2017

# An Examination of Leadership Behavior: Improving Family Engagement in an Urban Latinx School Community

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### Recommended Citation

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## Abstract

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The principal was observed for a year and interviewed extensively regarding his beliefs, practices, and behaviors in implementing a family engagement program called Parent University. Stakeholders were also interviewed and focus groups were conducted with parents that participated regularly in the program. Observations were made and field notes were collected for a year during pilot and initial full-year rollout of the Parent University program. This study provides field-based examples of principal behavior that informs practice through the case study of one urban principal.

## Document Type
Capstone

## Degree Name
Ed.D.

## Department
Educational Administration and Policy Studies

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## Keywords
Family engagment, Leadership behavior, Principal leadership, Latinx, Parent engagement

## Subject Categories
Educational Leadership | Secondary Education | Urban Education

## Publication Statement

AN EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR: IMPROVING FAMILY

ENGAGEMENT IN AN URBAN LATINX SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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A Doctoral Research Project

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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by

Mary Elizabeth Graft

April, 2017

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**Dedication**

I dedicate this doctoral research project to my parents, Michael and Patricia Graft, whose love for education inspired me to pursue my passions. Your wisdom and good counsel throughout my life encouraged me to reach for the stars and set goals so that I can contribute to the highest and best use of my abilities. You instilled the values of responsibility and perseverance that have helped make me who I am today. You are the reason my standards are high, my work ethic is solid, and my moral compass is true. You are my best cheerleaders and have supported me in countless ways, and I am truly blessed for your love.

I also dedicate this work to my brilliant oncologist, Dr. Clayton Smith. I am incredibly fortunate that it was you who cared for me when I was so profoundly sick. You were the one that had the heavy responsibility of delivering the tragic diagnosis to me, then you walked me through an educational process I never would have signed up for. You explained, taught, comforted, and encouraged me. Your determination to heal me saved my life. It is you that gave me hope, and I will do everything I can to be your best patient and make it to the thirty more years you suggested. It is because of you that I know what remission feels like, and I want you to know how much I admire and respect your magnificent mind and devotion to the art and science of medical care and research.

**Acknowledgements**

In the face of the devastating news that disrupted my world so soon after this doctoral journey began, my remarkable family and friends surrounded me with strength, kindness, and love. My siblings Sheila and Michael were quick to travel to Denver to be at my side, becoming pillars of strength. Your love pulled me through those many weeks when I walked through the valley of darkness, and I could see you suffer along with me as you encouraged me to fight the

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battle of a lifetime with grace. Your spouses, Maria and Michael, were incredibly helpful through this journey, giving me the gift of their expertise and understanding on countless occasions. I thank each of my sibs, Sheila & Michael, and Michael & Maria, for loving me.

My cousins, Michael and Barbara, opened their home and their hearts to me when I moved to Denver to attend the University. You were always there for me, taking me to countless medical appointments, spending precious time with me, and propping me up emotionally and spiritually along the way. Your love and help literally moved me forward in this journey.

The many friends that put their lives on hold to take turns living with me when I could not be alone were also a big part of this story. You brought me to my graduate classes, sat beside me while I read, insisted that I focus on course projects, walked with me, nurtured me, cooked for me, created an atmosphere for healing, and eventually it was you that made me find my sense of humor again in the face of grave adversity. Anne, Jen, Eric, Beth, Sandy, Jackie, and Candice – you all stepped in and bravely shared a tough experience with me. Your presence during that time allowed me to stay in school, and I will forever be grateful for your time and friendship.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Kristina Hesbol, thank you for your time, feedback, guidance, and encouragement throughout the doctoral program and the dissertation process. You have been exceptionally supportive both personally and professionally, you pushed me to challenge my own assumptions, and your knowledge and insight influenced me to become a more open person. You pulled me back off the ledge on more than one occasion, never judging my tears of frustration. I am a better educational leader today because of the theory and literature you introduced me to, and I appreciate the rich academic discourse our cohort had in your classes.

**Abstract**

The following is a technical report based on the qualitative case study of a school principal in a representative urban high school in the Rocky Mountain West. The purpose of this study was to better understand the extent to which an urban high school principal in a high poverty school can implement behaviors that increase family engagement within a Latinx school community. The research question in this study was: *What leadership behaviors are impactful in developing and increasing Latinx family engagement in an urban high school?*

The principal was observed for a year and interviewed extensively regarding his beliefs, practices, and behaviors in implementing a family engagement program called Parent University. Stakeholders were also interviewed and focus groups were conducted with parents that participated regularly in the program. Observations were made and field notes were collected for a year during pilot and initial full-year rollout of the Parent University program. This study provides field-based examples of principal behavior that informs practice through the case study of one urban principal.

**The Educational Doctorate Degree (Ed.D.): Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate**

"The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession" (About CPED, n.d.). This technical report summarizing the Doctoral Research Project (DRP) was guided by and vetted through the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) Working Principles. In this study, I implemented the CPED vision in collaboration with a field partner in an urban secondary school throughout the research, data collection, and analysis of this DRP. This project specifically utilizes descriptive case study methodology to understand principal behaviors that improve family engagement in a Title I school.

The six Working Principles as identified by CPED (2009) encourage Ed.D. students and candidates to utilize an array of skills that include applying theory, engaging communities, and leading for equity. These principles align and focus the following report to ensure quality, professional research practices. The Professional doctorate in education:

1. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities.
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships.
4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.
5. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.
6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.

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> At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents. - Jane D. Hull

## Part 1: Laying the Groundwork

Current research suggests that the activities and leadership of school administrators is vitally important to the educational equity and social justice of students and their families (Auerbach, 2009). Effective outreach to low-income, Latinx school communities is possible through the impactful actions of school leaders who take the role of reaching out to families (Zacarian, 2011). Instructional topics and activities that train future administrators to organize partnership programs and evaluate or improve the effectiveness of family and community involvement are lacking, however, in principal preparation programs (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Jeynes, 2012). Principals are left to find their own path to develop and implement effective engagement programs, and yet leadership for authentic family partnerships incorporates a vision that utilizes the goals of cultural responsiveness, broad participation, and social justice (Auerbach, 2011).

The increasing diversity of American school student populations challenge urban school principals to establish cultures that advance justice and equity within under-resourced school communities. According to the United States Department of Education, both community and family engagement are potentially powerful resources that, through collaboration, make schools more culturally responsive and equitable (United States Department of Education, 2016).

The United States is becoming more ethnically and linguistically diverse (United States Department of Education, 2016). Educational statistics indicate that the ethnic mix of the United States has shifted (United States Department of Education, 2015), and changing demographics call for new solutions that turn challenges into opportunities for equitable and just outcomes for every student. The Latinx population is currently the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United

States (United States Department of Education, 2016; Fry & Lopez, 2012; United States Census Bureau, 2010), with one in four public school children in the United States identified as Latinx (Fry et. al., 2012; United States Department of Education, 2013). National data reveals that it is common for urban Latinx children to attend public schools in which most children live below the poverty line, while White urban public school students tend to enroll in schools where children live above the poverty line (Saporito & Sohoni, 2006; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007; United States Department of Education, 2016). Nationwide, 44 percent of all children under 18 live in low-income families (United States Department of Education, 2016). However, for Latinx children, 62 percent under the age of 18 are from low-income families (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015), and a full 30 percent of all those children live below the poverty line (DeNavis-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013). For children from low socioeconomic family backgrounds, research indicates that, starting in kindergarten and continuing all the way through high school, their average academic performance is lower than those from middle- and upper-income homes (Mulligan, Hastedt, & McCarroll, 2012).

Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides federal financial assistance to schools with a high percentage of children from low income families in an effort to help ensure that all children meet state academic standards. In urban areas, 79 percent of Latinx children attend designated Title I schools (United States Department of Education, 2016). Specific to one state in the Rocky Mountain West, 23 percent of the public-school population is eligible for Title I benefits (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). In the largest urban school district in that same state, 57 percent of the children are identified as Latinx and 70 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

From a linguistic perspective, there is a growing population of English Learners (ELs) enrolled in school districts throughout the United States (United States Department of Education,

2016). ELs speak a variety of languages, but the majority of EL students nationally speak Spanish at home (Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang, & Velez, 2015; NCES, 2015). English Learners are more likely to go to schools in urban locations (NCES, 2015), and 85 percent of ELs in 5th grade or younger were born in the United States and learn their parent's language at home (Zong, Batalova, & Auclair, 2015). In addition to understanding the linguistic and economic challenges faced by their students and families, school leaders must understand that more than half of EL children have parents who do not have a high school diploma (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passell, & Herwantoro, 2005). These families may not be comfortable taking the first step toward engaging with teachers and administrators because doing so may negatively impact the confidence of EL parents (Capps et al., 2005).

In schools that serve low-income populations that include significant numbers of EL students, barriers such as communication and cultural differences between schools and parents serve to increase roadblocks to improved student learning outcomes (Auerbach, 2012; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). The interactions between parents and teachers or administrators are often unidirectional and tend to under-utilize the resources and culture of the families (Arias and Morillo-Campbell, 2008). In December of 2015, President Obama signed the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law, replacing the No Child Left Behind act. ESSA mandates that districts are responsible for developing a family engagement policy with the input of parents that is periodically updated (Henderson, 2015).  This puts an emphasis on engaging families and involving them in local accountability plans and school activities. At least one percent of Title I funding must be set aside for parent and family engagement programming. Targeted engagement strategies must be thoughtfully and meaningfully constructed to meet specific needs of diverse families. For instance, Latinx parents in low income urban communities may not be equipped for

effective and productive interactions with schools due to possibly limited English fluency, a lack of formal education, and potentially limited time to attend school-related meetings and events (Garcia and Keyes, 2012; Mathis, 2013). Programs that are offered in Spanish, intended to increase inclusion for those who do not typically participate in school events, and offered during times and days that increase opportunities for parent attendance may be considered. Engagement strategies that are crafted with attention to the population being served are more likely to receive a positive response. In schools that align with the culture of the local community and provide opportunities for inclusive linguistic interactions with families, engagement is likely to increase (Arias et. al., 2008; Epstein, 2015; Peterman, 2008; Warren, 2011).

When considering family and school interactions, there is a distinction between involvement and engagement (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Parent involvement starts with the school, as principals, administrators, and teachers define opportunities, challenges, problems, and solutions and then try to 'sell' their ideas to parents. This is a problem because such involvement offerings are pushed at parents instead of prompted by parent input or feedback. Opportunities for involvement that are offered by school staff may be simply occasional opportunities for volunteering and do not provoke the kind of collaborative, vested interest of programs and concepts that are the result of collaborative and interactive effort from parents and teachers or administrators.

