

**FAMILY-TEACHER CONFERENCES:
TEACHER PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT EFFICACY AND FAMILY-
TEACHER COMMUNICATION PRACTICES**

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy are essential, as teachers are responsible for connecting with the families of their students and conducting family-teacher conferences. This mixed-methods study examined teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy in family-teacher conferences and related communication practices at one South Texas elementary school. Twenty-two classroom teachers participated in a survey to obtain their perceptions of family engagement efficacy, family-teacher conferences, and related communication practices. Five survey participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to elucidate these perceptions.

The findings in this study suggest that overall teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy are higher-view: teachers believe that families play a large part in students' success and that families want to help their students succeed. The findings also suggest that teachers perceive barriers to family engagement efficacy, such as certain life circumstances, or family culture. In addition to family education, the high perception of student-led family-teacher conferences building family-teacher relationships emerged as a theme, with teachers citing that they experienced increased family engagement due to these school-required conferences. Additionally, a statistically significant relationship was found between family engagement efficacy perceptions and the conference topic of interest in extracurricular or enrichment activities, as well as between family engagement efficacy perceptions and the conference topic of social interaction concerns.

The study findings will be shared with the elementary school to develop a family-teacher conference protocol and review cycle to enhance family engagement practices.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this record of study to my family: to my parents, Robert and Phyllis, who helped me grow in resilience, in perseverance, and in developing a passion for helping others. I also dedicate this study to my sons, Robert and Justin, who make every day brighter, each in their own way. They supported me in completing this work through fun conversations and lots of laughter that kept me going.

Finally, I further dedicate this record of study to my husband, Kris, who, for more than half of my life now, has supported every dream I have ever had, big or small, with love, strength, and encouragement. Without your unwavering support, great sense of humor, love, and patience, I could not have completed this study. Thank you with all my heart.

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Contributors

This record of study was supervised by committee chair Dr. Michelle Kwok, co-chair Dr. Radhika Viruru, and committee member Dr. Susan Fields of the Teaching, Learning and Culture Department, and committee member Dr. Joyce Juntune, of the Educational Psychology department. All work conducted for the study was done independently by the student.

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CHAPTER I

CONTEXT AND THE PURPOSE OF THE ACTION

The Context

Over the last several decades, the emphasis on family involvement in a child's education has expanded significantly. Federal and state governments, multiple national organizations, and researchers have focused attention on the importance and components of parental involvement concerning student educational success (Evans, 2018; McFarland et al., 2017; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Wilson, 2012; Fan & Williams, 2010). While many aspects contribute to a child's success in school, parental involvement is one area found to have a strong, positive influence on student motivation for academic success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010).

The 2019-2021 school years were unlike any other, with abrupt school building closures and an immediate pivot to distance learning for many students worldwide due to health concerns. More than a half-billion students quickly became participants in virtual learning, and not necessarily by choice (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020). If parent-teacher communication was of value previously, it was nothing less than essential in the remote learning environment, especially at the elementary school level. Families are crucial stakeholders in a child's education, and during remote learning, they may have even more responsibility for student learning than was required previously (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). Lesson delivery demands clear communication between the parent(s) and teacher(s) to orchestrate the learning process. Communication was required multiple times a day between parents and teachers of early elementary school students. They could not access online lessons with as much independence as

students in the upper grades. While this has been a challenging time for the educational community, it does present an opportunity to explore ways to cultivate family involvement practices to grow into parental engagement-oriented practices that benefit students' educational success.

Significant research has taken place in the area of parental involvement, as schools continually work to grow family participation levels in education through a myriad of strategies and approaches, such as parent-teacher conferences and other forms of parent-teacher and parent-school communication (Patel, Corter, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2016; Oostdam & Hooge, 2013; Ferlazzo, 2011). One result of this reflection and further study is a shift in focus to family engagement, which represents a broader focus on a child's education concerning the partnerships between the school, parents or caregivers, and the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Wilson, 2012; Ferlazzo, 2011). The difference between these terms lies in the content and interaction between the parent and the school. For involvement, teachers seek to gain parent or caregiver participation in a child's education through a direct approach (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011). For engagement, as the word implies, a commitment is sought from all parties to build a relationship focused on the student's needs through a family-school partnership (Garbacz, Herman, Thompson, & Reinke, 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

There is worth in teachers actively seeking and promoting communication that helps support family involvement in a child's education: sharing ideas for helping a student learn at home, communicating a child's successes and struggles at school, and offering knowledge about opportunities and available to families through the school (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

Family involvement through family and teacher communication is essential to developing the broader concept of family engagement: it is a beginning step that leads parents toward school interactions that envelop the parent as an active participant, and contributor to the educational success of their child (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sheridan, Knocke, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011). Thus, many aspects traditionally envisioned in family involvement hold in family engagement, such as parent-teacher communication (Sheridan, Knocke, Kupzyk, Edwards & Marvin, 2011). Family engagement practices encourage teachers to strive to facilitate a two-way, or multi-way, conversation with all stakeholders, using all insights to further a student's success in education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Family-teacher communication takes place in many forms. One mode is through parent-teacher conferences. For decades, in-person, family-teacher conferences have served as a vital part of communication between home and school (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Ferlazzo, 2011). During these conferences, teachers communicate a child's progress, share praise, and express concerns regarding the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs to support student goal attainment. Families, in turn, are encouraged to ask questions, share concerns, and provide insight into a child's experiences and interests (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). If a parent cannot attend a conference, the school might conduct a home visit or reach out to the parent via phone. While this approach is a traditional vision when discussing parent-teacher conferences, communication options have expanded significantly. Technology facilitates communication between teachers and parents by other means, such as text messaging and videoconferencing (Patel, Corter, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2016; Hurwitz, Lauricella, Hanson, Raden & Wartella, 2015; Olmstead, 2013;). Some parents show preferences

toward texting the school or teacher in lieu, or in addition to, making or receiving phone calls (York, Loeb & Doss, 2019; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). These modes of communication provide options for parents and schools to develop mutually beneficial relationships and focus on the student's academic success. Regardless of the mode of communication, parental engagement occurs when there is authentic, two-way communication between a teacher and a parent regarding supporting the student in behavior, social-emotional, and academic needs to progress toward academic goal achievement for the student.

National Context

As a result of several decades of research in the area of parental involvement, federal and state support for parental involvement programs to develop parental engagement in public school education across the nation has grown (Evans, 2018; McFarland et al., 2017; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Wilson, 2012; Fan & Williams, 2010). The Centers for Disease Control (2019) recognized the importance of engaging biological parents as well as other adults who act *in loco parentis* for students. The latter serve as a caregiver for the student, who could be a grandparent, stepparent, foster parent, older sibling, or other guardian, biologically related or not. Additionally, the term family engagement has developed, embodying a deeper sense of partnership between schools, families, and stakeholders for the benefit of students (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2011). In acknowledgment, the term parental involvement is hence transitioned to family engagement for the purposes of this study. The term parental involvement will be used interchangeably when necessary, such as in reference to an established framework or reviewed literature.

Many schools have family centers that provide families with programming and activities that support family engagement in their student's education (Wilson, 2012). Districts receiving government funding are required to provide programming and events to increase family knowledge, grow family confidence, and help increase family engagement in a child's education (Texas Education Agency, 2018; Wilson, 2012). While research shows family involvement influences a student's success in reaching academic goals, and government funding to support family involvement programs exists, student success in academics continues to be a problem in the United States compared to other countries (Kim & Bryan, 2017).

Closure of school buildings due to the worldwide pandemic, closure of school buildings has made it difficult for schools to maintain or further develop their family involvement programs in traditional, in-person ways. However, government requirements regarding programming and activities for any school receiving funding have not changed. Requirements to provide families support and avenues for engagement are clear: meetings and activities must still occur, despite school building closures. More than ever before, communication between families and teachers is essential for ensuring a student is progressing in education while learning remotely.

Engaging families can be difficult with time constraints and many technology connectivity barriers between families and teachers (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020). School-based family involvement activities that lead to family engagement can help students reach academic goals (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010). Teachers and administrators must purposefully plan these activities in a regular school setting require planning and dedication from the teachers and the school (Sheldon & Jung, 2015;

Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Engaging families during remote learning can be a much larger undertaking, however. The workload and responsibility for both teachers and families during this time of remote learning has increased substantially, making time for anything perceived as not an explicitly-stated requirement from the federal or state governments left to the wayside (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020).

One way to mitigate the difficulty of engaging families during the current situation can be to focus on what researchers have found as the most influential factors of family engagement. Lee and Bowen (2006) noted that family expectations were a strong indicator of academic success for students. Families who had positive, high expectations of good academic outcomes for their students tended to have students who experienced academic success (2006).

Epstein and Sheldon (2016) referenced the importance of all stakeholders communicating and working together to achieve desired outcomes for students. Clear communication created an environment that supported students being successful in academic endeavors. When families engage with teachers in conversation in a common effort to help their child succeed, the student benefits (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

Situational Context

Despite the initial turn of events brought about by COVID-19 in mid-March of 2020, the South Texas Elementary School¹ has continued to engage families. Located in a mid-size town in South Texas, the South Texas Elementary School is a public Pre-K3 through 5th-grade elementary school with an enrollment of 472 students (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Over the

¹ The South Texas Elementary School is a pseudonym.

sixty years the South Texas Elementary School has been in existence, it has grown from a small, local neighborhood school to a school that draws from several neighborhoods. Rezoning, open enrollment policies, along with special programming have allowed this school to grow from well under 300 students to an average annual enrollment that falls between 450 to 500 students. The population of the South Texas Elementary School includes 93 percent of the students identified as low socioeconomic status, and 18 percent of the students identified as English language learners (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Eleven percent of the students receive special education services, and eight percent of the population receive gifted and talented services (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

The district requires two family-teacher conferences per academic year. Teachers set up required conferences at interim progress report periods any time there is a failing grade or a grade drop of concern to the teacher or administration (personal communication, August 8, 2015; personal communication, 2018). In addition, teachers must communicate with families a minimum of three times weekly, through either phone calls or written comments. To conduct a conference at the South Texas Elementary School, a teacher contacts the family to arrange student- and teacher-prepared samples of student work and develops talking points to review with the family. During the conference, the teacher asks the family questions, answers the families' questions, and offers ideas on how the family can support their student in goal attainment. The teacher also shares ideas based on family input on how the school can support their students in academics, behavior, and socio-emotional needs. While the administration shares this expectation with teachers, this is not a specific, detailed protocol to guide teachers through the process.

These initiatives have fostered teachers' habits of reaching out to families, and many families are accustomed to ongoing communication. Despite these efforts, some teachers express difficulty reaching families (personal communication, April 2018; personal communication, October 2019; personal communication, March 2020; personal communication, April 2020; personal communication, May 2020; personal communication, September 2020). These teachers also expressed frustration in message delivery and family follow-through when conferences occur, especially in academic goal progress and goal attainment discussions (personal communication, May 2019; personal communication, April 2019; personal communication, May 2018).

The Problem

One goal of the campus administration is to support teachers in engaging families in relevant, authentic, two-way communication about progress toward, and attainment of, the academic goals set for the student. A concern for district administration, the school administration, and teachers is the number of students performing below expected academic levels. While students are performing at or just below state levels in state accountability testing, such as reading and mathematics, growth on standardized tests has stagnated (personal communication, February 2020). To help each student, and in turn, the school, reach academic goals, the school administration, alongside the instructional lead team, began to look at different practices that might have influenced this stagnation. A scorecard was developed that addressed multiple areas of student achievement and areas that can influence student goal attainment (personal communication, February 2020).

Prior to the district's constraints on family outreach activities due to the pandemic, some teachers struggled to engage families in conversations about their student's academic progress toward goals. Many teachers were unsuccessful in consistently reaching some families whose students struggled to reach academic goals. There are expectations from both the district and the administration to carry out these conferences, but there is no specific protocol for conducting the conferences, or scheduling them. Teachers reported problems scheduling a conference, such as a family not returning multiple phone calls or text messages. Another concern was families accepting a conference invitation and not attending the conference. When a teacher would follow up with families, reasons shared for missing the conference varied, such as a sudden event that prevented attendance or being called to report to work. Sometimes, families stated they were not aware they had a conference or did not respond to the phone calls or messages. Social distancing requirements and other health protocols have amplified this problem, given the constraints of not being able to visit the homes of students who are not engaging, or not engaging successfully, in lessons.

Teachers also expressed concerns regarding some of the conferences with families of students who were not successful in reaching academic goals or were not making progress. Some teachers felt the conversations with the families were not productive because the family appeared angry at what the teacher shared about their child's academic progress (personal communication, May, 2020). Other teachers shared how the family would agree to help the child with homework during the conference, for example, but would not follow through with the agreement (personal communication, April, 2020; personal communication, May, 2020). Further complicating the issue, not all teachers reported the same problem communicating with families, and this disparity

became more apparent after the school building closure in the spring of 2020. During this time, some teachers reported having no issue reaching most, if not all, of their students' families during remote learning and were able to engage families to continue their student's education (personal communication, April 2020; personal communication, May 2020). The administration team noted that some of the reported disengaged families in multi-child households were engaging with some teachers but not with others (personal communication, April 2020). In this record of study, I will study teacher perceptions of family engagement and the influence of these perceptions on the family-teacher conference content and frequency.

Relevant History of the Problem

The district has implemented expectations with specific percentages for many areas of student growth shared through the school scorecard (personal communication, August 2015). There is a clear expectation for the school to show growth in the academic goals set for all students, and the stakes are higher each year (personal communication, February 2020). Expectations are defined in the scorecard from PreK3 to fifth grade for teachers and administrators, as per the scorecard provided by the district. The measurements used by the district to obtain the data for the scorecards are also clear for the teachers and administrators of the school. What is not clearly defined is a family's role in the scorecard. How are families informed and engaged in the conversation about what is expected of their students in their education? While many other pieces are needed to complete the puzzle, family engagement is key in ensuring student success in academic goal attainment (Evans, 2018).

Engaging families authentically from the entire community through communication is one campus goal set by teachers and administration to help students achieve academic success.

Some teachers feel that some of their students' families prioritize many other facets of life above the student's academic goals because the teachers have difficulty reaching families to schedule a conference, or having a family participate in a scheduled conference. It is not for lack of care, as families express a want to be involved, and understand the importance of involvement (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). There are potential barriers that families in low socioeconomic circumstances experience when trying to engage in a partnership with schools for the benefit of their children, such as work conflicts, or feeling they do not possess the skills to help their child (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Other teachers do not feel the same way. While there are difficulties in finding times that are convenient to all to attend a conference, some teachers do not feel they experience extreme difficulty reaching families and completing conferences. This misalignment in perceptions indicates a need for support for both families and teachers in family-teacher conference engagement practices to help families and teachers connect in the interest of student goal progress and attainment.

We want to help our families engage in conversations about student goal progress and goal attainment as a campus community. We feel that engaged families will grow to support their student at home. Families supporting and encouraging students in academics can help students feel capable and help students experience success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). When some teachers report a problem with engaging families in conversations about student academic progress, and others do not, there is an opportunity for growth and clarification of approaches to help all teachers in this vital area of need.

Significance of the Problem

Families engaged in their child's learning can improve outcomes for their students to a significant degree (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Students of families who are not engaged in their education may be less engaged in the classroom, develop problems with attendance, and experience complications with obtaining academic goals (Sheldon & Jung, 2015). One area the school can focus on to help advance academic goals is to grow constructive family involvement practices that can evolve into engagement by the family, such as the family-teacher conference. Taking the school's traditional family-teacher conference and ensuring the family feels heard through guided questions and responses to family concerns during this time, a relationship between both parties grows to support the student's academic goals. Teachers who engage families in a two-way conversation that considers the family perspective can positively influence students' academic goals (Centers for Disease Control, 2019; Ferlazzo, 2011).

While some teachers at the South Texas Elementary School may not feel as confident in carrying out conferences with families, interacting with families in support of a student's academic goals is an area of strength for others. The problem could be mitigated significantly by exploring what works for teachers with this strength and identifying key strategies. Developing a protocol that helps teachers engage better with families could help the school reach its scorecard academic goals. More importantly, a family-teacher conference protocol would help students make progress towards, and achieve, their academic goals. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) found that student achievement increases when teachers develop authentic, trusting relationships with families. In missing that connection, teachers can experience the opposite effect in their

classroom, one of the students not being successful, and a teacher not accomplishing their goal of success for every student (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012).

Research Questions

The following questions guide the research in this record of study.

1. What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement and the content of family-teacher conferences?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement and the frequency of family-teacher conferences?

Through this study, I seek to identify teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy, and what influence this may have on the content and frequency of family-teacher conferences. Based on this information, I will craft recommendations for the campus to create a family-teacher conference protocol and professional development plan to support teachers in this form of family-teacher communication for student academic goal progress. Additionally, I will recommend a plan evaluation cycle (Losoff & Broxterman, 2017) to ensure teachers and families have input each year on the family-teacher conference protocol, as well as inform the professional development for the following year. This way, even in times of change, the school can navigate family-teacher conferences over time in an aligned manner that considers current family perspectives, teacher perspectives, community circumstances, and campus goals.

