ENGAGING FAMILIES IN LITERACY EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

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Parent/caregiver participation is an essential component of the literacy education process. Current school-directed methods of involving parents/caregivers have shown inconsistent results regarding student literacy outcomes. Parent/caregiver-directed, collaborative efforts that engage families, teachers, and other school professionals ensure that parents/caregivers are invested in educational outcomes for their children.

The purpose of this study was to explore family engagement in school literacy curriculum development and implementation at a public charter school in Fort Worth, Texas. Specifically, this exploratory study sought to uncover both the strengths and limitations to effective family engagement via a triangulation of parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrative perspectives. The results of this study have the potential to impact future family participation models and ultimately improve literacy outcomes for students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Social and economic wellbeing are dependent upon literacy. Those with low literacy skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2013). Long-term consequences of low literacy include lower rates of productivity and earnings, higher risk for dependence on welfare, and higher risks for poor health (Baydar, Brooks-Gun, & Furstenberget, 1993; Marcus, 2006; Cree, Kay, & Steward, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) estimates that between 15% and 20% of the U.S. adult population is functionally illiterate. The Children's Defense Fund reports 66% of fourth graders and 66% of eighth graders are unable to read at grade level (2014). The pressure is on the current generation of families and educators to help young learners attain appropriate literacy expectations, and they are falling behind.

Racial and socio-economic disparities impact literacy outcomes. Minority populations underperform academically when compared to White and Asian-Americans (American Psychological Association, 2012). Testing scores and dropout rates are higher among minority populations. Reasons cited for such disparities include English as a second language (ESL) among Hispanic minorities, and increased rates of behavioral sanctions for African Americans. Early childhood education (ECE) programs seek to limit disparities, but minorities lack access to quality ECE programs as a result of limited funding. An American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force cites "ethnic and

racial bias in the relationships between students and their educators" as a contributing

factor to underperformance (2012, p. 9). Current educational practices do not cater to

learning styles that may be specific to poor and minority populations.

It is well documented that parent/caregiver involvement in the education process

is essential to positive student outcomes (Epstein, 2005; Sad & Gurbuzturk, 2013;

Rodriquez, Collins-Parks, & Garza, 2013). Yet, in spite of the wealth of research

supporting parent/caregiver involvement in structure and implementation practices,

finding consistent and innovative ways to reach parents/caregivers is a struggle for many

educators (Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Drury, 2012; Cairny & Munsie, 1995).

Schools are making strides with regards to shared visions among teachers and

administrators (Wollman, 2007) but what remains unclear is how well *families* are being

utilized in collaborative efforts. Muschamp (2007) argues that school policy rhetoric

acknowledges the importance of parent/caregiver involvement and even emphasizes

changing relationships between parents/caregivers and schools, but "there is little

evidence of real change" (as cited in Cremin, et al., 2012, p. 14). The reality is that

collaborative efforts still center around "traditional, school-centric and activity-based

models of parent involvement" (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009, p. 2244). Educators

direct the ways and means to encourage family participation in the school environment

instead of utilizing more successful, parent/caregiver-directed approaches to

participation.

This is especially true for literacy curriculum planning and implementation

(Cairny & Munsie, 1995). Keenan, Willett, and Solsken (1993) argue that most school-

directed approaches to engaging parents/caregivers in the literacy process "focus on training low-income and minority parents to support the school's instructional programs at home" (p. 205). Parents/caregivers are encouraged to read daily to their children and complete a plethora of language arts worksheets that have little relevance to the shared realities of struggling populations. Kruger and Mahon (1990) emphasize that parent/caregiver perspectives about the literacy process have greater value than mere supplements to teacher agendas.

An unequal balance of power between teachers and parents/caregivers is built into school structures thereby stunting the capacity for true collaboration (Cremin, et al., 2012). Research suggests a shift in school perspectives from "family involvement" to "family engagement" (Warren, et al., 2009; Hedeen, Moses, & Peter, 2011; Amendt, 2008). Currently implemented models understand the importance of the familial component for successful outcomes and are trying to "involve" parents/caregivers by asking them to assist in supplementing school efforts. Engaging parents/caregivers, on the other hand, emphasizes a more active and powerful role, where parents/caregivers mutually contribute to curriculum agendas and implementation practices. The parent/caregiver engagement philosophy is a true family-school partnership and improves literacy learning outcomes (Hedeen, et al., 2011; Keenan, et al, 1993; Cremin, et al., 2012).

Gaps in the Literature/Contribution to the Knowledge Base

Although the correlation between parent/caregiver participation and positive student literacy outcomes has been well documented, many schools fail to implement

research-based, family engagement practices. Additionally, the knowledge base

regarding a triangulation of parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrator factors

specifically related to literacy success is lacking. Trainor (2010), Latham (2002), and

Wanat (2010) conducted interviews of parents/caregivers regarding family advocacy and

involvement but did not include teacher or administrative perspectives. Sad and

Gurbuzturk (2013) and Williams and Sanzhez (2011) also analyzed parent/caregiver

involvement strengths and barriers but parents/caregivers reported their own gauges of

involvement, and the researchers did not seek educator perspectives.

Research specific to parent/caregiver engagement in literacy curriculum lacks

proven community based models of intervention. Blue-Banning, Summer, Frankland,

Nelson, and Beegle (2004) included both parent/caregiver and professional perspectives

to understand positive school relationships, but did not draw conclusions specifically

related to literacy curriculum engagement. Lawson (2010), Epstein (2010), and Warren

and colleagues (2009) studied community-based partnerships in educational settings but

did not identify barriers specific to literacy learning either. Huang (2013) and Dever and

Burts (2010) conducted studies on the use of literacy bags, where teachers put together

bags of books with complimentary activities to send home with students for reading

practice at home. Here, researchers studied school-directed approaches to

parent/caregiver involvement and not family-directed approaches to engagement.

Accounting for all of these factors, a consistent, successful, identified approach

for schools to employ regarding the engagement of families into the literacy learning

process does not exist currently. Additional research into unique factors facing

parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators is needed in order to succinctly identify guidelines for school professionals to follow regarding the active engagement of families in the literacy process.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore family engagement in school literacy curriculum development and implementation. Specifically, this exploratory study sought to uncover both the strengths and the limitations to effective family engagement from parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrative perspectives. This approach will assist in reconciling definitions of effective family participation that differ based on parent/caregiver, administrative, and teacher perceptions of how families should become engaged. At the core of this issue, Toldson and Lemmons (2013) cite a lack of understanding by teachers, administrators, and other school personnel with regard to various social issues facing students and their families.

Institutions that encourage family perspectives on involvement increase the likelihood that parents/caregivers will have a desire and a means to be engaged. Epstein and Voorhis (2010) assert that partnerships between schools, families, and communities should be at the center of any involvement program instead of traditional programs that only cater to a select number of available family members. With specific regard to engagement in literacy learning, families serve as "valuable resources for classroom learning" (Keenan, et. al, 1993, p. 211). When parents/caregivers are seen and utilized as educators, children's literacy achievement is positively impacted (Dever & Burts, 2010). Additionally, schools can transcend the barriers resulting from risk factors like race and

socio-economic status by implementing sound instructional practices that cater to unique individual and family needs. (Snow et al., 1998).

Potential Benefits to Social Work

The preamble to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008) states:

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people…Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living (para. 1).

Expanding a research base, which could contribute to improved collaborative literacy efforts, enhances the futures of school-aged children and addresses future living problems associated with illiteracy such as poor health, low earnings, and dependence on welfare (Baydar, et al., 1993; Marcus, 2006; Cree, et al., 2012). Improving literacy opportunities for minorities and the economically challenged (populations often overlooked in literacy curriculum planning and implementation) serves the core social work values of social justice and the dignity and worth of all persons.

Implications for Society

Increased concern over the functional literacy of America's children warrants an exploration into school literacy practices (OECD, 2013; NCES, 2003). The economic consequences for the future illiterate address a larger, societal problem (Bayder, et al., 1993). Identifying barriers to functional literacy among youth, in addition to exercising preventative measures, increases the likelihood that the next generations will contribute to society.

Engaging families in the literacy process improves the likelihood of successful reading and writing outcomes (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010; Dever & Burts, 2010). Sticht (2012) argues that families play a key role in the "transfer of literacy from one generation to the next" (p. 64) and that early childhood learning programs in particular yield successful results because of their role in educating parents and caregivers. Schools that effectively engage families in the literacy process teach parents/caregivers about reading and writing skills in return.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Definition of Terms

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) (NCES, 2007) defines literacy as the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. The NAAL also asserts that educational attainment is positively related to three types of literacy:

1) Prose: search, comprehend, and use continuous texts such as newspapers, brochures and instruction manuals.

2) Document: search, comprehend, and use non-continuous texts such as job applications, bus schedules, payroll forms, and labels

3) Quantitative: identify and perform computations such as balancing a checkbook, calculating a tip, and completing an order form.

Functional literacy refers to a person's ability to function in modern society based on their education level (NCES, 2007). Essentially, functional illiteracy results from an overemphasis of skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension but an under-emphasis on practices that employ literacy skills to accomplish specific tasks (Comings, 2011). For example, a person can comprehend a text but is unable to actually apply the principles learned in the text. Functional illiteracy is a major concern because it leads to intergenerational illiteracy, a phenomenon where parents/caregivers inadvertently sponsor home conditions that may seriously hinder their child's reading and writing

development (Cooter, 2006). Factors contributing to intergenerational illiteracy include a lack of strong language examples, little child interaction, and a lack of quality print materials available in the home.

A parent/caregiver is defined as the primary caretaker or legal guardian of the child (Martin, 2009). Throughout this study, "parent/caregiver" will adequately describe the role of caretakers who are biological/adoptive parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or older siblings tasked with the educational responsibility of a child. The term *parent/caregiver involvement* will refer to school-directed ways of encouraging parent/caregiver participation or an invitation by school professionals to support a school agenda (Amedt, 2008). For the purpose of this study, parent/caregiver involvement does not adequately describe effective participation that yields successful outcomes for students (Hedeen, et al., 2011). *Family engagement* and *parent/caregiver engagement* refer to the family-school partnership between parents/caregivers and school professionals and involves collaborative identification and implementation of agendas (Warren, et al., 2011; Amendt, 2008).

<center>Limitations to Successful Family Engagement</center>

One of the greatest limitations to family engagement lies in reconciling role definitions for parents/caregivers and educators. Educator definitions center around traditional teacher-family relationships where the teacher is the expert and the parent/caregiver should be involved to the extent that teachers give direction to do so. Teachers lay the structure and ground rules for such involvement based on the teacher's objectives and desires (Young, Audstin, & Growe, 2013). Often this includes asking

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parents/caregivers to help with classroom or clerical tasks on school campus and assisting with assigned homework outside of school. Traditional involvement asks parents/caregivers what they can do for teachers and not necessarily what can be accomplished together (Cairny & Munsie, 1995). Parents/caregivers who are unwilling or uncomfortable with teacher ideals of involvement may be perceived as lazy, uninterested, apathetic, critical, or simply having generalizable low-income deficits (Cairny & Munsie, 1995; Kernan, et al., 1993). Teachers may also see social differences such as race, ethnicity, income, and education level as problematic thereby stunting the collaborative process (Cremin, et al., 2012).

Parent/caregiver definitions of involvement include getting children to school on time and solving issues at home that directly involve the child (Young, et al., 2013). Additionally, they have become used to the directive role teachers play to define parent/caregiver involvement roles for their school-age children. Teacher expectations vary from teacher to teacher and even vary between teachers and administrators, leaving parents/caregivers unable to navigate their own effective styles of participation. A perceived imbalance of power leaves parents/caregivers unable to become involved without specific directions by school staff and administrators (Cremin, et al., 2012). Parents/caregivers may be uncomfortable or afraid to speak up about ways they are willing and able to become engaged and feel that their opinions would not matter anyway.

A 2011 study identified four barriers to parents/caregivers when it comes to school involvement (Williams & Sanchez). The first is time poverty. Schools' daily

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expectations regarding homework, reading with children, and school meetings may fail to consider limited time commitments families can make due to life circumstances. Second, parents/caregivers who work during the day are automatically excluded from direct classroom involvement during school hours. Third, financial resources limit the ability to pay Parent Teacher Association (PTA) dues, afford gas to make additional trips to the school, or miss work in order to fulfill school expectations to support students. Finally, many parents/caregivers lack appropriate awareness about ways to become involved. Notes sent home with children are often unreliable sources of information; notifications do not make it home or students forget to disclose the information. Additionally, some events and opportunities are announced with very little notice so families are unable to rearrange tight schedules.

Another limitation is a lack of adequate professional development for teachers about engaging families in the school environment (Lazer, Broderick, Mastrilli, 1999). This leaves many teachers unable to understand, let alone implement, paradigms of practice that engage families successfully. Inclusion practices are based on individual teacher initiative and experience (Kindervater, 2010). Once again, this method is problematic since students will have a multitude of teachers throughout their primary and secondary education, and also problematic for families with multiple children. Without consistent guidelines for family/teacher engagement, the expectations will differ drastically from year to year and student to student.