Parent engagement, meanwhile, starts with the parents themselves. "Ideas are elicited from parents by school staff in the context of developing trusting relationships. They emerge from parent/community needs and priorities. More parent energy drives the efforts" (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009, p. 6). When engagement is established as a school goal, it is more sustainable because families tend to be provided with an opportunity to make a long-term investment in the shaping of activities and programs that help themselves and their communities (Breiseth,

Robertson, and Lafond, 2011). Parent and family engagement is the greater goal, and a welcoming school makes room first for parent involvement that can provide a platform for the buildup of interactive and collaborative engagement. Both "involvement" and "engagement" are used throughout this paper.

In the United States, urban schools are increasingly faced with tough economic and academic challenges (Auerbach, 2011; Shields, 2010; Warren, 2011). Changes in demographics and pressure for accountability require an innovative set of tools for school principals. Research shows that in schools with high levels of poverty and English Learners, parent participation is often low (Crosnoe & Huston, 2007; Warren, 2009). Yet it is empirically documented that family engagement is essential to student success (Comer, 2007; Epstein, 2015; Warren, 2011). Particularly for English Learners from low-income families, studies show that improved communication between families and schools is associated with improved achievement for students (Crosnoe, 2009; Epstein, 2015). Traditionally, marginalized populations tend to lack political capital, economic opportunity, and social integration, and may therefore be less inclined to engage with schools. Rates of parental participation are historically lower in generally unrepresented populations. In response, recent educational reform arguments have focused on facilitating involvement with parents and caregivers so that their increased involvement has a positive effect on the goal of reducing achievement gaps for their children (Crosnoe & Huston, 2007; Crosnoe, 2012; Raver, Gershoff, & Aber, 2007; Warren, 2009).

Despite evidence from empirical research that points to the importance of family engagement, especially at the high school level, there has been little systematic attention paid to guiding engagement or creating a culture that genuinely invites and includes parents (MacIver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca, 2015). Furthermore, few school leaders have been trained in developing the skills to be effective in engaging historically uninvolved parent communities

(Shields, 2010). There is limited research on leadership characteristics that effectively increase parent engagement. The majority of preparation programs for school administrators consist of a combination of organizational content, management techniques, and fieldwork (Shields, 2010). A Wallace Foundation study noted that research still knows little about developing and preparing leaders to guide successful school improvement, especially when faced with a failing school or district (McCarthy and Forsythe, 2009).

**Problem of Practice**

This research project was a qualitative case study, focused on the leadership of an urban school principal to understand the behaviors utilized to improve family engagement. Mr. Donal Keogh, the principal at River Rock High School in Bellavon School District, was the subject of this study, the primary focus of data collection, and the Partner in Practice for this research project (to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all study participants, facilities, and organizations throughout this dissertation).

The problem of practice at River Rock High School (RRHS) centers on the lack of participation by parents and guardians in their child's school. Minimal parent involvement, interaction, and engagement has been a persistent problem in this low-performing school that narrowly escaped closure by the state in 2014. In an informal conversation with Mr. Keogh, he defined family engagement as "*parents or family members that are involved with the school to the point of understanding resources that are available through school, district, and community to enhance the educational experience of their children. This is beyond simply 'showing up' to meetings or events; it is being proactively engaged in such a way as to make an impact for their children*" (D. Keogh, personal communication, April 1, 2016). The Harvard Family Research Project describes family engagement as a focus on children's learning in a variety of settings and reflects the many ways in which families and schools interact with and support each other (Weiss

& Lopez, 2009). The National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group at the Harvard Family Research Project suggests foundational principles of family engagement (Harvard Family Research Project, n.d.). The first is a shared responsibility between family, school, and community. The second is engagement continuous across a child's life, and includes enduring commitment during different phases of maturity. The third is an acknowledgement that learning happens in multiple settings. Ideally, school districts should address these three core components for systemic family engagement, including (a) inclusive district-level strategies, (b) school-level engagement, and (c) interactive communication with families to help them understand how students learn (Schneider-Krzys, 2009).

Recent research (Lopez and Caspe, 2014) indicates that children whose parents are engaged in their education are more likely to graduate from high school. Latinx parents have high expectations for the quality of schools, but often feel marginalized as they face barriers to identify culturally appropriate ways to engage with American schools (Hill and Torres, 2010). Furthermore, Latinx parents frequently feel misunderstood and unwelcome when attempting to interact with teachers or administrators (Hill and Torres, 2010). When schools are welcoming, teachers cordially invite families to participate, and when leaders provide guidance for families to support learning, family engagement is increased (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Persistent encouragement from principals and teachers has the potential to reverse the trend of decreasing family engagement as children age (Hayakawa, Englund, Warner-Richter, & Reynolds, 2013).

**Theory of Action**

Based on the premise that leadership in low-income school settings with historically underserved school communities has the overall aim of improving equity and social justice (Shields, 2010, 2011), this study followed the activities of a school administrator who is working to increase family engagement in a high-poverty urban school community with a high percentage

of families for whom English is a second language. The theory of action is: *If an urban school principal utilizes transformative leadership behaviors to implement a program that invites parents to learn and interact with the school, then parent engagement will increase.* Through a program called Parent University, parents are brought together regularly throughout the school year to learn about goal setting, communication about values, interacting with the school system, effectively parenting their children through all ages, while participating in a supportive community with other parents. Because of his role as a school leader, the principal has a unique opportunity to be both effective and influential in promoting parent involvement (Griffith, 2001).

In the field of research on parent engagement, there is debate about whether schools can assist families to improve the academic outcomes of their children (Jeynes, 2012). Educators and social scientists that use social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as the foundation for their perspective believe that it is possible to teach mothers and fathers how to be more engaged in the education of their children (Mapp, Johnson, Stickland, & Meza, 2008). Engagement is the main problem that the Parent University program at River Rock High School intends to address.

**Framework**

The conceptual framework is the lens through which a researcher looks to examine and evaluate a problem. This report offers a summary of research that used a conceptual framework that focused on transformative leadership theory. Shields (2010) asserts that transformative leadership confronts inequity and strives to increase both shared social well-being and individual achievement while weaving the concepts of equity, social justice, and educational leadership together within the broader context of school communities (Shields, 2009). Transformative leadership starts with questions of justice and democracy, and engages power and authority to create a collaborative dialogue between social responsibility and individual accountability

(Weiner, 2003). Such leadership bears the possibility and responsibility of having a profound impact on improving justice in a school community.

I considered various leadership models relative to principal effectiveness, and transformative leadership provides the best opportunity to meet the social justice and academic needs of the American education system because it aims to bring about change in individuals, the organization, and society (Shields, 2009). The transformative school leader inclusively engages all stakeholders in school improvement, stresses open dialogue, and leads with creative action that provokes change in social, economic, and political sustainability within the school community (Callejo Perez, 2010; Shields, 2010, 2011). By contrast, other frameworks might include transformational leadership, which focuses on affecting change in structures, utilizing rewards and sanctions to encourage desired behaviors (Bass, 1991).

Few urban schools in low-income communities have kept up with their rapidly diversifying populations, and subsequently do not sufficiently address new and diverse needs (Shields, 2009). In analyzing leadership within diverse contexts, Shields (2010) studied the theories of transactional, transformational, and transformative school leadership and concluded that the latter offers the best potential to meet the needs of a complex and diverse educational system from both academic and equity perspectives. Effective leaders do things differently to bring change, and school principals that consider student life both within and beyond the school building can have a profound impact (Shields, 2010; Warren et al., 2009). When school leaders leverage their resources and capital in ways that improve parent engagement, barriers are reduced and student outcomes are increased (Lawson and Alameda-Lawson, 2012). It is the transformative leader that progresses from driving change for the good of the organization to utilizing a passion for social justice to improve overall equity in a school community (Shields, 2010, 2011). While this research is focused on understanding the specific behaviors a principal

utilizes to increase family engagement in a diverse community, the possibility of behaviors contributing to transformative leadership practices was noted and will contribute to future research.

For this study, I used two additional theories to study parent participation in a specific school community. Community cultural wealth theory (Yosso, 2005) guides understanding of the significance and importance of invitation, space, and platform that may be utilized to prompt Latinx parents to alter their engagement with schools. The theory of cultural proficiency describes leadership that is adept at identifying barriers faced by unengaged families and then works to overcome them through inclusive school programs and activities (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The effectiveness of the school principal is the central interest in this study, which sought to identify the kind of leadership activity that is effective during the implementation of a program designed to increase family engagement. The results of this research can assist school and district leaders to identify the leadership behaviors and actions that potentially contribute to increasing family engagement in urban schools with Latinx family populations.

**Site Selection and Context**

I became acquainted with River Rock High School at a community open house event sponsored by the high school and the neighboring elementary schools in late 2015. Upon meeting the high school principal and discussing mutual interests in community engagement, the principal revealed that one of the biggest challenges faced by the high school was the lack of parent engagement. The principal, Mr. Donal Keogh, was open about discussing the problem of practice and enthusiastic about a planned family engagement strategy in this low-income, Latinx community.

To provide context for the site, River Rock High School is in an urban, high-poverty community in the Rocky Mountain West. The school building was constructed in 1955 and has not benefited from the major renovations that have been common with older buildings throughout the district. The 750 students represent a demographic breakdown of 84% identified as Latinx, 86% designated as coming from low-income households, and 33% English Learners as noted on official Bellavon School District public records. While a large Latinx and low-income population does not make an urban school unique, the principal's work to develop a successful engagement program in a community with historically low family involvement makes this school unusual in the region.

As a newly promoted principal, Mr. Keogh relied on his observations and experience as an Assistant Principal at River Rock to identify critical problems in the school, one of which is a lack of family engagement. Making it a priority to address this need, he actively sought to identify programs that would work in the environment of his school community. While attending a national professional development conference, he met a consultant with expertise in Latinx family engagement who addressed the importance of parent leadership and advocacy. Mr. Keogh ultimately acted to create an intervention through a monthly Parent University program that intended to improve family engagement. The program invites parents and caregivers to the school for monthly, interactive classes designed to build relationships, promote a sense of community, and offer guidance in advocacy for children (D. Keogh, personal communication, April 1, 2016).

This study examines the behaviors and outcomes achieved as Mr. Keogh planned, implemented, and delivered a new program aimed at increasing engagement. The participants in the study were the school principal, a sample of stakeholders in the school community, and the family participants in the Parent University program. Stakeholders included a peer principal at a

neighboring elementary school, an assistant principal that was on the principal's staff who observed the planning and implementation of the Parent University program first-hand, and a family liaison paraprofessional who worked closely with the principal from program conception to program launch and ongoing through implementation. The variety of participants allowed the researcher to explore the leadership behaviors through the lens of different stakeholders.

To ensure ethical practices, the researcher prepared documentation to obtain approval from the school district, the University of Denver Institutional Review Board, and the participants themselves. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and an explanation was provided that the research does not present any foreseeable risks. Participation was completely voluntary and could be ended at any time, and a consent form was completed by each participant.

Prior to starting the research, I familiarized myself with other family engagement efforts at districts and social service agencies across the country. There are a variety of programs that have realized local and regional success with Latinx parent involvement, participation, and engagement, including Parent University. A sample list of such programs is included in the appendix.

