Parents as Allies funding. The total cost for these two additional initiatives was approximately $2000.

Research Design, Methods, and Data Collection

Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data used to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. The focus of qualitive research is to explore and understand the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals. Mertler (2022) explains that "in qualitative research, the researchers select particular people or sites that help best explain and describe the studied phenomenon" (p. 192). It can provide rich and detailed insight into phenomena to gain deeper understanding on the quality of an activity (Mertler, 2022). According to Creswell (2007), the qualitative research process involves a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issues. "The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem for participants and address the research to obtain that

information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). Qualitative research is emergent. Therefore, the researcher must allow for flexibility throughout the study.

The researcher received Pennsylvania Western University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in July of 2022. On August 17, 2022, the researcher's proposal was approved and data collection began. The email indicating approval can be found in Appendix A. This researcher wanted to investigate, what are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?

In order to address question number one, participants of the study included parents who have students that attend Second District Elementary School during the 2022 – 2023 school year. The researcher used an online questionnaire administered through Google Docs to survey families. The participants were asked questions regarding their perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities at Second District Elementary School. Parent participants were given the survey disclosure letter (Appendix B) and the questionnaire (Appendix C) at the beginning of the research study to help answer research questions 1 and 3. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to all participants via Google Forms, which recorded the responses. Second District utilizes Sapphire as a notification system to send messages to parents, guardians, and caregivers. The school can set up a broadcast to be sent on a specific date or date range, on a specific day or days, at a specific time. People receiving the message can decide which type of messages they want to receive, cell phone call, text message, or email. The disclosure letter and the questionnaire were also available by link

and QR code attached to the message (Appendix H). Google Docs tabulates the answers

to the questionnaire into a spreadsheet that allows the researcher to review the collected

data. On November 3, 2022, all parents, guardians, and caregivers at Second District

Elementary School were emailed and/or texted a link to participate in the questionnaire

regarding barriers to parental engagement. Prior to forwarding the link an all-call

notification was forward to the families to make them aware of the communiqué that

would follow via the Sapphire system. Additionally, the researcher was available on

November 3, 2023, during parent-teacher conferences to answer any questions about the

questionnaire and to provide a hard copy of Appendix B and C. Additional copies of both

appendices were left in the main office with the secretary for parents that my request a

printed copy.

Additionally, the researcher sought to understand from the perspective of parents

what are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase

parental involvement. The research centered on parents' perceptions and experiences of

barriers to parental involvement. A questionnaire can limit the ability to collect data

beyond the listed items and therefore provide a partial picture of perceptions (Bryman &

Bell, 2011). As a result of the questionnaire, themes emerged that required further

investigation such as barriers created by socioeconomic status, parent intimidation or

themes that emerged related to ethnicity or level of education. The researcher utilized a

mixed methods to collect both qualitative and quantitative data through the questionnaire.

The Likert scale questions allowed the researcher to gather quantitative data, which was

tabulated to identify any patterns or trends with questions six through nine on the

questionnaire. The open-ended questions provided qualitative data, which the researcher

analyzed to identify emerging themes or insights. This mixed method approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic by combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitive data collection.

According to Mertler (2022), coding qualitative data involves systematically analyzing and categorizing data collected through qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. The purpose of coding is to identify patterns, themes, and insights within the data, and to develop a deeper understanding of the research questions or topics of interest. The researcher identified specific words, phrases, or ideas in the data that were relevant to the research questions and repeated themselves throughout the data. The researcher used a colored coded marking system to sort the data into similar categories.

To address question number two of this research study, individual interviews were conducted with five parents to provide information-rich feedback from the themes that emerge. The researcher used semi-structured interview questions as an opportunity to dig deeper and understand the topic at hand. Semi-structured interviews allow participants the freedom to express their view in their own terms. Additionally, semi-structured interviews can provide reliable and comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). All participants were given the Interview Disclosure Letter available in Appendix F and interview questions found in Appendix G at the beginning of the session. The participants were asked to participate in an interview to further understand their perceptions. The researcher contacted individual participants first by email and then by follow up phone call to request their participation in the interview.

Validity

In research the use of multiple data sources to confirm findings is referred to as triangulation (Mertler, 2022). The use of triangulation increases the credibility of the findings. According to Hendricks (2017), "practitioners engaged in action research must consider both the credibility and validity of their research studies" (p 64). One method of increasing credibility is to use several sources of data to repeatedly establish identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). Therefore, the researcher used online questionnaires, semi-structed interviews, and a focus group to collect data to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the research study. As part of the validation of the data, the researcher conducted a focus group with the Second District Elementary School Design Team. The purpose of the focus group was to address ways that parent involvement was impacted because of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary. The goal of the Design Team was to identify, share, and facilitate the use of promising new strategies to build stronger family-school partnerships. All participants were given the focus group disclosure form (Appendix D) and focus group questions to respond to at the beginning of the session (Appendix E).

Prior to the start of the study, the researcher established the timeline that appears in Table 1 to ensure that multiple forms of data were collected during the study and to ensure data were collected to answer each research question. Table 1 includes the research questions, the data sources, and timeline for collecting the data. The researcher was able to execute the data collecting timeline as described in the table.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Research Question(s)	Data Sources	Timeline for Collecting Data
What are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?	Participants in this action research study will include parents who had students that attend Second District Elementary School in the Crawford Central School District. The researcher will conduct a survey. The participants will be asked questions regarding their perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities at Second District Elementary School. Parent participants will be given the survey disclosure (Appendix B) and the survey (Appendix C) at the beginning of the research study to help answer research questions 1 and 3. This survey will be distributed electronically to all participants. The survey will be sent to all participants via Google Form which will record their responds.	September-November 2022
In what ways was parent involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary?	The teachers and members of the Design Team will engage in a focus group with the researcher in April 2023. This focus group will help answer research question 2. All participants will be given the focus group disclosure form (Appendix D) and focus group questions to respond to at the beginning of the session (Appendix E). The participants will be asked to gauge in what way was parental involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary School.	April 2023
What are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?	The research will center on parents' perceptions and experience of barriers to parental involvement. As a result of the survey, themes may emerge that will require further investigation such as barriers created by socioeconomic status, parent intimidation or themes that may emerge related to ethnicity or level of education. Individual interviews will be conducted with 5 parents to provide information-rich feedback from the themes that emerge. All participants will be given the Interview Disclosure Letter available in (Appendix F) and questions found in (Appendix G) at the beginning of the session. The participants will be asked to participate in an interview to further understand your perceptions. This will further triangulate the data for questions number 1 and 3.	Mach- April 2023