Models of Successful Family Involvement: Engagement

Substantial evidence exists to support collaborative, community-centered, approaches to encourage parent/caregiver interaction in school settings (Hedeen, et al., 2011; Warren, et al., 2009; Cairny & Munsie, 1995; Keenan, et al., 1993; Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Studies also show that school-directed family involvement activities fail to consider community factors and thereby limit such involvement, especially among minority populations (Lawson, 2010; Williams & Sanchez, 2011; Young, et al., 2013). Student achievement improves with *effective* family engagement regardless of social or ethnic class (Jeynes, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Amendt (2008) observed that institutions and families learn to work together along a continuum involving stages towards collaboration. His Degree of Collaboration and Partnership identifies four stages of parent/caregiver participation. First, families are simply informed about school activities and events. This is accomplished via newsletters, emails, phone calls, and notes sent home. Second, families are invited to get involved in order to support a school agenda. These agendas include helping out in the classroom or with office and clerical tasks, voting at the PTA meetings, participating in school fundraisers, and attending school sponsored curriculum nights. The third level, engagement, happens when families are considered collaborators and join school professionals in the creative process. Families work together with teachers and administrators to design needed agendas. Amendt's final stage is leading. It is in this stage that parents/caregivers are given stewardship over school programs they were engaged in designing. Authentic community-centered partnerships invite

parents/caregivers to participate in planning the programs. Their values, strengths, limitations, and concerns become part of the planning process and subsequent program implementation guidelines are structured to incorporate these factors. Additionally, programs are enthusiastically directed by the families due to the personal investment in the creation and success of programs.

A 2011 study at a school struggling to improve family participation proved that encouraging parents/caregivers to decide the terms of their involvement improved overall home/school relationships (Lawson, et.al. 2011). Parents/caregivers were given a $40 stipend for each week of participation. They were given the responsibility to design needed programs and engage in implementing them. The small stipend encouraged those who would otherwise be unable to volunteer due to financial limitations to make the commitment to become involved. The study found two key factors that facilitate family engagement. First, when parents/caregivers felt ownership of a program, they became active in ensuring the success of the program. Second, parents/caregivers remained engaged because they saw their efforts yielding successful results. Lawson and colleagues also identified personal benefits to parents/caregivers through becoming engaged: They (1) felt respected and recognized, (2) gained a sense of connection to others (3) received financial incentives, and (4) became open to job opportunities via their school experience.

Family Engagement and Literacy Programs

Collaborative efforts are essential to student success especially with regards to literacy achievement. Darling and Westberg (2004) proved that parent/caregiver

involvement has a positive effect on reading acquisition, regardless of socio-economic status. Cairny and Munsie (1995) found children's literacy levels improved after involving families in a training program about tutoring their children in collaboration with school faculty. The participating urban community suffered from high rates of unemployment and crime, drug problems, and low educational participation. Parents/caregivers became more involved in the school decision-making process and the school gained a greater understanding and appreciation of families. Teachers came to understand how families define and use literacy as a part of their culture. Parents/caregivers came to value the literacy process and, because they did not feel coerced into participation, they were open to new experiences with their family regarding reading and literacy learning.

In another study, researchers invited parents/caregivers to participate in a classroom language arts program at an elementary school that struggled to regularly involve families (Keenan, et al. 1993). Before the program's implementation, parents/caregivers demonstrated little involvement/engagement with school activities. During the program, family members were invited to share a skill or talent. Subsequent class discussions about the visitors were implemented into literacy building activities. Of the twenty-four students in the class, twenty of the students' family members participated. One father volunteered to bake bread with the children. One mother read favorite family books and shared her experiences working on a tobacco farm. One father came to play the African drums. Students were exposed to various languages, dialects, and traditions that were representative of the school population's culture.

Parents/caregivers felt their presence was welcome on school campus and they understood a new dimension of volunteering: Their unique contributions to the school environment were encouraged and valued. The students were more invested in the literacy learning process because the lesson material was representative of their lived experience.

This qualitative research study identified four themes related to school/home collaboration. (1) Parents/caregivers can be valuable resources for learning when given the opportunity to become curriculum partners. (2) Family collaboration efforts require educators to implement cultural awareness and sensitivity practices for diverse populations. (3) The curriculum emerges through conversation and stories when co-teaching with families. (4) Collaborating with families requires teachers to acknowledge limitations and demonstrate a willingness to learn about students' families and cultures (Keenan, et al., 1993).

A social practice approach to literacy recognizes situational literacy practices in the home, school, workplace, and community and contradicts traditional institutional models of literacy as an autonomous set of decontextualized skills (Cremin, et al., 2012). Literacy educational practices should not be viewed independently from a student's experiences outside of school. The social practice model asserts that teachers double as researches whose main objectives are to identify each family's diverse experience in order to best accomplish literacy goals with students. Rogers (1999) referred to the social practice approach as the "real literacies" approach. He outlined a literacy curriculum using texts from local communities that were chosen by students instead of solely relying

on literacy primers as teaching tools. Barton and Hamilton (1998) conducted an ethnographic study of everyday family literacy practices and observed that daily tasks and activities framed the literacy education process. Warriner (2007) recognized the significant role social practices play in language learning and literacy among immigrant populations. Openjuru (2007) argued that literacy education should be based on the literacy practices students use in their daily lives. Curricula designed around the literacy practices of the population yield more positive learning outcomes than curricula whose texts lack relevance to the lived realities of students.

<center>No Child Left Behind and Family Engagement</center>

In spite of the wealth of literature clearly exposing the essential component of family relationships in the learning process, "creating responsive curricula that connect to the lived social realities of the children represent[s] a considerable professional challenge" (Cremin, et al., 2012, p. 101). Teachers who follow a social practice approach to literacy, and consider factors affecting students outside of the classroom, struggle to implement the necessary curriculum changes. This is largely due to highly structured, state and federally mandated, standardized curricula that can leave little room for interpretation and exploration (Hursh, 2006; Lipman, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) was designed to address concerns about quality in education (US Department of Education, 2002). Instructional practices stemming from NCLB are largely based on improving student performance for standardized testing (Kaniuka, 2009). Many argue that this is one of NCLB's greatest flaws: overinvestment in testing while underinvesting in capacity building in order to

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save time, money, and other resources (Elmore, 2003; Hursh, 2006; Lipman, 2003). Teachers, faculty, and districts now ultimately are accountable to the federal government for school performance. As a result of NCLB mandates, teachers and families have limited control over goals, curricula, and pedagogy (Hursh, 2006; Lipman, 2003).

NCLB altered the feasibility of incorporating parents/caregivers in the literacy curriculum planning process due to its regulated guidelines for instruction (Elmore, 2003). Section 1118 of NCLB outlines several mandates for parent/caregiver involvement (as cited in Epstein, 2005): Families are an essential component of the school environment and all recipients of Title 1 funds must implement a program to involve them. NCLB emphasizes that family involvement is directly linked to school improvement and the sprit of the Act recognizes shared responsibilities of parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators. However, NCLB does not differentiate between school-directed and family-centered approaches to the organizational structure of involving families.

Summary

Evidence clearly defines effective models of family engagement as essential to the learning process (e.g. a community centered language arts program, Keenan, et al., 1993; literacy partnerships between parents/caregivers and teachers, Cairny & Munsie, 1995; family-centered involvement in school programs, Lawson, 2010). However, many schools are unable or unwilling to implement these evidence-based practices (Cremin, et al., 2012; Williams & Sanchez, 2011; Lazer, et al., 2009). Even schools that rhetorically profess such practices in their systems are, upon investigation, found to have difficulty

balancing the extra investment into family involvement and the mandated curricula (Hursh, 2006; Lipman, 2009). Assessing some of the barriers prohibiting practice models from producing greater results can serve as a baseline for schools desiring to perform better. Additionally, identifying strengths from programs that engage families will assist schools that need an identified visual of a successful model.

The current research base lacks an exploration into family-centered models of family engagement that include triangulated perspectives from parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators specific to literacy planning and implementation. This study sought to explore family engagement in school literacy curriculum development and implementation. Both strengths and limitations to effective engagement practices were discussed from parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrative perspectives. The triangulation more adequately identified factors affecting family engagement in literacy practices.

Chapter 3

Methods

Design

This exploratory, qualitative study utilized two parent/caregiver focus groups and
one teacher focus group to gather information from parents/caregivers and teachers about
their literacy experiences. Additionally, three administrators were invited to individual,
in-depth interviews. The goal was to acquire a comprehensive idea about strengths and
limitations to family engagement in literacy planning, curriculum development, and
curriculum implementation. Execution of the outlined methodology commenced after an
Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Texas at Arlington's Office
of Research.

Parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators were selected from Chapel Hill
Academy (CHA), a public charter school located in Fort Worth, Texas. CHA has been in
operation since August of 2008 and, as of the 2012-2013 school year, serves 475 Pre-K
through Fifth Graders, an enrollment number that is comparative to other Pre-K through
5th grade campuses in surrounding districts (NCES, 2009). CHA's vision "is to offer a
rigorous and enriching learning experience for all students, to inspire critical thinking and
nurture a respect for self and others" (lenapopehome.org, CHA Link).

CHA is chartered by Lena Pope Home, a non-profit organization that has been
providing services to youth and their families for more than eighty years
(lenapopehome.org). Lena Pope Home's extensive experience working with children and
families at high risk qualified them to create an evidence-based model of education built

on the expectation that a strong academic foundation can help children overcome potential risk factors.

Demographically, CHA serves a high percentage of disadvantaged children, with more than 64% classified as economically disadvantaged (TEA CHA Report Card, 2012-2013). Ethnically, 58% of students are black, 18 % are white, and 23 % are Hispanic. Overall, CHA students scored slightly above the state averages in reading on the 2012 State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) (TEA, 2012). However, students underperformed in writing. In 2013 CHA students scored slightly under state averages in reading but outperformed state averages by more than 20% in writing, suggesting a shift in literacy focus to include writing material. STARR Performance Standards and cut scores remained constant for the two testing years (TEA. 2013) so this did not account for the drastic change. Given the growing popularity of charter schools and the curriculum flexibility offered in charter school environments (NCES, 2003), CHA family and faculty perspectives will contribute substantially to the knowledge base on parent/caregiver engagement in literacy programs.

Parent/caregiver focus group participants were asked questions about the literacy strengths and limitations of their children. Additionally, they were asked to explore how the charter school helps to meet literacy goals via the teachers, administration, and various programs (See Appendix A). The teacher focus group was asked to explore their own definitions of family involvement as well as to explore both effective and limiting outcomes of the school's policies, procedures, and practices that specifically relate to literacy (See Appendix B). Administrators were asked about institutional practices, their

specific roles, and how those roles relate to the literacy environment and success of the students. Questions also sought to uncover potential barriers to literacy success in their school (See Appendix C).

Participants

Although CHA is a school for students in Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade, this study eliminated teachers and families of Pre-Kindergarten students due to the limited gauge of literacy development for that age group. Parents/caregivers of Kindergarten through 5th grade students were selected to participate in information seeking focus groups. All CHA teachers in Kindergarten through 5th grade were invited to participate in a teacher focus group. Individual administrative interviews were conducted with the principal, the academic coordinator, and the literacy specialist.

Parents/caregivers were selected for the focus groups by CHA's school social worker using a purposeful sampling method. This method ensured that focus group recruitment adequately represented the racial demographics of the CHA student population. The sampling frame size consisted of 50 parents/caregivers for each of the parent/caregiver focus groups for a total sampling frame of 100 and 6% of eligible parents/caregivers participated. All 24 of CHA's Kindergarten through 5th grade teachers were included in the sampling frame and 8% of eligible teachers participated. Three administrators were included in the sampling frame and 100% of eligible administrators participated.

Recruitment and Data Collection

In order to ensure parent/caregiver contact information remained confidential prior to consent, CHA's school social worker mailed the recruitment letters to purposefully selected parents/caregivers. The researcher originally intended to have the two parent/caregiver groups divided by their child's grade level. Parents/caregivers of K-2nd graders received one letter (see Appendix D) and parents/caregivers of 3rd-5th grade received a different letter (see Appendix E) to accommodate the different meeting date and time for each group. The recruitment letters outlined the purpose of the study, explained that the groups would last approximately one hour, and offered an incentive for attending (a $5 Starbucks gift card). The recruitment letter also contained the researcher's contact information and instructed willing parents/caregivers to make voluntary contact with the researcher to ask additional questions and confirm attendance at the focus group sessions. Due to a low initial response, a second purposeful sample was selected for recruitment (See Appendix F).   Both parent/caregiver focus groups were then scheduled based on respondent availability and not on their child's grade level. Three parents/caregivers attended each group for a total of 6 parent/caregiver participants.

Teachers were recruited via an emailed form letter (see Appendix G) through a secure CHA faculty email system. Much like the parent/caregiver recruitment letter, teachers were instructed as to the nature of the study, the date, time, and location of the group, and notified that the group should last approximately one hour. Teachers were also instructed to respond to the email with any questions and to confirm attendance. Teachers, however, were not offered an incentive to participate. Due to a low response

from the initial recruitment email, a second email was sent to the sample frame. No additional teachers responded to participate.

The Principal, the Academic Coordinator, and the Literacy Specialist were invited via an emailed form letter (See Appendix H) through a secure CHA faculty email system. Administrators were instructed to respond to the email with available meeting times. Interview appointments were scheduled based on these availabilities.

On the designated date and time, focus group participants (both parent/caregiver and teachers) met in the conference room at CHA located adjacent to the front office. Participants were greeted by the researcher and then asked to read and sign an informed consent (see Appendix I for Parent/caregiver Consent form and Appendix J for teacher consent form). The consent form explained how disclosed information was be used and expressly stated that information discussed during the focus group was to be kept confidential except for the purposes of analyzing, coding, and interpreting data for the research study. Next, participants were instructed to fill out the demographic survey (See Appendix L for Parent/caregiver survey and Appendix M for teacher survey). Following the completion of said surveys, the researcher gave a brief introduction about the nature of the study and the participant roles during the focus group. Participants were encouraged to answer honestly and to give detailed responses with possible examples while still allowing time for other group members to respond and contribute. The researcher then proposed questions and allowed time for discussion.