Personal Context

I am presently an elementary school principal at the South Texas Elementary School, in which I will conduct the record of study. Having served at this school for close to a decade has

provided me the opportunity for deep insight into the academic endeavors at our school. It has also allowed a unique perspective into perceptions of family-teacher interactions from both parties in various scenarios. This experience has allowed me to hear teachers express joys and concerns about family interactions, and families convey gratitude and concern about teacher interactions. In addition, my role has provided a deep involvement in the professional development rollout of several programs to promote academic success as directed by the district and oversee all aspects of family engagement programming on campus.

Family engagement is an area of my current assignment that is not just a required part of the position in which I serve. I see it as an integral part of how we help our students obtain their best education. By developing mutually respectful, two-way relationships with families, we support our students at deeper levels, getting to know students in ways we would not if we did not develop a respectful relationship with the family. (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

Researcher's Roles and Personal History

Efron and Ravid (2019) describe action research as a study of one's own practice, where "...Practitioners carry out their investigations systematically, reflectively, and critically using strategies that are appropriate for their practice. (p. 4)." My role in this research will be as an active participant, as I am a practitioner seeking to solve a problem to better our practice in the specific area of family-teacher communication as a part of family engagement. While I am not directly responsible for conducting family-teacher conferences, I conduct family-administrator conferences and facilitate family-teacher conferences upon teacher or family request. I also work closely with the campus instructional lead team to ensure that family-teacher conferences occur.

As an additional layer of support, I also ensure campus procedures are in place to assist teachers in conducting home visits if they are having difficulty reaching a family for a conference.

My background as an educator is in early childhood bilingual education, Spanish and English. Early in my career, and to this day, one of my favorite parts of the work was helping young children acquire the basic skills they need to succeed in the next steps in their education. Nothing, to me, could influence a child's success in education than this ability, and I enjoyed being a part of that endeavor. In addition, working with families fascinated me. There were so many different personalities and ways in which families interacted with their children and other adults. I saw the family conference as an exciting challenge, figuring out the best way to listen carefully and support the family as they described their concerns or worries. I enjoyed learning about how my students interacted at home with their families, as I felt that this information helped me create the best classroom environment possible for my students.

While not all conferences went as planned, I appreciated the interaction with another adult about something I felt we had in common: their student's success. I have always had a very hands-on, involved approach when working with families, showing families how to read with a toddler who was the younger sibling of a student, for example. Due to this life experience and my current career, my role as a researcher will not be from an outsider's perspective. I will draw from the experiences with families, teachers, and students to derive a potentially deeper understanding of the problem.

Journey to the Problem

My interest in family-teacher conference communication related to family engagement and student goal attainment first developed when I served as a bilingual kindergarten teacher at a

different elementary school in the same district. I noticed a range of sentiments regarding the family-teacher conference when discussing completing this part of our duties as teachers. For example, one colleague shared how much she dreaded family-teacher conferences. Another colleague stated that she worried extensively about family-teacher conferences, as she was concerned a family would become upset and complain about her to the principal. A few years later, another colleague shared that she was fine conducting the family-teacher conferences, but felt they were ineffective, as families did not follow through with the activities discussed. These viewpoints intrigued me early in my career. All the experiences shared seemed plausible. A family could complain about something they did not like or understand, and a family could potentially not complete tasks asked of them. It just did not seem to be possible to me that most families followed those paths in my experience at the time.

When I became an instructional facilitator and later an assistant principal, I began to have different types of conversations with both teachers and families on a broader scale. In these roles, I developed as an active listener. I heard fear and anxiety in both family and teacher conversations, sometimes blanketed in anger, about a child's academic progress. Many times, I heard frustrations from both families and teachers from what seemed to stem from a lack of confidence in what to do next to help a student succeed. I have had the opportunity to observe several family-teacher conferences as a campus administrator that resulted in mostly positive outcomes for the student. Sometimes, these family-teacher conferences required more facilitation than others, as one or both parties involved struggled to communicate effectively with each other. I witnessed many teachers interact successfully with families, expertly gleaning information while providing clear direction in a child's next steps toward academic success. This

experience inspired me to explore this area further for our community, as these teachers expressed they felt they could get further with the student by having a collegial relationship with the family regarding the overall academic and socio-emotional growth of their student. By outlining what teachers who had consistently positive family-teacher conferences perceive, prepare, and do, a layer of support could be developed for all teachers to further support their goals for student success.

As a campus administrator, the drive to ensure all campus environments and activities are aligned to prepare students to achieve their academic goals is paramount. Authentic family-teacher conferences that are two-way conversations between the family and the teacher can be a family involvement activity that supports family engagement to a level that would benefit the student in achieving their academic goals (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon., 2011). This type of communication provides the teacher with student background, such as student interests, that the teacher can use to leverage her interactions with the student in the classroom (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). In turn, the family-teacher conference can provide the family with a clear picture of what the expectations are for the student, where the student stands concerning academic goals, and what a family can do to assist their child in achieving these goals. In addition, a mutual benefit of a constructive family-teacher conference can be the development of a positive working relationship between the teacher and the family in support of the student's academic goals (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). This relationship can help break down barriers to learning, as trust developed between both parties can increase communication effectiveness about, and commitment to, the goal (Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

The struggle for some teachers may not be the content of a family-teacher conference, but can be how the teachers receive, process, and deliver information during the conference. While both university-based teacher preparation programs and district-based new teacher programs address the family-teacher conference, some teachers still do not feel they are as effective at this aspect of their work (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). While some teachers identify that they feel they do not know how to talk to families in a way they understand, not all do.

Throughout the internship for the program, prior to the pandemic, I had the opportunity to observe conversations between teachers about family-teacher communications. Some expressed they felt that families just did not want to talk to them. Others conveyed frustration that families did not call them back when requesting a family-teacher conference. However, not all teachers observed during the internship period expressed the same concerns. Those who seemed to feel they had successful family-teacher conferences shared how they used different approaches with different families to engage them in conversations. They discussed how they called at different times and utilized texting with some families to ensure that they began to develop relationships with them. These teachers also shared how they spent additional time preparing items to highlight what a student could do. The teachers seemed to do this to inspire pride and promote feelings of efficacy in both students and families.

Harnessing the perspectives and documenting the preparations of those teachers who consistently communicate with families and perceive their family-teacher conferences to be effective would benefit the campus. From this research, key strategies could be identified to assist all teachers on the campus in organizing family-teacher conferences that are engaging for the families and oriented toward student success. The goal would not be to develop a set-in-

stone, family-teacher conference document but rather to develop a protocol that identifies the key focus values, approaches, and content that will support the campus goals of family engagement efficacy and student success through family-teacher conferences.

Significant Stakeholders

The instructional lead team at the campus strives for all students to succeed in reaching academic goals. This team is comprised of campus grade-level chairs, the counselor, and administration. One focus the team has on this area is to support teachers, ensuring they have the tools they need to reach their success goals for all students. While most support is gleaned from tangible items from this group, the focus is not solely on materials. A primary focus of the team is professional development. This team approaches this focus through collaboration, where teachers openly share strategies that have worked for them in academics and communications with families. In recent months, the team has shifted to a heavy focus on technology communications with both families and students, given that students were fully remote from mid-March until the beginning of October 2020, with about 50% of the campus remaining in remote or hybrid learning through June 2021 (personal communication, June 2021). Results from this record of study will be shared with this team through a presentation. The team will then design a teacher professional development and family-teacher conference protocol plan. This team will also develop the plan evaluation cycle to invite teacher input into the professional development and family-teacher conference protocol and family input for a family-teacher conference protocol.

Campus teachers are directly involved in preparing, carrying out, and following up with family-teacher conferences. Input from teachers who experience success in this area will provide

vital information to assist all teachers in the elementary grades, both current and in the future, to have more successful family-teacher conferences. In addition, the teachers have developed a culture of sharing, as led by the instructional lead team. Teachers currently share video recordings of themselves sharing communication and organization tips, which are added to our in-house learning database. Teachers routinely welcome other teachers to their rooms, now virtually, to observe them teaching a particular subject. It is not uncommon for teachers to model a lesson for a teacher, upon request, for a class and the teacher. While this sharing of ideas between teachers is a positive growth experience, the expertise and ideas shared are oriented toward in-classroom teaching and teacher-to-teacher planning communications. Sharing what works for communicating with families with each other is not yet part of the learning community discussions. With this research, the goal is to expand that willingness to share and learn from each other to the family-teacher conference, helping the teacher be more successful in family engagement. These stakeholders would benefit from an increase in successful family-teacher conferences. By developing a positive family-teacher relationship, the focus can become the child's academic goal attainment.

The child is at the heart of the family-teacher conference (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Teachers have unique approaches to teaching and conducting conferences. However, their training affords them standardization in professionalism and experiences in a learning setting (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). Families bring a wealth of information about their child, the purpose of the conference (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Not all families have the same experiences in a learning setting as teachers have experienced in their training. Providing professional development to teachers based on this research may influence how a

family perceives the relationship, which could positively influence the family-teacher conference. With key elements guiding a teacher through the conference, relationship-building can take place, which will, in turn, benefit the child (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, Sheldon and Jung, 2015).

Important Terms

For the purpose of this record of study, the following terms are used:

1. Academic Goal – The learning outcome expected for the student.
2. Academic Goal Attainment – A student reaching the expected learning outcome.
3. Communication—Mutual verbal and non-verbal interaction between a family and child about school and student progress (Epstein, Salinas, & Sheldon., 2011).
4. Family -- As defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), a maybe the biological parent of the child, but can also be "...a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare)." For the purposes of this study, the term family will be used in lieu of parent (see "Parent").
5. Family-Teacher Conference---The communication between a family and teacher about a student's progress, in person, over the telephone, or in a teleconference.
6. Family Engagement—Family participation in their student’s education through a two-way, mutually beneficial communication between the teacher, the school, and the family. (Ferlazzo, 2011). In current times and for the purposes of this study, “Family engagement in schools is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and

parents are committed to actively supporting their children's and adolescents' learning and development." (Centers for Disease Control, 2019).

7. Family Involvement--Family participation in school events that primarily relate to student academics (Epstein, 2018).
8. Instructional lead team—The team is comprised of grade-level chairs from PK3 to fifth grade, campus administration, and the campus counselor. The team's charge is to guide the school to its instructional goals and provide a feedback loop with all stakeholders, including the Site-Based Decision-Making team and school families.
9. Parent - the biological parent of the child, but can also be "...a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare)" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). For the purposes of this study, in reference to parental involvement, parental engagement, and parent-teacher conferences, a parent does not solely reference a biological parent, but any caregiver legally responsible for the student, or any caregiver given responsibility by a legal guardian (see "Family").

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 1

A campus that has mutually respectful, two-way communications between teachers and families can show to have a positive effect on student outcomes (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012). An area of family involvement that can potentially bring a family toward engagement is the family-teacher conference. By focusing on key choices that teachers make to ensure that families perceive the family-teacher conference as a benefit for their child's academic goal

attainment, the family-teacher conference can leverage both the family and teacher efforts to ensure the student's success.

A shift in focus to key aspects of what teachers see families perceive as inviting, comfortable, or engaging could significantly influence the relationship between teachers and families (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). A trusting relationship between these two parties can result in a supportive environment for students, both at home and at school, in their journey toward academic goal attainment (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012).

Given the current worldwide pandemic, the school looks very different than it did just a year ago. Families and teachers are more likely to be under stress and pressure, and both are experiencing new levels of responsibilities in education (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020). With remote learning, teachers and families now need to work together as a functional partnership more than ever before (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020). By researching what key strategies and content should be incorporated into the family-teacher conference, a guide can be developed to help teachers engage families and help students be successful.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

Family engagement is identified in research as a positive influence on students' academic success (Epstein & Jung, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010). Both institutional- and teacher-led programs have demonstrated a positive influence on students and their families in multiple elementary and secondary public school settings (Epstein, Clark, Salinas & Sanders, 1997; Fan & Chen, 2001; Kraft & Rogers, 2015, 2013; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The programs offered at the South Texas Elementary School seek to ensure that all students receive equal opportunity to achieve academic success at high levels by working with families so that students are supported at home and within the school. Questions that arise in this area of study do not focus on whether family engagement is effective but rather on the components of family engagement that significantly influence student academic goal achievement.

Following family involvement and family engagement development through decades of study, more and more research leads to less of a one-size-fits-all model that will work for any group of family, schools, or students in any given setting. What works for one group, be it socio-economic, ethnicity, region, or another factor, may not work for another (Newman, Northcut, Farmer, & Black, 2019). Studies of family and teacher perceptions regarding what it means to be involved in schools have led to the development of frameworks and trainings to facilitate positive home-school relationships in regards to academic success, as well as supportive interactions between families and students at home (Epstein, 2018; Jeynes, 2019). These

frameworks often include a standard component of engaging families in their student's learning through communications, including the family-teacher conference (Epstein, 2018; Jeynes, 2019). These frameworks are often linked to program suggestions with multiple facets designed to engage families in a partnership with the teacher, the school, or both to help students arrive at academic success (Jeynes, 2019; Epstein, 2018; Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Even equipped with this information, a protocol for family engagement can be hit-or-miss in reaching the goal of engaging families in a partnership with teachers for student success (Jeynes, 2019; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

Relevant Historical Background

Over the last four decades, family engagement research has led current practices to where they are today, beginning with a focus on families in all forms and all socio-economic levels and a more inclusive, tailored approach to engaging families. During the 1980s, a focus on the disparity between low-income families and non-low-income families was noted as problematic for engaging low-income parents (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Lareau, 1987). One of the suggested approaches that are widely recognized comes from Epstein's (2015) model for engaging families in their child's learning. The classifications within the model provide avenues for family members to learn about basic child development to ensure two-way communication between the family and school staff. True joint efforts exist between the family, school staff, and the larger community (Epstein, 2018). Programs use many of these framework components in development, particularly when addressing the needs of students from low-income families, such as in a study of a Head Start program (McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy & Mundt, 2013). The focus in recent years has moved toward identifying the most impactful components for students

or specific student groups, as researchers hypothesize that not all types of parental engagement work for all communities of learners (McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, & Mundt, 2013; Sabol, Sommer, Sanchez, & Busby, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

Family engagement in a student's academic endeavors can have a lasting, positive influence on a student reaching academic goals (Epstein & Jung, 2016; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010). Positive academic outcomes for students are fortified by strong family engagement. Multiple studies show aspects of family engagement that give students a stronger foothold in academics, preparing them for the next steps in their schooling (Ferlazzo, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010). Family engagement has been beneficial for a student's academic success and their behavioral and social-emotional well-being in the school environment (Epstein & Jung, 2016; Ferlazzo, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010). The questions that surface regarding family engagement are not just what activities encourage engagement, but what motivates a parent to engage in their student's academic success and what actions will inspire both teachers and parents to engage with each other for the benefit of the student. Aspects of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory in tandem with Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez's (1992) work in funds of knowledge concept guide this study. To add clarification to what family engagement entails in an elementary school setting, as well as provide a practical roadmap for action research, both Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997, 1995) parent involvement model and Epstein's (2018) six types of involvement model will frame this study.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory expresses his views on how aspects of culture and social interaction guide learning in children. Vygotsky's theory plays a large role in many well-

recognized models and frameworks in the family engagement field. In his theory, the first teacher is family. Students' interactions with their family and their larger community mold what they think about, what they value, what they prioritize, and how they learn (Vygotsky, 1978). While a student can learn things independently, the family and community play a large role in helping students reach higher levels of learning success.

Part of this assistance provided by the family and the community is defined in one of Vygotsky's concepts, the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In part, Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) idea defines the importance of adults or mentors in student learning, particularly those serving in caregiving roles. The ZPD is the next step beyond what a student can perform independently when a student can grow through facilitation provided by an adult or another student who has reached that step (Vygotsky, 1978). While Vygotsky (1978) references teachers, his work continuously mentions the importance of family and peer guides to support students in their learning. This view of a connection to family or community to help facilitate learning reinforces the research in family engagement that continuously shows the importance of family engagement to help a student achieve academic success.

Educators have an opportunity to further explore the benefits of engaging families in partnerships to benefit the student's academic success through the funds of knowledge theory (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The funds of knowledge theory relates to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, placing the family and community in high regard for education. In the funds of knowledge theory, the family, including the student, brings a wealth of life experiences that can be used to enhance their learning in the classroom environment (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Additionally, families bring valuable expertise in various

areas that educators and administrators can learn from parents and integrate into their family engagement practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Teachers can acquire more autonomy in the family engagement process through this theory, as it defines both the teacher and the family member as true partners, both with valuable experiences and knowledge that will benefit the learning environment, which will influence the student's engagement in learning (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). This study applied this theory in teaching, researchers saw the teachers as crucial in connecting the home and school environments (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). When a teacher takes on the role of the learner when visiting with the family member to provide a positive learning environment, the relationship can become more balanced, and sharing becomes more fluid (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). When families actively communicate with teachers, and teachers actively seek family knowledge from a value standpoint, the student benefits. Thus, the communication between the teacher and the family is crucial to authentically engage a family in a student's academic success.