Summary

The literature suggested there are several ways that schools can encourage parent engagement, this chapter provided a description of the qualitative research approach to gain insight of parents' perceptions of barriers to parental engagement at Second District Elementary School. Through triangulation of multiple data sets, the study aims to identify barriers to parental engagement. Additionally, the study seeks to implement strategies to improve parental involvement. A description of the setting and participants were presented along with the explanation of data collection process.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Results

The data were collected over a six-month period during the 2022-2023 school year at Second District Elementary School located in Crawford Center School District in Pennsylvania. The purpose was to gather information to assist Crawford Central School District in developing parental engagement strategies by identifying and addressing barriers. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher employed multiple data collection methods, including an electronic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. These methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting parental engagement and provided triangulation of data to ensure rigor. The following focus questions were addressed:

1. What are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?

2. In what ways was parent involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary?

3. What are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data from the brief questionnaire were analyzed by summarizing and comparing responses then displaying descriptive statistics in tables. In most cases, percentages and sample size are presented followed by narrative description. The top survey responses were considered to be most relevant and analyzed appropriately. Conclusions were drawn from the most relevant data. Open-ended responses provided context for survey data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data from the online questionnaire, interviews and focus group were coded using a data-driven coding system which allowed the themes to emerge from the data without any preconceived notions (Cessada, para.3, n.d.). This is also referred to as inductive coding. This approach enhanced the objectivity and credibility of the study's results. However, it is important to note that the conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted within the specific context of Second District Elementary School and may not be transferrable or generalizable to other locations or schools within the Crawford Central School District or beyond.

Quantitative Findings

This section presents the data from the online questionnaire distributed to parents/caregivers who had children enrolled in Second District Elementary School during the 2022-2023 school year. Twenty-six respondents participated in the online

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

questionnaire. Figure 1 indicates what grade level the respondents' child(ren) attended

Second District Elementary School.

Figure 1

Grade Level of Attendance

1. What grades did your child attend at Second District Elementary? (Please mark all that apply.)
26 responses

Grade	Count (%)
Kindergarten	12 (46.2%)
Grade 1	8 (30.8%)
Grade 2	8 (30.8%)
Grade 3	10 (38.5%)
Grade 4	14 (53.8%)
Grade 5	11 (42.3%)
Grade 6	4 (15.4%)
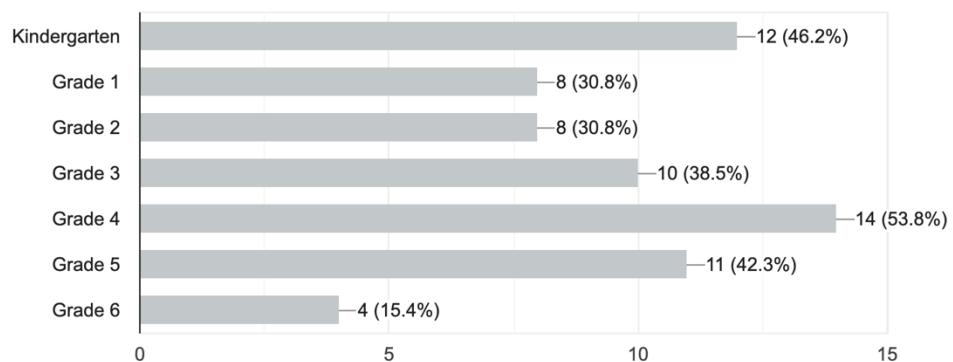
Based on the responses in Figure 1 the researcher concluded the number of years

respondents' students attended Second District School and the corresponding grade level.

Based on this data 46.2% (n=12) of parents had children who only attended kindergarten.

Sixty-two percent of parents had only one-year experience, 38% of parents had two or

more years of experience with the school.

Table 2 illustrates the demographics of the questionnaire respondents.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	21	80.4%
Male	4	15.4%
Non-binary	1	4.2%
Race/Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian, non-Hispanic	25	96.2%
Black/African America, non-Hispanic	1	3.8%
Age		
18-25	0	0
26-35	6	23.1%
36-45	19	73.1%
46-55	0	0
56 and over	1	3.8%
Highest Level of Education Possessed		
High School Diploma	7	19.2%
Bachelor's Degree	13	50.3%
Other	6	30.5%

The majority of respondents identified as female (n=21, 80.4%). Male respondents made up 15.4% (n=4) and 4.2% (n=1) identified as non-binary. Moreover, the majority of participants, 96.2% (n=25), identified their ethnicity as White or Caucasian, non-Hispanic and 3.8% (n=1) identified as Black or African America, non-Hispanic. A large majority 73.1% (n=19) of the respondents were 36-to-45-years old, and 23.1% (n=6) were 26-to-35-year-old. One respondent, 3.8%, was 56 years old or older.

The questionnaire consisted of four questions that asked those who participated to rate their response on a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=No opinion, 4= Disagree and 5= Strongly disagree. Table 3 illustrates the results.

Table 3

Responses from the Satisfaction Questionnaire

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Item	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
I feel connected to the Second District Elementary School community	2 (7.7%)	6 (23.1%)	6 (23.1%)	8 (30.9%)	4 (15.2%)
The school committee and the PTA/PTO reflect the diversity of the school community and actively recruit and welcome families of all background.	3 (11.5%)	3 (11.5%)	11 (42.3%)	3 (11.5%)	6 (23.1%)
Participation in parental workshops would increase parent engagement.	3 (11.5%)	2 (7.7%)	11 (42.3%)	5 (19.2%)	5 (19.2%)
Your last communication with a Second District staff member was positive	4 (15.4%)	2 (7.7%)	5 (19.2%)	3 (11.5%)	12 (46.2%)

Results from the online questionnaire indicate that a portion of parents and caregivers feel connected to the school community. Approximately 46% of the participants felt connected to the Second District community (strongly agree and agree). On the other hand, a smaller portion 30.8% (n=8) of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed they felt connected. Additionally, 23.1% (n=6) held no opinion about their connectivity to the school. Based on questionnaire responses, helpfulness of communication from school staff was mixed. That is, 46.2% (n=12) found the communication very helpful,

11.5% (n=3) of the participants found the communication helpful, 19.2% (n=5) of the

participants held no opinion on the effectiveness of the communication, 7.7% (n=2) of

the participants found the communication unhelpful, and 15.2% (n=4) of the participants

found the communication extremely unhelpful. The data indicates that a majority of the

participants found their last communication with the staff to be helpful.