Participating administrators were not asked to complete a demographic survey but did sign an informed consent form similar to the one given to focus group participants

(see Appendix K). As in the focus groups, a brief introduction to the study took place before the researcher began asking questions.

Both of the parent/caregiver focus groups, the teacher focus group, and the three administrative interviews were recorded using a digital recording device.

<div align="center">Measures</div>

The use of a demographic questionnaire helped to identify specific characteristics of the participating population. This information helped to explain qualitative data gathered during focus groups and interviews. Parent/caregiver participants were asked to identify gender, race, marital status, education, income, family size, and Likert scale formatted questions about literacy involvement (See Appendix L). Teacher participants were asked to identify gender, race, education level, years of experience, literacy training experience, and Likert Scale formatted questions about literacy education (See Appendix M).

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The recorded focus groups and interview files were sent electronically, through a secure server, to a transcriptionist where each session was transcribed separately.

Constant Comparative Method – Grounded Theory

Grounded theory data analysis procedures were utilized to review the transcribed material and to interpret meanings of participant responses (Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). According to Barney Glaser (2001), "all is data": "What is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents, in whatever combination. It is not only what is being told, how

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it is being told and the conditions of its being told, but also all the data surrounding what is being told" (p. 145). Analysis of the transcripts began with initial coding. Charmaz (2006) outlines the following strategies for initial coding: 1) remain open, 2) stay close to the data, 3) keep codes simple and precise, and 4) move quickly through the data. Careful, line-by-line readings of the data created initial codes. After initial coding, the researcher utilized a more focused coding where the most significant and frequent codes were used as guides to sift through the transcripts again and develop concepts (Charmaz, 2006). Axial coding allowed the researcher to make connections between codes in order to create categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). These categories were analyzed, compared, and combined to derive major themes. Memo writing throughout the process allowed the researcher to draw conclusions based on the data and to understand the collected data as it related to the research topic (Glaser, 2001). Identified themes from the parent/caregiver focus groups were compared to the teacher focus group themes and both were compared to the administrative interview responses to identify possible discrepancies and shared beliefs both as separate population groups as well as between the levels of authority.

Maintaining Rigor

Several research practices were implemented throughout this qualitative study in an attempt to maintain rigor. According to Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie (1994) "Qualitative research is not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding of the experience or form of action under study" (as cited in Lincoln, 1995, p. 278). The outlined

methodologies and subsequent implementation of the research design were in an attempt to understand role definitions and expectations with regard to family engagement in a school environment, specifically as it relates to literacy practices. Efforts were taken to maintain validity, reliability, and objectivity through the design, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis phases of the study.

This study builds upon the current knowledge base regarding family engagement in literacy education. The goal of the research questions was to further explore the extent families were engaged in the development and implementation of literacy curriculum, to discover both strengths and limitations to engagement practices, and to understand these variables from different perspectives. Subsequently, focus group and interview questions were carefully designed to collect data related to the outlined research questions. The triangulation of parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrator perspectives gave voice to the variety of participants in the literacy education process, a method previously unexplored in current research on family engagement in literacy.

The results of the study seek to serve CHA faculty, teachers, and families "rather than simply serving the community of knowledge producers and policy makers" (Lincoln, 1995, p.280). An institutional understanding of family factors and educational perspectives informs administrators and teachers regarding best practices to meet family engagement needs. The desire and willingness of families to be utilized in the literacy education process ultimately serves to improve educational outcomes for students. Methodology and procedures were specified in detail so the study can be duplicated to verify this study's results, as well as to further inform institutions and families.

Member checking during focus groups and interviews also contributed to maintaining rigor. The researcher attempted to establish rapport with participants in an effort to create a comfortable environment for sharing information and experiences. This was especially important in the parent/caregiver focus groups when sharing personal, family literacy struggles required a level of vulnerability. Member checking also included the researcher summarizing participant responses to ensure an adequate understanding of expressed views. For example, the researcher restated responses and asked follow up questions to expand upon vague statements in an effort to adequately portray participant meanings and intentions.

This study maintained rigor by preserving an audit trail. Audio recordings were transferred from the digital recording device to a password-protected computer. Digital transcriptions of focus groups and interviews were unaltered and digitally stored. Printed copies of transcriptions were used for coding and all coded copies were saved and stored. Completed demographic questionnaires from focus groups as well as signed consent forms from all participants were also stored. Additionally, digital copies of all original documents (focus group and interview questions, surveys, consent forms, and research proposal) were stored in a digital file on a password-protected computer.

Potential limitations were fully disclosed in this manuscript and will be disclosed to CHA participants and Lena Pope Home in a report of this study's findings. One limitation was that the response rate for both teacher and parent/caregiver focus groups was low when compared to CHA populations. However, participation was strictly voluntary and there was no way to account for low turnout prior to this study's design

and implementation. Additionally, participants covered the spectrum of teaching and

parenting experiences specifically related to literacy. An additional limitation was the

researcher's relationship with CHA but every attempt was made to limit researcher bias

through the use of third party perspectives at every stage of design development.

Chapter 4

Results

Quantitative

The demographic surveys were analyzed and information was categorically organized to explain the focus group populations. Microsoft Excel was used to compute the descriptive statistics. The parent/caregiver focus group surveys explained gender, race, education, income, and family size (See Appendix E). Table 4.1 on the following page lists the statistics from the demographic surveys. All participants were the biological parents/caregivers of children at CHA and were all female, ages 36 to 47. Racially, 67% identified as Caucasian and 33% identified as African-American. One participant was single, never married and the rest reported being married. All participants reported completing at least some college.

According to the Likert Scale responses, all participants felt comfortable asking their child's teacher questions and helping their child with homework. All agreed that they had a good relationship with their child's teacher and CHA administrators, and felt welcome at the school. All participants felt that CHA considers their family when making educational decisions, and that they could voice their ideas and opinions with employees of CHA. Participants also reported being engaged in the education process. Participants were neutral when asked whether CHA considers family demands when planning after school activities. The majority of participants reported having children who are reading and writing at or above grade level, but the majority also reported wishing they could help their child to perform better.

Table 4.1 Parent/caregiver survey results

Category	Percentage	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender				
Female	100			
Age		36-47	42.6	4.56
30-39	16.67			
40-50	66.67			
Did not disclose	16.67			
Race				
Caucasian (vs. African American)	67.00			
Marital Status				
Single, Never Married	16.67			
Married	83.33			
Number of Children		2-5	3.17	1.47
1	0			
2	66.67			
3	0			
4	0			
5 or more	33.33			
Education Level				
Some College	33.33			
College Degree	50.00			
Advanced Degree	16.67			
Household Income				
$25,000-$50,000	16.67			
$50,000-$75,000	0			
$75,000-$100,000	16.67			
More than $100,000	33.33			
Did not disclose	33.33			
Relationship to Student				
Biological Parent/caregiver	100			

The teacher focus group surveys explained gender, race, number of years at CHA, current teaching grade, past teaching grades, level of education, and professional development opportunities for both literacy education and engaging families (See Appendix F). Table 4.2 below describes statistics from the teacher surveys. All teacher

participants were female. The participants reported currently teaching kindergarten, first, and second grades but have previously taught all grades from kindergarten to fifth. All teacher participants reported at least a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education and two reported advanced degrees.

Table 4.2 Teacher survey results

Category	Percentage	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender				
Female	100			
Race				
Caucasian (vs. African American)	67.00			
# Years Teaching		5-11	7	3.46
1-5	66.67			
More than 10	33.33			
# Years at CHA		1-6	4	2.65
1-5	66.67			
6-10	33.33			
Current Grade at CHA				
Kindergarten	33.33			
1	33.33			
2	33.33			
Grades Taught				
Kindergarten	33.33			
1	66.67			
2	66.67			
3	33.33			
4	33.33			
5	33.33			
Education Level				
College Degree	33.33			
Advanced Degree	66.67			

According to Likert Scale responses, all participants reported experience and comfort levels teaching literacy. Participants agreed that they included parents/caregivers in the literacy learning process, in dialogue about helping children reach their literacy

goals, and when communicating concerns. All participants reported that they would listen to parent/caregiver concerns and that parents/caregivers felt comfortable addressing concerns when they arise. Two teachers reported an awareness of factors outside of school affecting students but one teacher did not. The teachers reported not considering family factors when assigning reading homework and reported that they neglect to regularly invite parents/caregivers into the classroom to help with literacy learning goals.

<div align="center">Qualitative</div>

The parent/caregiver focus groups identified themes about individual beliefs in literacy development and family beliefs about responsibilities to this development. Parents/caregivers offered concerns about personal obstacles in helping their children learn to read that are specifically related to institutional practices. They also offered their perspectives about the ways in which teachers and administrators have both successfully and unsuccessfully engaged families in the literacy process. Group members offered insight about potential solutions to overcoming barriers that could have implications for the literacy process.

Teachers expressed their core beliefs about literacy learning and identified limitations to engaging families. Teachers also identified strengths of effectively engaging parents/caregivers to encourage literacy progress among students. They addressed both family and institutional barriers, specifically as it pertained to encouraging family engagement in the literacy curriculum planning.

The administrators described their expectations from the institution, teachers, and families. They offered insight about family and institutional strengths as well as barriers

to literacy curriculum planning. In addition, administrators identified family and teacher roles that both prohibit and encourage the literacy learning process. Combining and comparing the three perspectives illuminated several strengths, limitations, and viable solutions to create an opportunity to move from a level of family involvement to a consistent level of engagement.

Role Expectations.

Parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators agreed that literacy education is a shared responsibility between home and school. Parents/caregivers identified themselves as their children's first teachers and chose formal schooling as a way to assist them in their responsibility to teach. One parent/caregiver commented: "I really feel like it's a partnership. I've always felt like I'm my child's first teacher…I started teaching them before they even came to school. But I do need their assistance." Another parent/caregiver stated: "It's cooperative because I don't expect the school to take full responsibility for that. And if I took full responsibility I would just home school."

Parents/caregivers also reported it is their responsibility to engage their children in literacy education, even after children begin formal schooling:

> It starts out with the parent reading to the child before they even get to school…Then school age is the teacher enhancing everything from there and the parent still has to continue to engage the child in reading at home, in the car, anywhere.

Parents/caregivers cited asking their child to read print material for them. One mother's example was, "Hey, I don't have my reading glasses on. Can you read me this recipe?"

Parent/caregiver participants shared a belief that teachers are responsible for teaching fundamentals through formal instruction and family roles are to coach, support,

and reinforce classroom agendas. Parent/caregiver participants also identified the following as their responsibilities: practice, do additional tasks, reaffirm, emphasize, ensure child does the work, and acquire teacher recommended resources. One mother summed up the sentiment of all parent/caregiver participants when she said:

> I'm not a teacher. So all the pieces that they have to have for standardized testing…I can't give them those things but I can practice and do the additional tasks to reaffirm and emphasize the places where they need the extra help, make sure that they have the resources that they need and make sure that they do the work.

Teachers also expressed the belief that parents/caregivers were children's first teachers and believed in the need to partner with families to accomplish literacy goals. One teacher stated, "I try to let the parents know: you are their first teacher." Another teacher said, "You cannot just say 'It is your job to teach my child how to read.' It has got to be collaborative." Teachers believed the family's role was to enrich what was taught at school. Teacher participants also believed their role was to teach parents/caregivers as well children:

> …I feel it is our job to equip them with how to do it, how to do homework with their kid. How to read with their kids and not just breeze through the words but stop every now and then and ask a question and let them explain stuff. Let them try to pick out the words.

In addition, teacher participants outlined the importance of making the home/school connection: "But you have to make that home connection…So you just kind of talk about how that correlates to school and some of the learning that happens."

Administrator perspectives about family roles were school directed, with the added belief that school directed approaches were best. According to one administrator, "[Parents/caregivers] look for the educator to help them out." Another administrator

described the CHA philosophy about family involvement: "Parents are always welcome…we encourage parents to come in and volunteer…they come in and they do small group reading." Participating administrators reported that CHA families were successfully involved based on turnout to school sponsored events. Cited examples of successful school directed involvement were attendance at Literacy Day, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering at the school. When asked how families were utilized, one administrator said,

> You know, we've got a group of parents that come in and make copies for teachers, do the laminating, the cutting…I think we rely on them to do the tasks that might seem, you know, kind of small or whatever, but they are still very, very important tasks and obviously we couldn't function if those things weren't done.

> Administrators reported being the directors of family engagement in the home.

One administrator explained parent/caregiver engagement by describing a school's responsibility to notify the family about literacy struggles:

> Here are some strategies that you can do at home, or this is what your child enjoys here at school…Whatever those strategies are that work for the individual student, we are going to go ahead and let the parents know so that they can reiterate that at home.

Administrators acknowledged the need for families to participate in the education process, and admitted there was room to improve family engagement:

> …We definitely could probably improve in this area to build the capacity of the parent to be the child's first educator…I definitely see where that could be an area that we really try to focus a little bit more on about, you know, helping parents and empowering them to be partners in the education process.

When asked if current family involvement practices were available to all parents/caregivers of CHA students, one administrator replied:

I think there's some really core group of parents that are very much engaged and
very much participating and excited to be here. They volunteer a lot, those sorts
of things…I think we could probably do more for those parents that work during
the day to bring them in and then in another way.