It is important to consider well-recognized family engagement models in the field when considering parental engagement theories for student academic benefit. This literature review focus in this area is on two seminal models of family engagement as shown in Figure 1: 1) Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parent involvement and 2) Epstein's six types of involvement. A family engagement model can help methodically guide a study and give valuable structure to many future studies (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Figure 1

Key Characteristics of the Models

	Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model for parental involvement	Epstein’s six types of involvement
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step-level definition of involvement • Parent motivational beliefs, perceived invitations to be involved, and perceived life context determine type amount of involvement • Involvement influences student perception of parent involvement • Student perceptions of involvement influence student achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six defined types of involvement: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, supporting school, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community • Sample practices provided for each type of involvement • Challenges noted for each type of involvement • Outcome goals outlined for students, parents and teachers
Main take aways for families and teachers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief system based: How a family perceives their ability to help their student succeed guides involvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-centric: Involves community-family-school partnership, is primarily initiated by the school.

Note: This is an overview of Hoover Dempsey and Sandler’s (1997) Model for Parental Involvement and Epstein’s (2018) Six Types of Involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 1995) presented a model of parent involvement from a psychology perspective, as shown in Figure 2. This model offered guidance to practitioners based on years of research on why parents choose to become involved with the school and their child's education and how family engagement could affect student success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Years later, Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) revamped the first two levels of the parental involvement model process in detail based on their collective empirical research and conceptual work, as well as that of other experts in the field. The project resulted in a modified model for the family engagement process base that provided a more parent-centered focus and developed practical scales for

practitioners to measure why and how parents become involved (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Other researchers in the family engagement field can also use these scales to study why parents choose to become involved in their children's education in a myriad of school settings. These studies' results could enhance parental involvement programs further to improve student outcomes (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) presented the original parental involvement model had five precise levels that guided their parental involvement work. Initially, the model had five sequential sections, each of which influenced the next, and ended with an effect on student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The first two levels offered reasons why and how parents become involved in their child's education, with the first level determining what type of involvement would take place at the second level (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The third level showed what parents do that affected student achievement results, and the fourth showed variables that may have enhanced or detracted from what parents do for their children (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The final level showed the result in student achievement (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) suspected that the model might need adjustment within the first two levels and wanted to study the interactions among the levels explored. In the original model, the focus in the first level was on parent self-perception, parent-self efficacy, and invitations given by the school or the child to a parent. Modifications also would define the first level better from the psychology perspective of why

parents are likely to choose to become involved (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

In summary, the study was able to accomplish two primary goals. First, it was able to adjust the parental involvement model's theory based on empirical research from multiple scholars in the field, including those who developed the model originally. Second, it provided scales based on the model that can benefit anyone studying parental involvement or a related area of study. The adjustments to the theory were presented in a sound, professional manner, and were associated closely with corresponding bodies of empirical research (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The researchers stated in the discussion that this level of discourse and study could not have taken place before the model was established first, and then only after multiple studies: "...without the first map, we would have nothing to test, and nothing to amend" (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005, p. 99). The questionnaires were developed with years of future research in mind, vetted well, and focused on action more than theory, thus making them useful in a school setting.

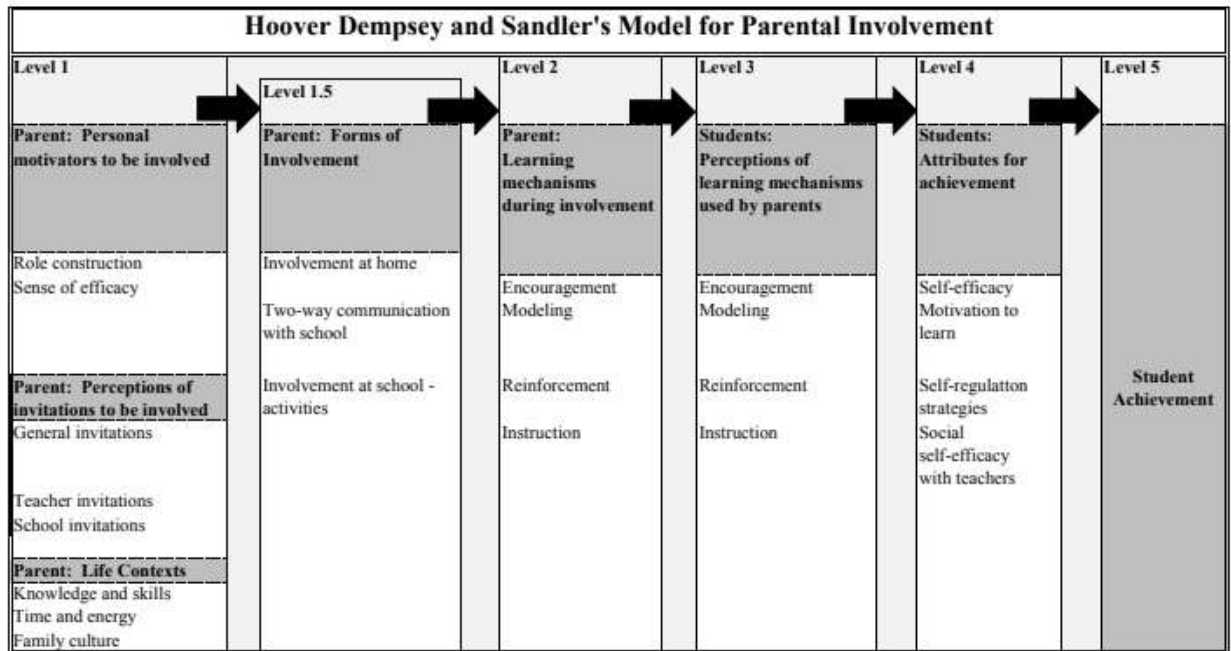
A limitation of this model in the conceptual framework for the proposed study could continue to be its content's theoretical orientation. While the questionnaires provide an action tool to gather data in a school setting, the revised model does not provide direction on what to do to change the course of a student's outcome (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The questionnaires only help define the phenomenon and potentially provide the reason for it. Despite this caveat, knowing the potential reasons why a family member chooses to be involved, and what activities they are likely to choose, as a result, is useful. This

information can help researchers explore possible actions in various settings to influence student achievement (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Mixed outcomes regarding student achievement and parental involvement appear to be a common theme in parental involvement. Studies indicate the need for more research on student achievement outcomes (Epstein, 1983; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The text also is limited to the review of the first two levels of the model alone. While it provides an in-depth analysis of these two levels, why parents become involved in their child's education, and how they choose to do so, it does not explore the following three levels (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The researchers pointed out the different aspects of what they omitted the three levels from the paper's scope, including the complexity of the model, and provided some tables of the empirical data to support their findings (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Regardless based on most studies mentioned in the text and what is available in the parental involvement/family engagement field, there has not been extensive research on the outcome elements of the parental involvement theory model, levels three through five (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Figure 2

Model for Parental Involvement (Modified from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997)



Epstein’s model of the six types of involvement (2018) provides a framework that provides lists of research-based actionable items to develop supportive family engagement in a student’s education as shown in Figure 3. In her framework, Epstein (2018) recognizes the types of involvement as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration as shown in Figure 3. For this study, the focus areas within the model will be communication and learning in the home environment. Epstein's framework for the six types of involvement, based on her and her colleagues' research and that of other experts in the field, is practical and simple to use in a school setting and is part of the larger school, family, and community partnership (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Epstein also has books and publications using this model to guide teachers, schools, and school districts to implement parental involvement programs and activities with their school communities

(Epstein, 2018; Epstein, 1991; Epstein, 1987). Epstein's structures for schools to implement parental involvement practices are extensive and useful and are based on a school-centered viewpoint of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997; Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Regardless, the most recent revisions to Epstein's six types of involvement and its renewed focus on the school, family, and community partnership have migrated toward a more balanced family-school relationship, even if still guided by the school personnel (Epstein, 2018).

A researched-based, stand-alone framework for this study could have been Epstein's framework for the six types of involvement as shown in Figure 3 (Epstein, 2018). However, it is not entirely what influenced this study's conceptual framework to help teachers mobilize in partnership with families for student success. Interestingly, however, Epstein's work was a subtle, consistent guide to looking for other perspectives. In one of Epstein's texts, she noted teachers' differing attitudes toward parents during her study (Epstein, 1983). While Epstein (1983) indicated that the observation did not seem to affect the study, she did find it necessary to note the observation in the study discussion (Epstein, 1983). Reflecting on Epstein's note about teacher attitudes caused me to reflect on teacher and family perceptions in family engagement practices, leading me to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997, 1995) original model for parental involvement. The revision to the model (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) clarified the perceptions portion of this study. Shifting the focus to what families perceive as inviting, comfortable, or engaging could influence parental involvement practices in a school setting (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Teachers at the South Texas Elementary School may be able to use this information in two key

areas to be explored in the study: the importance of knowing and understanding the parent community, as well as selecting family engagement communication practices to engage families, both based on data, to help students achieve academic success (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Figure 3

Six Types of Involvement (Modified from Epstein, 2018)

Parenting Parent education, helping parents help students academically		Communicating Two-way communication for student academic achievement		Volunteering Encouraging and organizing family volunteers in school
Epstein's Six Types of Involvement				
Learning at home Providing information to help students learn in the home environment		Decision-making Active in school community, developing family leaders		Collaborating Families and schools working together to fortify school supports

For this study, I focused on two types of Epstein's (Epstein, 2018) six types of involvement, communicating, and learning at home. Both Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's (1997, 1995) model for parental involvement and Epstein's six types of involvement (2018) provide different yet aligned perspectives on family engagement practices. A clear, practical guide of actionable items, such as Epstein's (Epstein, 2018) framework, will provide the school with a

blueprint for involvement, and Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's (1997, 1995) findings on parent motivation to engage helps identify which actions are more tailored to the school community. Additionally, Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's (1997, 1995) perceptions of what motivates a parent to be involved in their child's education enveloped the focus on communicating and learning at home. A dominant consideration on what families perceive as inviting or effective and how it relates to what they choose to participate in regarding student success in school could benefit teachers during family-teacher conferences.

Most Significant Research and Practice Studies

Home- versus School-based Family Engagement

Epstein and Dauber (1991) found that family engagement is a vital element of student success in elementary and middle school settings. The U.S. government has supported this concept by implementing such acts as the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), which ensures that components of parental involvement are in place in public schools. In their research, Epstein (1983) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) state that parental involvement throughout children's education is believed to support their global education. While empirical studies in this field support these statements, the studies in this literature review paint a detailed, complex picture of parental involvement in education. As the complexity of parental involvement research became clear, the delineation between home- and school-based parental involvement developed (Epstein 1987, Epstein & Dauber, 1991). S. Phillipson and S. N. Phillipson (2012) found home-based parental involvement activities positively influence student achievement. Others, such as Stright and Yeo (2014), have found mixed results of certain school-based types of parental involvement on student achievement.

Researchers have produced nuanced definitions of parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 1995) studied parental involvement in developing their parental involvement model process and defined it as having many home- and school-based forms. Examples in their papers included reading with a child, helping him/her with homework, participating in school events, volunteering at the school, participating in parent-teacher conferences, and written communication (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 1995). Researchers found it essential to define home- and school-based parental involvement in identifying and measuring elements of parental involvement better (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). In their research, Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey (2005) clarified both home- and school-based behaviors to develop scales to assist in parental involvement research. Epstein's (1987, 1986) work in parental involvement defined the types of involvement according to what takes place in the home versus school. Olmstead (2013) considered technology as a form of parent-teacher communication. The research indicated that delineation of home- versus school-based parental involvement was essential for parental involvement through communication (Olmstead, 2013).

Family Involvement: Learning at Home

The framework for Epstein's six types of involvement defined the learning at home component as supporting academic learning in the home environment (Epstein, 2018). As defined in the framework, this term covers various activities (Epstein, 2018). For many a common first thought about learning at home relates to homework: the ways to assist a child with homework, monitor a child in assignment completion and accuracy, or even encourage a child to attempt homework (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Learning at home can include these tasks and more (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). For example, learning at home can also include family-teacher communication in times where the parent initiates communication to support learning, such as when a parent wants to know how a student is progressing in class or wants to ask a teacher how to help their student at home (Epstein, 2018).

Family Involvement: Communicating

Communication is a significant part of family engagement and has been defined in the six types of involvement framework and the parental involvement model process (Epstein, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, 1995). In Epstein's six types of involvement, communicating refers to the way teachers and families communicate (Epstein, 2018). This model defines formal modes of communication, such as parent-teacher conferences, in which translation is available if a parent requires it, ensuring clear communication (Epstein, 1987). Other modes of communication can be routine, scheduled forms of contact via phone, newsletter, or written communication (Epstein, 1987). Parental involvement research defines different types of communication in various ways. For example, an informal phone call from the parent to the school sometimes is considered an activity in home-based parental involvement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011), while an in-school parent-teacher conference is viewed consistently as a school-based parental involvement activity (Epstein, 1986). The goal of these communications helps elucidate whether the contact is home- or school-based: a parent's phone call to ask for general information would be considered a home-based parental involvement activity, while a phone-based, parent-teacher conference about a student's progress in reading likely would be defined as a school-based parental involvement activity (Epstein, 2018).

Overall, the activities in this type of parental involvement model tend to be school-based, either originating at or from the school (Epstein, 2018; Epstein, 1991). While parents can initiate contact for conferences, routine, scheduled communication is school-based communication when the communication is focused on the student's progress (Epstein, 1991).

Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's model for parental involvement is a form that can take place after a parent has experienced an invitation from the teacher or their student to become involved (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The types of invitations to set the stage for communication can be general invitations from the school, an invitation from a teacher to attend a meeting or other event, or a verbal invitation from the student to be involved (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). While the types of invitations defined by teacher and student can be verbal or written, general invitations have a broader scope. A general invitation from the school can be direct, such as a printed invitation or a phone call, or indirect, such as a parent perceiving the front office staff as welcoming (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Communicating: Types of Communication. Both Hoover Dempsey and Sandler's model for parental involvement (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and Epstein's six types of involvement (Epstein, 2018) directly state and allude to different types of communication in the models. Written communications, both specific to the parent and general from the school, allow schools to extend invitations to begin communicating with the parent (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Phone calls from home, casual conversations between a parent and teacher, or videoconferencing are all considered communications between parents and teachers (Epstein, 2018; Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In recent years, texting has been

growing as a type of communication that is more timely than traditional written communication, but a type of communication that seems to glean family response (Van Tiem et al., 2021). During remote learning, more parents and teachers used Seesaw platforms to communicate student progress toward academic goals (Baxter & Toe, 2021).

A traditional form of communication in parental involvement is the family-teacher conference (Jeynes, 2019). With the onset of the 2020 pandemic at the beginning of widespread remote learning, video conferencing to hold family-teacher conferences increased (Daftary, Sugrue, Gustman, and Lechuga-Peña, 2021). It is more common now for a family-teacher conference to be held to achieve the same outcome of family-teacher communication (Barnett, Grafwallner, & Weisenfeld, 2021; Daftary, Sugrue, Gustman, and Lechuga-Peña, 2021;).

Communicating: Cultural Considerations. Family-teacher communications via phone calls, in-person conferences, and letters are common in elementary school settings. The key to communication in family engagement is the quality of the communication, the clarity of student goals, and building relationships between teachers and family member (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Epstein, 2018). Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013) conducted a mixed-methods study that explored interactions between teachers and a small group of parents in a Head Start setting. After extensive review, the researchers found differences in communications between teachers and parents who spoke languages other than English compared to conversations between teachers and parents whose primary language was English. The study also noted that teachers took a more directive stance when communicating with parents who appeared to struggle to speak English. Teachers who perceived a parent did not have a good command of English dictated goals to the parent, while teachers who perceived that a

parent communicated well in English worked with the parent to determine their child's goals. Cheatham and Ostrosky (2011) also explored what a quality parent-teacher conference entails and discovered that while teachers were developing good relationships with parents, the teacher still assumed the role of the expert, and the parent that of the information recipient. Cheatham and Jimenez-Silva (2012) used a case study to explore a way to help teachers develop better two-way communication with immigrant Latino families and emphasized sharing power. These studies demonstrated teachers' good intentions to communicate with parents, but also showed that communication was not a balanced two-way conversation between teachers and parents (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011, 2013, Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012).

Socio-economic factors can also influence family-teacher communication. Sometimes low-socioeconomic class families are perceived as not wanting to be involved in their child's education because they do not participate in the same types of activities and communications that families from other classes expect or enjoy (Rothstein, 2014). Families can also feel as if they do not have the time or skillset to be involved in two-way communication about their student's education (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Communicating: Developing the Family-Teacher Relationship. A potential approach to developing effective two-way communication is to invite family members into the school system in a myriad of ways to make them feel comfortable and that teachers and staff respect and hear them (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012). It is valuable for teachers to help parents feel supported and that they have something to contribute (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). In a Head Start setting, Hindman and Morrison (2011) found that a good relationship between the parents and teacher fostered sentiments of openness to parents'

presence in the classroom and school. The development of good relationships helped parents understand how to help their children learn about letters and words better to be more successful and develop a positive attitude about learning (Hindman & Morrison, 2011). Rose, Vaughn and Taylor (2015) studied the implementation of parts of Epstein's six types of involvement framework developed in a classroom setting to improve low-income students' literacy outcomes. The study found that while some types of parental involvement activities did increase literacy, the relationships developed between the teaching staff and parents set the stage for many other future interactions (Rose, Vaughn, & Taylor, 2015). Of significance in these authors' study were family-connected literacy assessment and observable classroom activities supported at home after that, which supported classroom literacy goals (Rose, Vaughn, & Taylor, 2015).