The next questions asked respondents to rate their perceptions of whether school

committees and the PTA/PTO reflect the diversity of the school community and actively

recruit and welcome families of all backgrounds. Results included that 23.1% (n=6)

strongly agree that the school committees and PTA/PTO reflects the community and

welcome families of all backgrounds while 11.5% (n=3) agree that the school

committees and PTA/PTO reflects the community and welcome families of all

backgrounds. Moreover, 42.3% (n=11) held no-opinion about the diversity of the

PTO/PTA or the school committees and 11.5% (n=3) disagree and 11.5% (n=3) strongly

disagree that the school committees and PTA/PTO reflects the community and welcome

families of all backgrounds. Based on the data the vast majority of participants (34.6%)

when combine the strongly agree and agree, believe the school committees and PTA/PTO

reflects the community and welcome families of all backgrounds. On the other hand, a

combined percentage of 23% of the participants held the opposing view disagreeing or

strongly disagreeing that the school committees and PTA/PTO reflects the community

and welcome families of all backgrounds. The largest percentage of participants, 42.3%,

expressed no opinion on the matter, indicating that they either didn't have enough

information or chose not to form an opinion.

The next question asked respondents to rate if participation in workshops would increase parent engagement. Results indicate that 19.2% (n=5) strongly agree that participation in parental workshops would increase parental engagement and 19.2% (n=5) agree that participation in parental workshops would increase parental engagement. No opinion was held by 42.3% (n=11) held no-opinion about the impact of parental workshops on parent engagement, and 7.7% (n=2) disagree that participation in parental workshops would increase parental engagement while 11.5% (n=3) strongly disagree that participation in parental workshops would increase parental engagement. From this data, it appears that a significant portion of the participants (38.4%) when combined with the percentage of strongly agree and agree, believe that participation in parental workshops would increase parent engagement. On the other hand, a smaller percentage (19.2%) hold the opposite view. The largest percentage of respondents (42.3%) expressed no opinion on the matter.

Lastly, respondents were asked to provide additional information about connection to the school through open-ended responses on the questionnaire. When asked to share about a specific time they felt connected to their school, based on the responses provided, the participants felt a sense of connection to Second District through various means including contact with teachers, use of communication applications and school-wide activities such as field day. The following is the interpretation of that data:

- Participants appreciated the opportunity to talk to teachers and get to know them during open house event. This face-to-face interaction helped establish a connection between parents and teachers.

- Another significant event for fostering a sense of connection was the parent-teacher conferences. These conferences allowed for child's progress which helped build a stronger relationship.

- The use of communication apps like Classroom DoJo played a crucial role in keeping parents connected. Participants expressed that these apps made it easy from the to reach out to teachers with questions or comments, fostering open lines on communication.

- The ability to volunteer at track and field day created a sense of involvement and connection to the school. Parents appreciated being able to contribute and participate in school activities alongside their children.

- Participants emphasized the importance of school personnel in fostering a sense of connection. The secretary was mentioned as a key figure who helped keep the school together by answering questions and providing support. The school nurse was also acknowledged for assistance with children's health matter. Teachers were specifically mentioned as instrumental in establishing connections through personal interactions and updates on students' progress.

However, it should be noted that not all participants felt a strong connection to the school. Reasons varied, such as not meeting their children's teachers or feeling disconnected due to the school's relocation. Overall, the themes that emerged suggest that opportunities for personal interaction, effective communication channels, involvement in school events, and supportive school personnel play a vital role in creating a sense of connection between parents and Second District Elementary School.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

When asked for suggestions to improve the connection to Second District Elementary School could implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement, the following themes emerged:

- Organize more on-site activities such as family nights or events that encourage parents to participate in their child's school life.

- Continue using and expanding the use of digital platforms like Classroom DoJo and Goggle Classroom to facilitate communication and updates between teachers and parents.

- Make parental engagement a priority within the school's practices.

- Address the concerns raised about one-sided communication and insufficient information reaching parents. Explore alternative communication platforms that are more effective and accessible for parents.

- Recognize the financial burden of obtaining necessary clearances for volunteering and consider sharing the cost with parents.

- Create opportunities for parents to share about their children and their unique perspectives.

Based on the participants' responses regarding how they wish the staff would connect with them the following are some suggested ways to improve communication and connection with parents:

- Responding to the participants' preferences staff should utilize phone calls, emails, text and the use of ClassDojo for communication.

- Parents expressed a desire for staff to genuinely listen to their concerns and insights about their children. Second District Elementary School should create a "structured way for parents to share information and feedback with the school."

- Utilize social media platforms like Facebook to share informative posts and pictures of classroom activities. This can help parents stay informed about their children's school experiences and encourage engagement. Improve communication by "providing weekly or monthly updates on homework expectations, upcoming projects, and school events."

Additional data in the open-ended responses provided insights into the needs of the parent/caregiver community. One respondent stated, "not all parents can attend in-person meetings or events due to various constraints, " and "each family is unique, and their engagement needs may vary." Moreover, parents stated that financial limitations or time constraints due to multiple jobs often interfere with their ability to engage with the school and parents often feel judged for not being present at the school. Overall, the data indicates that successful parent engagement involves offering varied opportunities, creating a welcoming environment, recognizing individual family needs, and emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in supporting student achievement.

Qualitative Findings

Interviews are a valuable methodology for exploring a topic in depth and gaining insights from participants. The flexibility of interviews allows the researchers to probe further into specific areas of interest or seek clarification on particular points raised by the participants (Mertler, 2022). The researcher sought a richer comprehensive

understanding of parental engagement at Second District Elementary School by utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore further the topic of engagement and connection.