Collaboration vs. Cooperation

Parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrator participants shared beliefs about the

importance of families in literacy education. However, parent/caregiver participants

described opportunities to collaborate with teachers, while teachers and administrators

described a desire for parents/caregivers to cooperate. Parents/caregivers expressed

desires to be aware of problems, such as grade level proficiency in reading, and to be part

of finding solutions: "[Teachers] are not really sending home any instructions of what to

look for or how to go about showing the child if they're struggling at home how to fix it

or solve the problem." Parent/caregiver participants expressed a desire to implement

home practices that enhance literacy development. In order to accomplish this goal, they

wanted to collaborate with teachers and expressed frustration when teachers did not

consider the home component. One mother explained:

> …Teachers are so hard pressed to teach, teach, teach to a test. So, and that's
> where the collaborative effort comes in because the parents have to help their kids
> when they get home, but if we have a number done on them before we even get to
> that path, then it makes it really difficult to be a collaborative effort…

Parents/caregivers admitted that they are not equipped to do the job alone. One

parent/caregiver openly professed that she did not have all the pieces to prepare her kids

for standardized testing: "I don't know what the milestones are." However,

parents/caregivers expressed a desire to be utilized as more than someone to do as they

are told: They want to be partners in the learning process. One mother believed that literacy education is "70% parent responsibility and 30% teacher responsibility."

Teachers professed a belief in true collaboration but cited examples that demonstrated their desire for parents/caregivers to carry out teacher-initiated agendas. Teachers' examples of involvement were attending Open House, Literacy Night, and parent-teacher conferences. Additionally they cited directives such as "read to your child", "go to the library", and "read together" as examples of collaboration. When asked what role they expected families to play, one teacher vocalized the sentiments of the entire group when she said:

> I would like for families to take a more active role in literacy like reading together at home, a little less I guess TV and video and just, you know, maybe even a family reading thing or listening to books on tape, on CD together. Trips to the library and, you know, make it an interactive thing; that way it's not just the kid sitting at a table having to read this or finish homework.

When asked to share a successful collaborative experience, one teacher shared a story about working with a struggling reader: "I spent a lot of time just talking to the mom and suggestions with mom and telling her even on the weekends if she doesn't want to read, she needs to be reading." Teachers defined a partnership as parents/caregivers coming to observe the classroom, reading to a group of kids, and helping out with classroom projects and clerical tasks.   One teacher vocalized her belief that presence was enough when she said: "If the kids see that the parents care enough to come up here and spend their time and everything…then you know school is important."

Administrators believed that parents/caregivers are valuable contributors to they system and emphasized the importance of their feedback. One administrator stated that

they "rely on parents" but did not describe collaborative efforts. Instead she mentioned

the Parent Advisory Committee as something parents are invited to attend to provide

feedback about school activities. She explained that the faculty member facilitator has an

agenda, "but we always leave room at the end for parents to give input and talk about,

you know, any new business and anything new they would wanna see."

Genre Study Model

Perhaps true collaborative efforts have not been perceived as important until the

implementation of a new literacy education model. Traditional reading curricula, termed

"canned" curricula by participating administrators, were described as pre-packaged

lessons that include reading passages and questions for students to answer about the

selected passage. According to administrator responses, these curricula have ready-made

lesson plans for teachers and offer limited critical thinking opportunities for students.

One administrator described the old curriculum structure as, "this is the expectation and

let me see how many of you can reach this far."

Participating administrators reported that in 2012 CHA began implementing a

new, evidence-based, genre study of literature in place of the traditional reading

curriculum. Administrators referred to the new literacy instruction program as a

"workshop model". One administrator described the new curriculum by saying:

> First and foremost, it teaches the students all the different genres that there are
> available to them so that they can find what they are most interested in or what
> they enjoy the most. So it's teaching them to have a love of reading, an
> appreciation of all literary texts, and the actual state assessment is now just testing
> authentic reading. So anything that they use on the assessment is going to be true
> poetry, true stories, true biographies that are really out in the real world.

Another administrator said the workshop model provided a scaffolding to help kids reach an independent level of learning while teaching strategies, not text, that every reader will need. According to administrator responses, this model eliminated leaving lower readers behind during instruction because concepts could be applied to any reading level. Gifted and talented students also benefitted because they were not limited in what they chose to read and apply literary concepts to. Administrators believed the workshop model encouraged students to take more risks with literature, which increased depth of learning.

In spite of its benefits, the administrators reported workshop model challenges for teachers, and administrators see that teachers are hesitant to embrace the technique. The model is a new way of teaching, takes some getting used to, and requires more intuition. One administrator said, "There's a small sense of loss of control because it's a lot more student focused, student driven. And so the teacher has to kind of be a little bit more hands off, and for some teachers that's very intimidating." According to another administrator, instead of falling back on reliable, canned curricula, teachers are required to invest in each student's literacy experience: "It's not a prescribed method. You can't open a book and teach this…whatever is written." Administrators reported that more time is devoted to individual and group conferencing to accommodate the variety of student learning interests and literature choices. Additionally, the curriculum requires teachers to be familiar with students' interests, lived experiences, and relevant literature: "It takes a lot of thinking and really knowing your kids out of the process…We want our teachers to know our kids, to know how they learn best." "And so you not only have to

know your child and their interests and what they, you know, really need but you have to assess constantly to see what they've mastered."

Administrators explained that successful implementation of this model requires collaboration with individual students and their families. According to administrators, teachers are still learning how to successfully implement this model through "weekly staff development, a professional development that is actually being led by the teachers themselves". Administrators reported that the workshop model teaching technique takes time to master but that teachers are "growing together, with administration included so that there is a true buy-in with the entire staff, and they can see they results." Interestingly, parents/caregivers did not comment at all on the Genre Study Model, an indication that families may not have been engaged in the workshop model process yet. One administrator said, "I think once we get the teachers comfortable with this type of model then they can transfer that to the parents."

Struggling Learners

In addition to the new curriculum seen as a teacher limitation, administrators cited the added responsibilities for struggling learners as a common drawback for teachers. According to participating teachers and administrators, the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework is a federally mandated tier system. Its four essential components are 1)screening, 2)progress monitoring, 3)data based decision making, and 4)a multi-level prevention system (Zirkey, 2013). All students begin schooling on tier one, translated to performing at or above grade level. Teachers are responsible for identifying struggling learners and then keep detailed notes for six weeks to track progress. After six weeks, an

administrative committee meets with the teacher to review the notes and recommend a movement to tier 2 if insufficient progress was made. According to teacher participants, moving tiers is "a conversation that [the school] has with parents" where parents/caregivers are informed about their child's lack of progress. According to one administrator, "Tier two we at least have a parent-teacher conference." The administrator reported that tier 2 students are assigned to work with the Reading Specialist and given extra take home assignments to improve literacy outcomes:

> With our lower grades we'll give them like an alphabet chart where they can match the letter to the picture so that way they know letter-sound correspondence and do that at home. I give them writing activities so like involving your child in writing the grocery list or different activities that are more fun but easy for parents.

Administrators explained that students who continue to struggle are moved to tier 3 where frequency and intensity of interventions is increased.

Participating administrators observed that this could be an overwhelming process for teachers and sometimes teachers were unable to find the best practices to meet students' needs. Teachers expressed how painful it was to see students who were not on reading level at the end of the year, particularly when they perceived a lack of family support as a contributing factor: "It just breaks my heart because, you know as a student that is just…he's not progressing. It's just painful to see at this time of the year that you're not reading on level." "I'm constantly telling [parents/caregivers] what to do and it's more a choosing not to do." "So there are some parents it seems like it's just not a priority for them." "But it's the ones that don't try and don't really care because the parents don't really care."

Parent/caregiver participants expressed concern that teachers invest too much time on struggling learners instead of overall classroom instruction: "the smart kids are overshadowed by the needy ones." One mother believes that parents/caregivers should be accountable for struggling learners instead of the classroom teacher. By way of solution, one administrator suggested the implementation of shorter, whole group lessons and then target specific students who need assistance afterward in order to help teachers meet the diverse needs in the larger classroom setting.

Accountability

Teachers reported that they assigned weekly reading logs as homework and tried to "get [the students] to higher level thinking" by adding a question/answer section students must complete about their reading. Teachers said they "appreciated our administration this year because they said, 'You have to do the reading log.' They understand how important literacy is and their reading component." One administrator commented, "I think teachers in every grade have some type of like a reading log where the students are responsible for logging reading time." As an accountability measure, teachers and administrators commented that families would not be invited back the following year if they were not willing to enforce the completion of homework in the home environment: "And so we had one family that we said, 'You might not be invited back.'"

> And there have been some instances where I've had to say, 'You know, CHA may not be the best fit for you. If you can't help us out at home and at least your child is sitting down and doing their homework, then this may not be the place for you,' because we do have certain expectations that the families have to meet.

Parent/caregiver participants reported several practices that encouraged accountability. Some of the parent/caregiver participants felt that reading logs held them accountable to completing a teacher directed task and they admitted this helps them make sure their child reads at home. Parents/caregivers are required to sign off each day their child has read: "…the teachers have little things they want them to read and initial that you've done it. And that keeps us accountable besides just being a good idea." Parents/caregivers stated they checked backpacks and homework folders daily so they were aware of the expectations for their child and so their child expected to disclose any necessary information on a daily basis. Parents/caregivers also believed that having a child read aloud was a form of accountability to check for fluency: "But there are days when either we're home or going places in the vehicle and I'll have her read to me, checking for fluency." "I feel like reading aloud helps with speech and it helps with delivery and it helps with a level of comprehension."

Challenges in the Learning Environment -Teacher Practices

The Red Pen

Both parents/caregivers and administrators addressed teacher practices that detract from a positive learning environment. One example was a teacher's use of the red pen as a barrier to literacy learning. The shared belief was that teachers hindered the learning process when resorting to the red pen instead of using a student's mistakes as a teaching moment to foster growth. One administrator observed:

> I think that a creditable teacher that might…instead of providing feedback they decide to get the red pen…you know, that red pen I think hinders it. So instead of helping them grow where you can say, 'I noticed you did this. Why don't we try this?' It's more like, 'That's wrong.'

One Parent/caregiver participants vocalized her child's experience as a victim of the red pen:

> I'm sure you all saw the packets that came home with all the red on it. And for kids that struggle, it does a huge number on the psyche and their self-esteem. So when I get there I have to clean up and help him get to a place where, 'Okay. This is not the end of the world.'

Ultimately, parents/caregivers felt that when teachers made a child feel like a failure, it was one more thing families had to deal with at home: repairing hurt feelings, rebuilding self-esteem, and fostering courage to try again.

The Pressure of Failure

Parent/caregiver participants felt that teaching to the standardized test was another factor that contributed to a negative learning environment. Participants agreed with arguments regarding NCLB's flaws: overinvestment in testing while underinvesting in capacity building (Elmore, 2003; Hursh, 2006; Lipman, 2003). One mother said, "And there's too many of them [teachers] walking around saying 'If you don't pass the test, you're not going to go to the next grade level'". The pressure of testing combined with the threat of failing caused anxiety among their children and reduced the capacity to learn: "I had one [child] last year that took the STAR test that was so upset…I mean, throwing up…just distraught that he was gong to have to repeat fourth grade." While parent/caregiver participants understood the need to benchmark levels of achievement, participants felt that standardized testing expectations were a private conversation for parents/caregivers to have with their child and should not be used by schools as threats to improve performance: "It's fine if you wanna send that…to talk to

the parents and let the parents deal with the child that way, but don't just throw it out there in the classroom."

Expectations

Administrators felt that when behavior expectations were more important than learning, teachers hindered the education process. They also cited rigor as a curriculum expectation. One administrator described her role in assessing literacy goals: "I have the role of observing teachers to make sure, you know, that they are implementing their lesson plans, of observing teachers to make sure there is rigor in the classroom and things like that." Administrators believed that quiet classrooms did not foster an education in literacy because so much of literacy learning begins with language:

> If you walk around, some teachers don't believe in talk or conversation in the classroom. That can severely impact because language is so related to reading and writing. So I really try to promote talk, but there are teachers that really like a silent classroom where kids are, I guess, 'being good'.

> Talk amongst students is really what grows their learning process because they're asking questions and they're serving as the expert sometimes. And they are kinds of exploring their thinking, and that's really a proven theory of learning.

Parent/caregiver participants cited constantly changing expectations that confused both parents/caregivers and students, and limited educational potential. One example discussed was the reading log expectations. Students have always been expected to complete a weekly reading log but about half way through the school year, teachers decided to add a question section to the reading log to encourage students to critically think about what they read and to incorporate writing practice into weekly homework. At first, students were required to formulate their own critical thinking questions and answers based on their texts. One parent/caregiver said homework "jumped from the 10

yard line to the 50 yard line." Parents/caregivers felt this was an unnecessary burden for their child and above their grade level proficiency, so parents/caregivers began composing the questions their child should answer. Teachers reported the questions were a great idea and did not acknowledge an unnecessary burden for parents/caregivers.

Parent/caregiver participants also felt that homework lacked adequate instructions and/or examples about how to do the work. This presented a large problem when students could not remember the classroom instruction after returning home to complete homework. Subsequently, this limited a parent/caregiver's ability to help their child with homework:

> Sometimes, if they're having a problem with the homework it's not enough detailed instructions…say it's a math problem and there's no sample of how it's done somewhere, you know almost the same. And they can't remember from school. So it needs to be more examples or… we had books to take home. There are no more books. It's just worksheets and packets.