In contrast to building close parent-teacher relationships, Kraft & Rogers (2015) concluded that less personal, but consistent, communications with parents, for example, through a text messaging system, could have a positive effect on students' academic success as long as the delivery mode and time were consistent and clear. Hurwitz, Lauricella, Hanson, Raden, & Wartella (2015) found electronic communications effective for parent involvement. Their study concluded that Head Start parents who used text messaging to receive parenting tips and academic activities had significantly greater participation in activities, particularly among fathers and sons (Hurwitz, Lauricella, Hanson, Raden, & Wartella, 2015). However, when communicating in person, Gartmeier, Gebhart, and Dotger (2016) found that straightforward, clear communication must be balanced with amicable parent-teacher interactions to arrive at solutions. Creating a welcoming environment through consistent communication, soft skills, and

a positive atmosphere establishes the setting to develop two-way communication that supports parental involvement (Gartmeier, Gebhardt, & Dotger, 2016).

Perceptions of Family Engagement

An underlying influence on the parent-teacher conferences and the overall concept of family engagement concerning lower-income families and student success could potentially be teacher perceptions of what family engagement is to them. In a study that documented teacher-parent engagement practices, the perceptions reported by teachers were very positive in regards to parental engagement, but there was no strong evidence to support the engagement was a result of the positive attitude (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Epstein and Becker (1982) noted that teachers who needed parents to help out found their way past barriers to be sure to include them and did not see lower income as a barrier to a parent getting involved in a school setting. The study did note lower-income families' attitudes were different but described a weak relationship between teacher attitudes and what actions they took when it came to lower-income families and parental engagement, according to the study (Epstein & Becker, 1982). In another study, teachers in a lower-income school did feel less impactful in their job. Parents' engagement in the school was lower than in schools with smaller numbers of low-income families (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). Overall parent perceptions of parent engagement from lower-income, Latino, and African-American parents of Head Start children in one study indicated they felt that their experiences with the school is what helped them understand what to do with their students at home to help them be successful, and enjoyed engaging in the activities with their children (Sawyer, Cycyk, Sandilos, & Hammer, 2018). The parent perceptions study showed positive sentiment, and the teacher perception studies did not indicate teachers had negative actions due

to lower parent engagement from low-income families. The study noted that teacher perception, in particular, is an item to consider when reviewing parental engagement with lower-income Latino families.

Family Engagement in the Early Years of Education

Family engagement activities positively impact early childhood and primary elementary settings for low-income students or students who are otherwise disadvantaged compared to other student groups. However, not all activities are suited for all settings, and some stand out more than others. In a study defining what family engagement is for low-income Latino parents in an early childhood setting, McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, & Mundt (2013) found categories within parental engagement that were meaningful and made a difference for the group studied, such as family school, with participation and activities associated with learning at home. Sometimes the umbrella of what is considered as family engagement by a school is too narrow, as found in a study of family engagement activities in an early childhood setting (Sabol, Sanchez, & Busby, 2018). The family-school and family-teacher relationships were related to student academic success in a study of pre-kindergarten students (Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010), among other benefits, such as more positive behavior outcomes. The relationship between families and the school portion of family engagement was a running theme in these studies, either directly or indirectly noted in multiple ways, as a positive portion of programs or activities researched (Sabol, Summer, Sanchez, & Busby, 2018; McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, & Mundt, 2013; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010).

Other aspects of family engagement can also have a positive impact on academic success in elementary school students. Strategies that emphasize the common-goal relationship

development between the family and the teacher for the student stand out in that they support academics, better behavior, better attendance, and better social skills in students (Epstein, 2018; Jeynes, 2019).

Family Engagement Training

To encourage reflection of perceptions and, as a result, implement a new activity with fidelity, an important step is professional development or training. To outline and guide future recommendations for professional development, early childhood teachers participated in research that explored their perceptions of family engagement in conjunction with parental engagement learning taking place over two years, with the participants developed their self-efficacy in working with parents as partners (Brown, Knoche, Edwards, & Sheridan, 2009). Altinkaynak and Akman (2016) concluded that training in family engagement could benefit families and teachers. They recommended that families set up areas in their homes to invite and support literacy and that teachers could be the support in training parents to accomplish this task. Whether training is specifically for teachers, families, or both, awareness through education can assist programs in implementing family engagement activities.

Family Engagement Programs

Programs that use different aspects of family engagement can effectively ensure consistency in family engagement activities, particularly when combined with quality two-way communication. However, it can be difficult to find what specific interventions work. For example, one study used a combination of an in-school program intervention and an in-home program intervention to ensure school readiness in Head Start students, but with emphasis on empathy and kind communication on behalf of the teachers (Landry, Zucker, Williams, Merz,

Guttentag, & Taylor, 2017). Some, but not substantial, student growth was noted, and recommendations for further study of partnered home and school programs are warranted (Landry, Zucker, Williams, Merz, Guttentag, & Taylor, 2017). A study conducted on family engagement for Head Start families was conducted, and while family engagement did increase, it did not show substantial student academic growth (DeLoatche, Bradley-King, Ogg, Kromrey, & Sundman-Wheat, 2015). Positive family interactions were found in family engagement activities in a Head Start impact study, in which families indicated they enjoyed completing the activities with their students (Gelber & Isen, 2013). A home-based family engagement program found success in increasing literacy skills with kindergarten students when clear, orchestrated direction to parents on delivery of the home instruction (Altinkaynak & Akman, 2016). Jeynes (2019) noted that two statistically significant actions in family engagement across many programs were parent-teacher partnerships and parent-teacher communications. A relationship implies mutual respect and commonality in goals, and quality family-teacher communication can help further develop that relationship (Jeynes, 2019). The key aspects, in turn, support other family engagement for the student, such as learning in the home (Jeynes, 2019).

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 2

The connections between family and school personnel can be a game-changer, positive, or unfortunately, negative. A two-way, communicative relationship between the family and the classroom teacher can help the teacher prepare and provide what is needed for the student to succeed at school and can help the family provide at home what is needed for the student to succeed in academics. In an elementary school setting, the connections made and the communication maintained can make a positive difference in the academic success of a student.

Throughout the literature reviewed, it was necessary to define which actions were considered family engagement precisely and within the study's scope. All research reviewed explained family engagement, although some of these definitions were more precise than others. To provide the basis for this record of study, the clarification of home- and school-based family engagement and the definitions of learning at home and communication in regards to the six types of involvement model were essential (Epstein, 2018). Some studies have found promising evidence that family engagement positively affects student outcomes (Crosby, Rasinski, Padak, & Yildirim, 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). The literature also has noted the potential of teachers building relationships with parents to help increase family engagement (Gartmeier, Gebhardt, & Dotger, 2016; Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Epstein's framework components (Epstein, 2018), combined with building relationships as explored in Hoover-Dempsey and Sanders's model for parental involvement (Walker, Wilkins, Dalliare, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), was a launch point for this record of study. This framework and model process and the reviewed literature provide a base of knowledge to guide work in connecting teachers and families in effective family -teacher communication that can help students achieve success in the school setting.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Outline of the Proposed Solution

This record of study aims to identify teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and explore the relationship between family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conference practices. Identifying practices, content, and frequency that best support family engagement efficacy can promote successful family-teacher conferences and other family-teacher communication that support family engagement, bolstering student academic success. Family engagement practices that unite schools and families in a joint effort to help students move toward student success are part of what is required of a Title I school (United States Department of Education, 2018). This requirement is based on empirical research that identified family engagement practices as key to student success in PK-12 learning (United States Department of Education, 2019). Outlining a cyclical protocol for family-teacher communications with specific attention to the family-teacher conferences can help remove barriers teachers may experience in this area, facilitating this vital part of student learning support.

For this record of study, I focused on my assigned campus in the South Texas Rio Grande Valley area, the South Texas Elementary School. Teachers who were currently teaching in prekindergarten through fifth-grade self-contained classrooms received an invitation to participate in an anonymous survey. The survey sought to gather information about teacher perspectives on family engagement efficacy and teacher perceptions on what encourages families to communicate with the school personnel. Current family-teacher conference practices were also collected via the survey, such as family-teacher conference content and family-teacher

conference frequency. This information underpinned the development of semi-structured interview questions to provide deeper insight regarding teacher perspectives of family engagement through family-teacher conferences, conference frequency, and conference content. The interviews were voluntary, with teachers having the option to participate in interviews after completing the survey.

Generalization was not a goal of this study, as the priority of this study was to address a problem of practice in family engagement efficacy at a specific campus. While the results of this study are not generalizable, the results provided findings to guide a proactive approach for better family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conference practices. Additionally, it provided insight into teacher perspectives regarding family engagement theory as applied in the everyday school setting.

Justification of Proposed Solution

Family engagement is essential to school readiness, student achievement, and other forms of student success (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Ferlazzo, 2011). Student success is not only supported by what occurs within classroom walls during a school day. However, it can also be contingent on a student's connections with the other adults in their life: caregivers, parents, and extended family. Additionally, family engagement sets the stage for student engagement in the classroom and student attendance while supporting teachers' endeavors to facilitate student success (Sheldon & Jung, 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010). When families and teachers are on the same page regarding goals that help students move toward success, both families and teachers can support students to encourage student success (Epstein, 2018).

While family-teacher conferences and communications are essential to the myriad of tasks a teacher performs to ensure student success, little time may be devoted to this practice in teacher preparation programs (Walker & Legg, 2018). This choice in curriculum design is understandable, given the vast content covered for pre-service teachers preparing to enter the teaching profession (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Allen, 2003). Specific, clear, and outlined steps for engaging families are not always readily available to teachers, especially regarding family-teacher conferences or other forms of family-teacher communication (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Minke & Anderson, 2003). Developing a training-to-application protocol that considers teacher perspectives and experiences can help prepare teachers to engage all families authentically in working together toward overall academic success for their students. Developing said protocol with a user-friendly cyclical process for data gathering, implementation, and reflection could ensure communication and partnered support between teachers and families for years to come at the campus.

Study Context and Participants

The study took place during the COVID-19 virus global pandemic period, which was in its third school year of affecting the South Texas Elementary School. The school experienced an abrupt change in family engagement practices when the district shut down all in-person classes and switched to remote learning in March 2020. During the regular school year before this change, the South Texas Elementary School had at least one evening-based family engagement event and at least two daytime-based family engagement events per month. The campus housed an active family center where parents could visit the campus twice a week and volunteer. Additionally, the campus library invited parents to volunteer to assist with library activities and

services throughout the year. After the change, the district closed campuses to visitors. Until August 2022, visits to campus by parents were limited to small gatherings with limited seating. Parent-Teacher Association meetings and all other family engagement meetings or training took place virtually via Zoom videoconferencing. These practices continued through early spring of 2022, as there were still reports of COVID-19 cases in the south Texas community.

During the 2020-2021 school year, the South Texas Elementary School had close to 40% of students attend school in person for most of the year, with in-person learning increasing to just around 50% by the end of the school year (campus internal attendance data, December 2020-May 2021). The campus resumed on-campus classes in October 2021, with parents able to choose from on-campus classes, learning from home with videoconferencing support through learning platforms, or a hybrid of the two options. While teachers and families could still have in-person conferences in part of the building, teachers reported that some of their families were uncomfortable coming into the building for a conference, or they could not contact the families for teleconferences or videoconferences (personal communication, January 2022).

The Texas Education Agency allowed for limited funded at-home learning for the 2021-2022 school year. The district narrowed down who was eligible for virtual learning at districts not explicitly set up for virtual learning. Less than 300 students district-wide enrolled in virtual learning with the district, including students from two families in the South Texas Elementary School zone (personal communication, October 2021). There was a district-wide decrease in enrollment from the prior year. The South Texas Elementary School's enrollment declined from 483 students to 448 students, with students enrolling in a district that offered virtual learning, a local charter district, or choosing to home-school their students (personal communication,

August 2021). While teachers at the South Texas Elementary School continue to be able to host in-person family-teacher conferences in Spring 2022, larger family engagement events to encourage overall family engagement were not allowed through mid-March 2022, and those were limited in seating. More than ever, teachers at the South Texas Elementary School needed concise strategies to engage families in conversations and partnerships to help students reach goals of overall academic success.

In the years prior to the pandemic, the South Texas Elementary School's enrollment hovered near 480 to 500 students for several years. The campus is a designed Title I campus in Texas, with a low socio-economic status (SES) enrollment of between 82 percent and 91 percent each year. The number of families who identify Spanish as a home language is lower than many other district elementary campuses, with about 20% of families indicating they prefer communication in Spanish (personal communication, September 2021). Approximately 18% of students are identified as emergent bilingual students. Forty percent of the campus participates in a two-way Spanish dual-language program track that is offered at the campus. The campus is also a designated International Baccalaureate (IB) World School and provides all its students with the IB Primary Years Programme (IB-PYP).

As this study sought to identify teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conference practices to solve a problem of practice at the campus, the participants for this record of study were the self-contained teachers currently assigned to the South Texas Elementary School. During the 2021-2022 school year, the self-contained prekindergarten-through fifth-grade teachers implemented a student-led, family-teacher conference initiative for each student in their class in addition to their traditional family engagement communications.

Teachers reported that between 40 percent and 90 percent of families from their classrooms participated in these conferences by December 2021 (personal communication, January 2022). In some cases, families attended a student-led conference for one sibling but not a younger or older sibling (personal communication, January 2022).

Participants in this study were limited to self-contained, core-content prekindergarten-through fifth-grade teachers. While there are other teachers on campus, such as teachers of Music, Physical Education, and Spanish, the self-contained, core-content teachers carry the primary responsibility of consistent, systemic contact with their assigned students' families.

As aforementioned, Spanish is an identified home language and is a preferred communication by a fifth of the South Texas Elementary School families. Additionally, many more families are comfortable conversing and communicating in Spanish and English. Thus, it benefits the campus to employ teachers certified to teach in dual language-Spanish classrooms. Seventy-five percent of the potential teacher participants at this campus are Texas-certified, bilingual-Spanish teachers. More than 90% of the campus staff members have shared they are comfortable communicating in Spanish and English (personal communication, June 2021).

Almost all self-contained, core-content classroom teachers have indicated they are comfortable conversing in Spanish. However, some generalist-certified teachers will request a colleague to help translate if they feel it would facilitate communicating more detailed information (personal communication, June 2021). This overall proficiency from teachers in both English and Spanish, in addition to almost all of the teachers being from the Rio Grande Valley area, assists in providing space for relationship development with all families. There are fewer potential

language barriers, and most teachers feel they understand local cultures and customs from their experiences living in the Rio Grande Valley (personal communication, June 2021).

Research Paradigm

Since the record of study focused on one school's teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and their family-teacher conference practices, a mixed-methods triangulation design was referenced to address the research questions. Mixed methods research uses strengths from both quantitative and qualitative methods to help answer research questions by elucidating collected quantitative data through qualitative methods after the quantitative data is collected (Creswell, 2015; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). By focusing on a mixed methods paradigm, a researcher can use "...an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints of qualitative and quantitative characteristics" (Gunasekare, 2015). Mixed methods triangulation design allowed both quantitative and qualitative data to be used to deeply explain the study findings (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Using quantitative data allows for input from more participants but may not tell the whole story of what phenomenon is occurring on campus. Alternatively, using qualitative data alone would provide rich accounts of participant experiences, but will be limited in scope. Gathering both quantitative and qualitative data will provide a deeper, more detailed view of the study phenomenon (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

A mixed-methods triangulation design was justifiable to answer the study questions because the method provides a better picture of what is occurring and why it may be happening by expanding the quantitative outcomes with qualitative data (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham,

1989). In the context of the research questions, the quantitative portion of the survey provided information about participant perspectives of family engagement efficacy, the relationship between those perspectives, and the frequency and content of family-teacher conferences. Quantitative data collection alone would not provide enough information for the campus to develop an effective protocol for family-teacher conferences and communications. There was no dialogue to describe why the participants chose those responses in the survey. Additionally, using a mixed-methods design allowed portions of the survey to contain open-ended responses on family engagement perceptions that could be analyzed qualitatively.

By choosing a mixed-methods approach, greater validity is provided to the study than solely a qualitative method by connecting the quantitative and qualitative data collected sequentially (Bryman, 2006; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). What the participant teachers perceived and experienced is likely much more complex than what a quantitative survey alone would express. While the study is not generalizable due to its size and purpose, using this methodology provides a connection between the quantitative and qualitative data that helped provide the campus with rich, valid data. This data helped develop protocols to support campus family engagement goals and student success.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys

Surveys are used in research to gather study participants' information by collecting answers to questions (Chambliss & Schutt, 2018). For this study, invitations to participate in the study were emailed to the 28 prekindergarten- through fifth-grade core-content teachers at the South Texas Elementary School with a link to a survey. The voluntary, anonymous survey, was

divided into four sections. The first section gathered demographic data for the participating teacher, such as years of experience teaching, years working outside of the teaching field, current teaching certifications, and years of experience working in schools with a higher low-socioeconomic status population. The following section explored teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy on a 5-point Likert scale, with “Never” ranked as one to “Always” ranked as 5. The next section of the survey rates the content and frequency of family-teacher conferences on a 5-point Likert scale. Example items include, "How many conferences do you hold per year for each of your students," and “How many conferences do you have per year for each student that addresses academic concerns?” The following section prompts participants to choose topics they prioritized in family-teacher conferences, which included options for open-ended responses. Finally, the survey concluded with open-ended questions regarding teacher perspectives of family engagement influences. Both the district director for the Family and Community Engagement department and the district director for the Multilanguage department reviewed the survey and provided feedback. Both directors agreed that the survey had merit for the purposes of the record of study (personal communications, April 2022). Additionally, the record of study proposal was submitted to the institution’s Instructional Review Board, and received a determination of not human research. See **Appendix A** for the finalized survey used to collect data for this record of study.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were guided by the outcomes of the quantitative data collected from submitted surveys for this record of study. The qualitative data analysis resulting from selecting semi-structured, open-ended questions allows the moderator space to explore the

answers further (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data derived from the surveys informed finalized question guide for the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were intended to elicit deeper information on participants' perspectives about family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. Examples of questions include "Why do you have the number of family-teacher conferences you do each year," "How do you choose the content for a family-teacher conference," and "How do you encourage families to come in for a family-teacher conference? Participants were also asked about perceived barriers to family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conferences, how they prepare for them, and their priorities and concerns when preparing to conduct a family-teacher conference. See **Appendix B** for the semi-structured interview protocol.