**Significance of the Study**

School reform efforts throughout the United States are designed to enhance students' educational experiences and improve academic outcomes. One specific area of urgency seeks to find ways to effectively increase family engagement that reflects authentic partnerships between school leaders and parents. In the Rocky Mountain West, one particular governor, Colorado's John Hickenlooper, noted in October 2015, that his state *"continues to experience an unacceptably high dropout rate, inequalities in the academic achievement levels of students from different racial and socioeconomic groups, and low rates of enrollment and*

*persistence in postsecondary education"* (Colorado Department of Education, 2015), acknowledging the importance of improving public education through family and school partnerships. In proclaiming that October would henceforth be Family and School Partnership in Education Month, Governor Hickenlooper noted that:

- Studies show that when parents, families, and schools collaborate effectively, students achieve higher levels of academic performance, demonstrate better attendance and homework completion, and are less likely to drop out of school;
- Students from all cultural backgrounds tend to perform better academically when their parents, families, and the professionals at their schools bridge the gap between the culture at home and the classroom;
- Students benefit from active involvement by well-informed and engaged parents and families in their life and education; and
- Colorado desires to increase graduation rates, academic achievement levels of all students, and raise rates of enrollment and persistence in secondary and postsecondary education (CDE, 2015).

The governor's call to action presented an opportunity to elucidate the complex social and cultural factors that shape parent engagement in high-poverty schools and improve understanding of effective principal leadership. The school community in this study "consists of families who are predominantly low-income, where English is more apt to be a second language, and where parents have not engaged with the school for decades" (D. Keogh, personal communication, May 17, 2016).

School leaders must be able to address the needs of whichever population comes into the school. Due to the rapid growth in population of Latinx children in urban school settings, addressing the needs of this group creates an urgent demographic imperative and makes research in this area of particular interest to anyone seeking to increase Latinx involvement with schools. The study of an urban school principal's leadership behaviors as he works to engage Latinx

families is relevant because it provides guidance for aspiring leaders as they work to lead change. This research can also help districts identify leaders that have the characteristics of transformative leaders with a heart for social justice and equity, an important consideration in the hiring process.

This case study identified the leadership actions of an urban school principal who successfully increased family engagement and makes recommendations that will enhance program development for improved family participation in other schools with similar demographics. Significantly, an executive summary and technical report will be submitted to Bellavon School District upon completion of this study. Educational leadership programs, professional development programs, district administration, and current school leaders who work in high-poverty schools can use the results of this study to develop a deeper understanding of the transformative leadership skills that influence the success of parent involvement and family engagement programming. School principals may refer to this technical report to understand the behaviors and activities that Latinx parents effectively respond to as they consider the design and implementation of successful family engagement programs such as Parent University.

**Part 2 - Methodology**

The impact of leadership on increasing family engagement is unknown at the current point in time. This research expounded on empirical literature to benefit a variety of stakeholders, including principals and other administrators, teachers, district leadership, parents, community members, and policy makers. Principals who have a heart for social justice and equity leadership have the capacity to build engagement through the behaviors they exhibit as they work with their school communities. This study explored the leadership behaviors of one school administrator who contributed to improving family engagement in an urban school environment within a Latinx community.

Descriptive case study methodology is the qualitative research strategy. Case study research "involves the study of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Yin (2009, 2013) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. In this study, the contemporary phenomenon is the improvement of family engagement and the real-life context is the Parent University program that has been developed by the principal in a low-income, urban school setting.

**Research Design**

I chose qualitative case study methodology to examine the behavior of one high school principal attempting to increase family engagement to understand how his actions affect parent participation. The research design for this case study included data collection consisting of observations of and interviews with the principal, interviews with stakeholders, and focus groups of parent participants. Semi-structured interview protocol used open-ended questioning to inquire about planning, design, and implementation of the program. The principal's critical analysis of the pilot launch, subsequent improvements, and implementation of the first full year of Parent University were addressed through questioning. The list of interview questions and focus group questions are included as appendices. I observed the principal for one year as he led the monthly Parent University classes, and collected field notes during these observations.

When observations are made in the field, the researcher is the primary instrument of research, and performing such fieldwork is a highly-valued aspect of conducting a case study (Yin, 2011). Yin (2009) notes that challenges are faced by the researcher in collecting field data. First, the fieldworker has some unavoidable cultural and personal perspectives that may impact data collection or analysis; second, the field worker's presence may affect participants in such a way that routine behavior may change; and third, the fieldworker must make the discretionary

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decision to select where and when to make observations (Yin, 2009). Because direct observations were made, the researcher worked hard to avoid tainting the data collection by limiting field notes to a written recording on what was happening, who was present, and the curriculum presented at each Parent University session. Classes were held monthly on the last Tuesday evening and as an observer, I attended each monthly session, first as a community member during the pilot implementation and then as a researcher upon IRB approval.

Qualitative research seeks to find meaning in context (Creswell, 2007; Stake 1995). Because transformative leadership has the most likelihood of making a difference in efforts for social justice and equity (Shields, 2010), an interpretive lens focused on leadership behavior was used to analyze fieldwork data. The natural environment served as the setting for qualitative research so that data collection could be used to understand a phenomenon while accurately mirroring what is happening (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Multiple sources of evidence were triangulated during analysis, and contributed to the strengthening of the case study inquiry (Yin, 2009). Observations, interviews, and focus group data were coded and triangulated to increase the generalizability and external validity of the research findings.

Case studies are examinations of bounded systems with the researcher focusing on the processes in context as opposed to the outcomes of specific events (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Utilizing case study methodology was an advantage because the researcher sought to answer a "how" or a "why" question (Yin, 2011). This research contributes to the understanding of how a principal's leadership behaviors impact family engagement. This case study was a single-case design with descriptive units of analysis that included observations, interviews, and focus groups. I observed the behaviors of the school principal to understand the impact of his leadership actions in creating an inviting paradigm shift in a community of Latinx parents who

responded positively to the creation of a platform for bonding and collaboration by identifying a newfound sense of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

**Data Collection**

Field observations, individual interviews, and focus groups made up the data collection of this study. My qualitative data collection process included the following: (1) maintain a narrow focus; (2) develop analytical questions relevant to the study; (3) record observations to enhance critical thinking and make connections; (4) explore the field of literature to ensure breadth and depth of topic; and (5) bring the data to life by using descriptive and figurative language (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative design is emergent, necessitating that the researcher made decisions about what to look for next as data is collected (Merriam, 2009).

The collection of data for this study occurred in phases, some of which were concurrent. The initial phase included observations of the community night and kickoff of the Parent University program which I attended as a community member. Further observations were made as I attended the monthly sessions of the pilot program of Parent University as a community member, continuing into the first full year of program implementation. Classes were held monthly in either the cafeteria or library of the school, and a meal was provided to all in attendance prior to the start of every Parent University session. Additional phases of data collection included one-on-one interviews with the principal, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups with parent participants (see Appendices for interview and focus group protocols). Because most of the parent participants speak Spanish as their native language, focus group consent forms were provided in Spanish and English, and the focus groups were conducted in partnership with Miss Amelia Kennedy, a bilingual volunteer who is a staff member at River Rock High School. The final phase of data collection consisted of a member checking to confirm

accuracy with those who were interviewed by sharing a draft of the narrative themes that emerged through analysis with the participants.

**Interview Protocol**

Interviews were the primary data collection method in this qualitative case study. Yin (2009) contends that interviews are essential to case study data collection because they can take many forms and capture human activity that can be interpreted and reported through the interviewees' perception. Focus groups are a form of group interviews with the purpose of obtaining information of a qualitative nature from a limited number of people (Krueger and Casey, 2014). Focus groups were incorporated into this research to include the perceptions of the parent participants attending the Parent University program.

The principal was interviewed several times during the study, and then again after data analysis to provide member-checking. Stakeholders who were present to observe the leadership of the principal in planning, developing, and implementing the new Parent University program were identified as potential interviewees. Stakeholders with the following roles were invited to participate in this research project: teacher, dean, assistant principal, principal, parent, family liaison, and director. The first three stakeholders to respond to the call for participants were an assistant principal, a peer principal, and a family liaison paraprofessional who each accepted invitations to participate in one-on-one interviews that explored their perceptions of Principal Keogh's leadership.

For focus groups, every parent who attended the Parent University session in December 2016 was invited to join in a focus group. Thirty-two adult family members were invited to participate, and eleven parents volunteered, representing a 34% response rate. Two focus groups were held. While other parents were socializing and eating dinner in the school cafeteria, focus

group volunteers were invited to a quiet classroom adjacent to the library. Parent focus groups were conducted in English and Spanish with the help of volunteer translator Amelia Kennedy, a bilingual teacher known to the parents from the River Rock High School community. Both interviews and focus groups concentrated on dimensions of principal behavior that were observed throughout the implementation of the program. Interviews were open-ended and the interview guides were designed to extract perceptions, attitudes, and opinions that stakeholders and parents have about the leadership of the Parent University program. The interview protocol was used as a guide so that modifications could be made along the way at the discretion of the researcher during the session.

<p align="center">**Part 3: Analysis**</p>

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service and returned to me in Microsoft Word format, which I uploaded into Google Docs for secure storage in the cloud. After all interviews and focus groups were completed, transcriptions were verified for accuracy and compared with observational field notes. I solicited the help of a bilingual peer to assist with the debriefing of data. This collaborative effort with a peer provided outsider perspective that offered strange-making because this peer was not close to the research process (Mannay, 2010; Evans,2006), this teamwork also assisted with data reduction and served to reduce potential researcher bias.

I reviewed secondary data that was collected by the principal and school administrators. This data was publicly available and was used to familiarize myself with possible indicators of parent engagement such as total number of parents who attended previous school events and levels of family participation at events such as back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences,

and monthly parent coffees. Because my research studied the implementation of a program that was newly developed, there was no baseline or historical data regarding Parent University participation at River Rock High School.

**Database Design and Methodological Framework**

Yin (2003) suggests that researchers should document the steps or procedures used to analyze data from their case studies. I constructed a methodological framework to provide an outline of the procedures used during the qualitative data analysis phase of this project. Methodological frameworks are also used to manage and organize the process of data analysis and allows researchers to substantiate the procedures used in the process of analyzing data (Spencer and Ritchie, 1994).

All data analysis procedures were conducted using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 11 Pro. This methodological framework is intended to be systematic and comprehensive. It is also transparent because it carefully outlines all analytical procedures and helps the researcher avoid bias. Open coding through data triangulation, categorical aggregation of Parent Nodes and Child Nodes (NVivo Pro 11, 2016) and thematic analysis were selected as the main methods of data analysis for this study. The NVivo CAQDAS utilizes the term "Parent Nodes" to represent main themes that emerge from triangulated data, and "Child Nodes" represent additional, more specific sub-themes that emerge as data is further analyzed within the main themes.