One mother mentioned that she has regularly had to Google how to do a problem and sometimes it was not the same process the teacher used during instruction. This left her child more confused than enriched from homework. She explained, "I helped children of mine in the past and have been told, 'No, you're not supposed to help me with that because we're learning it this way now.' So I'm trying to support the way they're doing it but I'm not gonna confuse the issue." Additionally, without instructions, parents/caregivers did not feel they knew what to look for in order to identify struggling areas and thus fix any problems.

Administrators also cited a lack of communication of school literacy expectations as a teacher initiated barrier for learning. One administrator said, "You have to teach

them how to choose a good book." Specifically, parents/caregivers did not know what to read, what their child reads, or how to help their child choose appropriate literature. One administrator explained that she was working on a blog to help families navigate assisting their children in choosing books: "So what I'm working on is what does each grade level reader look like? So let me show you a picture of a kindergartener, you know; this is what types of books they should be reading and then here are some books to support that."

Teachers in the focus group addressed regular encounters with families who stressed about finding level-appropriate material for their child. Teachers explained the process of choosing appropriate literature: "If your child can't read, read the book to the child. Don't let the kids struggle through entire books of words the kids don't know." "Just because it's a very child-like book that just means he's going to enjoy it; that does not mean he's going to be able to read it."

Assuming Families Do Not Care

Teacher participants believed that some families do not know how to engage. One teacher said, "So I think once we work with them [parents/caregivers] and try to equip them with the tools to help their kids, most parents are receptive…" Another teacher explained, "There are some families…you can tell, there's a high school education and they're just not sure what to do." In contrast, teachers also believed that some parents/caregivers were choosing not to help because it's "just not a priority for them [parents]," as one teacher explained. Another teacher said, "I can talk to a parent/caregiver until I'm blue in the face and it doesn't seem to make a difference."

Parent/caregiver participant responses point to a lack of knowledge, not a lack of investment. In addition to not knowing how to choose level-appropriate literature, parent/caregiver participants expressed their frustrations at not knowing enough about literacy benchmarks in order to help their children reach appropriate milestones. They also commented that standardized testing was not as stressful when they were young. Teacher directives were not always understood in the same way they were intended. Parent/caregiver participants admitted they were not educators and did not have access to the same knowledge and resources.

Teacher Strength - Individualized Care

Parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators shared that teachers were good at ensuring learning styles were met. Teachers proclaimed tailoring the homework to meet the child's academic needs: "You need to go back and do sight words before you can understand the assigned homework." "There have been some [parents] that have I've told, 'Don't do the homework anymore. I need you to go back to letters and sounds and read to them every day.'" "I'll customize [homework] and try to make it work for them…So, let's put this packet aside; it's not going to help your child at this point."

Teachers and administrators felt that teachers are willing to implement new practices if they were backed by research and they make modifications to curriculum for a child's best interest. Administrators commented:"I know our teachers and I as an administrator feel like we don't need a district policy to tell us that we do what's best for the kids." "Our teachers don't need a piece of paper giving them permission to make whatever modifications or accommodations they need to make to help that child be

successful." "I think the teachers are really good at making sure other student's style of learning is met."

Parent/caregiver participants felt that CHA teachers generally care about students, will take their own time to give additional help as needed, and bring a level of excitement to the learning environment: "I just see that the teacher's excitement level and the joy of being there…and really their knowledge makes a big difference for the children."

> My oldest's teacher we talked about, 'Yeah, he's getting pulled out for extra help here. Well, I can stay on and stay and do extra work with him.' Out of her own time! There was not a group. It was just…she was going to do extra with him to help him get to grade.

Institutional Strengths

Best Practices

Participating parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators agreed that CHA employs best practices to support the students. One administrator said, "We don't need a district policy to tell us that we do what's best for the kids." Administrators felt that CHA is individualized and open to new ideas with the understanding that what works for one might not work for another. According to administrators, CHA understands the importance of literacy, in fact they claimed that literacy is the strength of the school, and teachers felt supported in their efforts to help students reach literacy goals. Teachers believed the administrators have an open door policy for teachers to make suggestions as long as they are backed by evidence-based practice and translate to positive test scores. Parents/caregivers stated the CHA expectation is that "You are going to read here!"

Incentives and Peer Learning

Parent/caregiver participants also cited peer learning and incentives as institutional strengths. Better readers were often paired with struggling readers, serving a dual purpose: The proficient reader was awarded an opportunity to help a classmate and the struggling reader benefited from the individualized reading attention. Entire classes of upper grades were assigned to tutor younger classes, building confidence for all participants. One mother said, "I know that was a good influence, was a big impact on my daughter that she has helped somebody else." Another mother said, "The Book It! Program too…that's a good incentive for the kids that they have to read, you know, so many minutes to earn something. And they enjoy doing that." Students were also given books to take home over the summer months, with struggling readers given at least 25 books to keep: "My son last year went to the reading camp…and he had like three bags of books come home." An administrator explained that the reading camp was part of a book drive to donate books to struggling readers over the summer: "Last year we raised 3500 books and so all of my struggling readers got at least 25. And then everyone else in the school came through and at least got to choose 4 or 5 books of interest."

Cutting Edge

Administrators describe CHA as cutting edge and claimed that the genre study model was just being introduced in other districts but CHA boasts two years of implementation. One administrator explained that CHA has "ongoing professional development throughout the year. That's something new we started this year on Monday afternoons…Professional development has definitely been a focus this year." She explained that teachers demonstrate small group and one-on-one instruction and the

reading specialist shows videotapes or herself teaching specific classroom lessons. Administrators also claim CHA has access to more technology: "We have like 200 and something iPads…We have the technology component, smart boards in every classroom; that is very powerful…We have a science lab and I don't think a lot of schools would have that."

Institutional Barriers

Access to Books

Chief among the institutional barriers to literacy is the lack of a circulating library at CHA where students can check out library books to take home. All participants explained that the current library does not have an adequate inventory to accommodate the entire student population, so students in the older grades check out books but have to leave them in their desks at school. Both teachers and parents/caregivers also felt that the current library selection and atmosphere are not conducive for younger grades.

Essentially, and vocalized by all participants, a lack of access to books does not translate to a school whose highest priority is literacy. One administrator stated "research shows that schools without circulating libraries are less likely to have readers on level because they don't have access to print". Teacher and parent/caregiver participants felt the lack of a library places an added burden on families to make the journey to their nearest public library to compensate. Additionally, parents/caregivers pointed out that for many families with time and transportation constraints, particularly those of lower socio-economic status, public library access is limited if at all present. Parents/caregivers also argued that a lack of regular access causes students to lose interest in books. One

parent/caregiver lamented that she wished her child could take home a book from the school library "because we're here everyday. The public library is 5 miles away." Other parent/caregiver comments addressed student perceptions influenced by the lack of access to books: "If books are off limits, what does that mean?" "What message does that send?" "Maybe they're kind of only for certain people." Teachers and administrators believe that children cannot translate literacy to the home environment when they cannot take books home: Books become just a "school" thing.

Teachers felt they are expected to have a substantial classroom library and some teachers allow students to bring home books from the classroom. According to one administrator, "a good educator is always going to pour in a lot of their salary into their own classroom." Teacher participants confirmed that they invested a lot of money in their classroom libraries. They also received donations from families as well as Scholastic book order incentives. However, they cited several limitations to a school's sole reliance on classroom libraries. Teachers claimed they invest in paperback books, typically cheaper than hardbound but do not stand the test of time. One teacher explained,

> You'll never have enough books because…the good thing about library books is they are hardback so they're durable. Well, the books that I buy from Half-Price Books or Scholastic, they are paperback. And so one year and you have to replace just about all of them because even no matter how much you teach about, you know, how to take care of books and stuff that's 20 kids with the same books every day for 180 days and there's going to be some wear and tear.

Additionally, grade level libraries do not serve to benefit struggling or gifted readers. As an added stressor, teachers explained that they may move grades from year to year, forcing them to invest in different grade level classroom libraries. One teacher, currently

teaching second grade this year, addressed both of these issues with the following

statement:

> I taught fourth grade last year and all my books are like fourth, fifth grade, and higher third-grade level books. And I'm like 'I don't have any second-grade books.' Or even the kids that are struggling second-grade readers, I don't have kindergarten or first-grade level books. I don't have any. So that was a chore to try to build that up…

According to administrators, the implementation of the workshop model to

literacy education requires a circulating library for students to have literacy success.

Because students choose their own literature to read, they need an opportunity to select

from a wide variety in order to fully benefit from the model's intentions. However, one

administrator noted, "I think the good thing is we're putting books in the classroom."

Meeting Student Needs

Administrators agreed that they could do a better job meeting the needs of all

families, particularly those of diverse populations. One administrator said, "…I don't

think we're quite where we need to be on making sure every student's need and strategy

is implemented." She cited the new reading curriculum as a tool to foster growth for

struggling learners: "When you have our demographics you get a lot of low readers. And

so you have to teach them on the level they are in order to boost them up."

Parent/caregiver participants believed that meeting student needs has become

increasingly difficult each year as the school has school expanded. Now at full capacity,

parents/caregivers felt that the structure, resources, and mentality have not expanded

accordingly. One participant commented:

> Now, compared to what you have at a public school and the immense library and the books and everything that they can offer at that public school. We have the

same number of students now from Pre-K to fifth grade—almost 500 students— we should have the resources for the students at this school in order for them to excel.

Parent/caregiver participants also cited inadequate parking and an insufficient auditorium to accommodate all parents/caregivers who wish to attend special events like Literacy Night, the Talent Show, and Open House. They believed this could deter families from wanting to participate. One mother stated, "The school got too large for them to continue to meet the needs of students." Another mother said, "In my mind, Chapel Hill School needs to change locations to better meet the needs of the students and families."

Parents/caregivers feel that a high teacher turnover rate is also a barrier for CHA's delivery of services. One mother explained her experience after her children's teacher left suddenly:

We've had several years where the teacher has left suddenly…there's no warning… And, you know, [my sons] didn't want to come to school. They were up in the middle of the night having this 'Who's gonna be there? What's gonna happen? Am I gonna have to stay back in my grade level because I don't have a teacher that's gonna be there to help me?'

Administrators also discussed high turnover rate, and one administrator cited improper teacher training: "I would have to say that we don't do the right training here at the beginning of the year…our training is not targeted to curriculum. It's not…I think that's the biggest weakness." As a result, administrators observed that teachers have not felt successful going into the classroom. In addition, one administrator believed that an exit interview when teachers leave could help determine areas for needed improvement: "And there's also no exit interview so there's high turnover rate but they're never saying, 'Well, what could we do better?'"

Lack of Training

In addition to a lack of curriculum training, both teachers and administrators admitted a lack of teacher training about successfully engaging families. Administrators believed that teachers are expected to come to CHA with this knowledge. According to one administrator,

> I would say we probably haven't had any formal like in-service about how to include parents. That is…It's something we strive for here at CHA because, I mean, we do rely so heavily on parent involvement. And so I think when we bring on teachers, you know, we bring them on with the expectation that this is a school that the parents are here…so we bring [teachers] in expecting that. Now, I'm not sure we really do anything to really foster their ability to do that.

Administrator participants felt that "CHA has room to grow" with teaching this skill to teachers.

Teachers expressed the belief that most schools do not train to engage parents/caregivers yet felt it would be advantageous for teachers to learn how to teach families as well. When asked if CHA offers teacher training to engage families, all teacher participants unanimously responded "No." When asked if they had ever participated in this type of training at another school one teacher said, "I can say that I know that I've been to things where there's parts of the workshop or there's parts of the developments that will be part of it but it won't necessarily be the reason you're at that development." Teachers vocalized a desire for implementation of professional development on engaging families. One teacher said, "Make these school districts offer us training in working with parents! It's that important!"

According to administrator perspectives, "the biggest complaint from teachers is our training." The school's superintendent (who is also the Executive Director of Lena

Pope Home) dictates what is included in the mandatory faculty training. According to one

administrator, a substantial portion of the back-to-school trainings were agency related

instead of education related: Defensive Driving, Handle With Care, CPR, and bullying

program training. In addition to the summer agency related training teachers were

required to visit each upcoming student's home before the start of the school year as part

of "the parent engagement component," according to one administrator. However,

teachers were not given training about conducting home visits. They were expected to

come equipped with this skill. One teacher described summer home visits as a wreck:

> We're told to do on these home visits. But they don't say what to do. So I would
> say probably--even though we do the home visits—I would say probably 25% of
> the people are home when we go. And that's because we go during the day. Our
> parents are working and so we're not really told what to do. So most of them we
> just leave a note on the door saying we were here. And you're lucky if you've
> gotten to a fourth of your class.

Administrators also expressed concern at the lack of time spent training teachers

to implement the workshop model to literacy. This was a new approach to literacy

education that most teachers were not used to. Instead of having all students literally on

the same page, teachers have had to emphasize concepts and how they relate to the

literature each child had chosen. One administrator, responsible for training teachers with

the new curriculum, said, "I was given 30 minutes in August to train teachers. So I

haven't had…If I had, you know, two days maybe they would've probably gone into the

classroom feeling comfortable." Administrators explained that the new curriculum also

requires more investment from teachers to get to know each individual child's likes and

interests and that proper training ultimately serves to engage families. To help the child,

a teacher has to know and understand family, economic, and community factors affecting

student learning. According to one teacher, "As teachers we have to build a relationship. It's not just about relationships with the kids. We have to build a relationship with the parents…"

Family Factors Limiting Literacy Engagement

Time

Consistent with time poverty findings by Williams and Sanchez (2011), all participants cited time as a family factor limiting literacy engagement. Administrators perceived time as a barrier to getting families involved due to obligations and overscheduling. They expressed empathy and demonstrated an understanding of social issues facing families: multiple jobs, a full plate, relying on daycare, single parents/caregivers, and low-incomes. While administrators acknowledged these factors as necessary tasks that may prevent opportunities to help out at school, they were not perceived as sufficient reasons to neglect literacy development:

> I now it's hard and I don't sit in judgment on them at all. But as an educator to see what kind of difference it makes…just if they could spend a little bit of time with their child reading…you know, it's disheartening a little bit. But I understand, you know.