In addition to the questionnaire, five participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to gather additional feedback on the topic. These interviews were conducted using different methods, including in-person meetings, Zoom video calls, and telephone conference calls. It's worth noting that the interviewees were part of the group of participants who had already completed the online questionnaire. The participants in the interviews represented a diverse range of educational levels. This included individuals with a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree, some college experience, as well as high school graduates. This varied educational background contributed to a broader understanding of the topic. Based on the data, three themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews which include: *Barriers to engagement*, *increased engagement means increased connection*, and *suggestions to improve engagement.*

Semi-Structured Interview Findings

Theme 1: Barriers to Engagement

Theme 1, Barriers to Engagement, emerged from the interviews. All five participants mentioned that they found there to be problems either internal or external to the school that prohibits parents from being fully engaged. Most often cited were access to the school and/or teachers, and barriers related to time, communication, resources and education. For instance, Participant 1(P1) mentioned engagement is dependent on the

parent's ability to give their time to the school for activities such as PTO. P1 stated, "I am wary of joining the PTO due to concerns about commitments that revolved around fundraising and event planning. It feels like you're jumping into a big commitment which potentially can kind of mushrooms into sometimes," referring to involvement or joining the PTO. The participants suggested that Second District Elementary School offer a range of opportunities that cater to varying interests and consider the time commitments that participation entails. Capitalizing on parents' talents and strengths could potentially improve the engagement of parents. Likewise, Participant 2 (P2) also mentioned that a barrier is the physical aspect of accessing the school. She stated,

> Anywhere else we've ever been and lived the schools have always been inviting and I didn't know about the Sandusky thing. So, I just thought, well all elementary schools are very inviting to parents, especially the first day of school, but when you are met at the doors like you can go into the entry point but, as soon as you hit the second doors, you can't go past that. It was almost like, kind of rude and put-offish. Like you guys do a good job with keeping security tight in that building which after knowing about the Sandusky thing I get it. But that's just not welcoming especially if you are new parent or you're a kindergarten parent.

This sentiment was mentioned by the other participants as a physical barrier to access to the school which made them feel unwelcomed and unappreciated by the school thus reducing engagement. It was mentioned that having a person in the office who is firm with parents can be beneficial to maintain order and boundaries. However, it is also important to have someone who is friendly and approachable, striking a balance between enforcing policies and creating a welcoming atmosphere for parents.

Another barrier mentioned is the delayed dissemination of information to parents. Parents may receive information about events with short notice, which can make it challenging for them to participate or contribute in the desired ways. "Parents may need more time to save up money or make arrangements to support their children's participation in activities that require additional resources," remarked Participant 2 (P2).

Financial barriers were also mentioned by participants. Participant 3 (P3) noted that parents may face financial barriers when it comes to participating in school activities or fulfilling requests for contributions, such as bringing in items for parties or events. P3 stated, "I think sometimes there's financial barriers, you know parents who want to be able to contribute and can't. This isn't something that necessarily can be fixed with engaging parents." While these contributions are often voluntary, parents may feel pressure to provide for their child's participation, which can create a sense of exclusion for those who are unable to afford to help. This sentiment was mentioned by four of the five interview participants. One participant also mentioned that older siblings care for younger siblings which interferes with family engagement as time and money is important to them to make ends meet.

Finally, educational barriers were present in the data. P3 stated, "I think there's education barriers to the parents because it's not a matter to them not wanting to be involved or not wanting to be engaged, it's a matter of them being ignorant of the fact that it is even an option for them." Understanding that a parent or caregivers voice is important to the school is important for the engagement of parents. Additionally, P1 mentioned that being in a lower-income, lower-education community presents certain "structural barriers" to parent engagement. The participant highlighted specific

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

challenges within the community, such as parents who may struggle with substance abuse or other personal issues. These barriers can make it more difficult for parents to actively engage in their child's education.

Theme 2: Increased Engagement Means Increased Connection

The second theme that emerged from the interview data indicates that parents and caregivers believe that in order to increase engagement the adults must feel connected to the school in some capacity. All participants mentioned this in their interview. The school involves parents through fundraisers, open houses, and events like carnivals, creating opportunities for parents to engage with the school community. P3 stated, "I come into the school, and it just feels really opening it feels like you can actually just be there and not having to worry about watching your back all the time." The participants also mentioned that feeling connected to the school means that they feel welcome and engaged. According to P4, "I wanted to be able to help my child succeed in school, but I can't do that unless I'm able to be engaged, not only with them but with their teachers." Other participants agreed with this sentiment. The fact that parents are encouraged to come in and speak with the staff indicated an open and collaborative environment. P5 was excited to share how they feel connected to the school and enjoys being involved. "You can feel it when you walk in how it gives you that sense of just being relaxed and being like hey you know this is great this is where I want my child to go to school."

However, the participants emphasized that while the teachers at Second District are fantastic, they wish there were more opportunities to engage with the classrooms and the school in general. The lack of such opportunities led to a feeling of exclusion or a

sense that the school does not want parental involvement. P2 stated, "I'm a fairly engaged parent but it's hard to figure out if I wanted to be engaged in other ways.

Theme 3: Suggestions to Improve Engagement

Engagement for all parents is not an easy mission to accomplish. Although all five of the participants were able to articulate examples of when they felt engaged, they were able to offer suggestions to improve engagement. Meaningful opportunities for parental engagement were provided. P2 stated, "For parent engagement there needs to be like opportunities for parents to be involved like providing opportunities beyond the traditional field day or open house." Likewise, P5 suggested that Second District Elementary offer opportunities for parents to contribute, such as volunteering in classrooms, organizing events, participating in committees, or sharing their expertise. "Regarding the carnival, it seems there is room for improvement. Updating the prizes and games can help make the event more engaging and exciting for both parents and students, according to the interviewee." Parents feeling like they are valued may be one way to accomplish this.

P2 acknowledged that not all parents have the same level of desire or capacity to be involved in the school community and this should be recognized by the school. "But, for parents who really want to just get into the meat and potatoes of what their kids are doing I think that there should be an opportunity." P3 also recognized that barriers may be harder to overcome than one may think. Engagement may very well require involvement by the children. P3 stated, "So, I don't know if there's a way to have open

communication, directly between the teachers and the parents that wouldn't involve the kids as intermediaries."

Although parents and caregivers understand the importance of involvement, many believe that engagement is hard to accomplish and takes a concerted effort by all involved.