**Coding Structure**

Open coding refers to "the initial interpretive process by which raw research data are first systematically analyzed and categorized" that "builds from the ground up by identifying essential concepts and patterns that emerge from openly reading and reflecting upon raw data" (Price,

2010, p. 180). In case study research, this is described as the process of initial coding of categorical data (Stake, 1995). Since building an open coding structure in NVivo is important (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), all data sources were broadly coded in Detail view.

The second phase of data analysis involved data triangulation. Triangulation is a method used in qualitative research that involves cross-checking multiple data sources and collection procedures to evaluate the extent to which all evidence converges (Saldaña, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Triangulation ensures that "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). It involves cross checking multiple data sources and an evaluation of the extent to which evidence converges (Patton, 2005). Data was triangulated from two principal interviews, two focus groups, two stakeholder interviews and observational data from 12 sessions of Parent University.

**Categorical Aggregation**

According to Stake (1995), categorical aggregation is a strategic method of expanding upon broader sources within a data set through the extraction of lesser codes that, when taken together, contribute to a deeper understanding of the original broad data set. Simultaneously coding across all sources of data allowed for the development of these broad codes, or Parent Nodes as they are referred to in NVivo 11 (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). After Parent Nodes were extracted, further analysis through categorical aggregation was required to extract more specific codes, or Child Nodes (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Child Nodes were not bounded precisely within one Parent Node but overlapped in several. Two to six codes emerged as significant within a single Parent Node (Saldana, 2015). This stage of data analysis lends itself to the formation and aggregation of specific categories, themes and sub-themes in keeping with case study research. It is also integral to the data reduction process leading to a revelation of the

underlying structure of the data (Yin 2009) which produces an emergence of the essence of principal behaviors that answered the research question.

The categorical aggregation of Child Nodes from Parent Nodes allowed for development of themes and sub-themes in the case under study (see Figure 1, below). Thematic analysis emerged as the final stage of data analysis. One of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research, thematic analysis, emphasizes examining and recording patterns, or themes, within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are associated with a research question and are important to the description of a phenomenon (Saldana, 2015).



*Figure 1. Database Design and Methodological Framework*
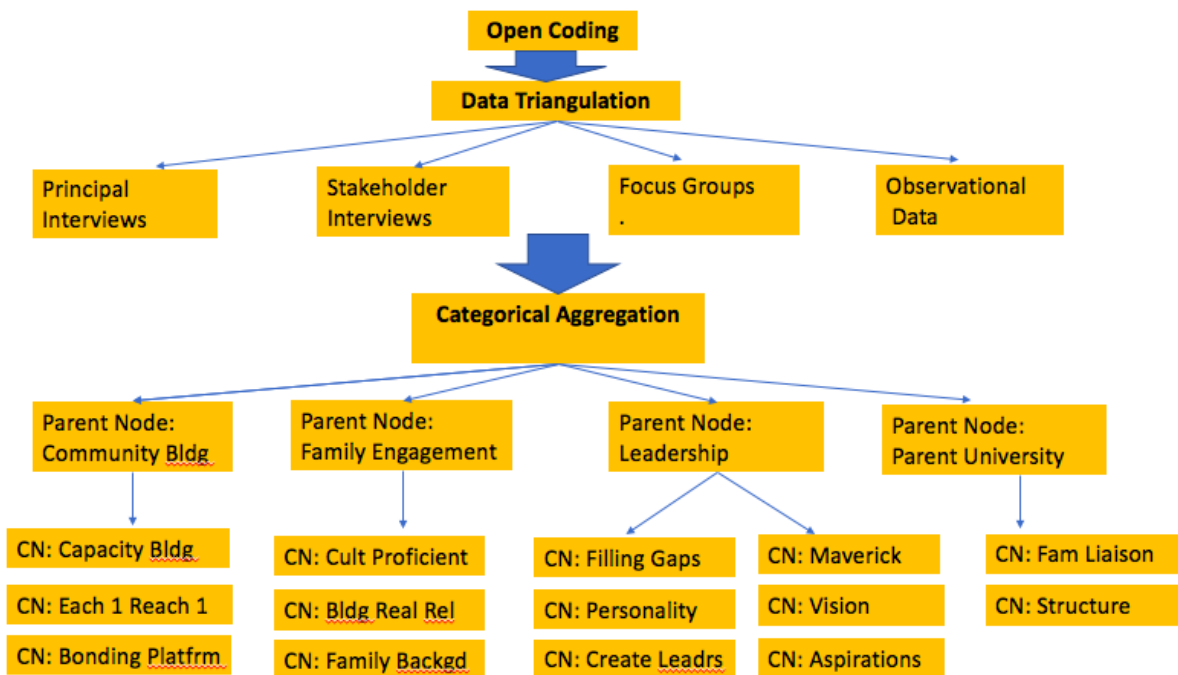
Analytic generalizability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which theory developed within a study is transferable to provide explanations for the experiences of others in comparable situations and is held as an integral component of case study research (Yin, 2009; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). These generalizations would then be used to compare and contrast

against literature on the research topic. Generalizability in case study research tends to occur after the various techniques of data analysis have taken place. It attempts to look at the larger picture to find where the particular case can "fit in" with larger developments at the local, regional and even national levels.

**Data Display**

Node matrix displays were used to exhibit some of the findings of this case study research for preliminary explanation (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013). Node matrices were generated in NVivo 11 Pro to display the emergent coding structure within the study. NVivo 11 orders the data into columns which contain the Parent Nodes and more specific rows which contain the Child Nodes leading to further explanation through identification. This method also allows this case study to move beyond extended text as the primary method of analysis and has the added benefit of "organizing information into an immediately accessible compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and draw justified conclusions" (Yin, 2009 225; Miles et al, 2013). It is a final product that is "an organized compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (Yin, 2009).

**Validity & Reliability**

In this qualitative case study research, results were achieved through triangulation of data. The use of triangulation allows a researcher to analyze accounts from three or more perspectives, and in this study, I viewed four different perspectives. Qualitative analysis of text is often achieved with various sources of information to satisfy the principle of triangulation and increase trust in the validity of the study's conclusions (Saldaña, 2015). I combined different sources of data, analyzing transcribed principal interviews, stakeholder interviews, and parent focus groups along with observational field notes. Then I crossed-checked and looked for convergence of data through codes that emerged from the study. Parent Nodes and Child Nodes

came from the convergence of the four sources of data, producing validity and reliability. Interviews were utilized for their ability to focus directly on the study topic. Focus groups were utilized for their ability to obtain detailed information about group opinions, perceptions, and feelings. Field notes from researcher's direct observations were used as they covered information in real time and included the context of the Parent University sessions.

This study is valid because the data analysis is built on the strengths of multiple data sources to increase the strength of the findings. This study is reliable because the data is dependable, trustworthy, authentic, and consistent. Triangulation strengthened my qualitative research design because it enhanced the validity and reliability of the results while offering visual depictions of the emergent themes to enhance the reader's understanding of the study outcomes.

**Emergence of Themes and Sub-themes**

I ran matrix coding query and analytic coding query through the NVivo 11 software to produce the matrix display as seen in Figure 2, below. The Parent Nodes and Child Nodes that emerged after analysis can also be classified as themes and sub-themes in case study research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). My thematic analysis utilized categorical aggregation to identify outcomes, resulting in four broad themes that emerged from the data: Community Building, Family Engagement, Leadership, and Parent University. Each of these main themes had an additional level of categorization, revealing a total of fourteen emergent sub-themes.
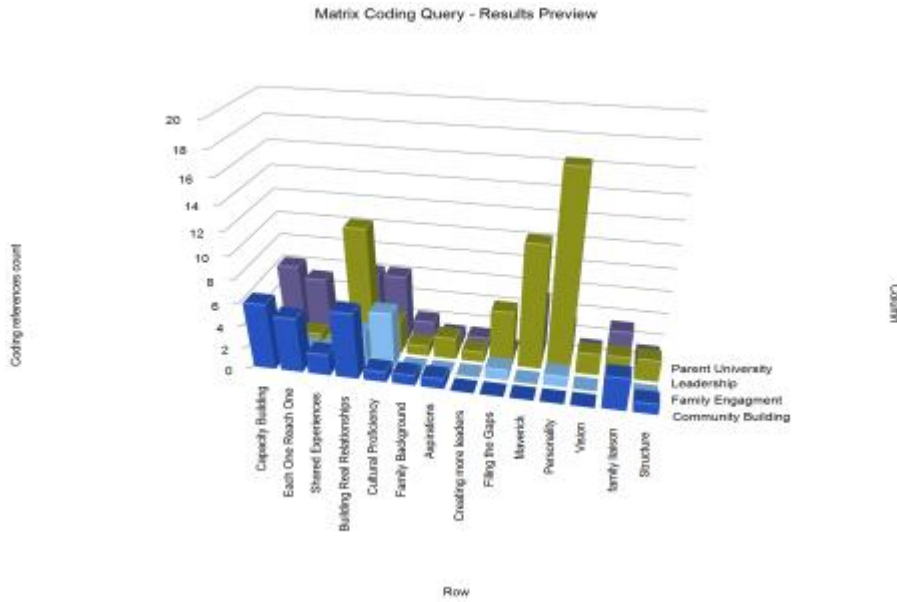
*Figure 2. Results of the Matrix Coding Query*

Emergent themes provided information about the substance of various passages within the interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and observational field notes. The following table shows the themes and the more specific sub-themes that emerged from the data.

| THEMES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Community Building | Family Engagement | Leadership | Parent University |
| SUB–THEMES | | | |
| Capacity Building | Building Real Relationships | Aspirations | Family Programming |
| Each One Reach One | Cultural Proficiency | Creating More Leaders | Program Structure |
| Bonding Platform | Family Background | Filling The Gaps | |
| | | Maverick | |
| | | Personality | |
| | | Vision | |

*Figure 3: Themes and Sub-themes*

In analyzing results, themes and sub-themes were identified that make sense of the data and reflected a general and common understanding of observed activity. Community Building refers to the ability of the principal to create a sense of belonging among a group of parents within the geographic area of River Rock High School. This broad theme included the following sub-themes:

- Capacity Building: the process of developing skills and abilities that enhance parent advocacy for their children

- Each One Reach One: the enthusiasm of parents for reaching out to welcome and inform other parents

- Bonding Platform: the space and resources provided by the principal for families to gather, meet, build relationships, and create community cultural wealth

The next theme identified in the data is Family Engagement, which is an ongoing, reciprocal partnership between families and schools that is evident by active participation and advocacy for both children and the broader school community. Sub-themes under this theme include:

- Building Real Relationships: where the principal knows, acknowledges, understands, interacts with, and serves as a resource for community members

- Cultural Proficiency: the range of values and behaviors of the principal that reflect his positive response to and understanding of diversity (Lindsey et al, 2009)

- Family Background: the shared or common experiences of the participating Latinx families

Leadership is a broad theme that the data showed as important, and refers specifically to the principal's ability to create a culture of participation, involvement, advocacy, and support

through the engagement program he designed and implemented. Many sub-themes were identified in this important category, including:

- Aspirations: the principal's hope for the program

- Creating More Leaders: the ability of the principal to nurture and encourage the development of leadership skills among parents

- Filling the Gaps: the leader's ability to identify what is missing in resources for families as well as the relationship between school and parents and then finding solutions that meet the needs of the school community

- Maverick: a leader who is bold and willing to advocate for his community to achieve results

- Personality: the unique qualities of the principal's distinctive character

- Vision: the goals for and intended results of the engagement program implementation

Parent University is both the program being implemented and the fourth theme that emerged from the data. Sub-themes under Parent University include:

- Family Programming: opportunities for families within the community to gather, learn, and connect

- Program Structure: the specific design of the monthly learning events

**Part 4: Findings**

**Leadership Traits and Behaviors**

Research Question: *What leadership behaviors are impactful in developing and increasing Latinx family engagement in an urban high school?*

This research studied the leadership behavior that improved family engagement in a low-income, urban, Latinx community. Based on analysis of the interview and focus group

transcripts, field observations, and literature, leadership traits that improve family engagement and the behaviors that are exhibited within these traits emerged from the data. Specifically, four leadership traits emerged:

1. Cultural Proficiency
2. Building Authentic Relationships
3. Filling the Gaps
4. Building Capacity

Research participants including principal, stakeholders, and parent participants identified principal behaviors that were demonstrated within each leadership trait.