Administrators and teachers felt that time constraints contribute to parents/caregivers abilities to follow through with literacy tasks and "just don't spend the time reading." Both groups vocalized desires for families to turn off the television and other electronic devices and spend time reading. Teachers admitted to forcing students to miss recess if they did not complete their homework, even after it was conveyed that the student did not have a family member to help them at home. Some teachers also demonstrated a lack of sympathy for the time constraints of some families. This was

evident by teacher admissions that they do not make concessions or curriculum adjustments to students who lack family support.

Parent/caregiver participants agreed time is a barrier to getting involved. They expressed a desire to support school agendas but logistics prevented it. They stated that families have to make tough choices about what to engage in. One parent said, "I wanted to go support but I can't be five places at one time. Uh, somebody has to take the kids home to eat…and then trying to do homework and all that in between. So you have to pick and choose which is the priority and what's not." Managing time to revolve more around literacy was something that the parents/caregivers felt they could improve. One mother said she has time alone with her children in the car and that she could do better about having her kids read aloud to her while she was driving in order to assess phonics, fluency, comprehension, and proficiency. Parents/caregivers also felt that electronics should be used as motivators instead of as a lifestyle. One mother stated that her kids earn electronic time by reading and completing other homework tasks.

Communication

Teachers vocalized how they feel about communicating with families and disclosed that it is very one-sided. Emails, phone calls, conferences, newsletters, notes in the folder, and lists of resources are all ways teachers listed that they communicate with families. However, parent/caregiver focus group respondents all felt that they were verbal parents/caregivers who advocated for their children yet voiced concerns for those parents/caregivers who were not proficient at communicating child and family needs:

"I make myself accessible, and I think that's a huge strength. I know it's tough for a lot of folks that may work that may not be able to get away." "That always concerns me because I know there are a lot of parents out there that aren't super-involved or aren't, you know, reading or aren't…they are at work or they are ill or whatever else. Ando so…that always concerns me." Ultimately parent/caregiver participants believed that advocating for their child and communicating needs resulted in better services.

Parent/Caregiver Influence

The personal educational experiences of parents/caregivers served as both strengths and weaknesses, depending on the nature of such views. Each of the administrators expressed that family views about literacy influenced a child's view:

> 'Oh, I just never like to read.' Or 'Reading's not my thing.' You have to be cognizant as a parent about what slips out of your mouth because kids are listening and whether you think that they are busy doing something else, they always pick up on what you don't want them to hear.

> Kinds are gonna imitate what they see…We have parents that a lot of them don't read and don't really consider themselves readers…Or they may not have time…There are some hindrances as far as also what kind of experience the parent brings, you know…Was education valued in their home as they were growing up? What kind of educational experience did they have?

Administrators also observed that a parent/caregiver's negative school experiences influences how they approach engagement with their own children and the school.

> Parents have preconceived ideas of what their child's education is going to be like based on what they had, you know? If they had issues in school and struggled, their idea of even stepping into school might scare them to death. Those parents might not be as involved because they do not have, they don't associate school with anything good!

Consistent with the findings of Williams & Sanchez (2011), one mother vocalized that she brought her own issues from childhood into the school experience of her children:

"I was berated in front of my fourth grade class because I couldn't do long division and I was in remedial math." This experience affected her ability to have confidence when helping her son with homework. Teachers agreed that parents/caregivers might be intimidated when helping their child or asking for help from teachers and administrators. They cited feelings of inadequacy, not knowing what to do, not wanting to look stupid, and an "us against them" mentality preventing engagement.

Administrators, teachers, and parents/caregivers agreed that families who do not model reading and writing at home have children who struggle to read and write. However, all participants also vocalized concerns about families who force reading and writing as a chore. Teachers felt that parents/caregivers often go too far in an effort to help their children improve and inadvertently push their child into not wanting to read or write at all. Teachers emphasized that drilling does not foster a love of learning and that pressure can be detrimental. One parent/caregiver admitted that forcing her child to read caused the child to push back and give up reading all together. One administrator felt that parents/caregivers "drill the kid until they hate reading" instead of engaging the child in meaningful, interactive literacy activities. Teachers agreed that parents/caregivers should make learning fun with games and not drills.

Lack of Early Literacy Emphasis

Teachers reported finding that families often do not take literacy development as seriously in the younger grades. While they acknowledged there is some variation in literacy development based on maturity level, teachers observed there are instances where a parent/caregiver's lack of involvement stunted literacy development. Teachers reported

that parents/caregivers take struggling readers more seriously when standardized testing is involved: "…the older [students] get, the more serious it is." "The parents start taking it more seriously." "[Students] have to take a test." One teacher, who has taught bother lower and upper elementary grades, found that lower grade proficiency is essential to future literacy mastery: "In the younger grades it's foundational because they're gonna struggle in second and third and fourth grades if they're not given that foundation in Kindergarten."

Socio-Economic Status

Administrators addressed the impact of low-income and single-parent/caregiver households on literacy development. One administrator observed that most struggling readers are from low-income, single parent/caregiver homes and felt that "these kids already come to school with a limited vocabulary" as a result of limited literacy experiences in the home (reading, writing, conversation, exposure to modeling reading). Another administrator cited that a lack of basic resources limits a family's desire for higher learning. Teachers also expressed that when basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter are absent, education and higher moral functioning are not addressed as priorities in the home. Administrators felt that Lena Pope Home, the chartering/governing agency, is very good about helping families meet basic needs in order to help them make education a priority for their children, a luxury not awarded in other districts. Teachers and administrators agreed that it is very difficult, but not impossible, to help a child progress unless the home environment changes to a focus on literacy.

Strengths of Families

Modeling Literacy

All participants agreed that modeling literacy and the value of education is one of the greatest family contributions for literacy success. One parent/caregiver discussed how her role as an adult student in college helped her children to value education. Parents/caregivers who had already earned their degrees before having children felt that a college degree modeled the value of education into adulthood. Teachers observed that a parent/caregiver's level of education affected how they engaged with their child. One administrator felt valued practice at home should emphasize showing children that literacy is a "life" thing and not just a "school" thing.

Parents/caregivers felt reading to their child before he/she knew how to read was an important contributor to future literacy success. Teachers believed that reading, as a family activity, is a strength families brought to school literacy success. Each administrator mentioned modeling literacy as a family strength and that parents/caregivers who read raise children who read. Families should share their own literacy experiences with children and talk about what they are reading. Administrators also believed modeling writing is just as important, and gave examples such as putting notes in their child's lunchbox or writing out a grocery list.

Parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators discussed the value of siblings modeling literacy behaviors. Teachers and administrators both commented that older siblings reading to younger siblings, and vice versa, were excellent resources for families who are busy. Parents/caregivers, teachers and administrators emphasized the value of a child reading aloud to someone. Teachers felt that this encourages interactive reading,

where family members can ask questions throughout the process: "What do you think will happen next?" "What was your favorite part?" "I like how the main character did this. What did you think?" Administrators also emphasized the importance of having conversations with a child about text and its role in improving understanding and excitement about the literacy process.

Access to Books At Home.

In response to a lack of access to a library at CHA, one parent/caregiver said, "I refuse to be limited by whether or not [my daughter] gets a book from the school library or not." Participating parents/caregivers each boasted a personal home library, visits to the public library, and downloadable digital books to make sure their children have access to books. Teachers believed that access to books at home is a characteristic of successful literacy families. Administrators also felt that access to books at home was imperative to literacy success, therefore they ensured that disadvantaged families were given books to keep at home. Once again, the emphasis was on making sure that reading was not something that only takes place at school.

Make Reading Run

Parents/caregivers believed that a love of reading is a priority over catching up to grade level and that a parent/caregiver's role is to push the enjoyment of reading. "I don't want to make anything that would be like 'reading is not fun'." Administrators noted parents/caregivers who make learning at home fun as a benefit to literacy development. Teachers also believed learning at home should be fun for kids.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Best practices for family engagement in schools also suggest that parents/caregivers learn how to engage their children in the home with regards to literacy. Parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators who participated in this study reported that family participation in the reading process is largely responsible for producing literate children. In fact, teachers and administrators argued that accomplishing literacy success is almost impossible without involving families in the process. Each of the administrators expressed that family views about literacy influence a child's view, supporting arguments that families play an important role in the transfer of literacy (Sticht, 2012; Cooter, 2006). What participants disagreed on, however, were the means to accomplish engagement and at what level families should be engaged.

Administrators believed that most families shared their philosophy of family involvement. Consistent with previous research findings (Cremin, et al., 2012; Muschamp, 2007; Warren, et al., 2009), teachers and administrators professed ideals of engagement, but implementation of these ideals implied traditional, school-directed expectations for families (Young, et al., Cairny & Munsie, 1995). Parents/caregivers desired true collaboration with school faculty, yet they have become comfortable conforming to school-initiated requests and standards. Responses from participants in the parent/caregiver focus groups suggested their willingness to play a more active role in deciding the ways and means with which to become involved.

Access to Books

CHA administrators claimed that literacy is the strength of the school, yet participants described limitations to literacy education due to the lack of a rotating library. One administrator's claim that access to print correlates with reading on level is supported in several studies on literacy development (Lance, Curry, Rodney, Hamilton-Pennel, 2005; Pascopella, 2005; Smith, 2001). Particularly as CHA seeks to fully participate in a genre study approach to literacy education, access to books is critical for students' literacy achievement. While teachers at CHA have classroom libraries, they do not all allow students to take books home. Additionally, according to teacher participants, their classroom libraries are inadequate to accommodate both struggling and gifted learners.

While parent/caregiver participants in this study were determined not to be limited by CHA's lack of a library at school, they acknowledged that a school library is especially important for economically disadvantaged families who do not have the means to make additional trips to the public library. Essentially a lack of access to books at school results in a lack of access to books for families. Homes without books could make it impossible for families to engage in the literacy learning process. Additionally, the ability to bring schoolbooks home further bridges the gap between home and school, models to students that reading is a "life thing" and not just a "school thing", and creates the home/school partnership teachers, administrators, and parents/caregivers spoke of as necessary to literacy growth.

<center>No "Red Tape"</center>

According to administrators at CHA, there is no big bureaucracy looking down on them. A 35-member board of directors governs Lena Pope Home. An executive director serves as the school's superintendent and next in the chain of power is the CHA principal. This simple chain of command can be a benefit for timely approval and implementation of programs and curriculum. Public schools may take years to implement new curriculum because they have to be approved up the chain. By the time they are implemented, they are no longer cutting edge. The limited "red tape" at CHA translates to faster implementation of ideas. However, this governing board is not composed of former educators and, because measuring success differs from educational to business perspectives, final decisions are not always educational priorities. Often these business decisions mean trainings to protect agency liability (Handle with Care, Defensive Driving, and CPR) instead of sufficient training to successfully implement curricula such as the Genre Study workshop model. As a result, one administrator believes that other schools will surpass CHA's performance in student reading and writing outcomes.

<center>Rapport vs. Report</center>

Teachers and administrators suggested a report style of communication with families. The relaying of information about school activities, instructional and intervention strategies, and family involvement practices were all forms of informing families about school culture. Instead of reporting elements of school culture, teachers and administrators who learn to build rapport with families create success with students by bringing families into developing this culture. The practice of reporting keeps families

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at a distance. In contrast, building rapport invites families into the education process and the collaborative development of school culture.

<p style="text-align:center">Presence</p>

Presence at school appeared to be a determinate of successful family engagement at CHA. Administrators measured their family involvement practices based on "full house attendance" at school-sponsored events and parents/caregivers assisting in the classrooms on a regular basis. Teachers shared this view and added the importance of family presence at home, so long as families were implementing teacher-directed engagement practices. Parent/caregiver participants repeatedly mentioned their presence at school and "availability" for school-sponsored activities. It appears that families have begun to measure their adequate engagement on what the school expects from them and not necessarily on what their child needs.

Focusing family investment solely on presence at school perpetuates programs and engagement strategies that cater to a select few. Parents/caregivers who wish to be invested in their children's education may not have schedules to accommodate presence at school sponsored activities and events. Family members who work during the day are ineligible to be present during school hours. Additionally, school sponsored activities in the evening do not always coincide with schedules, particularly those of lower-income families who may work multiple jobs. Family factors eliminating presence at school as an option should not be used to infer a lack of interest/investment in literacy education.

While educators are certainly qualified to know the best practices for literacy success, parents/caregivers are also qualified to weigh in on the best literacy practices for

<p style="text-align:center">67</p>

their children. A parent/caregiver is better informed about their child's interests, dislikes, and learning styles than a teacher who has only had interaction for a few weeks or months. An understanding of this concept was implied several times by administrator, teacher, and parent/caregiver participants in the study: parents/caregivers as the child's first teacher, relying on the parent/caregiver to engage children at home, learning to account for and understand family practices as a framework in the genre study curriculum. Consistent with Wollman's (2007) findings, teachers and administrators shared visions of involvement yet families were seen as incapable of deciding the ways and means to become engaged.