Purposeful sampling was used to select five participants from the PK-5th grade South Texas elementary school teachers who participated in the survey and indicated a willingness to be interviewed. As there was a small pool of participants, it was important to select participants for the interview with a purpose (Suri, 2011). The participants selected were from various grade levels within the school to ensure that teacher voices were represented in the qualitative portion of the record of study. As the researcher, I conducted the interviews with each participant and have worked with the participants for several years. There is merit to interviews with someone with whom the participant feels comfortable or familiar, as this connection can help facilitate free-flowing information, providing rich data collection opportunities (Alshenqeti, 2014). While there is benefit to familiarity, there is also higher potential for bias. Nelsestuen and Smith (2020) encouraged interviewers to reflect on who they are in regards to bias, and how this can affect what an interviewee may, or may not, share as a result. While the conversation during interviews

flowed well, I was cognizant of the fact that I am their supervisor, and some thoughts may have been withheld. Regardless, positive relationships between the interviewer and those interviewed provide comfortable conversation (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Combining a purposeful sample of teachers who know the researcher with the space to explore answers allowed for abundant data collection.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In this mixed-methods study, validity and trustworthiness were developed by relying on this methodology's strength: data provided through different instruments appropriate to either quantitative or qualitative methods, working together to fortify the study as valid. Collecting data using different instruments can further explain findings and confirm them (Zohrabi, 2013). An open-minded, objective inquiry is key to ensuring that all perspectives are fully represented to the extent possible in quantitative data outcomes (Patton, 2014). Triangulation of quantitative data with qualitative data helps provide greater validity to studies by providing mutual support of findings to both study phases (Bryman, 2006). By ensuring the quantitative data is collected and analyzed correctly. The qualitative data is thoroughly documented and analyzed concerning the quantitative data, and the foundation for trustworthiness will be established for this study.

To ensure proper data collection and confidentiality throughout the interview process and subsequent data analysis, videoconferences using Zoom software was used. The data collection available in the software and the ease of use and confidentiality for participants support a quality collection of qualitative data for a study (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). The additional caveat was that while I was the researcher, I am also the supervisor to the participants, and the interview did not have the anonymity the surveys had, as I was interviewing participants

via Zoom, but still face to face. To ensure that the conversations were genuine and participants felt safe in sharing, I prefaced each interview with a clear description of what was about to take place, and how they could opt out at any time, for any reason. I also conducted the interviews from an off campus location while we were on summer break to help delineate the different between work and study participation. During the interviews, participants provided ample anecdotal data, most going over the allotted time while sharing. Furthermore, the record of study proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board to further ensure safeguarding of study participants, and the study received a Not Human Research Determination in November 2021.

Data Analysis Methods

For the quantitative portion of the data collected, the survey's Likert-scale item responses were analyzed. Likert-scale surveys provide an overall view of multiple participants on the same topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The data was analyzed by creating frequency distributions and calculating each question's means. To complete this task, Spearman's rank correlation (Glasser & Winter, 1961) was used to help determine any relationships between family engagement beliefs and the frequency or content of family-teacher conferences. Reviewing these data outcomes informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions that were analyzed qualitatively to provide a more in-depth view of the phenomenon.

The qualitative phase of this study consisted of semi-structured, video-recorded interviews with voluntary participants using questions that were created from the study constructs (see Appendix B for the semi-structured interview protocol). Video conferencing using the Zoom platform is chosen so that participants can choose the location for participation and ensure accurate interview transcription.

Qualitative data can be difficult to analyze without a clear plan, given the sheer amount of dialogue and information that can be received (Patton, 2014). The data collection and analysis must be well-defined to ensure that patterns and themes in the data collected are more easily identified (Patton, 2014). I began a structured inductive coding process to identify common key phrases for this study, identifying words to inform themes based on the constructs of family engagement and teacher perceptions of the value of family-teacher conferences based on frequency, content, and initiators of the conferences. These themes were analyzed using open inductive coding (Given, 2008). Research has shown that family engagement in a student's education is connected to student academic progress (Fan & Williams, 2010; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

The construct of family engagement as a positive indicator that leverages student success guided the semi-structured interviews. During the interview process, construct detail was developed, and more constructs were uncovered during the interview process. The interviews were semi-structured based on the idea of the construct of family engagement as a support for teachers in helping students progress academically, as well as teacher belief in this construct. Open inductive coding allowed for discovering additional constructs related to the frequency, content, and initiators of family-teacher conferences.

Justification of Use of Instruments in Context

The mixed-methods triangulation design helps augment quantitative data collected using qualitative methods (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Quantitative research in its purest form would not lend itself to a study in this environment. The potential participant pool is smaller than traditionally desired for a robust quantitative study (Creswell, 2015). Alternatively, qualitative

methods can draw rich dialogue to illustrate a phenomenon, especially in smaller settings (Creswell, 2015). For this record of study, qualitative on its own would have limited the potential teacher voices and perspectives on the campus, potentially rendering the protocol artifact less valuable to the faculty as a whole. Using a mixed-methods triangulation design to study the problem of practice allowed for all faculty who chose to participate to have their perceptions and experiences included while also enveloping narrative data that helped explain the phenomenon in a more meaningful way. Teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy were clarified by using a mixed-methods triangulation approach. Moreover, this approach will inform the development of a family-teacher conference protocol to help the faculty accomplish goals in family engagement efficacy and overall student success.

Timeline

The created data collection activities timeline helped accommodate busy teacher schedules, as teachers had more professional development and planning sessions than in previous years due to efforts to close the achievement gap brought on by the pandemic as shown in Table 1. The survey was emailed to potential teacher participants in late May 2022, with a two-week response time given to complete the survey. This survey timeline was in keeping with other survey timelines the teacher participants are accustomed to completing for the district and the campus. Data collection continued after survey data collection and analysis in July 2022. The semi-structured interview phase took place over a week, and the data analysis for those interviews was conducted in the summer weeks after.

Table 1

Data Collection Activities

-
- Activity 1- Electronic distribution of teacher participant surveys
 - Activity 2- Collection and analysis of teacher participant surveys
 - Activity 3- Development of semi-guided teacher interview questions
 - Activity 4 – Interviews of voluntary teacher participants on Zoom
 - Activity 5 – Interview Transcript Analysis
-

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 3

A mixed-methods triangulation design provided an insightful view into teacher perspectives on family engagement efficacy and the current frequency and content of family-teacher conferences and other communications. By using a survey to obtain data to address the problem of practice followed by a semi-structured interview to explore the perspectives and experiences of participants at a deeper level, I collected data that shed light on teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. This data will help inform the development of a family-teacher conference protocol with the South Texas Elementary School faculty.

This data collected from participants is directly impacts problem of practice. Using different instruments to collect data to answer the study questions through the mixed-methods methodology adds validity and richness to the study. All proposed collection and analysis areas were chosen because of their established acceptance in research practices, which will benefit the students, families, and faculty of the South Texas Elementary School.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis Approach

The mixed-methods study was conducted to explore teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy through the family-teacher conferences. The questions addressed by this study were:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the content of family-teacher conferences?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of family-teacher conferences?

In the first phase of this study, the overall perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency and content of family-teacher conferences concerning teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy were analyzed and explored using quantitative data from a survey. Since the sample size was small due to the focus of this research study on teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences at one elementary school, descriptive statistics were used as a guide for the subsequent qualitative phase of the study. The study's second phase involved open-ended survey question analysis and conducting interviews with teachers to collect in-depth teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy in family-teacher conferences.

When all of the original survey items were reviewed, three sections of the survey were removed: the questions that referenced who initiated contact for the family-teacher conference,

the quantitative section that asked respondents to identify priority topics, and two questions regarding family non-attendance at family-teacher conferences. The initial contact questions were determined to be irrelevant to the research study questions. The section regarding priority topics was repetitive information compared to the conference content section. The two questions regarding family non-attendance at conferences were removed, as these questions were not directly related to teacher perspectives of family engagement, frequency of family-teacher conferences, or content of family-teacher conferences.

Presentation of the Data

The presentation of the data in this study is organized into four sections. First, a descriptive presentation of the participants collected from the survey and interviews is presented. Next, the findings for the three research questions appear in three associated sections.

Participants' Demographics

The survey was sent to 28 teachers at South Texas Elementary School. Twenty-five teachers submitted surveys, but three were only 10% complete and removed from the sample. The survey completion rate was high at 79%.

The sample of teachers held a variety of years of teaching experience: 23% have between one and three years of experience, 18% have between four and six years of experience, 27% have between seven and 10 years of experience, 14% have between 11 and 15 years of experience, and 18% have over 16 years of experience. Teachers responding to the survey represented homeroom teachers of all grade levels at South Texas Elementary. A total of 24% of the teachers taught prekindergarten, 10% taught kindergarten, 5% taught first grade, 10% taught second grade, 19% taught third grade, 19% taught fourth grade, and 14% taught fifth grade. One

respondent did not provide the grade level taught. Certifications held by respondents were EC-6 Generalist or equivalent (32%), EC-6 Bilingual Generalist or equivalent (59%), or EC-6 Generalist with EC-12 Special Education or equivalent (9%), as shown in Table 2. All survey participants indicated they had taught in schools with higher than 50% of the population of students identified as having a low socioeconomic status for the same amount of years they had been teaching. However, 72% indicated they had previously worked in a field outside of teaching. Just six participants responded that they had no work experience outside of education.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Demographic Information	<i>n</i>	%
Years of Experience		
0 to 5	5	23.0
4 to 6	4	18.0
7 to 10	6	27.0
11 to 15	3	14.0
16 or more	4	18.0
Grade Level Taught		
Pre-Kindergarten 3-4	5	24.0
Kindergarten	2	10.0
First Grade	1	5.0
Second Grade	2	10.0
Third Grade	4	19.0
Fourth Grade	4	19.0
Fifth Grade	3	14.0
Certification Held		
EC-6 Generalist	7	31.8
EC-6 bilingual Generalist	13	59.1
EC-6 generalist with EC-12 special education	22	9.1
Years Taught in Low-SES Schools		
0 to 5	5	23.0
4 to 6	4	18.0
7 to 10	6	27.0
11 to 15	3	14.0
16 or more	4	18.0
Years of work experience outside of education		
0 to 5	6	27.3
4 to 6	5	27.7
7 to 10	8	36.4
11 to 15	2	9.1
16 or more	1	4.6

Research Question 1: Perceptions of Family Engagement Efficacy in Conferences

This section addresses the research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of family engagement efficacy?” First, the survey results for perceptions of family engagement efficacy are described. Next, the thematic findings from the qualitative data are presented.

Modified Teacher Questionnaire

In order to gauge teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy, a modified version of a Teacher Questionnaire (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992) as referenced in Morris et al.’s (1995) report on parent efficacy, teacher efficacy, and parental involvement was adapted. Responses were provided on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Seventeen questionnaire items were originally adapted, and two were removed. The two removed items referenced teacher self-efficacy rather than directly referencing teachers’ perceptions of family engagement efficacy. The scores of the 15 items included in this study were summed to generate total scores ranging from 15 to 75. Participants with higher scores had higher views of family engagement efficacy than those with lower scores. The average total score for the modified teacher questionnaire was 51.6, with a standard deviation of .97. Participants’ scores ranged from 43 to 62. The Cronbach's alpha for the modified Teacher Questionnaire was .54, suggesting the instrument lacked reliability in this sample, potentially due to the sample size in this record of study. The modified Teacher Questionnaire specific item means and standard deviations are listed in Table 3 (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Modified Teacher Questionnaire (Modified from Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie, 1992)

<i>Item</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Families want to help their children learn.	3.82	.65
Families make a difference in the academic and behavioral progress of their children.	4.59	.72
My students' families know how to help their children make academic progress.	3.14	1.01
My students' families know how to help their children make academic progress, but do not do so.	3.68	.65
In our school community, teachers can share ideas with families, but cannot influence families to use these ideas.	2.59	1.01
Families want more information than they receive about their child's academic progress.	3.82	.73
Families help students with their homework.	2.82	.78
Families can help their child learn when their child does not seem motivated to do so.	3.68	.82
A student's academic performance depends on the home environment; I have limited influence.	3.18	1.10
Families want to help their child learn, but do not always take steps to do so.	3.82	.73
Families make a significant educational difference in the lives of their children.	4.41	.58
As a teacher, I have a great influence on families to support a child's positive academic and behavioral outcomes.	3.45	.94
Families want to communicate with me regarding their child's progress.	3.64	.71
Most families support the things I do for their child as a teacher.	3.86	.62
A child's motivation starts at home. I have little influence as a teacher on a child's motivation to learn.	3.68	.65

Overall, participants indicated that they perceive families make a difference in family engagement. "Families make a difference in the academic and behavioral progress of their children," had a mean score of 4.59 (SD = 0.72), with 70% of respondents indicating they strongly agree with that statement. Additionally, almost all participants perceived that families made a significant difference. The item "Families make a significant difference in the educational lives of their children" had a mean of 4.41 (SD=.58), with 95% of respondents indicating they agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. The frequencies of these items are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequencies of Selected Modified Teacher Questionnaire Items (Modified from Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie, 1992)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
Families make a difference in the academic and behavioral progress of their children.	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	27.3%	68.2%
My students' families know how to help their children make academic progress, but do not do so.	0.0%	31.8%	31.8%	36.4%	0.0%
Families help students with their homework.	0.0%	40.9%	36.4%	22.7%	0.0%
Families want to help their child learn, but do not always take steps to do so.	9.1%	72.7%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%
Families make a significant educational difference in the lives of their children.	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	50.0%	45.5%
Families want to help their children learn.	0.0%	4.5%	18.2%	68.2%	9.1%

Survey participant data also indicated that families do want to help their student, but do not always help. The item "Families want to help their child learn, but do not always take steps to do so" had a mean of 3.82 (SD=.72), with 91% of participants indicating they agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Participants also leaned toward disagreement with the item "Families help students with their homework," which had a mean of 2.82 (SD=.78), and 41% of participants disagreeing and 34% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with that statement. Even though participants perceived not all families were engaged, they did not equate that perception with families not wanting to help their children learn. The item "Families want to help their children learn" had a mean of 3.82 (SD=.68), with 77% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. The frequencies of these items are listed in Table 4.

Overall, the quantitative data reveals patterns that suggest teachers have a high-view perception of family engagement and the ability of families to influence positive academic and behavioral outcomes in students. The data shows a pattern in participant beliefs that families want to help their students, and that families can make a significant difference in the life of students. There are also patterns that suggest that participants perceive that while families want to help, they do not always do so. The lowest-rated items in the survey suggested that participants felt that families did not help as much with homework, and participants felt they were not influencing families as much as they would like when sharing ideas with them. Thus, the data seems to indicate teachers perceive that while families want to help their students through family engagement, something is keeping them from engaging. Next, I present the qualitative data that support and add nuance to these patterns.

Teacher Perceptions of Family Engagement Efficacy Themes

The qualitative data overall suggests that teachers perceived family efficacy as playing a significant role in family engagement efficacy and that teachers might not influence family engagement efficacy greatly. Teachers discussed their students' families as wanting to be engaged but not always able to do so because of work and other conflicts. Additionally, the teachers discussed the barriers and avenues to family engagement and the different strategies they used to capitalize on growing family engagement in family-teacher conferences and communication.

The survey presented three open-ended responses to participants based on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) life context variables of the parent involvement model to gather additional, in-depth information about family engagement perceptions. Of the 22 submitted surveys, 14 participants responded to the open-ended items. These responses were used partly to develop the semi-structured interview guide as modified from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 1995) and the Epstein (2018) parent involvement models.

Of the 22 respondents to the study survey, eight indicated a willingness to participate in an interview to discuss their perceptions of family engagement and family-teacher conferences. A purposeful sample of five teachers, representing 23% of the surveyed participants and five different grade levels, were selected from those willing to be interviewed. Each of the five participants were selected to represent both upper and lower grades to gain a deeper perspective on the overall survey findings. Pseudonyms were assigned to the interview participants to protect their identities. The characteristics of the participants' educational experiences are shown in Table 5.