Cultural Proficiency. Evidence from the findings identify specific leader behaviors that demonstrated the trait of cultural proficiency: valuing diversity, respecting the community, and responding effectively. Being culturally proficient enables a leader to understand needs so that focus on social justice and equity develop a school climate that identifies shared visions, fosters consensus, builds a positive school culture, and cultivates participation in school decisions, therefore increasing engagement.

Notable quotes on Culturally Proficient behaviors:

- "…it's about first making sure the parents can be in our school building and feel safe."
- "He respects us and our language, and that makes us want to open up to him."
- "…and the principal really seems to enjoy learning about those that are culturally different - he likes the diverse group of parents."
- "He is really good at working with the parents; he respects them and his interactions are appreciated. He pays attention. They told me that they admire that he takes the time to

understand our culture and our family situations, and that makes everyone want to work with him."

- "Mr. K. came to our house, and we saw him at church. He tries to make things better for us at home and at the school for our kids. One day he fixed a broken window at our house. We would do anything to help him."

- "… language is no longer a barrier."

Building Authentic Relationships. Mr. Keogh placed himself at the same level of parents by constantly creating relationships. This approach developed channels of communication that parents had previously not enjoyed, opening the door for them to embrace relationship building with the principal, his staff, and other parents. The principal behaviors most noted in building authentic relationships include: being welcoming, listening, and establishing democracy. In building relationships with parents, the principal displayed the desire to move beyond cooperation and toward active collaboration with community partners, one of Auerbach's (2012) characteristics for authentic partnerships. Parent feedback indicated that they had a strong response to the principal's genuine invitation to participate by being warmly welcomed when they arrived at each Parent University session. Mr. Keogh was present at the door as parents came in, he remembered names of parents and students, and reached out to hold babies. He recalled and referred to previous conversations, and parents reacted with smiles, laughter, and conversation. He asked questions to determine needs, and listened with intent, promising and then delivering with follow-up. He takes a democratic and participative approach to his leadership, respecting the ideas of parents. In a community that is often maligned, Mr. Keogh has created a healthy environment where ideas are entertained and considered, which encouraged an increasing flow of ideas as the Parent University sessions progressed.

Notable quotes on behaviors for Building Authentic Relationships:

- "…it was completely different when I got here. I felt welcomed by him. I think he's the one who creates that atmosphere. He's the light in the room."

- "This principal listens, and tells us positive things, and he supports us, and our kids. He accompanies us; he's so friendly and nice, and he wants to help everyone."

- "…and because of him, we will be open and we will participate, because he wants to hear our voices."

Filling the Gaps. Another identified leadership trait is filling the gaps where Mr. Keogh notices a void in resources provided for or utilized by the community, contributing to the lack of family engagement. The descriptive behaviors displayed while filling gaps include identifying needs, finding resources, and advocating for parents. This principal goes into the community, making home visits to meet families and understand their needs. He talks to them about their goals and dreams for their children and finds ways to direct them to helpful resources or offers to personally help with their needs. He advocates for parents and students throughout the school as well as within the district and the greater community. Nine months into the Parent University program, he received community school status for River Rock High School to provide more comprehensive services for students, family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children. At River Rock, initial services include activities that improve access to and use of social service programs, adult education programs focused on instruction in English as a second language, and family engagement programs like Parent University which promote family literacy, parent education, and parent leadership.

Notable quotes on Filling the Gaps behaviors:

- "He is really good at opening options for all parents to navigate different ways to interact with the school that maybe even aren't district-prescribed."

- "The parents give me feedback on what's not going well, and I'm able to teach them the vital parts of the school system so that their knowledge of the school and why we do things increases each time we meet."

- "…and he makes sure that everything we need is in Spanish. We have interpreters at every meeting, the phone calls come in Spanish now, and all the letters home are in Spanish and English."

- "For me the title of the program attracted my attention. I want to learn how to be a better mom to my children."

Building Capacity. The final leadership trait identified in this study is building capacity, where the principal works to develop leadership skills in parents. The behaviors he has demonstrated include: modeling professional leadership, providing training, and building a platform for parents to interact and establish a stronger sense of community. Mr. Koegh made the effort to understand the needs of his families, developed a program that he felt would increase participation, and planned and delivered the Parent University sessions. Stakeholders noted that the leadership he modeled is appreciated by parents. When he greets parents at the door, he is warm and welcoming in a professional manner.

In addition to the regular professional development he provides for his staff, he has expanded professional development to include parents. He has taken several parents to overnight family leadership conferences, providing an opportunity for learning, training, and collaborating with educators that they have not experienced prior. The parents that have gone to training workshops have come back excited to step into leadership roles and eager to interact with other parents. A stakeholder observed that the training "…taught them how to look at data, and to understand what school business is, and what is involved with district business, and now Donal is teaching them how to advocate for themselves." The principal is clear about his training vision

and intended results, stating that, "...the goal is to develop leaders that will eventually plan and facilitate the Parent University program." Another stakeholder commented that "...by teaching them leadership, it helps parents understand what they need to put in themselves in order to accomplish the community goals in their greater community." This demonstrated a clear understanding of the principal's activity to build capacity and create more leaders. Parents have acknowledged their own growth because of participating in the new program: "I've been more involved in the school because of the classes. I can focus better on my kids and make sure they have a good future, like checking in with their teachers and grades, keeping them working hard. I also now go to the SAC meetings, and now I understand the reports they talk about and why they are important to the school."

Parent University has become a platform for community organization where families with students of all ages get to know one another, find common ground, determine needs, participate in decisions for the school, and bond together as advocates for their children. It was the principal who, through this program, built the platform for these families. Since program inception, there was a significant change in participation of the Latinx families. When the parents started coming to the first few sessions of Parent University, they were shy, quiet, and timid about walking into the class. As they became repeat attendees, the parents appeared to be more comfortable and confident walking into the cafeteria, more interactive with other parents and staff, and more social. The energy in the room increased with each subsequent Parent University meeting. Mothers brought other mothers and introduced them around, and fathers started coming to the sessions with their wives. In response to the opportunity to gather with other community parents interested in learning, building relationships with both the school and other parents, and advocating for their children, momentum grew. Families were building formal and informal social networks.

The first evening of Parent University had an attendance of 12 parents. That number grew dramatically during the year, and one year later there were 61 parents for the Tuesday night session, which represents an increase in program participation of over 400%. As Parent University programming moved into the second school year, the back-to-school community night attracted almost a thousand family members, parents responded to the call for volunteers for the School Accountability Committee (SAC), and numbers increased by 60% at the fall Parent-Teacher Conferences. Parents were observed interacting more with school staff, and teachers reported to Mr. Keogh that they saw a noticeable change in parent interest and participation. Throughout the Bellavon School District's articulation area, at the district office, and even in the greater community, awareness of Parent University grew as more teachers, district professionals, and community members showed up to Parent University sessions. Stakeholders beyond the parents came, participating in class sessions and offering positive verbal feedback to Mr. Keogh and his peer principals. Parents, in their new-found confidence, now step up to meet and welcome visitors, demonstrating their own increased capacity for leadership within the school community.

Notable quotes on Building Capacity behaviors:

- "In the first summer, he sent three families to the leadership training, then four more over winter break. They come back ready to serve, they become disrupters in a positive way. More families are signed up to go, they do not mind the long drive three states away and they come back charged up to be involved with the school."
- "As they build their own capacity and power, they have joined the SAC and become engaged in other areas. They are creating a ripple effect that empowers other parents and is benefiting the students."

- "When we learn how to be leaders here, we understand better how to accomplish goals at the school and even in the community."

The following table provides a summary of the primary behaviors exhibited through the principal's leadership traits.

| LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS<br>THAT IMPROVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valuing Diversity | Welcoming | Identifying Needs | Modeling Professional Leadership |
| Respecting | Listening | Finding Resources | Providing Training |
| Responding Effectively | Being Democratic | Advocating for Parents | Building a Platform |
| LEADERSHIP TRAITS | | | |
| Cultural Proficiency | Building Authentic Relationships | Filling the Gaps | Building Capacity |

*Figure 4:* Leadership Behaviors that Improve Family Engagement

## Limitations

I selected case study design because I determined it would be the most appropriate methodology to address the problem of family engagement and the question of what leadership behavior is impactful in increasing it. The first limitation of this study was that it focuses on one urban school principal. Because of the uniqueness of human nature and personality, it is possible that the behavior of one principal, who has a disposition for equity and social justice, may not be generalizable to all school principals who want to increase family engagement. The second limitation was that the study uses one secondary school as the site for the study. The Latinx population at the site of this study may differ from other Latinx populations in this or other urban

communities. Transferability of findings to other school communities may be limited because of site variations and possible differences in the specific Latinx population at selected schools.

The third limitation was that I am neither bilingual nor bicultural. During observations of the principal as he led Parent University classes or interacted with parents, even with district-sponsored translation services at every event, some verbal exchanges were not understood in their entirety.

## Part 5: Discussion

Review of the evidence and data in this case study suggest that the behaviors of a principal can positively impact family engagement. Because Mr. Keogh was successful in increasing family engagement at his school, his actions and behavior are notable. In his thoughtful critique of the school culture and community, he deepened his understanding of power and privilege, and took a careful look at how the system and the individuals within perpetuated oppressive practices. As the principal of River Rock High School, Mr. Keogh sought an equity-oriented solution to the lack of family engagement. His Parent University program is an intervention that has proved successful in bringing parents to the school, with ongoing monthly increases in attendance. As parents became more comfortable in the building, they got to know the principal and other school leaders, learned about parenting and advocacy, became familiar with the school system, and started to engage with the school in other ways.