Focus Group Findings

When asked what was learned about the perceptions of parents during the school year as it relates to parent engagement one focus group member stated, "I learned that parents want to be involved but don't always know necessarily how to be involved and there are some barriers like clearances." Another member commented, "I just want to add to what she said , not only do they want to be involved but they really responded well to individual invitations whether it was e-mail, direct phone calls, or text." The group acknowledged the importance of personal interactions. "They need somebody to listen to them, and hear what the struggles at home are, and what the struggles at school are. "Instead of feeling judged , they feel like they have an ally, they have somebody who's willing to listen, understand and walk forward with them." Building trust through communication and personal interactions was considered crucial in creating a supportive environment.

Another theme that emerged from the focus group was trust. One focus group member stated, "You just said something that I thought was very fascinating that they rose to the occasion if you trust them…they will do it. I agree that's what it was… letting go a little bit of the power that as a school we often think we must keep control of."

Schools often feel that educators need to maintain control and power over decision-making processes. However, when parents were trusted and given some power in decision-making, they responded positively and took ownership. Therefore, trust was identified as a key part in parent-school engagement.

The group acknowledged the continued growth and success of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary School. One participant stated, "And it's growing, tomorrow is the student of the month breakfast at Second District, so again, parents are coming into that. We met at the end of March and talked about different ways that we can keep this going." Other initiatives included the new principal's idea to invite parents to the building for a pastry and time to say hello and meet the new administrator.

Moreover, engagement has increased in the social media following and engagement opportunities will be posted such as a cookout for the incoming kindergarten students and their families. Activities that encourage the active participation of parents is vital to the health of the school.

When asked if anyone had any final thoughts, one participant expressed their excitement with the progress made in parent engagement by sharing," I'm beaming right now, because I gave a lot of input years ago about parent engagement and I am starting to see what I was giving, I'm hearing it happening. People are starting to realize that it works, like this is the way you get parents in the fold, this is the way you get them more concerned about their child's education." The focus group articulated their excitement for more opportunities to engage families and children.

Interpretation of the Data Analysis Process

The researcher attempted to design a study that would provide several sources of data to support answering the research questions. As the researcher analyzed the data, it was clear that triangulation helped paint a complete picture of the research questions by collecting the data multiple ways. By collecting online survey data, conducting interviews, and organizing a focus group, the researcher was able to delve deeply into the topic. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the researcher adopted a data-driven coding approach, which allowed the themes and patterns to naturally emerge from the data.

However, it is important to mention that the data collected is specific to the research setting and the school year in question and serves as a limitation of the results. Not all school buildings in the district operate in the same manner due to factors such as difference in building leadership and personnel.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the quantitative and qualitative data from the current study. Findings indicate that although Second District Elementary School is doing some innovative and effective engagement and involvement activities for parents, there is room for improvement. Providing time and space for parents to feel welcome in the school and important to their child's education journey will help close the gap for parents. The focus group findings provided context for what the school is planning to do moving forward to encourage the involvement of all parents. In the next chapter, the researcher will draw conclusions based on the data analysis and provide recommendations based on the findings.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The shift to remote learning during the pandemic heightened the attention of family engagement as a critical area of focus for schools (Rebora, 2022). The aim of this action research was to identify the barriers to parental involvement in a rural school district with a high free and reduced lunch percentage and low academic success. The research questions focused on parents' perceptions of barriers to parental involvement by collecting pertinent data with an online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. Furthermore, the study sought to provide strategies to strengthen family-school partnerships. An asset-based approach is needed that focuses on strengths. In the context of family engagement, this means understanding that caregivers can support student learning and are equal partners in the educational process (Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

The negative implications of the lack of parental involvement support the need to examine the details associated with parent participation in schools. Some parents are disenfranchised by the educational system because they do not know how to become involved in the process (Foley, 2015). The literature review highlights that parental involvement in school increases student achievement, enhances self-esteem, improves behavior, and boosts school attendance. However, despite this evidence, family engagement in U.S. schools remain minimal (Mapp, 1997). Chapter V will present conclusions of the study, discuss the effectiveness of the interventions, highlight limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for future research.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Conclusions

Based on the data collected in this action research study, the researcher can return to the questions in order to provide answers. This section will provide the research questions and the findings associated with each question.

Question 1: What are the parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in parent involvement related activities such as parent workshops, Title I Parent Conferences, Literacy Under the Lights reading activity, Carnival Night, etc. at Second District Elementary School?

Question one sought to understand parents' perceptions of barriers to parental engagement. The data collected from the online questionnaire distributed to parents/caregivers at Second District Elementary School during the 2022-2023 school year revealed several barriers to parent engagement. These barriers include:

- educational barriers,

- financial constraints,

- delayed dissemination of information,

- structural barriers in the community,

- and the importance of trust in the parent-school relationship.

Based on these findings, five recommendations can be made to improve parental engagement specifically.

The first recommendation is to provide parents with resources and support to enhance their knowledge and understanding of how to effectively engage with their child's education and the school community. Beyond the traditional open house, the

school can create a celebratory theme which will allow students, families, and teachers to connect to one another. Additionally, the school can offer monthly learning café events that are linked to learning and happenings in the classroom. These sessions can cover topics such as supporting children's learning at home, navigating educational resources, understanding curriculum changes, or addressing shared challenges faced by parents. As one participant stated, "Parent engagement isn't hosting more events; it's getting parents engaged with their children learning."

The second recommendation is to address the lack of clarity about engagement opportunities by clearly communicating what these opportunities entail and how parents can become involved. One solution is to use various communication channels, such as e-newsletters, emails, and digital platforms to ensure clear and direct communication with parents. Often parents state they do not receive the relevant information from the school(s). One way to ensure parents receive information is to ensure it is disseminated often and in many formats. The recommendation of efficient dissemination of information is aligned with this recommendation.

The third recommendation is for school officials to explore options to reduce or eliminate financial burdens, such as seeking sponsorships, providing financial assistance programs, or sharing the costs with parents through collaborative efforts. The financial barriers that often exclude parents from engagement would alleviate any disenfranchisement parents may feel. Often parents choose not to participate in school activities because they feel that financially they cannot provide materials or donations. By eliminating the financial hardship from the equation, parents would be free to engage

without embarrassment. Sponsorships from local businesses could potentially close the financial gap parents may be experiencing.