Two overarching themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the five teachers. The first overarching theme was *low engagement due to life circumstances*, and the theme is described by three subthemes. The second overarching theme was *higher engagement happens with education and building relationships*, and is further described by two subthemes.

Table 5

Characteristics of the Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Certification	Years of Teaching Experience
Brenda	EC-6 Bilingual Generalist, or EC-6 Generalist, or equivalent	11–16+
Julia	EC-6 Bilingual Generalist, or EC-6 Generalist, or equivalent	1-10
Angela	EC-6 Bilingual Generalist, or EC-6 Generalist, or equivalent	11-16+
Elisa	EC-6 Bilingual Generalist, or EC-6 Generalist, or equivalent	11-16+
Teresa	EC-6 Bilingual Generalist, or EC-6 Generalist, or equivalent	1-10

Low Engagement due to Life Circumstances. Overall, the participants perceived that most parents seemed to want to engage in family-teacher conferences but struggled to do so due to life circumstances. The most referenced reasons by the five interview participants for lower family engagement were work schedules, family care, and family culture. Each of these subthemes is described in the following paragraphs.

Work Schedules. All five interview participants noted that family work schedules were the most common reason for lower family-teacher conference engagement. All interview participants shared concerns about the long hours their students’ families worked and their perceptions that working long hours impede engagement in family-teacher conferences. Angela said, “many of the families have two jobs, and they are working or asleep, and they are too tired

to come to a conference.” Teresa lamented that “many of my families work shift work, the grandparents take care of the kids, and Brenda described having “a mom cancel on me three times because she kept sleeping through the conference time when she got off work.”

From the open-ended responses in the survey, 12 participants responded that a family member’s perceived time and energy had an effect on family engagement. Survey respondents wrote: (a) “My parents work two jobs and can’t come to conferences.” (b) “The only time parents can talk is late at night because they work.” (c) “A lot of my parents work a lot so they sleep during the day and are tired. It can be hard to contact them. They deal with a lot, so it’s not always what is first to them.” (d) “Parents sometimes work a couple of jobs, or overnight. They are tired and don’t come to meetings.” One respondent described the effect in one word: (e) “major.”

Family Care. Caring for immediate and extended family members was cited as a common reason for families not engaging in family-teacher conferences. Four interview participants reported that caring for aging relatives, other family members’ children or their young children hindered family-teachers conference participation. Teresa described the effort she made to hold conferences:

I’ve tried to have these conferences on Zoom when the parent can’t make it in person. It still does not work. There are too many people in the house. The children are crying. A provider is asking questions to help the grandma. The parent is stressed and not really paying attention. I feel really bad for her.

Family care was also cited by all participants regarding the number of children in the family. Angela reported that “one of my parents has a lot of kids. I’m not even sure how many.

There are three that go here. Can you imagine having to talk to all those teachers?" Julia said, "I have a parent, and some of my colleagues, we try to do conferences on the same day because she has several children in our school." Elisa noted "it's the grandparents who [were] helping because the parent is in jail, I think. They are having a hard time." In the survey, one participant reported that (a) "some parents have multiple children, some that suffer health problems. This limits their availability." Another open-ended survey item response provided details:

(b) If the family is occupied most of the day, time and energy will be very limited. There are families that may be eager for engagement, but by the time they are available, the activity may be over or would interfere with prior daily routine.

Family Culture. All five interview participants discussed family culture as a perceived barrier to family engagement in family-teacher conferences. Some family culture perceptions were in reference to a different generation. Elisa observed that "the parent culture is different now; it's harder to get them to come in." Julia said, "Some cultures have a lot of respect for the teacher. They don't want to ask questions." Teresa lamented, "I think sometimes families do not come in because they are undocumented." Brenda shared a personal experience related to family culture affecting family-teacher conferences: "My parents were the same, that was my experience, too, when I was in school. They cared about my education, but they did not want to come to the school. They were undocumented, and they were afraid."

Fifteen responses from the open-ended survey echoed that family culture was an influence on family engagement, calling it a (a) "significant," and (b) "major," influence on family engagement. One respondent shared that (c) "Some cultures do not want to feel like they are arguing with the teacher so they stay quiet and don't get too involved or they just don't say

when they don't understand what is going on.” Other respondents shared how families may not engage in campus activities as a result of culture: (d) “A student's family culture can impact whether a student can be involved in school activities or not. If a student's family culture has different views on what is acceptable to them, then they may be excluded from certain activities,” and that family culture (e) “...has a great influence because children will do or behave how they have been taught at home. If parents don't give importance to their child doing their homework, then the child learns that it might not be important.”

Higher Engagement with Education and Building Relationships. Participants reported overall that families that were more inclined to engage through family-teacher conferences were professionals or grew up with families who were professionals and had knowledge or experience with family-teacher conferences. Additionally, participants perceived that the addition of student-led family-teacher conferences increased engagement and communication practices from all families who participated, regardless of life circumstances.

Higher engagement happens with educated professionals. Overall, all five interview participants noted that educated professionals, or families raised around educated professionals, were more likely to respond to family-teacher conference invitations. Julia said that “teachers always come to the conferences.” Brenda agreed that “anyone who has a professional career has come to the conferences, or they call to reschedule.” Elisa added, “The parents that are from a more professional culture, or whose parents were professionals, come to conferences more and seem more confident about helping their child.” Finally, Angela responded that “it’s how they are raised. If their mom or dad was a teacher or another type of professional, they go to their kids’ conferences.” Six participants who provided open-item responses on the survey also noted

this, and two wrote: (a) “Parents that are better educated can assist in that engagement;” (b) “The influence the parent’s knowledge and skills has on family engagement is strong. If the parent feels ashamed or embarrassed due to their lack of education, then they will pass this on to their children.”

Student-led family-teacher conferences build relationships. A theme that emerged during all five participant interviews was the perceived benefits of student-led family-teacher conferences in building relationships with the family, which teachers perceived as increasing family engagement in some instances. Student-led family-teacher conferences began in December 2021 and continued through March 2022 at the South Texas Elementary School as a new part of the school curriculum. In this type of conference, Elisa said, “the student is leading the meeting, talking about what they are good at, and what they are working on. The parents listen.” Teresa observed that the parents and students “really were excited to be at the conferences.” Brenda noted that “the students enjoyed showing their parents and the parents were so proud and sometimes surprised, but proud.”

Participants also shared that they perceived the families were more responsive to invitations to come to the school and communicate with teachers after experiencing student-led conferences. Angela said parents “respond quicker to my texts now, and ask me about complaints they have instead of going to the office.” Brenda observed that parents were “sharing about things they would do at home that their child learned at school.” Julia noted that this connection seemed to go beyond academics when compared to previous experiences with family engagement. She shared had families checking in on her personally as well as checking on their children: “They were checking in on me, which I thought was very thoughtful of them, just

checking in how are they doing, how was my weekend, and little things like that [made] a big difference.”

Overall, the qualitative data suggests that teachers have a high-view perception of family engagement efficacy: teachers believe that families want to support their students, and want to help. The data also suggests that teachers perceive influences considered out of a family’s control impede family engagement efficacy. A family-perceived lack of time or energy from family care and work schedules keeps families from engaging in family-teacher conferences. Data also suggests that family culture plays a role in impeding family engagement efficacy, such as not wanting to participate in events on campus for various reasons, or not wanting to contradict what a teacher says out of respect. The data also showed perceived family efficacy in unique circumstances. Interview participants noted that there was higher family engagement efficacy with families who seem to have knowledge about the family-teacher conference process because they were themselves professionals or had been around family who were in professional careers. A fascinating subtheme that emerged was the perceived high family-engagement efficacy when families engaged in student-led teacher conferences: participants interviewed perceived that building relationships with the families through the student grew family engagement efficacy and developed more connections with families.

Research Question 2: Content of Conferences

This section addresses the research question: “What is the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the content of family-teacher conferences?” First, the quantitative data collected are described. Then, the thematic findings for the qualitative data are presented.

Family-Teacher Conference Scale

To determine the content of family-teacher conferences held by teachers for this study, a Family-Teacher Conference Scale (FTCS) was created based on Thompson and Mayer's (2012) research in regard to parent-teacher communications for academic achievement, and Becker and Epstein's (1982) research in regard to teacher parental involvement practices. The information obtained for this eight-item scale focused on the number of family-teacher conferences participants had with each student's family per year, as well as the content of the family-teacher conferences. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .85, suggesting good reliability of measurement between the items.

Respondents provided information on how many conferences they held per year that included the following topics: academic progress, behavior concerns, attendance concerns, social interaction concerns, student-to-student or student-to-teacher interaction concerns, and interest in extracurricular activities or enrichment. The responses were in Likert-scale category form, with one indicating the topic was never included in family-teacher conferences and five indicating the topic was included in seven or more conferences. More than half of survey participants (54.55%) indicated they held three to four conferences in which they discuss a student's academic progress with families. This is 18.19 percent higher than the two next highest topics discussed at three to four conferences: general social interactions concerns (36.36%) and student-to-student or teacher-to-student social interaction concerns (36.26%). All survey participants indicated that they hold at least one or more conferences in which they discussed student academic success or academic concerns with families. The data also indicated that 36.6% of participants held no conferences in which they discussed an interest in extracurricular activities or more challenging

material for students. The item-specific percentages of the modified family-teacher conference content are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentage of Topics Discussed at Conferences

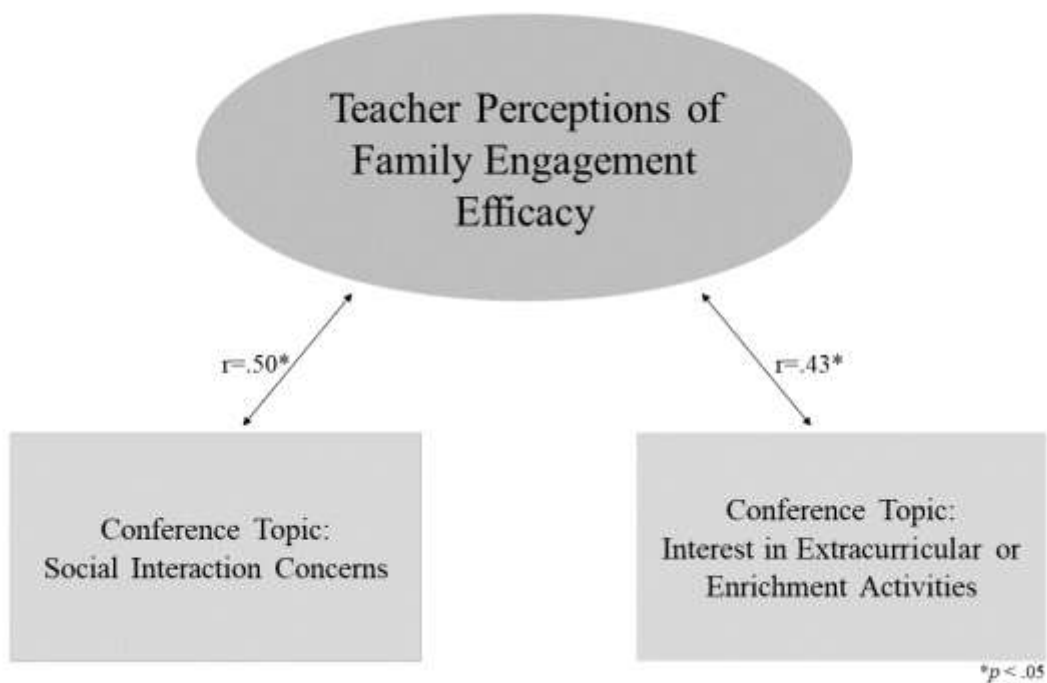
Item	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address behavior concerns?	4.55%	45.45%	31.82%	9.09%	9.09%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address attendance concerns?	27.27%	45.45%	18.18%	9.09%	0%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address general social interaction concerns?	18.18%	45.45%	36.36%	0%	0%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address academic success?	0%	40.91%	31.82%	13.64%	31.64%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address academic concerns?	0%	36.36%	54.55%	0%	9.09%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction concerns?	13.64%	40.91%	36.36%	0%	9.09%
How many conferences do you have with your student's families that address experiencing an interest in extracurricular activities, or more challenging academic material (enrichment activities)?	36.36%	50%	9.09%	14.55%	0%

Relationships between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and conference content. Correlational analysis using Spearman's rho was conducted to determine the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the content of family-teacher conferences. No significant correlations were found between respondents' overall perceptions of family engagement and the overall content of conferences. To examine the relationship between specific conference content and teacher perceptions of overall family

engagement efficacy, a correlational analysis using Spearman's rho was conducted on each topic item. A statistically significant positive correlation was identified between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the family-teacher conference topic of extracurricular activities or more challenging material for a student ($r = .43, p < .05$). A significant positive correlation was also found to exist between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the topic of general social interactions. ($r = .50, p < .05$). Figure 4 depicts the correlations.

Figure 4

Family Engagement Efficacy Perception and Topics Correlations



Overall, the quantitative data suggests that teachers prioritize the topic of academic concerns, regardless of their perceptions of family engagement efficacy. Additionally, the data suggests that teachers with a higher-view perception of family engagement efficacy talk more with families about extracurricular or enrichment opportunities than those who have a lower-

view perception of family engagement efficacy. The data also suggests that general social interaction concerns are higher on the discussion list for teachers if the teacher has a higher-view perception of family engagement efficacy. Next, I present the qualitative data to describe the quantitative findings.

Family-Teacher Conference Content Themes

Overall, two subthemes emerged from family conference content. Academic progress for students on track and not on track for academic success was frequent among both open-ended response questions and participant interviews. Positive social participation was also noted in both the open-ended response questions and participant interviews.

Academic Progress is Paramount. All five interview participants indicated that academic progress is high on their list regarding family-teacher conferences. When asked about conference content, this consistently was the first topic brought up by interview participants. The teachers discussed preparing data and strategies to ensure the family member understood how their student was performing and how families could help their student. Brenda said, "I like to make sure that the data is there and that parents understand it." Julia talked about the importance of sharing the positive growth of a student along with any academic concerns so that "...the parent is proud..." and they will "...want to help...". Teresa said she likes to emphasize the importance of homework, "...they need to practice." Angela indicated that it is important for a family member to understand how their student is performing to support them: "...it's important that they know what all of this means. If they know they can help, they will help."

Eight respondents indicated that academic concerns were a top priority in their family-teacher conferences, whether a student was meeting expectations in the classroom or not. Two

respondents indicated they would (a) "request an academic contract" or (b) "create an academic contract" in regard to academic concerns.

Positive Social Interactions are Essential. Three interview participants indicated that a priority topic is positive social interactions, such as making friends and participating in activities. "Every time I meet with parents, I tell them about all the things they can do, especially in the summer, but all year, too," Angela said. "It's not good for them to just be home. They need to interact, learn new things, be around others." Brenda talked about how she praises shy students with their parents when they are helping others: "I like to tell parents how their child is being caring with others. Their face just lights up, hearing how their child is growing." Open-ended survey responses also indicated a focus on social interactions, such as including (a) "opportunities for extracurricular involvement and (b) "student engagement opportunities on campus."

The qualitative data collected suggests that academic progress is important to discuss in family-teacher conferences. The goal of this topic seemed to lead toward focusing on providing learning for the family member to ensure they felt confident in helping their student. Additionally, social interactions seem to be of importance to discuss. Sharing with families about how their students are engaging with others and opportunities to be involved seem to be common topics for family-teacher conferences.

Research Question 3: Family-Teacher Conference Frequency

The research question "What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of family-teacher conferences?" is addressed in this section. First, the quantitative family-teacher conference frequency data is presented. Then, the

quantitative data comparing the frequency of the conferences to teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy is presented. Finally, thematic findings for the qualitative data are presented.

Family-Teacher Conference Frequency Item

To determine the how many conferences a teacher has per year, per student, the conference frequency item from the aforementioned FTCS was referenced. The responses to this item were grouped into ranked categories. The categories are as follows: 1 as the minimum value, representing teachers holding zero conferences per year per student; 2 representing teachers holding one to two conferences per year per student; 3 representing teachers holding three to four conferences per year per student; 4 representing teachers holding five to six conferences per year per student; and the maximum value of 5 representing teachers holding seven or more conferences per year per student. The mean value for the ranked categories was 2.86 with a standard deviation of 1.10. This mean suggested most teachers held between one and four conferences per year per student.

In terms of frequencies for the number of teacher-family conferences held per year, 50% of the respondents held one to two conferences per student per year, 31.8% of respondents held three to four conferences per year, and 18.2% of respondents held seven or more conferences per year. No respondents reported holding zero conferences, and none responded that they held five to six conferences per student per year, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7

Percentages of Conferences Held by Teachers for Each Student

Number of conferences	<i>n</i>	%
0	0	0.0
1 to 2	11	50.0
3 to 4	7	31.8
5 to 6	0	0.0
7+	4	18.2

Relationships between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and conference frequency. To determine the relationship between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of conferences, a bivariate correlation analysis with the Spearman’s rho ranked correlation coefficient was conducted using the participants’ total family engagement efficacy scores and the total conferences held, a ranked categories item on the FTCS. A statistically significant correlation did not occur between teachers' overall perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of conferences ($\rho = .023, p = .919$). The null hypothesis was retained. Next, qualitative data is presented to gain insight into the frequency of family-teacher conferences.