<div align="center">Workshop Model</div>

CHA administrators reported the implementation of Fountas and Pinnell (1996) guided reading model two years ago to replace the previous "canned" reading curriculum. CHA administrators referred to this genre study curriculum as "cutting edge," citing that "we've been doing it for two years and [other] schools are just adopting it." However, workshop model approaches to literacy education are not new. Small group reading instruction began in the late 1800's and guided reading emerged again as the predominant method of instruction in some countries in the 1980's (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). A variation of this technique was developed by Lucy Calkins in 1986 and outlined how teachers should instruct reading and writing without a concrete curriculum (Ravitch, 2007). The Fountas and Pinnell model currently implemented at CHA was published in 1996.

Calkins (2001) emphasized the importance of educating teachers to structure a classroom conducive to this model. Essential components include classroom libraries, independent reading workshops, reading and strategy lessons, and conferencing with student readers. A 2008 research study concluded that student learning substantially increased over a three-year period using guiding reading models (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2008). The study also cited professional development throughout the three-year study and found that teacher expertise was directly related to the coaching teachers received.

While CHA is misguided as to the cutting edge nature of workshop models, they have implemented a program that is research based and proven to improve students' learning outcomes. Based on participant responses, teachers are building classroom libraries and engage in both group and individual conferencing with readers. However, teachers lack adequate training to fully benefit from the models intentions. This study's findings suggest that CHA needs to invest more time coaching teachers to improve expertise. Additionally, administrators reported that families are not yet engaged in genre study implementation. The workshop model promotes agency and accountability among readers and allows students the opportunity to invest personal interests, lived experiences, and cultural relativity into literacy education. By design, engaging families is an essential component to the success of this model. Teachers and families can work together to find appropriate literature for students as teachers share their genre expertise and families share their expertise about their children. Proper curriculum training for teachers ultimately serves to engage families.

Agency and Accountability

A reappearing theme among the findings was a desire to improve literacy engagement in low-income and minority families. Administrators referenced a lack of basic resources as a limitation to a family's desire for higher learning. Consistent with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, teachers also expressed that when basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter are absent, education and higher moral functioning are not addressed as priorities in the home. Participant responses suggest that Lena Pope Home is instrumental in helping families overcome physiological barriers but CHA is still searching for effective ways to help working families move toward a stage of self-actualization.

The solution may lie in studying the ways in which students are led to higher-level thinking. Administrator and teacher participants repeatedly referenced engaging practices that mold students into critical thinkers. The genre study curriculum centers on helping children develop a sense of agency in literature selection, and students are accountable for their choices through individual teacher conferencing. An application of the genre study principles of agency and accountability could encourage families to become critical thinkers as it pertains to engagement in education. Creating opportunities for parents/caregivers to exercise agency in their engagement practices, coupled with a sense of accountability to school obligations, may help families become invested in opportunities for home/school partnerships in spite of the necessity for basic provisions.

Communication and Collaboration

Communication from parents/caregivers was rarely reciprocated, at least not to the degree that teachers were communicating with families. Additionally, according to parents/caregivers who participated in the study, teachers' ineffective communication of expectations with regard to homework assignments as well as choosing appropriate literature for their children prompted confusion instead of action on the part of families. Teachers expressed a desire to build relationships with families in order to increase communication. However, a perpetuated mentality that teachers are the experts created an instant barrier for families to communicate (Young, et al., 2013). Rather than seek parent/caregiver feedback as an afterthought, teacher approaches that seek expertise from parents/caregivers about their children build rapport and open lines of communication, the first step towards collaboration.

Another area where improved collaboration may be necessary for engaging families more effectively is the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Accounting for teacher and administrator concerns as well as parent/caregiver participant beliefs of family accountability, engaging families in the RTI process could prove more successful and eliminate classroom burdens. One administrator has had experiences in other schools that include parents/caregivers in the RTI process and she cited a lack of CHA staffing to accommodate this. Due to time and staff limitations, the committee often discusses more than one student during a meeting, making it inappropriate for parents/caregivers to attend. However, research supports the inclusion of families in the literacy process for improved success (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010; Dever & Burts, 2010). Early childhood

intervention programs have proven successful because of their role in educating families (Sticht, 2012). These same collaborative principles could benefit elementary intervention programs like RTI.

Implications

The results of this study have implications for school faculty, students, and their families. An understanding of the different factors that both help and hinder literacy education practices serves to improve literacy curriculum planning and implementation. An institutional awareness regarding discrepancies between rhetorical claims and deliveries can allow schools to find alternative means to engaging families. This study's discovery that families wish to contribute as equal partners in the education process serves to dispel an education myth that school directed forms of engagement are best. Implications from this research include an increased awareness about the ways families contribute valuable insight into the educational practices of their children. Furthermore, presence at the school sponsored activities and events is an irrelevant factor when encouraging family input about literacy education.

Training Teachers to Engage Families

This study supports previous research findings citing a lack of professional development for teachers to effectively engage families (Lazer, et al., 1999). Participating teachers and administrators admitted a need for this training and teachers were open to exploring options. In fact, participating teachers were hopeful that results from this study would lead to some type of mandate for family engagement training. They recognized that effective interaction with parents/caregivers was essential to literacy success for

students. As CHA continues the genre study workshop model of literacy education, training teachers to utilize families will improve a child's love of reading and investment in the literacy process. Proper curriculum training also ultimately serves to engage families. To help the child, a teacher has to know and understand family, economic, and community factors affecting student learning.

Cultural competency should be an essential component to any professional development program on engaging families. Parent/caregiver perceptions of involvement develop based on a variety of cultural, environmental, and socio-economic factors. For example, a common view in the Hispanic culture is that teachers are the absolute authority (Dever & Burts, 2010). African-American parents/caregivers cite negative interactions with school personnel and negative school associations from their own youth as barriers to involvement (Williams & Sanchez, 2011). This study's findings support these views as parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators, who participated in the interviews and focus groups, vocalized instances where negative school associations interfered with effective engagement.

Implications for Social Work

The results of this study suggest a social practice approach to family engagement is needed in order to better meet the needs of all students regardless of social factors. Minorities underperform their Caucasian and Asian-American counterparts in literacy achievement because education styles are not currently tailored to consider cultural factors (APA, 2012). Parents/caregivers are qualified to identify environmental factors affecting student populations and subsequently play a vital role in the incorporation of

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literacy programs that address family needs. When family insight is utilized in designing literacy programs, the needs of disadvantaged populations are addressed and such programs no longer cater to a select few. This includes acknowledging that presence at school is not the only determinant of engagement, and emphasizing the need for a rotating school library to ensure book access for all.

Engaging families in literacy education serves to avoid future social problems associated with low literacy such as unemployment, low-earnings, dependence on welfare, and poor health (Baydar, et al., 1993; Marcus, 2006; Cree, et al., 2012; OECD, 2013). Previous research findings support literacy level improvement regardless of socio-economic status when families collaborate with school faculty about literacy education practices (Darling & Westberg, 2004; Cairny & Munsie, 1995). Family engagement in literacy education also facilitates modeling of positive literacy experiences and improves overall family perspectives about reading and writing. Additionally, encouraging literacy engagement activities in the home helps families learn how to model literacy as a "life thing" instead of just a "school thing."

This study also has implications for social workers to engage families in literacy education. CHA's social worker is currently tasked with stewardship over family involvement. While she does not play a direct role in literacy education, she works with families to meet basic needs, sits on IRB boards for struggling learners, and facilitates the Parent Advisory Council currently seeking feedback from families. The utilization of social workers in school settings could have a dramatic impact on moving institutions from levels of parent/caregiver involvement to more collaborative engagement practices.

A social worker's "person in environment" perspective can be utilized to assist families in understanding how their experiences are valuable contributions to education, and to assist educators in understanding how family factors affect education outcomes. Instead of social workers fixing social problems and educators fixing education problems, social workers and educators can collaborate to address all issues affecting literacy education.

Implications for Society

When families are seen as equal partners in the education process, parent/caregiver feelings of inferiority are eliminated. Families are more willing to share ideas and experiences with confidence when they believe their perspectives will be valued and utilized to improve quality of instruction. As a result, family/school partnerships become the expectation instead of the exception. Unity in school setting can translate to community cohesion and ultimately serves to improve overall function in communities.

Family engagement practices improve literacy outcomes for current and future parents/caregivers. Families who practice and model reading and writing activities regularly in the home avoid intergenerational illiteracy problems in the future. Additionally, familial bonds are strengthened as parents/caregivers actively engage in literacy learning with their children.

Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations to this study. Parent/caregiver focus group turnouts were low compared to the number recruited and as compared to the number of families attending CHA. Additionally, participants did not reflect the demographic

makeup of the school: all but one participant were married, all had at least some college, only one reported a household income under $50,000, and none of the participants were Hispanic. However, participants' children covered the spectrum of academic performance, ranging from struggling learners to gifted and talented. They also offered valuable insight into positive and negative school experiences that affect literacy education. Additional research is needed to determine the scope of transferability of this study's findings. Another limitation is that, in an effort to protect the anonymity of participants, demographic information is not associated with direct quotes and perspectives. As a result, perspectives cannot be compared against demographic data to ascertain trends among certain population groups. Future research could include focus groups based on demographic characteristics such as race or socio-economic status.

Response and attendance to the teacher focus group was also low and did not include current teachers from the third, fourth, or fifth grades. However, teacher participants did have previous experience in upper elementary grades and were able to offer perspectives for higher- level literacy achievement. Future research should include perspectives from upper elementary grade level teachers, specifically to address the impact of standardized testing on literacy curriculum structure and planning as it relates to engaging families.

While the triangulation of parent/caregiver, teacher, and administrator perspectives about literacy education fills a gap in the knowledge base, this study did not seek student perspectives. Their ideas and experiences could further illuminate both strengths and limitations specific to family engagement in literacy. As recipients of

intervention strategies, future research should include student perspectives to adequately represent all parties affecting literacy education.

Another limitation is the researcher's involvement with CHA as a parent of children who attend the school. While some views expressed during data collection may have been shared with the researcher's personal experiences, every attempt was made to limit the researcher's personal perspectives to influence data outcomes. Focus group and interview questions were designed to uncover specific factors, strengths, and limitations to literacy practices and family engagement. These questions were analyzed and approved by a committee with no affiliation to CHA. Furthermore, coding of transcribed focus groups and interviews and analysis of demographic information was performed using evidence-based, grounded theory research methods.

This study supported ideals that family views about literacy impact student views. Future programs should seek to educate parents/caregivers and foster their literacy framework, ultimately serving to improve student outcomes. Given the success of early intervention programs to educate parents/caregivers, additional research is needed about early intervention programs and their ability to translate to elementary school interventions and improve family engagement. This study's findings, coupled with additional research findings, could be utilized to develop a standardized, professional development for school professionals about engaging families in literacy education.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Parents/caregivers have become accustomed to the directive roles educators play in engaging families. Administrative access to research-based practices may serve to

separate them from individualized care. Likewise, a teacher's experience in the classroom and their observation of proven methods for literacy throughout their teaching experience may lead to gross generalizations about educational practices in spite of personal circumstances affecting families. While proven methods serve a purpose in an educational setting, they should be utilized to accommodate the individual circumstances of students. Parents/caregivers also bring inaccurate assumptions to the education setting based on paradigms developed from personal experience.

Previous studies on literacy isolated each of these perspectives and subsequent conclusions failed to factor the shared components of literacy education. The triangulation of the three perspective in this study illuminated differences between administrative, teacher, and parent/caregiver frameworks for engagement in literacy education. Comparing and contrasting responses from participants in the same educational setting allowed for a side-by-side analysis of perspectives. This study's findings suggest faulty assumptions made by educators about family experiences and motives. Likewise, findings suggest that parents/caregivers make incorrect assumptions about teachers and administrators without considering literacy motives and methodology. The results of this study recommend factors that could contribute to a mutually beneficial practice model for engaging families in literacy education.

Appendix A

Parent/caregiver Focus Group Questions

Hello, my name is Karin Havens, and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington in the School of Social Work. The purpose of today's focus group is to try to better understand your perspectives on being engaged in the literacy learning process of your children.

As part of this focus group, I will be asking you all a series of questions. My hope is that you will be comfortable with sharing your honest opinions with each other. The focus group should last about 60 minutes, and I will be recording the interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. Anything that you say in this group will be confidential, and every effort will be made to ensure that what you say here cannot be linked back to you in any way. Your results will be reported anonymously, and will not be shared with Lena Pope Home, Chapel Hill Academy, or UTA.

This research has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Office of Research. In the case that you were to encounter any negative effect due to your participation in this study or wish to speak to someone about this study, you may contact their office at regulatoryservices@uta.edu (email) or 817-272-2105 (email). In addition, you may contact me directly at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or 817-938-0637.

Any questions?
Okay, are you all ready to begin?
1. Tell me about your child's experience with reading and writing? Are they on grade level? Do they enjoy reading?

2. What role do you expect to play in the literacy process of your child? For example, do you feel a responsibility to help your child reach the next reading level? Is this a teacher responsibility? Or both?

3. Describe some strengths and barriers in your family's life that make it difficult to accomplish reading/writing homework tasks. How do you overcome these strengths and barriers?

4. Give me an example of something specific that a teacher did to help your child make progress in reading/writing.

5. Give me an example of a time when a teacher did not do enough to help your child reach his/her literacy potential.

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Teacher Focus Group Questions

Hello, my name is Karin Havens, and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington in the School of Social Work. The purpose of today's focus group is to try to better understand your perspectives on engaging parents/caregivers in the literacy learning process.