The fourth recommendation is to address structural barriers by recognizing the specific challenges faced by parents in lower-income, lower-education communities. These challenges include limited resources, lack of access to educational opportunities, and challenges associated with poverty. Many families have busy schedules with parents often juggling multiple jobs and other responsibilities. Time constraints can make it challenging for them to attend school events or participate in meetings. One way to alleviate the structural barriers is to collaborate with community organizations and agencies to provide additional support to parents dealing with substance abuse, mental health issues, or other personal challenges. Often times, parents experience challenges that the school cannot directly eliminate, but by providing resources, the school can support parents who may be struggling in other areas of their lives.

The final recommendation is to foster meaningful encounters and effective communication channels to build trust between parents and the school. By supporting parents through the first four recommendations, the school can build trust so that parents feel comfortable walking through the doors of the school. Trusting teachers and school officials is a long process that can be nurtured by eliminating barriers that may seem impossible to overcome.

The five recommendations can contribute to successful parental engagement not only at Second District Elementary School but also district wide. Administrative and faculty support will be the key to success for all involved.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Question 2: In what ways was parent involvement impacted because of the

implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary School?

Question two explored the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District Elementary School. The data revealed six key findings.

Finding 1: Desire for involvement.

Parents expressed a strong desire to be involved in their children's education and school activities at Second District Elementary School. Despite facing barriers, such as a lack of knowledge on how to participate or obstacles such as obtaining clearances, parents demonstrated a genuine interest in being deeply involved. The elimination of obstacles will inevitably make involvement much easier and fulfill parents' desire to be engaged.

Finding 2: Negative past experiences.

Some parents may have had negative experiences themselves when they were in school, which can influence their willingness to participate in their children's education. Ensuring parents understand they are welcome and wanted in the school building is one way to begin to nurture the relationship with parents.

Finding 3: Importance of Personal Interactions.

The focus group emphasized the significance of personal interactions in building relationships with parents. Understanding that some parents may have experienced trauma is an important step to increasing personal interactions. It was highlighted by the data that focusing on what happened to them rather than what's wrong with them is essential. Individualized invitations, such as personal phone calls or direct emails, were found to be more effective in engaging parents compared to general announcements or flyers.

Finding 4: Perceived Power Imbalance.

Parents may perceive a power imbalance between themselves and educators which may lead to them feeling that their opinions and input are not valued or considered equal. Addressing this perception and creating a more inclusive and respectful environment can encourage greater parent involvement.

Finding 5: Ownership and Responsibility.

Providing parents with a sense of ownership and responsibility in their child's education enhances their engagement and involvement. When parents are entrusted with tasks and responsibilities, they often rise to the occasion and demonstrate their capabilities. Empowering parents in this way can foster a stronger sense of engagement.

Finding 6: Collaboration with Community Partners.

To address the challenge of obtaining clearances, the Design Team collaborated with community partners. This comprehensive approach helped parents navigate the clearance process and resulted in an increase in the parent voluntary group from two to fourteen. The focus group discussed future plans to explore the concept of clearance coaches, utilizing parents who have successfully completed the clearance process.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing barriers, building relationships, and creating a supportive and inclusive environment to enhance parent involvement.

Question 3: What are effective methods to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?

The data addressing question number three were collected via semi-structured interviews with five participants. Based on the responses provided by the participants, the

following are recommendations for Second District Elementary School to implement in order to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement.

The first recommendation was for the school to organize more on-site activities. By hosting on-site activities, the school can provide opportunities for parents to engage with the school community and build relationships with teachers and other parents. These activities can include workshops, open houses, family nights, or school fairs.

The second recommendation was to focus on how parents can help their children. Data revealed that parents are interested in actively contributing to their children's education and a concerted focused attempt to help support parents in this process can be successful.

The third recommendation was to engage with parents beyond scheduled events. Parent engagement should extend beyond simply hosting more events. Each family is unique, and their engagement needs may vary.

The fourth recommendation was to consider financial and time constraints of parents and understand these can stand in the way of parent involvement. Some parents may have financial limitations or time constraints due to multiple jobs or other responsibilities. The school should explore flexible ways for parents to contribute and participate, understanding the various challenges they may face.

The final recommendation was to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for parents. It is crucial for parents to feel comfortable and confident when interacting with the school and its staff. By creating a welcoming and inclusive environment parents may be encouraged to actively engage and participate.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

By implementing these strategies, Second District Elementary School can work towards removing barriers to parental engagement.

Fiscal Implications

The study highlights the financial constraints associated with a rural, low socioeconomic school like Second District Elementary. These constraints can affect family engagement, and ultimately, the success of the students in the school. If further research supports the idea that parent engagement is beneficial, the district must consider whether investing in assisting parents to obtain clearances is worthwhile.

The current cost of obtaining the necessary clearances for volunteering is approximately $120 per parent. This cost includes background checks or any other clearances required by the school or district. The estimate provided by a Second District Elementary School teacher suggests that it takes about two hours per parent to complete the necessary paperwork and follow-up. Under the current collective bargaining agreement, teachers are entitled to supplemental pay beyond regular school hours. The stipend mentioned is $27 per hour.

Based on the provided calculations, the total cost to invest in ten parent volunteers per year would be $1,740. This includes the cost of clearances for the parents and the teacher stipend for their time spent supporting the program. If the district decides to expand the program across the district, the estimated cost would be approximately $13,920. This suggests that the costs would increase significantly when involving more schools and parents.

Overall, the fiscal implications revolve around the need to allocate funds to support parent engagement initiatives, cover the cost of clearances, and potentially

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

provide stipends to teachers involved in facilitating the program. With increased pressure and mandates from the federal and state level to improve family engagement linked to funding, it will be critical for schools and districts to improve in this area.

Limitations

There were a few limitations that influenced the overall results of the study. First, the study's findings may not be applicable other to urban or suburban districts or different grade level buildings in the district such as middle school or high school because of the context where the study was conducted. The lack of transferability or generalizability limits the ability to use these findings and/or recommendations to make broad conclusions as the findings cannot be applied to other contexts. Moreover, the small sample size limits the reliability of the study. Furthermore, the majority of participants in the study identified as White or Caucasian, non-Hispanic, with only one participant identifying as Black or African American, non-Hispanic. This lack of diversity in ethnicity limits the generalizability of the findings to a more diverse population. A more representative sample that includes individuals from various ethnic backgrounds would enhance the study's validity and applicability.