Family-Teacher Conference Frequency Themes

Qualitative data revealed two subthemes for family content frequency. The themes identified are teacher compliance and student need.

Compliance. Interestingly, the qualitative data showed that teachers comply with the requirements for holding the minimum number of family-teacher conferences as directed by

campus policy and explained why they decided to hold around two family-teacher conferences per year. All interview participants cited that they attempt to complete the number of family-teacher conferences they conduct each year for all students because it is the required amount. Angela, Teresa, Elisa, Brenda, and Julia all reported that they conducted about two conferences per year. Teresa, Brenda, and Julia added that having two conferences per year per student can be "really hard to get in" (Teresa). Julia added, "This was my first year to get 100% of the required [2] conferences. I was very happy."

Family Member Concerns. Second, the qualitative data showed that teachers have more conferences when there is a family perceived student need. All interview participants shared that they conducted more conferences when the family has shared about a student's need, such as when "parents ask me about things for their child to do when we are talking. I try to bring it up, get them in," said Angela. Teresa had "...more conferences when [students] are really having a hard time with schoolwork because I want the parents to help them practice." Brenda noted that "sometimes the parents have concerns about their child having friends or getting along with others and want to talk about it." Elisa concurred that "any additional conferences are basically for issues that arise, maybe with behavior or grades going down." Julia added that parent concerns about a student in need increased family-teacher conferences, such as in potential bullying, "...one or two... mentioned bullying, and so we had conferences in which the child is being bullied, so we talked about that and addressed it."

The qualitative data shed some light on why teachers hold the number of conferences they hold. All participants shared that they attempted to complete the required conferences for each student. The data indicated that teachers hold more conferences when there is a specific

need or request. Additionally, no themes emerged in the qualitative data that indicated a higher-view or a lower-view of family engagement efficacy concerning family-teacher conference frequency.

Results of Research

This section provides the overall results of the research, organized into three sections by research question. In each section, the quantitative results are reviewed, as well as the qualitative findings that elucidate the quantitative results.

Research Question One

The quantitative data and qualitative data collected and analyzed in this study suggest that that suggest teachers have a high-view perception of family engagement and the ability and desire of families to influence positive academic and behavioral outcomes in students. The data also showed that life events could impede family engagement efficacy. Additionally, family culture was perceived to limit family-teacher conference communication or attendance. Higher family engagement efficacy for families who worked in professional settings was noted in the data.

Additionally, the qualitative data revealed that family engagement efficacy was higher when relationships were built with families through student-led family-teacher conferences. These factors implicate a need for the South Texas Elementary School to consider the aspects of family-teacher conferences that involve the student and build relationships, leveraging the high-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy held by the teachers as indicated in the data. Building relationships could open the door for communication with families regarding the

perceived barriers to family engagement efficacy to seek solutions that support the families and their students.

Research Question Two

The quantitative data collected and analyzed shows that there is a significant positive correlation between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the conference topic of extracurricular or enrichment activities in family-teacher conferences. Data also indicates that there is a moderate positive correlation between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the conference topic of general social interaction concerns. The qualitative data supports this finding, as the data showed that teachers shared social interactions in organizations and with other students, a topic they prioritize in family-teacher conferences. Additionally, teachers placed a high priority on academic progress as a topic in family-teacher conferences. These factors implicate that those who have a higher-view perception of family engagement efficacy see benefits in sharing about social connection with families. This information could be used to leverage building relationships with families in family-teacher conferences.

Research Question Three

The quantitative data found no relationship between teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of family-teacher conferences. Qualitative data collected and analyzed revealed that teachers prioritize compliance with campus requirements and individual student need for the number of conferences they hold for each student each year. No qualitative themes indicated that teacher perceptions of family efficacy influenced the number of family-teacher conferences held. These findings implicate the importance of the South Texas Elementary School in carefully developing campus requirements through appropriate channels

that support family engagement efficacy practices, including frequency of family-teacher conferences that meet the needs of both teachers and families.

Interaction between the Research and the Context

The school district was supportive of the study process, adjusting timelines to accommodate the pandemic and other factors that were taking place. The study will be a support to the South Texas Elementary School as well as the district Family and Community Engagement (FACE) department. This department assists all schools in the district with family engagement, including the South Texas Elementary School. The findings of this study elucidate current teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy in regards to family-teacher conferences and conference practices. As such, this study will provide important input when developing family-teacher conference protocols and related professional development to support family engagement efficacy through conferences.

No operational issues that arose during the study. Study participants were positive about participating in the process, and discussed it frequently, asking questions about the study will help our school. The participants were busy, but expressed overall that they were happy to help provide feedback via survey, and several were willing to spend time during the summer break in an interview session. The interviews were relaxed and had an easy-going feel, participants shared freely during the interview sessions.

Plans are in place for the campus' lead instructional team to review the findings of the study. Additionally, the findings of the study will be shared with the district FACE department as a resource for the district community. The importance of identifying teacher perceptions of

family efficacy and family-teacher conferences will help inform the important family engagement work for the school and the district.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy are high, and there are perceived barriers to family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. In addition, there are indicators of high family engagement efficacy, such as knowledge of family-teacher conferences and building relationships through student-led, family-teacher conferences. Results also suggest that teachers with high-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy tend to share more about social interactions, extracurricular activities, or enrichment activities in family-teacher conferences. Perceptions of family engagement efficacy are not indicated to influence the frequency of conferences, but requirements and student need do. Implications for this study will inform the family-teacher conference practices at the South Texas Elementary School to better support family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conferences.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Family engagement practices encourage teachers to strive to facilitate a two-way, or multi-way conversation with all stakeholders, using all insights to further student success (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Engaging families in authentic, two-way communication through family-teacher conferences ultimately benefits students (Ferlazzo, 2011). Teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy are essential, as teachers are responsible for connecting with families and organizing family-teacher conferences. This mixed-methods study sought to identify teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy. Additionally, the study explored the relationship between family engagement efficacy perceptions and family-teacher conference practices.

Three questions were developed to guide this study. The first research question was: What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy? This study suggests that overall teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy are higher-view: teachers believe that families play a large part in students' success and that families want to help their students succeed. While teachers perceived that families wanted to help their students and engage, they shared that sometimes they do not. Teachers perceived barriers to family engagement efficacy that primarily relate to perceived uncontrollable circumstances: overall, life gets in the way of family engagement. Work schedules and caring for other family members were seen as barriers to family engagement efficacy. In addition to life circumstances, family culture was seen as a barrier in some circumstances. Teachers perceive that some families do not engage because they

are uncomfortable with perceived confrontation or academic content they may not understand. In addition, there are indicators of high family engagement efficacy. Teachers perceived that families who work in professional settings or have parents who work in professional settings were likelier to be engaged in family-teacher conferences. Interestingly, the high perception of student-led family-teacher conferences emerged as a factor, with teachers citing that they experienced high relationship-building with families due to these school-required conferences.

The second research question was, "What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the content of family-teacher conferences?" Findings suggest that teachers with high-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy tend to discuss more content related to social interactions and interests in extracurricular or enrichment activities in family-teacher conferences. Factors such as academic success and social interactions were also identified as priority content for family-teacher conferences.

The third research question was, "What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and the frequency of family-teacher conferences?" Perceptions of family engagement efficacy were not related to the frequency of family-teacher conferences. Qualitative data collected helped explain this, as teachers indicated the factors of school-based requirements and student needs to guide a teacher to decide how many family-teacher conferences should be held for a student.

The findings suggest that teachers perceive families want to be engaged, but some barriers sometimes impede that engagement. Teachers noted that families who know family-teacher conference procedures, such as those who work in a professional setting, were more likely to engage in those conferences, possibly indicating a perception that families who did not

know conference procedures, or did not work in a professional setting, were less likely to engage in conferences. The relationship-building potential of student-led family teacher conferences was also a perception held by teachers. Through student-led family-teacher conferences, teachers perceived families were more comfortable communicating with them and were more engaged after a student-led conference. Additionally, teachers with higher-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy seemed to include more content outside of academics in their family-teacher conferences, such as social interactions, extracurricular activity opportunities, or enrichment activities. The findings also indicated that teachers do what is required regarding the frequency of family-teacher conferences, with additional conferences included when there is a clear student need.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature

The findings in this study connect to and extend the literature that has been previously reviewed concerning family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. Overall, teachers had a high-view perception of family engagement efficacy, as evidenced in the quantitative data survey and supported by the qualitative data of open-ended survey responses and the interviews. This view is aligned with the findings identified in Epstein and Dauber's (1991) study on teacher and parent perceptions of parent involvement, in which teachers' feelings were found to be positive. This is also supported in the literature by Cheatham and Jimenez Silva (2012), who found that teachers had overall positive attitudes toward family engagement with "good intentions" about family-teacher conferences.

This study identified that while teachers have a favorable view of family engagement efficacy, there are perceived barriers to engagement. Teachers identified that while families want

to help their students, they do not always do so. Both survey and interview data showed this: teachers feel that family engagement works and is excellent for helping a student arrive at success, but some circumstances prevent families from fully participating in their student's academic experiences. Teachers interviewed expressed deep concern and frustration when sharing their attempts to engage families and their perceptions of what was happening when they were not engaging. Barriers to family engagement exist and were identified in the research conducted by Walker, Wilkins, Dellaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005), who identified that barriers, whether concrete or perceived, can inhibit involvement and affect family engagement efficacy. Epstein and Sanders (2006) noted lower family engagement by families of lower-income families.

Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) noted that there was less involvement from lower-income families and that teachers, while optimistic about their efficacy overall, felt less effective when teaching in predominately lower-income enrollment schools. Given that the South Texas Elementary School is predominately comprised of lower-income student enrollment, this study fortifies the literature on this aspect.

The literature also underpins lower family engagement efficacy due to life circumstances. The perceived reasons for lower family engagement efficacy cited by teachers are connected to a subsection of the first level of the model for parental involvement, life contexts (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Teachers shared their experiences of how their students' families struggled with work schedules and family care, impeding their family engagement efficacy in family-teacher conferences. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identified perceived time and energy as contributing life context factors to family engagement efficacy. Family culture was

also recognized as an influence on whether a family engaged through family-teacher conferences, with teachers perceiving that some families do not want to contradict the teacher or have other concerns about speaking out in the family-teacher conference setting. Family culture is also an identified life context element in the model for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013) found that when families appeared to struggle with the English language, teachers took a more directive role in family-teacher conferences than when teachers did not perceive a struggle with English.

Interestingly, in this study, teachers seemed to connect knowledge and skills with socio-economic status. Responses in both the open-ended questions on the survey and the interviews intermingle knowledge and skills with socio-economic status. While two of the collected open-ended item responses indicated they believed that all families have knowledge and skills to engage, teachers identified professionals, or those with professional relatives, as more likely to engage in family-teacher conferences. Family-perceived knowledge and skills as an influence on family engagement is identified as a life context in the model for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987) noted that family engagement was higher in schools with smaller numbers of low-income families.

A compelling revelation during the teacher interviews was how teachers perceived student-led conferences build relationships. Teachers shared that strong relationships were built due to the student-led family-teacher conferences they held and felt that building relationship with the families made a difference in how families engaged. Teachers perceived that families were proud of their students and were more engaged in the family-teacher conference. This study supports the findings of Walker, Wilkins, Dellaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey (2005) as well

as Epstein (2018). They found that building relationships in a variety of ways support family engagement. Cheatham and Jimenez-Silva (2012) identified building relationships for two-way communication by inviting families in, making them feel comfortable, and ensuring families feel heard by teachers. This study also ties into another component of the model of the parental involvement process, perceptions of invitations to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), which partly identifies perceived invitations from the students are more likely to encourage engagement than general invitations from the school. Rose, Vaughn, and Taylor (2015) also found that the relationships developed between teachers and families during their literacy study were of particular note and set the stage for future interactions.

Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned

I learned so much from the record of study process. I found it was a trial at certain stages. I was close to the problem, an issue acknowledged in the first chapter, and working through that was more difficult than I originally thought it would be. Objectivity was the critical lesson I learned to be able to conduct this study in a way that benefited the South Texas Elementary School.

First, I wanted to be sure that I understood the plight of our teachers as we worked together to provide the best education for our South Texas Elementary School students. I envisioned this study, if designed well, would help me deeply understand the problem of practice as we strive to grow family engagement efficacy in our South Texas Elementary School community. I specifically chose to conduct research at and for this school, as I wanted the feedback to be authentic and useful for those who were proximate to the problem. I realized this also meant that I, as a researcher, was proximate to the problem, and research bias must be

considered. I implemented measures to ensure I was naming the biases and moving beyond them. I noticed, however, that being proximate to the problem made me question occurrences and potential problems that I might not have had I not been directly connected with the issue. My research was not just a personal passion for family engagement efficacy in education, but it was a large part of my life, with faces of students, teachers, families attached to almost every sentence I wrote for quite some time.

Objectivity was a challenge, and I learned to embrace it. Analyzing transcripts of participants I know professionally and personally caused feelings of joy, hope, and worry. With active acknowledgment of the experience over time, I let go of worrying about the outcomes. Not worrying about outcomes is quite the opposite of what I do for a living, as positive outcomes are a focus in my daily work. I learned to accept that this study is simply data, and I was an observer, collector, analyzer, and interpreter of this data: nothing more, nothing less. In retrospect, I was able to grow in fortitude and learned much from the process, giving this record of study the focus and objectivity the topic deserved to benefit the school community.

Implications for Practice

Connect to Context

Family engagement through family-teacher conference practices is vital to ensure that families and teachers support students in a joint effort to ensure student success. The study results indicate that teachers perceive that families want to be engaged, and it is helpful for families to be engaged. While there are perceived barriers to family engagement found in this study, there are also findings that can guide practices in family engagement to leverage family-teacher conferences for the benefit of the South Texas Elementary School students.

The barriers teachers perceive as an impediment to family engagement seem to be unavoidable life circumstances. A noteworthy implication in this study that is vital to the study context is what was said, and also not said, about families who participate in family-teacher conferences. Teachers saw unavoidable life circumstances and culture as barriers to engagement through family-teacher conferences. Teachers also clearly perceived that families who are professionals, or have a professional background, were more likely to engage in communication with teachers and participate in conferences. Given this finding, what was not said directly was that families of lower-SES, or families who do not have a professional background, were less likely to engage in communication with teachers and participate in conferences. This was implied in the finding regarding life circumstances: the scenarios described by the study participants are often linked to life circumstances families of lower SES can experience (Milne & Plourde, 2006).

Teachers also reported that student-led family-teacher conferences seemed to build better relationships with families and noted increased communication with families that participated in these conferences. Additionally, the outcomes for this record of study implicated that teachers with a higher-view perception of family engagement efficacy were more likely to talk about enrichment activities or extracurricular activities with families. Teachers also shared in this study that they completed the required number of conferences to the best of their ability; perceptions of family engagement efficacy had no bearing on this. In consideration of these findings, the implications for practice are below.

First, a family-teacher conference protocol for the campus should be defined. The information regarding this study can be shared with the campus' lead instructional team. This

information will be shared through a presentation at a regularly scheduled planning meeting for the next school year. The outcomes of this record of study and the protocol draft will be shared with the lead instructional team. This way, the data can be reviewed with the team, and discussion about family-teacher engagement practices through family-teacher conferences can take place. The data from this record of study will provide campus-specific data for the committee to reflect upon while adapting the protocol. Then, the team can outline the outcome vision for family-teacher conferences and begin to develop the steps needed to implement the process. For consideration during this process, the lead instructional team will be provided with a sample family-teacher conference protocol teacher guide (see Appendix C).

Professional development is key to ensure that teachers feel supported in their endeavors to engage families in family-teacher conferences. Student-led family-teacher conference teacher perceptions will be essential to share during the family-teacher conference protocol development and related professional development training. While teachers perceived many barriers to family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conferences, all teachers interviewed shared about the positive relationship building resulting from student-led family-teacher conferences. Professional development that supports this practice will be paramount to help all families connect with teachers for the benefit of their student.

To further support teachers and the perceived benefits of student-led family-teacher conferences, cultural training should also be considered as part of this protocol. Teachers shared perceptions that implied families who were not professional or have a professional background were less likely to engage in family-teacher conferences. In developing the family-teacher conference protocol, identifying strategies or practices that do more to engage all families is

paramount to the goal of this practice, and it is important to consider potential perception biases that may impede communication between families and teachers. By providing professional development that sheds light on perception biases and provides approaches for engaging all families, teachers can leverage family-teacher conferences for all families to benefit students. Family-teacher conference topics will be an important area to address in this area, as those with higher-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy were more likely to discuss outside-the-classroom opportunities with families for their students.

Finally, the number of conferences held that the lead instructional team considers effective will need to be discussed and added to the protocol, as teachers indicated that they aim to complete the required number of conferences each year for their students. This data can help guide the instructional lead team to discuss what protocol to implement and what professional development is needed for campus teachers to better support the protocol. See **Appendix D** for the draft family-teacher conference protocol development process.

Connect to Field of Study

The outcomes of this record of study provided interesting results on teacher perceptions of family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. This mixed-methods record of study fortified Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey's (2005) work that found that what teachers see and perceive regarding families and engagement could influence the relationship between teachers and families. Additionally, the relationship-building teachers noted as a result of student-led family-teacher conferences adds to the overall positive view of family engagement efficacy as perceived by teachers. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) found that a

good relationship between families and teachers provides supportive environments for students to be successful.