One of the principal's leadership traits is cultural proficiency. To demonstrate cultural proficiency, the principal made a genuine effort to understand his unique community by getting to know students, welcoming and interacting with their families, joining the local economic development council, and reaching out to religious leaders. He noted the lack of civic events and places that could provide opportunities for families to gather, celebrate, enjoy, and get to know

one another beyond what was offered in small local churches, Meanwhile, he heard from parents that they were interested in meeting other parents so they could work together for the good of the school.

Deeping their understanding of social, economic, cultural, and political contexts helps school leaders improve the educational experiences of historically underserved communities (Theoharis, 2010). The leadership behaviors that emerged from the data as important under the trait of cultural proficiency are valuing diversity, respecting the community, and responding effectively. In his demonstration of valuing diversity, Mr. Keogh shows the community through a variety of words and actions that he recognizes, admires, and loves the differences that are represented within his school community. Beyond differences, however, he shows respect for the community by acknowledging the difficult situations faced by many in this low-income Latinx population. Some parents express significant fear because, while their children were born in the United States, their immigration status may be unclear. One of the most important and foundational issues Mr. Keogh faced as a school principal during this study was the local and personal fallout from the national political climate regarding immigration reform and persons living in the United States without legal documentation. Latinx families nationwide express concern, anxiety, and distress regarding the possibility of federal immigration agents accessing schools, and Mr. Keogh made it very clear to the parents after the 2016 presidential election that his school would always be a safe zone that is inclusive for all families. He understands their concerns and responds effectively by promising to advocate for his community while establishing a place where parents can build a community of advocacy with and for each other. He assures families that the school and district are not collecting information on the legal status of student's families, that students will be sheltered at school, and that communication will always be translated and delivered to families in their first language.

His attention to what matters most in the lives of families in his community helps Mr. Keogh build authentic relationships with parents and their children. When he first launched Parent University, he found ways to warmly invite parent participation. He spent hours greeting parents at the curb when they dropped off their children, he set up a Facebook page in Spanish that promoted Parent University, he brought in a dynamic speaker that is a national Spanish-speaking expert on family engagement and leadership in the Latinx community. With every parent interaction, Mr. Keogh was warm and welcoming. To engage his staff, he provided an incentive that rewarded each teacher who invited and sat with a parent to the Parent University kick-off event, and the lively bilingual event attracted hundreds of teachers, parents, and students to an overflowing gymnasium. At the Parent University sessions, each family member is enthusiastically greeted by the principal, who makes an effort to remember names of parents and students while keeping the tone sociable and light. Many parents, especially for the first few times, are intimidated when they come into a school building. An effective principal, however, can create an atmosphere where families are acknowledged with a friendly greeting and feel accepted as members of the community when they walk into school.

Once parents feel comfortable in the school environment and see that Mr. Keogh is genuine in his interest in parents and students, they become more communicative and the principal is offered the opportunity to listen. With the Parent University curriculum that Mr. Keogh planned, parents share their hopes, goals, and dreams for their children in small groups. They report out to the larger group, find common ground with others, and express concerns. Parents became comfortable approaching Mr. Keogh in pairs or one-on-one to discuss school or community matters, especially those who attended leadership training. They comment to each other, to the family liaison specialists, to teachers, and to the researcher that Mr. Keogh really listens to them.

His democratic behavior also helps Mr. Keogh build authentic relationships. As a participative leader, he encourages involvement and engagement because he is right there alongside the families. Through establishing democracy, the principal brings out the best in the parents that have opted into participation with Parent University, capitalizing on their interest in their children by letting them share their views rather than simply expecting them to conform. The behaviors Mr. Keogh exhibits as he builds authentic relationships open the lines of communication, focus the discussion on the school community and student advocacy, and solicit the ideas of all participants. As he builds relationships through offering this family engagement program, parents understand that their ideas are now being respected and considered. This is a vast improvement for a population of parents that previously felt unwelcome, left out, and silenced.

To fill the gaps for families that were uninvolved with the school, Mr. Keogh took action to identify needs by purposely seeking to ascertain the broken lines of communication and resources between the school and the parent community. He also acted to find resources. "I did the research because I had to find something we could do as a school that would enhance and increase family efficacy," he stated in one of his interviews. To meet the needs of this underserved community, he set out to find an engagement program that would work in his unique school community, one that could be customized to the needs of the families and enhanced as the program grew. It was through this process that Mr. Keogh determined that the flexibility of the Parent University program represented an opportunity to plan and implement an intervention that could also serve as an engagement strategy.

As a teacher, and then an assistant principal, Mr. Keogh had the opportunity to observe how low-income Latinx families were not involved with the school system. As a principal, it became one of his professional missions to address this problem of practice by finding a way to

fill the gaps. Because he also displays the characteristics of cultural proficiency and the ability to build authentic relationships, this principal has set himself up to advocate for parents. He is able to fill gaps because he understands the needs of the community, is able to identify ways to provide meaningful solutions to problems, and support parents as they are finding their voice within the school building and into the greater community.

Stakeholders, parents, and researcher noted the principal's leadership trait of building capacity, which manifested in behaviors that encouraged and improved engagement. By understanding the needs of his school community, researching best practices for increasing Latinx parent participation, creating and communicating a strategic vision for improving engagement, implementing the Parent University program, and collaborating regularly parents, Mr. Keogh modeled professional leadership. He understands that it is important for students that their parents are involved in their education, so he provided training for parents so that they could learn and develop the skills needed to step into leadership roles and feel more confident in collaborating regularly with other parents, staff, and administrators. Mr. Keogh built a platform for families to become comfortable with the school, where they could get to know other families with similar shared experiences. This space, within the school building, became a safe zone where parents could set aside their anxiety and concerns regarding immigration status or documentation and participate in the educational journey of their children.

Those that lead for change in low-income urban school environments must first understand the lived experiences of those that are marginalized and have the willingness and commitment to improve lives within the community (Lindsay et al., 2014). Accepting and welcoming a school community of English Learners and their families reflects a deeper understanding of historically underserved populations. As a leader's awareness increases, so does his leadership identity and sense of self, creating space to question how the school system

he administers works to perpetuate practices that create barriers for a marginalized community (Terrell & Lindsay, 2008). Research points out the need for more school leaders that courageously engage in dialogue and action to confront the realities of injustices spread within schools (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Shields, 2013).

There is an urgency for leaders that seek change to promote critical reflection within their schools and districts as public school leaders address increasing demands to eliminate achievement gaps between mainstream populations and students that have been historically underserved.  Because demands on school leaders are so great, they often distance themselves from holistic approaches to education which would include understanding the lived experiences of students and their families through conversations and building authentic relationships, especially with those that have been disenfranchised due to race, class, language, and immigration status (Boske & McEnery, 2012). It is time for school leaders to commit to strengthening their school communities, especially for those that bear the social burdens of our present political and cultural climate. School administrators that exhibit effective leadership behaviors incorporate the goals of liberation and equality into programming that promotes a higher level of engagement (Shields, 2013).

When school leaders are asked to focus on standardized testing, assessments, and annual yearly progress, time constraints often limit them from identifying strategies that build meaningful relationships throughout the school community. Managing school systems is the focus of leadership preparation programs, leaving principals to discover for themselves how to establish connections within their school communities. In schools that lack family engagement, leadership that attends to social justice has a transformative impact on equity and involvement, which is a strategy for school improvement that can ultimately impact student outcomes (Shields, 2010, 2013). Mr. Keogh's work through the implementation of Parent University made a

difference in the school community within the first year, therefore the leadership traits and behaviors he exhibited can inform other principals that face similar problems in practice.

The results of this case study point to the importance of principal behavior in leading programs that improve parent engagement. Behaviors that support cultural proficiency, building authentic relationships, filling the gaps faced by underserved populations, and developing capacity among parents are key to creating equity. Family engagement is critical if parents are to understand and have the confidence to navigate complex educational systems. An increased level of comfort in advocating for their children can be fostered by leadership behavior that reflects valuing diversity, identification of needs, and establishing a culture of democracy. Thoughtful school leaders that strive to improve parent engagement can create their own successful programs by listening to their community, identifying needs, finding appropriate resources, and responding effectively.

When parents are warmly welcomed in a manner they perceive to be genuine, when they get the opportunity to observe professional leadership behaviors being modeled by the school principal, and when a platform is provided for them to interact with other parents that have the same goals and dreams for their children, they will respond to invitations for training that will increase their capacity, and they will become more engaged in the community. School leaders are in a position to lay the foundation for creating parent leaders who will enhance and improve the school community for years to come. Principals can work to understand their community, building their cultural proficiency so that they can fill the gaps and respond to needs created by barriers within the system. Principal leadership behavior can be a game-changer in family engagement, breaking down hidden disparities and resulting in more participative experiences that link parents to opportunities and resources for their children and create space for their voices to be heard throughout the school community.

**Recommendations**

1. Leadership Training. Educational leadership preparation programs should provide training in community outreach and engagement strategies, and more research needs to be done in studying different leadership characteristics that increase family engagement. Principal preparation programs will become stronger when they incorporate units of study, project work, and field practice in community outreach, advocacy, and parent engagement and do so in such a way that a genuine commitment is made to socially just and equitable leadership. Exemplars of effective principal preparation programming include Duquesne University in Pittsburg and University of California at San Bernardino, but we need many more forward-thinking preparation programs across the nation if we are to address the current needs of our changing society.

2. Accountability. Because the new Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) mandates that districts receiving Title I funds are held accountable for family engagement programs, leaders need to know how to offer programs and activities that deliver meaningful and relevant parent and family involvement opportunities. Administrators must actively pursue family engagement as part of a broader moral commitment to educational equity for disenfranchised populations.

3. Cultural Proficiency. Principals in historically underserved communities must be culturally proficient and understand the challenges faced by low-income and historically marginalized groups that contribute to their lack of engagement. Districts should provide collaborative professional development opportunities for administrators who are already in place but did not have preparatory training that developed skills and understanding of outreach, engagement, and cultural proficiency.

4. Prioritize Family Engagement. School leaders must appreciate the value of family engagement as it promotes school readiness, social-emotional growth, positive attitudes toward school, and academic success (Weyer, 2015). Parent engagement sets children up for long-term outcomes that increase potential for post-secondary career success and becoming contributing citizens.

5. Identify Best Practices. Seek out and learn from others by identifying best practices in districts that have been effective in increasing parent participation. Find successful programs in school communities with similar demographics, visit them, and build a relationship with the leaders. Share ideas for increasing family engagement.

6. Support policies. Support local, state, and national policies that provide resources for leaders to encourage family engagement.