Recommendations for Future Research

In terms of building on this research, there are several different approaches that could be taken to provide a deeper level of understanding parental involvement and what schools can do to increase not only how often parents engage with the school but also examining the quality of the engagement.

First, a large-scale quantitative study examining parents' perceptions of the level of engagement and the opportunities provided at their school would shed some light on the issue more globally. Examining parental involvement trends in rural, suburban, and urban settings would help to truly understand all the barriers parents perceive to stand in the way of full engagement with their children's schools. A second future study that would shed some light on parents' engagement at all levels would be to survey and interview parents at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Research indicates that parental engagement decreases as students age, and it would be important to understand if parents disengage because of the schools' lack of opportunities provided for parents or parents have chosen to stop engaging in their children's schools as they age.

Summary

According to Search Institute (2023), schools struggle to engage and partner with families. School officials often complain that many families are too busy or overwhelmed, uninterested, or simply unavailable and unable to be a resource for their children. Dozens of challenges make family engagement difficult. The challenges and barriers to engaging families demand rethinking our approach to family engagement in schools.

Based on the results of this study, the researcher has classified barriers to family engagement into three categories: structural barriers, attitudinal barriers, and institutional barriers. Structural barriers include educational factors such as a lack of knowledge or understanding of how to effectively engage in their child's education. Many families may also lack support and resources, face financial constraints, or experience time constraints

due to busy schedules. Additionally, substance abuse and mental health issues can further impede family engagement.

Attitudinal barriers encompass factors such as a lack of trust between parents and the school, negative past experiences, perceived power imbalances, and a lack of communication between parents and the school.

Institutional barriers include delayed dissemination of information and limited meaningful engagement opportunities. A lack of a welcoming and inclusive environment and safety procedures that restrict parental entry into schools, such as clearance requirements.

According to Trotman (2001), parent involvement in education was envisioned to establish a partnership between home and school, aiming to facilitate increased collaboration for the purpose of enhancing student outcomes. The objective was to strengthen the school's ability to comprehend and value the diverse values and cultures of families, thereby enabling them to be more effective in meeting the needs of students. Likewise, according to the authors from the Brookings Institution (2021), unjust power structures can create obstacles that prevent families from actively participating in their children's education. These barriers may exist due to several factors such as socio-economic disparities, cultural biases, or institutional practices. A new norm must be developed to dismantle the barriers to family engagement for families. Additionally, new norms will require an assets-based approach. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), if effective educational partnerships between home and school are to be implemented and sustained, engagement initiatives must include meaningful family engagement linked to

learning, a trusting relationship between the home and school, and a mutual respect between both parties. Moreover, meaningful family initiatives must focus on building the capital of the stakeholders involved in the process and will need to bring families and staff together for shared learning.

Parent engagement benefits everyone. When parents are actively engaged in their children's education, it positively impacts student success. Engaged parents can support teachers and create a more conductive learning environment benefiting both students and educators. Parent engagement involves parents being a partner to teachers in their children's education. It involves staying informed about children's activities, supporting teachers' expectations, and actively participating in the school community.

Successful parent engagement involves schools offering varied opportunities, creating a welcoming environment, recognizing individual family needs, and emphasizing the importance of parental involvement is supporting student achievement.

Trust was identified as a key element in parent-school relationships. If parents do not trust the school and the educational system, they will hesitate to engage. Overall, building trust, addressing power-dynamics, and promoting open communication were crucial factors in overcoming barriers and fostering effective family engagement.

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

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APPENDICES

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board
250 University Avenue
California, PA 15419
instreviewboard@calu.edu
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.

Dear Thomas,

Please consider this email as official notification that your proposal titled "Parents' Perceptions of Barriers that hinder engagement for disenfranchised parents at Second District Elementary School in the Crawford Central School District" (Proposal #PW22-004) has been approved by the Pennsylvania Western University Institutional Review Board as submitted.

The effective date of approval is 08/17/2022 and the expiration date is 08/16/2023. These dates must appear on the consent form.

Please note that Federal Policy requires that you notify the IRB promptly regarding any of the following:

(1) Any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented)

(2) Any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects

(3) Any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

(4) To continue your research beyond the approval expiration date of 08/16/2023, you must file additional information to be considered for continuing review. Please contact instreviewboard@calu.edu

Please notify the Board when data collection is complete.

Regards,

Melissa Sovak, PhD.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PennWest
UNIVERSITY

Appendix B
Survey Disclosure Letter

I am conducting a study to investigate parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in school at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, the study seeks to identify effective methods to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School and throughout the district.

In this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of barriers to parent participation at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, questions will center around suggestion you may want to offer to remove barriers and increase involvement. Also, questions will seek to understand your perceptions of how connected you feel to the school community.

I will also collect information to describe your gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, and the grades your child(ren) attended Second District. You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a parent with a student(s) that this enrolled at Second District Elementary.

You will be asked to participate in a survey that will take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete. The survey is distributed and collected via Google Forms. Participants are also asked to engage in selected response and open-ended questions. As a precaution there is some risk to those interviewed as open-end questions do not always guarantee confidentiality. However, the exploratory research data collect will be kept confidential.

The potential benefits to you from being in this study are varied and provide both short and long term assistance to the district. One such possible benefit is the improvement of connectedness to the school community. Another is the increase of parental involvement.

Your privacy is important, and I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the research study in a way that will not identify you. I do plan to present the results of the study as a published study.

You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to participate, please do not complete the survey. If you do agree, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, just tell me. Otherwise, by clicking continue, you are giving your consent to

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

participate in this questionnaire.

If you have questions about this research project, please contact Mr. Thomas K. Washington at 484-707-3559 or California University of PA Assistant Professor, Dr. Wolf at wolf@calu.edu.

Approved by the California University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. This approval is effective 08/17/22 and expires 08/16/23.

By clicking continue, you agree to participate in this questionnaire.

Approved, September 12, 2005 / (updated 02-11-2016)

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Appendix C

Survey Questions

Please provide us with your ideas of Parent Involvement activities at Second District Elementary School.