Furthermore, the record of study outcomes shows that family engagement efficacy does not influence how many conferences a teacher has with students' families. However, it can influence what is discussed at these conferences. Findings by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) indicate that teachers receiving guidance on critical elements of a family-teacher conference can positively influence the conferences held.

Lessons Learned and Limitations

This record of study process provided illumination regarding teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conference practices. This study also revealed areas that future studies would need to consider including to further research in this field. Additionally, there were limitations to the study that should be recognized.

The small sample, while a large percentage of the campus teachers, was still small, which does not provide the reliability that a quantitative survey with a large number of participants can produce. I was aware of this when I was designing the study for our school, and felt the survey would provide valuable perception information for the campus, as well as inform the semi-structured interview question development. Even with this additional measure, I wished I had more data, even though the respondents gave complex, detailed descriptions of their experiences. In retrospect, while the data was exceptionally descriptive, the participants, it seemed, focused on their most recent experiences: how conferences went this school year and how student-led conferences were a good experience for them.

Given that we are emerging from a pandemic that caused shutdowns of schools, I anticipated that topic in interviews about family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences. Instead, the only indirect mention related to the pandemic was the use of Zoom by two teachers: one said it was helpful for those parents who cannot come in, and she was glad we started using it, and the other shared that families had a hard time logging in for conferences when she tried to use it. In future studies about family-teacher conferences and the impact of the pandemic, direct questions about the pandemic and its effects could provide more perspective in regard to the changes during and since the pandemic

In reflection, I also considered it a possibility that teachers not sharing directly about the pandemic experience may be a way to cope with the experience. Teachers also shared the barriers and successes families were experiencing in a way that seemed as if they had this experience for many years, not in just the pandemic years. I reflected as I analyzed the data that it was possible the family-teacher connection has always been perceived by teachers as a deep struggle on a predominately lower-income campus, so much so that while the pandemic posed many challenges, family engagement seemed no more or less of a challenge than before. I would explore these potential teacher perceptions more deeply if replicating this study.

Recommendations

This record of study gathered data from one small elementary school in South Texas. While there was a high percentage of teachers from this school who participated in the study, the sample was relatively small, especially for the quantitative portion of this study. The purposeful sampling for the participant interviews was appropriate for the study goals. It helped elucidate some of the data that emerged from the quantitative portion of the study. With a larger sample,

the data has more potential to show stronger or more correlations, both negative and positive. Future studies would benefit from a larger pool for the survey distribution, including several schools of similar demographics.

Additionally, studies in this field would also benefit from inquiring about the relationship-building potential of student-led family-teacher conferences. Student-led family-teacher conferences are familiar to the field of family engagement. Student-led conferences have been found to be effective in engaging families in their child's education (Conderman, Hatcher, Ikan, 2012; Hackmann, 1995; Little & Allan, 1989). All interview participants in this study spoke about the impact of this type of conference without any mention in the questions about it. Overall, these teachers expressed that they felt parents were more communicative after participating in these conferences. This is closely tied to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) parent-perceived invitations by the student to be involved, as it is a student who invites the family, with the help of the teacher, to the student's presentation on their progress. While Family and Community Practice (Epstein, 2018) does provide information about specific family engagement practices, student-led family-teacher conferences are not referenced. Exploring teachers' specific perceptions or practices regarding this type of conference and family engagement has the potential to explore building relationships between families and teachers further.

A final recommendation would be to examine the topics teachers cover in any family-teacher conference. In this study, teachers indicated that discussing academics was a high priority in family-teacher conferences. Interestingly, teachers with higher-view perceptions of family engagement efficacy tended to share more about extracurricular or enrichment

opportunities for students. Studying this aspect of family-teacher conference practices, especially across multiple schools with a higher number of lower-income families, could provide additional information to inform teacher training and family-teacher conference procedures for districts with higher numbers of lower-income families.

Closing Thoughts

Family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conferences is a primary connector between families and schools. The school is responsible for ensuring a welcoming, inviting environment for students to learn and grow and for families to feel that they and their students are welcomed in that environment. However, the teacher has a unique opportunity to build relationships with the family: a classroom teacher at an elementary school is the one adult on campus who spends the most time with a student. Classrooms can become like a second family for students, where they feel cared for and heard. Getting to know a student well enough to help them learn thoroughly can help teachers gain deep insight into a student's life and the opportunity to connect with a student's family through that insight.

Teachers' perceptions of family engagement efficacy are essential to understand, as they are the planners, creators, and deliverers of most communications between their classrooms and their students' families. Asking teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices in family engagement efficacy and family-teacher conferences grows understanding in this vital area of education. It also provides space for reflection about what practices are working and what practices are not and gives information for teachers to continue to grow their practice in communicating with families about their students.

Relationship building is a potential lever for ensuring more families engage in family-teacher conferences to support the success of their students. In this study, teachers shared that families who were professionals or whose parents were professionals seemed to participate more in family-teacher conferences. The teachers interviewed also noted that families seemed more responsive after a student-led family-teacher conference was held between the student, the teacher, and a family member. While teacher perceptions in this study indicated they felt professionals were more engaged in family-teacher conferences, the commentary regarding these conferences suggested that once families felt they had a relationship with the teacher, they were more likely to connect with that teacher.

Elementary school teachers have a unique opportunity to embrace the relationship-building potential between the families of their students and the school through family-teacher conferences. These connectors meet families when their students are very young and can help establish a relationship that can influence student outcomes throughout a student's educational career. A well-designed family-teacher conference with thoughtful communication can assist a teacher in guiding a student toward success, engaging the family to invest time and support in their student's success, and providing more information about the student. Ultimately, a teacher wants success for each of their students. Gathering and analyzing teacher perspectives of family engagement efficacy through family-teacher conferences is a vital first step to better understanding these practices. Teachers can use this data to reflect on what is working and needs adjusting. Then, a cyclical protocol can be developed for family-teacher conferences, including any professional development needed, to ensuring that teachers have needed support to engage in this crucial component of effective family engagement.

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APPENDIX A*

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND FAMILY-TEACHER CONFERENCES SURVEY

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

How many years have you been a teacher?

- (1) 1-3 years (2) 4-6 years (3) 7-10 years (4) 11-15 years (5) 16+ years

What grade level do you currently teach?

- (1) Prekindergarten 3-4 (2) Kindergarten (3) First Grade (4) Second Grade (5) Third Grade
(6) Fourth Grade (7) Fifth Grade

What teaching certifications do you currently hold?

- (1) EC-6 Generalist or equivalent (2) EC-6 Bilingual Generalist or equivalent (3) EC-6
Generalist with EC-12 Special Education or equivalent

How many years have you taught at a school with a low socio-economic status student
population above 50%?

- (1) 1-3 years (2) 4-6 years (3) 7-10 years (4) 11-15 years (5) 16+ years

How many years of work experience do you have outside of the teaching profession?

- (1) 1-3 years (2) 4-6 years (3) 7-10 years (4) 11-15 years (5) 16+ years

**Please answer the following questions based on your experience as a teacher, and your
understanding of family engagement. We are interested in your perspective as a teacher,
there are no right nor wrong answers.**

**Please share your perceptions about family engagement and family-teacher
communications in schools, based on your experience:**

1. Families want to help their children learn.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree
2. Families make a difference in the academic and behavioral progress of their children.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5)
Strongly Agree²

² *Part of this survey is modified from Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie's (1992) Teacher Questionnaire.

3. My students' families know how to help their children make academic progress.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
4. My students' families know how to help their children make academic progress, but do not do so.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
5. In our school community, teachers can share ideas with families, but cannot influence families to use these ideas.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
6. Families want more information than they receive about their child's academic progress.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
7. Families help students with their homework.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
8. Families can help their child learn when their child does not seem motivated to do so.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
9. A student's academic performance depends on the home environment; I have limited influence.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
10. Families want to help their child learn, but do not always take steps to do so.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
11. Families make a significant educational difference in the lives of their children.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

12. As a teacher, I have great influence on families to support a child's positive academic and behavioral outcomes.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
13. Families want to communicate with me regarding their child's progress.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
14. Most families support the things I do for their child as a teacher.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
15. A child's motivation starts at home. I have little influence as a teacher on a child's motivation to learn.
(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

Please share your experiences as a classroom teacher in regards to family-teacher conferences each year.

Think about the family-teacher conferences in which you have participated. Please answer accordingly:

1. How many conferences do you hold per year for each of your students?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
2. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **academic progress concerns**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
3. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **behavior concerns**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
4. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **attendance concerns**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+

5. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **social interaction concerns**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
6. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **academic success**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
7. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction concerns**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+
8. How many conferences do you have per year with a family whose student is experiencing **an interest in extracurricular activities or more challenging academic material (enrichment activities)**?
(1) 0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7+

Think about the family-teacher conferences you held. If you feel there are more topics you would like to share regarding these family-teacher conferences, please share your thoughts under “additional information.”

1. Additional information regarding priority topics in regards to a student who is meeting classroom expectations:
2. Additional information regarding priority topics in regards to a student who is **not** meeting classroom expectations:

Please answer the following questions based on your experience as a teacher, and your understanding of family engagement. We are interested in your perspective as a teacher, there are no right nor wrong answers.

1. What influence do you think parent/guardian knowledge and skills have on family engagement?
2. What influence do you think parent/guardian time and energy have on family engagement?
3. What influence do you think a student’s family culture have on family engagement?

Thank you for participating in this survey.

If you are interested in potentially being selected for an interview to share your thoughts on family-teacher conferences more in depth, please follow the link below and fill out the information. Thank you again for your time and valuable input.

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The researcher will read the following prior to the recorded interview:

“Thank you for volunteering to participate in the interview portion of this study. This interview will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes and your answers will remain confidential. The only people who can see your answers is the principal investigator and me. All answers are voluntary: if you do not feel comfortable with a question, you can choose not to answer that question. You can also opt to end the interview at any time, for any reason. This preface statement, the questions, and your answers are being recorded and transcribed on this Zoom videoconferencing platform. Your name will not be included in the recording. Once I have confirmed the recording has been correctly transcribed, the recording will be deleted. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

The researcher will answer any questions the participant has, and then the question session will begin.

Please answer the following questions based on your experiences as a teacher, and your understanding of family engagement as a teacher.

1. How do you define family engagement?
2. Why do you think families become involved in their child’s education?
 - a. Think about those families of your students who become engaged in their child’s education through family-teacher conferences. What are some of the communication experiences you have had with these families?
3. Why do you think some families do not become involved in their child’s education?
 - a. Think about those families of your students who do not become engaged, or rarely engage, in their child’s education through family-teacher conferences. What are some of the communication experiences you have had with these families?
4. Think about the families of your students that you initiated contact with for a family-teacher conference. What were the reasons, or reason, you initiated contact?

- a. Please share how you choose these topics for these family-teacher conferences.
 - b. Has holding family-teacher conferences helped you reach success for your students?
Why and/or why not?
5. Think about the families of your students that initiated contact with you for a family-teacher conference. What were the reasons, or reason, they initiated contact?
- a. Please share how you choose these topics for these family-teacher conferences.
 - b. Has holding family-requested family-teacher conferences helped you reach success for your students? Why and/or why not?
6. How many family-teacher conferences do you hold each year in general, and why do you hold the number of family-teacher conferences that you hold each year?
- a. Are the number of family-teachers conferences you hold depend on different circumstances? If yes, please describe how the number of family-teacher conferences held varies for you.
7. Please share if, or how often, you have discussed the following content in family-teacher conferences you have held, and your experiences with these family-teacher conferences.
- a. Academic/progress concerns.
 - b. Behavior concerns.
 - c. Attendance concerns.
 - d. Social interaction concerns.
 - e. Academic success.
 - f. Student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction concerns.
 - g. An interest in an extracurricular activity or academic enrichment activities.

- h. Any other topic you feel is of importance in your family-teacher conferences.
8. What challenges do you encounter as a teacher when scheduling and/or holding family-teacher conferences?
 - a. What would reduce these challenges in scheduling and/or holding family-teacher conferences?
 9. Have you had any training in family-teacher conferences? Please share any you have had, including from teacher preparation programs, outside district training, or in-district training.
 10. Think about family engagement, in general. Please share, from your experience, if the following has influence on a family's engagement in family-teacher conferences, and why.
 - a. Parent/guardian knowledge and skills?
 - b. Parent/guardian time and energy?
 - c. A family's culture?
 11. Think about family-teacher conferences in general. How influential are family-teacher conferences on student success, and why?

APPENDIX C

A DRAFT STUDENT-LED, FAMILY-TEACHER CONFERENCE PROTOCOL

TEACHER GUIDE

Four Steps for Student-Led, Family-Teacher Conferences

First Step: Engage in Conversation. Getting to know your students' families is the first step to positive family engagement. Be sure families know how to reach you and you have their contact information.

Second Step: Keep Engaging. Be sure to reach out to families via phone calls or campus messaging to connect with your students' families well before you begin conferences to develop a relationship that benefits your students' growth. [Number of communications determined by the instructional lead team and administration].

Third Step: Prepare for Conferences. Use the following and the guides provided during the family-teacher conference protocol professional development to guide your work. [Number of conferences determined by the instructional lead team and administration].

The student will:	The teacher will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collect quality work in each subject• Prepare for the conference, completing all conference preparation work aligned with essential agreements and quality work practices• Prepare the presentation promptly, uploading any audio, video, or other files they need for the presentation• Practice the presentation with a chosen peer or campus adult• Reflect carefully on strengths and areas of growth, and plans to discuss both with their family. Student will ask for help from the teacher if they are not feeling confident about sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guide students in what constitutes quality work for collection• Develop essential agreements about conference preparation work, times, and best practices with students• Guide students by providing timelines, arranging for time to work on the presentation, and guiding students through the process as needed• Provide time in the classroom schedule for students to practice presentations, assisting students in finding an audience for practice• Model how to discuss strengths and areas of growth, and how to discuss these topics with others

Fourth Step: Schedule and hold conferences. Schedule your conferences using the resources provided by or developed by our campus team that will be provided in the family-teacher conference protocol training. Be prepared to have a discussion with the family after the student presents to answer any questions families have, as well as provide information and resources to families.

APPENDIX D

A DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FAMILY-TEACHER CONFERENCE PROTOCOL

This brief proposal is designed as a draft to guide the Instructional Lead Team of the South Texas Elementary School in developing a Family-Teacher Conference Protocol. The proposal will encompass the development, implementation, and evaluation processes to ensure implementation fidelity of the protocol, as well as provide adjustments to fit the school community's needs. The overall protocol design is based on the plan development, implementation, and evaluation steps of Losoff and Broxterman's (2017) work on a problem-solving approach to school change. The professional development recommendations as the conference protocol are based on the outcomes of this study. A draft student-led, family-teacher conference protocol for consideration by the campus instructional leader team is provided in **Appendix C**. The draft student-led, family-teacher conference protocol teacher guide will also be shared with the district FACE department.

Step 1: Review the research. The campus instructional lead team will participate in a presentation regarding the study's findings and a guided discussion with thought-provoking questions regarding family-teacher conferences for consideration. The team will then be provided with a draft of a student-led family-teacher protocol and an article regarding equity in family engagement. Team members will be encouraged to gather feedback from their departments regarding what they have learned and receive information regarding the agenda items for a follow-up meeting.

Step 2: Brainstorming activity, protocol development. The team will reconvene after two weeks to brainstorm ideas for implementing a plan for the campus family-teacher conference protocol. Critical items for consideration will be professional development for cultural and socio-economic considerations, professional development for interpersonal communications, types of support desired by the teaching staff, communication requirements, frequency of conferences, and content of conferences. The team will also address evaluation based on Losoff and Broxterman's (2017) model for progress evaluation in the plan. After finalizing ideas, the group will select a team of three staff members to work with the campus administration to complete the plan. The plan's finalization will also include steps for inviting family and community input into the process.

Step 3: Finalization of the plan and presentation to faculty. The family-teacher conference protocol team will meet with campus administration to clarify the specific steps of the protocol, including finalizing family engagement, professional development, and other resources needed for the protocol. The completed plan will then be presented to the instructional leader team for any necessary amendments or adjustments. Any edits or clarification will be addressed during this time. Then, the family-teacher conference protocol team will present the finalized plan to the rest of the faculty with the support of the full instructional support team as needed. The plan will be provided to each teacher in a document filed in the campus electronic documents, to which all faculty have access. The family-teacher conference protocol lead team will then develop a one-page, family-oriented document to distribute to the South Texas Elementary School community regarding the protocol implementation. Both documents will be provided to the district FACE department for their review and consideration at the district level.

Step 4: Program Evaluation. The family-teacher conference protocol team with campus administration will develop an implementation guide (IG), which helps guide school staff in the effective implementation of initiatives for school change (Losoff & Broxterman, 2017). The implementation guide developed by the team will provide critical steps in a rubric format that will help determine if the family-teacher conference protocol is being implemented to its fullest potential. The IG will also help identify any areas that might need extra support (Losoff & Broxterman, 2017). This guide will be reviewed at each instructional focus team meeting. Feedback will be sought via surveys from families twice per year to provide input to the team. Additionally, focus groups of family members will be invited once per year to provide conversational information on the process.