7. Hire the right leaders. In the interview process, focus on the behaviors a principal candidate reports. Hire principals with a heart for equity and inclusion and that convey sincere interest in engaging marginalized families. Ask situational questions that encourage candidates to share how they have effectively worked with underserved populations. Invite them to discuss their ideas for improving family engagement, and seek leaders that can demonstrate thoughtful reflection regarding understanding and working with low-income communities. Display leadership behaviors that work. This study identified the following 12 leadership behaviors that were shown to be effective in improving family engagement:

    a.  value diversity
    b.  respect the community
    c.  respond effectively
    d.  be welcoming
    e.  listen
    f.  establish democracy
    g.  identify needs
    h.  find resources
    i.  advocate for parents

j.   model professional leadership
    k.   provide training
    l.   build a platform for community participation

8.  Encourage greatness. Districts should recognize the individual innovation and success of
    effective principals that increase family engagement. Provide extra monetary district support
    and stipends to principals that successfully address the challenges of Title I schools. And
    make sure those leaders are developing succession plans.

9.  Provide culturally relevant training. Effective principals do not act in a vacuum. The entire
    school staff must understand the needs of the community and support family engagement
    initiatives. Diversity training that addresses the surface aspects of culture, such as customs,
    traditions, foods, and contributions, is a good start but inadequate to address complicated
    underlying problems. To become culturally proficient in communities that are different from
    their own lived experiences, educators need diversity training that helps them understand
    how their own and the school's cultural identity are embedded in all aspects of schooling.
    This depth of understanding does not occur after one or two packaged professional
    development sessions. Becoming culturally proficient requires a transformative journey that
    takes educators beyond cultural awareness and knowledge to a safe space where deficit
    beliefs and practices can be explored, challenged, and changed.

**Future Research**

●   There is limited research on leadership characteristics that effectively increase parent
    engagement. Gathering data from multiple programs to compare and contrast leadership
    actions and behaviors that improve participation would further inform the field.

●   Track this specific Parent University program to determine whether it is sustained beyond
    the tenure of Mr. Keogh, the founder of the program. Such research could also seek to
    understand how other leaders within the school community step into program leadership

roles. Also, the influence of an increase in family engagement on student learning outcomes at River Rock High School would be a longitudinal study will that would contribute meaningfully to the literature and help to further define the critical necessity of family-school partnerships.

- Replicate this Parent University program and curriculum in other schools or districts with similar demographics to determine whether they have similar results would provide additional insight into the value of Parent University or similar family engagement programming.

- Case studies should be developed that seek to understand the effectiveness of school leaders that completed principal preparation programs that incorporated community and family engagement skill development in their leadership training curse and fieldwork. It would be beneficial to these programs and other preparation programs in development to identify the impact that trained leaders have in building and sustaining parent participation.

**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX 1**

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Qualitative Research Interview Questions: Semi-Structured Format

Principal Interview I - Principal Background [45 minutes]

Distribute consent form / obtain signatures from participant.

Intro: Years as an educator _____.  As a principal _____. At this school _____.

1.      What do you believe is the purpose of schooling?

2.      How do you feel about this current job in terms of enjoyment, challenges, and ability to make an impact?

3.      How does your personal and professional knowledge of diversity and cultural proficiency guide your work as a school leader?

4.      How do you define diversity?

5.      As a school leader, do you reflect upon your own assumptions as you plan and implement your interactions with the school community?

6.      When you hold yourself accountable as a school leader, what are the top main factors you consider?

7.      In what ways have you been compelled to challenge yourself beyond your comfort zone to take on this school improvement effort?

8.      As a school leader, how do you become familiar with the lived experiences of your students and their families?

Principal Interview 2 - Family Engagement [45 minutes]

1.      How do you define family engagement?

2.      How did you determine that family engagement was a problem in your school community?

3.      What are some of the other critical problems of practice in your school community?

4.      As you investigated the issues around family engagement, did you discover any current system or teacher practices that contributed to the problem?

5.      What barriers might the families in your school community face that could affect their participation or involvement in their child's school?

6.      What made you select the improvement of family engagement as the primary focus point for your school improvement effort?

7.      You chose Parent University as the vehicle through which you might start to improve family engagement. How might the 2Generation approach of Parent University be impactful in your school reform effort?

8.      What are the anticipated benefits of improving family engagement at your school?

9.      What everyday practices do you model as a school leader that foster improvement in family engagement?

10. *How do you handle the power and authority that come along with a leadership position as you focus on improving family engagement?*

11. *Besides Parent University, how do you foster parent involvement in your school with any other programs or activities?*

Principal Interview 3 - School Community and Culture [45 minutes]

1.      What kind of cultural competency programs are part of the professional staff development and daily educational goals in your school?

2.      What do you feel is your responsibility as a leader toward equity within your school community?

3.      As a leader in the greater community, how do you see your obligation toward social responsibility?

4.      Describe any risks you have taken to develop and implement Parent University.

5.      What strategic alliances have you created to develop and implement Parent University?

6.      What barriers are faced in your school system that impede your practice of culturally relevant leadership?

7.      How do you address the bicultural characteristics of your students and families?

8. *Is it important as a school leader to build a sense of community, and if so what actions do you take to do so?*

9. *Should the greater community be involved in the process of helping students be successful, and how do you engage the community in supporting your school?*

10. *As a principal, where do you see your strengths in influencing a culturally competent school environment?*

11. *What strategies do you utilize to develop and recruit culturally competent teachers?*

**APPENDIX 2**

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Qualitative Research Interview Questions: Semi-Structured Format

Stakeholder Interviews (Peer Principal, Assistant Principal, Family Liaison Specialist)

1 interview, 3 unique stakeholders, 40 minutes each

Distribute consent form / obtain signatures from participant.

Ask background question: What is your title, how long have you been in education, how long have you been at this school?

1.      Describe the leadership traits you have observed in the principal.

2.      Which of the principal's behaviors and actions have influenced family engagement in the school community?

3.      How did this principal convey his vision and goals for the Parent University program?

4.      What behaviors, if any, does this principal display that improve family engagement?

5.      Describe the climate that has been created by this engagement improvement program.

6.      What kind of expectations were set by this leader for the Parent University program?

7.      In what ways, if any, does the Parent University program address social justice needs in this school community?

8.      Is the principal effective at improving engagement?

9.      *In what ways does this principal's effort to improve engagement benefit the school community?*

10. *Have you observed benefits from this principal's effort to improve engagement?*

11. *What impact does this principal's leadership have on parents?*

12. *Does this principal seek and listen to feedback regarding family engagement?*

13. *What have you observed as the values of the principal?*

**APPENDIX 3**

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Qualitative Research Interview Questions: Semi-Structured Format

Focus Group - Parent Participants [30 minutes]

Distribute consent form / obtain signatures from participants.

Gather demographic information on half sheet: age, gender, grades of kids

1. Before this program, what kept you from being involved with the school?

2. What made you want to come to Parent University?

3. Tell me what you think about the principal as the leader of Parent University.

4. How has this program changed your relationship with the school?

5. What changes have you made as a parent a result of this program?

6. Does what you learn at Parent University influence your goals for yourself and your children?

7. *Can the principal do anything to encourage more participation from you and other parents?*

8. *Does this program help students, parents, and families, and if so, in what ways?*

9. *What do you think the principal values?*

10. *What does it mean to you to participate in the school?*

Spanish Translation:

Grupo de Enfoque - Padres participantes [30 minutos]

Distribuir formulario de consentimiento (Inglés y Español). Recopilar información demográfica sobre la mitad de la ficha técnica: la edad, el género, las calificaciones de los niños

1. Antes de este programa, lo que le impidió estar involucrado con la escuela?

2. ¿Qué te hizo venir a la Universidad de Padres?

3. Dime lo que piensas acerca del principal como el líder de la Universidad de Padres.

4. ¿Cómo ha cambiado este programa su relación con la escuela?

5. ¿Qué cambios ha hecho como padre resultado de este programa?

6. Hace lo que se aprende en la Universidad de Padres influir en sus objetivos para usted y sus hijos?

*Preguntas opcionales, el tiempo lo permite:*

*7. ¿Puede el director hacer nada para fomentar una mayor participación de usted y otros padres?*

*8. ¿este programa ayudará a los estudiantes, los padres y las familias, y en caso afirmativo, de qué manera?*

*9. ¿Qué piensa de los valores principales?*

*10. ¿Qué significa para usted participar en la escuela?*

**APPENDIX 4**

DEFINITION OF TERMS

*Community Cultural Wealth* - An array of knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005).

*Culturally Proficient Leadership* - Knowing how to learn and teach about different groups, having the capacity to teach and to learn about differences in ways that acknowledge and honor all the people and the groups they represent, holding culture in high esteem, and seeking to add to the knowledge base of culturally proficient practice by conducting research, developing new approaches based on culture, and increasing the knowledge of others about culture and the dynamics of difference (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

*Hispanic or Latino*: A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the United States government utilizes the words Hispanic and Latino interchangeably due to the regional usage of the terms differs: *Hispanic* is commonly used in the eastern portion of the United States, while *Latino* is commonly used in the western portion (Office of Management and Budget, 1996).

*Parent Engagement* - The authentic invitation to all adults that matter in the life of a child to encourage the contribution of a family vision to the big picture of learning and education (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

*Transformative Leadership* - Leadership that encompasses more than the institutional focus of transformational leadership and includes an awareness of and concern for equity (Shields, 2011).

*Maverick* - A person who shows independence of thought and action, especially by refusing to adhere to the policies of a group to which he or she belongs; he/she isn't scared to cross the line of conformity, but their unorthodox tactics get results (Urban Dictionary, 2003).

**APPENDIX 5**

CURRENT LATINX DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Current Demographic Trends: The Hispanic Population

The National Center for Educational Statistics, United States Department of Education, 2016

·  The Hispanic population in the U.S. more than doubled between 1990 and 2013, from 22.6 million to 54.1 million (during this period the White population increased by 5 percent and the entire U.S. population increased from 250 million to 316 million)

·  The Hispanic population represents 17 percent of the U.S. population (the White population is 63 percent)

·  In 2013, the percentage of Hispanic population born in the U.S. was 65 percent (96 percent for Whites)

·  School age children of Hispanic origin aged 5-17 increased from 16 to 24 percent in from 200 to 2013 (White children in this age range decreased from 62 to 53 percent)

·  94 percent of Hispanic children under the age of 18 were born in the U.S. (99 percent of White children were born in the U.S.)