1. What grades did your child attend at Second District Elementary? (Please circle your response).

    Kindergarten   Grade 1   Grade 2   Grade 3   Grade 4   Grade 5
    Grade 6

2. What is you gender? Female _____   Male_____   Other_____

3. What is your ethnicity?

            American Indian or Alaskan Native   ___

            Asian or Pacific or Alaskan Native   ___

            Black or African American, non-Hispanic   ___

            Hispanic   ___

            White or Caucasian, non- Hispanic   ___

            Other: _____

4. Which category best represents your current age?

        18- 25 ___

        26- 35 ___

        36-45 ___

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

46- 55 ___

56 or older ___

5. What best describe the educational level you have attained?

High School Equivalent   _____

High School   _____

BA or BS   _____

MA or MS   _____

Ed. D or Ph.D.   _____

Other   _____

Answer the following questions using a scale from 1 to 5 with 1= Strongly agree 2 = Agree, 3= No opinion, 4= Disagree and 5= Strongly disagree.

6. I feel connected to the Second District Elementary School Community?
        1. __ 2. __ 3. __ 4. __ 5. __

7. Please rate your last communication with a Second District Staff Member on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1= not helpful at all to 5= extremely helpful.
        1.__ 2. __ 3. __ 4. __ 5. __

8. The school committees and the PTA/PTO reflect the diversity of the school community and actively recruit and welcome families of all backgrounds.

        1.__ 2. __ 3. __ 4. __ 5. __

9. Participation in parental workshop would increase parent engagement.

        1. __2. __ 3. __ 4. __ 5. __

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

10. Tell me about a specific time you felt connected to your school. Why did you feel that way?

11. What are effective ways/methods/strategies for schools to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement?

12. What are some of the ways you wish the staff would connect with you.

13. What other comments would you like to add about parent engagement?

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Appendix D

Focus Group Disclosure Letter

I am conducting a study to investigate parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in school at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, the study seeks to identify effective methods to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School and throughout the district.

In this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of barriers to parent participation at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, questions will center around suggestion you may want to offer to remove barriers and increase involvement.

You have been selected to participate in this study due to your role as a member of the design team. You will be asked a series of questions in this interview related to my research topic. If all participants agree, the interview will be electronically recorded for my records. If any participant does not want to be recorded, detailed notes of the interview will be kept instead. As a precaution there is some risk to those interviewed as open-end questions do not always guarantee confidentiality. However, the exploratory research data collect will be kept confidential.

The potential benefits to you from being in this study are varied and provide both short and long term assistance to the district. One such possible benefit is the improvement of connectedness to the school community. Another is the increase of parental involvement.

Your privacy is important, and I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the research study in a way that will not identify you. I do plan to present the results of the study as a published study.

You do not have to be in this study. If you do not want to participate in the focus. If you do agree, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw, just tell me. Otherwise, I will convene the focus and you are giving your consent to participate in this group.

If you have questions about this research project, please contact Mr. Thomas K. Washington at 484-707-3559 or California University of PA Assistant Professor, Dr. Wolf at wolf@calu.edu.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Approved by the California University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. This approval is effective 08/17/22 and expires 08/16/23.

By clicking continue, you agree to participate in this questionnaire.

Approved, September 12, 2005 / (updated 02-11-2016)

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

What did you learn about the perception of parents?

What are some of the perceived barriers you learned about from parents during this year?

What did you find most beneficial in learning about barriers that impact parents at Second District Elementary?

In what way was parent involvement impacted as a result of the implementation of the parent engagement process at Second District?

PennWest
UNIVERSITY

Appendix F

Interview Disclosure Letter

I am conducting a study to investigate parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in school at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, the study seeks to identify effective methods to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School and identify strategies that can be replicated in other schools throughout the district.

In this study, you were asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of barriers to parent participation at Second District Elementary School. As a follow-up to the survey, you are invited to participate in an interview to further understand your perceptions.

You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be done in person at Second District Elementary School, or another location mutually agreed upon. As a precaution there is some risk to those interviewed as open-ended questions do not always guarantee confidentiality. However, the exploratory research data collected will be kept confidential. In an effort to collect accurate information, I plan to record our interview for data analysis purposes.

The potential benefits to you from being in this interview process are varied and provide both short and long term assistance to the district. One such possible benefit is the improvement of connectedness to the school community. Another is the increase of parental involvement.

Your privacy is important, and I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the research study in a way that will not identify you. I do plan to present the results of the study as a published study.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

You do not have to be in this interview process and may stop participating at any time.   If you wish to withdraw, just tell me. Otherwise, we will plan to meet for 45 – 60 minutes. If you have questions about this research project, please contact Mr. Thomas K. Washington at 484-707-3559 or California University of PA Assistant Professor, Dr. Wolf at wolf@calu.edu.

Approved by the California University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. This approval is effective 08/17/22 and expires 08/16/23.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS

Appendix G

Interview Questions

Let's think about parent engagement at Second District. Which areas are the school doing well in? Which ones will need more work?

In your opinion, what defines effective parental involvement?

How does Second District Elementary School involve parents in making the school open, welcoming, and collaborative?

What steps could be taken to help Second District become more family-friendly? Right away, Over the long term.

How connected do you feel to the Second District School Community? Why?

What is your perception of barriers to parent engagement at Second District?

Appendix H

Sapphire Messages

Audio portion

Hello. This message is being sent on behalf of Mr. Washington. I am conducting a study to investigate parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in school at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, the study seeks to identify effective methods to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School and throughout the district.

You are invited to participate in the survey. Be on the lookout for information about the survey at Thursday's Parent Conferences. If you are not able to attend Parent Conferences, email Mr. Washington at was1885@pennwest.edu to request information about the survey.

Text Message

Mr. Washington invites you to complete a parent engagement survey. Click here for survey information and here to access the survey.

Letter:

https://bit.ly/ParentSD

Survey:

https://forms.gle/dJLABgkwZ2E28bnt9

 Email Message

Hello. This message is being sent on behalf of Mr. Washington. I am conducting a study to investigate parents' perceptions of barriers that keep them from participating in school at Second District Elementary School. Additionally, the study seeks to identify effective methods to implement to remove barriers to parental engagement and increase parental involvement at Second District Elementary School and throughout the district.

Click here to access information about the survey.

Click here to access the survey.