·  A greater percentage of Hispanic children were born in the U.S. in 2013 than a decade earlier (94 vs. 89 percent)

·  In 2013, 57 percent of Hispanic children live with married parents (as compared with 73 percent of White children)

·  The percentage of Hispanic children under the age of 18 living under the official poverty measure is 30 percent (10 percent for White children)

·  The percentage of Hispanic children enrolled in public schools increased from 18 to 24 percent between 2002 and 2012 (the percentage of White children decreased from 59 to 51 percent during that same time)

·  In 2013, Hispanic children made up 78 percent of public school students enrolled in English learner (EL) programs (3.6 million out of a total of 4.6 million)

·  In 2013 the grade 4 White-Hispanic reading gap remained the same at 26 points as it was in 1992

·  In 2013 the grade 8 White-Hispanic reading gap decreased from 26 points in 1992 to 21

- In 2013 the grade 12 White-Hispanic reading gap remained the same (22 points) as it was in 1992

- There was no measurable reduction in the gap in mathematics at 4th, 8th, or 12th grade for Hispanic students between 1990 and 2013

- In 2013, only 10 percent of Hispanic public students earned a credit for taking a calculus course for math credit in high school (18 percent for White students)

- In 2012, the percentage of Hispanic students who had ever been suspended from school was 23 percent (21 percent for White students)

- In 2013, the Hispanic dropout rate was 12 percent (5 percent for White students)

- For Hispanic 18-to 24-year-olds, the 2013 total college enrollment was 34 percent (42 percent for White students in the same age range)

- The total fall enrollment in undergraduate college programs for Hispanic high school graduates between 1990 and 2013 increased from 6 percent to 17 percent

- In 2013, the number of Hispanic adults 25 and older who had not completed high school (35 percent) was higher than any other racial/ethnic group

- In 2013, 14 percent of Hispanic adults in the U.S. had earned at least a bachelor's degree (33 percent of White adults)

- For full-time workers 25- to 34-years-old that did not complete high school, the 2013 median annual earnings for Hispanics was $22,800 (for White workers median earnings were $30,000)

**APPENDIX 6**

RIVER ROCK HIGH SCHOOL PARENT UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM


Parent University Lessons (held monthly on the last Tuesday)

Lesson 1 - Home: Where Leadership Begins

Lesson 2 - Self Identity: Past, Present, and Future

Lesson 3 - Setting Goals: A Reflection of Family

Lesson 4 - Journey to the Future: A Roadmap for Success for Youth

Lesson 5 - Bringing School to Home: Supporting Your Child's Learning

Lesson 6 - Communication: Listening and Talking between Parents and Children

Lesson 7 - Advocacy: Working with the School and Teachers

Lesson 8 - Community: Opportunity, Responsibility, and Wealth

Lesson 9 - College: Why it Matters, When it Matters

Lesson 10 - Field Trip: University Campus Tour

APPENDIX 7

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

*LaFamilia Initiative* was started by a group of Latina immigrant mothers in northern California. It is an effort to "organize and mobilize families to establish an active partnership with the school with the goals of supporting student achievement through improved dialogue with school personnel, enhancing student safety and participation, promoting cultural pride, and increasing family engagement at all levels of school life" (Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). The initiative was so successful in promoting family engagement that other schools in the region took notice and parent participation has been influenced far beyond the initial school community.

*Padres Comprometidos* is a program especially designed by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) to reach out to parents who have historically not been connected with their children's schools as a result of linguistic challenges, cultural differences, economic background, negative perceptions of schools, or a lack of knowledge of how to get involved. Participating parents meet weekly for ninety minute sessions over the course of nine weeks. During the sessions, parents are encouraged to engage in discussions about the themes presented in the curriculum. Topics may include navigation of public school systems, academic goal setting to create pathways for their children's school experience, modeling behaviors that contribute to academic success, and understanding the social-emotional and academic course requirements for college and career readiness. This program is active in 65 different communities across 21 states and is getting traction in Latinx communities.

*Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)* presents Latinx parents the opportunity to learn about the American educational system through a series of parent education classes. Intended to improve perceptions between parents and teachers, the eight classes in the *PIQE* program have been noted for increasing understanding, improving collaboration, and positively influencing parents' sense of place in the education of their children (Chrispeels & Rivera, 2001). Created in 1987, *PIQE* has a strong presence in Southern California, where over 250,000 parents have attended the program which in turn has impacted hundreds of thousands of Latinx students (Parent Institute for Quality Education, 2016).

*Abriendo Puertas* [Opening Doors] was recognized in 2015 by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics as being a "Bright Spot" in Latinx family engagement (United States Department of Education, 2016). A comprehensive training program developed for and by Latinx parents, *Abriendo Puertas* provides training and community for low-income Spanish-speaking parents with preschool age children. Their mission is to support parents in their role as leaders of their families and acknowledges that parents are the most influential teacher with the home being the first school their children will know. A two-generation approach is directed at building parent leadership skills and knowledge so that positive educational outcomes for children have increased possibilities (Abriendo Puertas, 2016).

*ASPIRE (Achieving Success through Parental Involvement, Reading, and Education) Family Literacy* is a program that utilizes an innovative model of community partnerships and evidence-

based approaches to working with low-income families. Also recognized by the White House as a "Bright Spot" is in Austin, TX (United States Department of Education, 2016), *ASPIRE* was started in 1995. This program serves hundreds of low-income families in central Texas and equips them with skills for success, from raising happy, healthy, and curious children to GED classes, language courses, or workplace development programs (ASPIRE, 2015). With partnerships that include the city, the county, the community college, a regional foundation, and a national nonprofit, *ASPIRE* has designed a model that meets the needs of the local community. Programs are campus-based and consist of classes or special projects that follow the Community in Schools model that creates a network of volunteers, social services, businesses, and community resources that work together to break down barriers and help students and families succeed (Communities in Schools, n.d.). Parents learn ways to nurture their children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development, and the organization collects data indicating that ASPIRE children outperform their peers academically even years after they and their parents graduate from the program (ASPIRE, 2015).

*RISE Colorado* has also been recognized by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics as a "Bright Spot" for the outstanding work the organization is doing to encourage and support Latinx family engagement (United States Department of Education, 2016). Working specifically with low-income families of color, *RISE* embraces a mission to educate, engage, and empower families to rise as change agents for their children so that educational equity is increased in public schools (RISE-Colorado, n.d.). In addressing the opportunity gap, *RISE* offers workshops and leadership training so that parents can be frontrunners in the movement by joining together, learning about issues, designing solutions, and addressing the challenges faced by their communities. *RISE* provides programming that shows parents how to collectively push for change, identify resources, and become involved in policy work (RISE-Colorado, n.d.).

*Parent School Partnership Program (PSP)* intends to improve their leadership confidence and capacity so families have a voice in improving school effectiveness (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). Research shows that low-income Latinx parents responded to the *PSP* program with an increase in both individual and collective organization and action (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). *PSP* workshops showcase the benefits of getting involved in the school community as well as the added value of leadership (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). Parents that go through the *PSP* program are encouraged to come back as mentors and group facilitators in working with current participants (MALDEF, n.d.), leading to a platform where increased intellectual capital and community cultural wealth can be built within school communities that have been historically underserved.

*Parent University Programs* Parent University is a grassroots, school-based parent engagement program that has been attracting attention across the country (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2016). Although there is an absence of published empirical research, formal programming, or official partnerships with social service organizations for Parent University, schools and districts are developing their own programs with the intention of building the confidence and capacity of parents. Because there is no agency oversight to a Parent University program, each one uniquely reflects the local community. Programs might be as formal as a year-long, biweekly series of classes designed by a collaborative team of district personnel and community members, or they might be as simple and informal as a one-night workshop to discuss a pressing current event. Courses and curriculum are based on current educational trends and identified community needs. Significant effort is made to design workshops or classes intended to honor the parent's position as leaders in their family while helping them find ways to build their strengths as advocates for

their children. Because each Parent University program is developed for a local district or community by a school leader, curriculum is designed to reflect the cultural values, talents, and experiences of the participants.

With a program name that gets attention, potential participants may wonder what they will learn by attending Parent University. Some well-established programs in larger districts offer classes offered under specific strands or themes. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina has designed four strands to provide opportunities that align with the needs and interest of parents and families:

- ❏ Parenting Awareness empowers parents to raise confident children that are ready for the demands of the 21st century,
- ❏ Helping Your Child Learn provides information on supporting both the academic opportunities and challenges that students face today,
- ❏ Health and Wellness showcases activities and information that help parents set goals for a family lifestyle that is physically and emotionally healthy, and
- ❏ Personal Growth and Development focuses on the personal and professional life of the parents so that they can be the best and most effective advocates for their children (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 2016).

From San Diego to New York, from Palm Beach to Seattle, and in many points in between, Parent University classes are being offered by districts to increase family engagement and address the goal of empowering parents to raise children that are successful in school and prepared for life. More than just parenting classes, curriculum ranges to meet the needs of families throughout the school district. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the fourth largest school district in the country with just under 400,000 students (Chicago Public Schools, 2016), and it selected Parent University as the model to increase family engagement. Partnering with community-based organizations, the CPS program established the following guiding principles:

- ❏ Provide opportunities for parents and community to engage in the learning process.
- ❏ Provide opportunities for parents and community to be active participants in the education of our students.
- ❏ Principle Three: Design programs that encourage parents and community to pursue extended growth opportunities.

An extensive review of websites across the nation identifies Parent University programs that offer classes covering topics as varied as understanding the electronic gradebook, communicating with teachers, English as a Second Language, citizenship, navigating school systems, raising healthy children, goal setting, values identification, computer basics, Internet safety, dealing with transitions, leadership, and accessing community resources (see Appendix for a list of Parent University courses). Classes may be held in school buildings, public libraries, community centers, local churches, or the YMCA. Parent University is always free and it is appropriate for districts to use Title I funds to cover the cost of implementation, including books and supplies, food, childcare, and transportation (United States Department of Education, 2015). Districts that offer Parent University programming oversee and set the standards for the implementation of the classes with topics and scheduling tailored to the school community (Bafile, 2006).

In the Rocky Mountain West, Parent University programs are established at Davis School District, UT, Douglas County School District, CO, and Nampa School District, ID. At Davis, the program is a blended learning model with an extensive online platform and occasional

workshops offered for parents in various departments throughout the district (Nampa School District, n.d.). At Douglas County, there are a variety of resources offered to parents through classes located at different buildings across the school district focusing on technology, financial literacy, college pathways, and health and wellness (Douglas County, "About Parent University," n.d.). At Nampa, the Parent University program is set up specifically to acquaint parents with the newly adopted Journeys English Language Arts Curriculum and explain the Common Core reading requirements at workshops held on two different evenings at two different schools (Nampa School District, 2016).

Regardless of the demographics and community needs addressed by the local district that seeks to improve family engagement with schools, districts that offer Parent University courses state a mission similar to that found on Colorado's Douglas County Public Schools district website: *Parent University will educate, empower, and connect families with community resources needed to build parent and student confidence, enhance character development and teach life skills in order to help increase the likelihood of family success in academic behaviors* (Douglas County, "About Parent University," n.d.). In addressing the needs of participants in Parent University, program managers seek to understand the framework within which their adult learners operate: they exhibit an orientation to learning that is task- or problem-centered and they exhibit a relatively high degree of internal motivation (Ross-Gordon, 2011) because they have joined the program to enhance their skills in advocating for their children.

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