As part of this focus group, I will be asking you all a series of questions. My hope is that you will be comfortable with sharing your honest opinions with each other. The focus group should last about 60 minutes, and I will be recording the interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. Anything that you say in this group will be confidential, and every effort will be made to ensure that what you say here cannot be linked back to you in any way. Your results will be reported anonymously, and nothing that you report will be shared with your Lena Pope Home, Chapel Hill Academy, or UTA.

This research has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Office of Research. In the case that you were to encounter any negative effect due to your participation in this study or wish to speak to someone about this study, you may contact their office at regulatoryservices@uta.edu (email) or 817-272-2105 (email). In addition, you may contact me directly at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or 817-938-0637.

Any questions?
Okay, are you all ready to begin?

1. What role would you like families to play when it comes to improving literacy outcomes for students?

2. How do you encourage parents/caregivers to participate in these roles?

3. Describe for me some strengths and challenges families have expressed about literacy curriculum activities and homework. Have families complained?

4. How do you address the challenges?

5. Tell me about a time when you successfully collaborated with a family to help a student improve his/her literacy skills. What specifically helped and why?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C

Administrator Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Karin Havens, and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington in the School of Social Work. The purpose of today's interview is to try to better understand your perspectives about engaging parents/caregivers in the literacy learning process.

As part of this focus group, I will be asking you all a series of questions. My hope is that you will be comfortable with sharing your honest opinions with each other. The focus group should last about 60 minutes, and I will be recording the interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. Anything that you say in this group will be confidential, and every effort will be made to ensure that what you say here cannot be linked back to you in any way. Your results will be reported anonymously, and nothing that you report will be shared with your Lena Pope Home, Chapel Hill Academy, or UTA.

This research has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Office of Research. In the case that you were to encounter any negative effect due to your participation in this study or wish to speak to someone about this study, you may contact their office at regulatoryservices@uta.edu (email) or 817-272-2105 (email). In addition, you may contact me directly at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or 817-938-0637.

Any questions?
Okay, are you all ready to begin?

1. Explain for me how your role here at CHA is related to the literacy process for students.

2. What are some of CHA's literacy education strengths? Weaknesses?

3. Could you describe the professional development opportunities for CHA teachers and support staff that address effectively engaging parents/caregivers?

4. Describe the teacher's roles that both help and hinder the literacy progress of students?

5. Describe the family's role that both help and hinder the literacy progress of students?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Parent/Caregiver Recruitment Letter 1

Dear Parents/caregivers of Pre-K, 1st, and 2nd Graders:

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the subject of **family engagement in literacy curriculum structure and implementation** on Monday, April 28th at 5:00 p.m. This study seeks to uncover parent/caregiver perspectives about participation in literacy program development.

The focus group will be approximately one-hour long and all identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card in compensation for their time. This study has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to participate, please RSVP to Karin Havens at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or (817) 938-0637 by Friday, April 18th.

I am happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Karin Havens, Graduate Student
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Appendix E

Parent/Caregiver Recruitment Letter 2

Dear Parents/caregivers of 3rd, 4th, and 5th Graders:

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the subject of **family engagement in literacy curriculum structure and implementation** on Monday, April 28th at 7:00 p.m. This study seeks to uncover parent/caregiver perspectives about participation in literacy program development.

The focus group will be approximately one-hour long and all identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card in compensation for their time. This study has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to participate, please RSVP to Karin Havens at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or (817) 938-0637 by Friday, April 18th.

I am happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Karin Havens, Graduate Student
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Appendix F

Parent/Caregiver Recruitment Letter 3

Dear Chapel Hill Academy Parents/caregivers :

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the subject of **family engagement in literacy curriculum structure and implementation** on Monday, May 19th at 5:00 p.m. This study seeks to uncover parent/caregiver perspectives about participation in literacy program development.

The focus group will be approximately one-hour long and all identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. Choosing to participate will have no affect on your relationship with Chapel Hill Academy and information collected will not be shared in any way that could potentially identify you. All participants will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card in compensation for their time. This study has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to participate, please RSVP to Karin Havens at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or (817) 938-0637 by Friday, May 16th.

I am happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Karin Havens, Graduate Student
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Appendix G

Teacher Recruitment Email

Dear Teachers at Chapel Hill Academy,

You are invited to participate in a focus group on the subject of **family engagement in literacy curriculum structure and implementation** on Tuesday, April 29th at 4:00 p.m. This study seeks to uncover perspectives about parent/caregiver participation in literacy program development and implementation. Teacher perspectives about strengths and barriers to parent/caregiver engagement will prove very valuable to evidenced based practices regarding this issue.

The focus group will be approximately one-hour long and any identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. This study has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to participate, please RSVP to Karin Havens at karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu or (817) 938-0637 by Friday, April 18th.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Karin Havens, Graduate Student
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Appendix H

Administrator Recruitment Email

Dear (Administrator's Name),

I am conducting a study on the subject of **family engagement in literacy curriculum structure and implementation**. This study seeks to uncover perspectives about parent/caregiver participation in literacy program development and implementation. Administrative perspectives about strengths and barriers to parent/caregiver engagement will prove very valuable to evidenced based practices regarding this issue.

This study has been approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

Please contact me regarding any further questions you may have and to schedule a time for an interview. I can be reached via email at:

Karin Havens, karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu

Thank you for your time and attention.

Best regards,

Karin Havens, Graduate Student
University of Texas at Arlington
School of Social Work

Appendix I

Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)
Karin Havens, School of Social Work Graduate Student, karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT
Engaging Families in Literacy Learning

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a study of family perspectives on the literacy learning of their children. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time with no consequence to you. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
This study intends to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent do schools include students' families in the structuring and implementation of literacy programs? 2) What are the strengths to including families in literacy program development and implementation? 3) What are the barriers to family engagement?

PROCEDURES
You are being asked to participate in one focus group that is expected to take 60 minutes. The focus group will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences engaging in literacy learning at Chapel Hill Academy.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to participants from the study, there will be possible benefits to your family, Chapel Hill Academy, and the knowledge base of literacy learning outcomes. We expect that the information and knowledge gained in this study will inform strategies to enhance the quality of the experience for both families and schools with regard to literacy learning.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
We do not expect you to experience any risks or discomforts by participating in this study. Should you experience any discomfort, please inform the interviewer. You have the right to quit the focus group at any time at no consequence and may do so by informing the interviewer.

COMPENSATION
You will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card as compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.
CONFIDENTIALITY

We will make every effort to ensure that your responses are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored at the social work campus at the University of Texas Arlington for at least five (5) years after the end of this study. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional studies may come from the information you have provided, however, reporting of results will be kept strictly anonymous, and your information will not be linked to you in any way.

Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the University of Texas Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the researchers with this study will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your interview records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to email the researcher, Karin Havens at karin.havens@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a participant or a study-related injury may be directed to the UTA Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272- 2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this study:

_____
Printed name of survey administrator   **Date**

_____
Signature of survey administrator   **Date**

CONSENT
By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years or older and that you have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____
Signature of participant   **Date**

Appendix J

Teacher Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)
Karin Havens, School of Social Work Graduate Student, karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT
Engaging Families in Literacy Learning

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a study of family perspectives on the literacy learning of their children. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time with no consequence to you. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
This study intends to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent do schools include students' families in the structuring and implementation of literacy programs? 2) What are the strengths to including families in literacy program development and implementation? 3) What are the barriers to family engagement?

PROCEDURES
You are being asked to participate in one focus group that is expected to take 60 minutes. The focus group will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences engaging families in literacy learning at Chapel Hill Academy.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to participants from the study, there will be possible benefits to your family, Chapel Hill Academy, and the knowledge base of literacy learning outcomes. We expect that the information and knowledge gained in this study will inform strategies to enhance the quality of the experience for both families and schools with regard to literacy learning.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
We do not expect you to experience any risks or discomforts by participating in this study. Should you experience any discomfort, please inform the interviewer. You have the right to quit the focus group at any time at no consequence and may do so by informing the interviewer.

COMPENSATION
You will not receive any compensation in exchange for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will make every effort to ensure that your responses are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored at the social work campus at the University of Texas Arlington for at least five (5) years after the end of this study. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional studies may come from the information you have provided, however, reporting of results will be kept strictly anonymous, and your information will not be linked to you in any way.

Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the University of Texas Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the researchers with this study will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your interview records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to email the researcher, Karin Havens at karin.havens@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a participant or a study-related injury may be directed to the UTA Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272- 2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this study:

_____

Printed name of survey administrator   **Date**

_____

Signature of survey administrator   **Date**

CONSENT
By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years or older and that you have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____

Signature of participant   **Date**

Appendix K

Administrator Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)
Karin Havens, School of Social Work Graduate Student, karin.havens@mavs.uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT
Engaging Families in Literacy Learning

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a study of family perspectives on the literacy learning of their children. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time with no consequence to you. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
This study intends to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent do schools include students' families in the structuring and implementation of literacy programs? 2) What are the strengths to including families in literacy program development and implementation? 3) What are the barriers to family engagement?

PROCEDURES
You are being asked to participate in one individual interview with the researcher lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interview will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences engaging families in literacy learning at Chapel Hill Academy.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to participants from the study, there will be possible benefits to your family, Chapel Hill Academy, and the knowledge base of literacy learning outcomes. We expect that the information and knowledge gained in this study will inform strategies to enhance the quality of the experience for both families and schools with regard to literacy learning.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
We do not expect you to experience any risks or discomforts by participating in this study. Should you experience any discomfort, please inform the interviewer. You have the right to quit the focus group at any time at no consequence and may do so by informing the interviewer.

COMPENSATION
You will not receive any compensation in exchange for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will make every effort to ensure that your responses are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored at the social work campus at the University of Texas Arlington for at least five (5) years after the end of this study. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional studies may come from the information you have provided, however, reporting of results will be kept strictly anonymous, and your information will not be linked to you in any way.

Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the University of Texas Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the researchers with this study will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your interview records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to email the researcher, Karin Havens at karin.havens@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a participant or a study-related injury may be directed to the UTA Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272- 2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this study:

_____
Printed name of survey administrator   **Date**

_____
Signature of survey administrator   **Date**

CONSENT
By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years or older and that you have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____
Signature of participant   **Date**

Appendix L

Parent/Caregiver Demographic Survey

Parent/caregiver Demographic Survey

1. Your age: _____

2. Your Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

3. Your Race: ☐ Caucasian   ☐African-American, Black   ☐ Asian-American
         ☐ Native-American   ☐ Hispanic, Latino   ☐ Other

4. What is your current marital status?
         Single, never married
         Married
         Widowed
         Divorced
         Separated

5. How many children reside in your household?
         1
         2
         3
         4
         5 or more

6. How far did you go in school?
         ☐ never went to school
         ☐ 8th grade or less
         ☐ more than 8th grade, but did not graduate from high school
         ☐ High School Diploma or GED
         ☐ Some College
         ☐ College Degree
         ☐ Advanced Degree (Masters or PHD)

7. What is your annual household income?
         Less than $25,000
         $25,000-$50,000
         $50,000-$75,000

$75,000-$100,000
More than $100,000

8. What is your relationship to your student at Chapel Hill Academy (check all that apply)?

      Biological Parent
      Custodial Parent/Guardian
      Foster Parent
      Grandparent
      Other family member: _____
      Other: _____

9. To what extent do the statements below describe you? Please choose one answer for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In general, I feel comfortable asking my child's teacher questions.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am able to help my child with his/her homework.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have a good relationship with my child's teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel welcome when I come to the school.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a good relationship with the CHA administrators.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel that CHA considers my family when making decisions about my child's education.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have ideas about what would help my child perform better at school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel that I can share my opinion with the people who work at CHA.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel engaged in my child's education process.	1	2	3	4	5
10. CHA considers my schedule when planning events and activities outside of school.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My child is reading and writing on grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I wish there was something I could do to help my child read and write better.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix M

Teacher Demographic Survey

Teacher Demographic Survey

1. Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Transgender

2. Your Race: ☐ Caucasian ☐ African-American, Black ☐ Asian-American
☐ Native-American ☐ Hispanic, Latino ☐ Other

3. Number of Years Teaching (in academic years): _____

4. How long have you been teaching at CHA? _____

5. What grade do you currently teach? _____

6. What grades have you taught at CHA or elsewhere?
_____

7. Highest Level of Education:
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's Degree
☐ PhD

8. Please list what your degree(s) is in:
_____

9. Have you received professional development on teaching literacy? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please explain.
_____
_____

10. Have you received any professional development on engaging families? ☐Yes ☐No
If yes, please explain.
_____
_____

11. To what extent do the statements below describe you? Please choose one answer for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have experience teaching literacy.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am comfortable teaching literacy.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I include parents/caregivers in the literacy learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I ask parents/caregivers about how to help their child accomplish literacy goals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel comfortable communicating my concerns with parents/caregivers.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am aware of the factors that affect my students outside of the school environment.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I consider family factors when assigning reading homework.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I believe parents/caregivers of my students would feel comfortable voicing concerns to me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am willing to listen to parent/caregiver suggestions about improving the literacy process for their child.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I regularly invite parents/caregivers into the classroom to help with literacy learning goals.	1	2	3	4	5

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Karin Marie Havens earned an Associate of Arts degree from Tarrant County College in May of 2011. She continued her education at The University of Texas in Arlington and earned a Bachelor of Social Work degree in 2012. Due to her interest in clinical work, Ms. Havens continued her education at The University of Texas in Arlington to earn a Master of Social Work degree. Her future plans include pursuing a license for Clinical Social Work.

This thesis is Ms. Havens' first attempt at conducting formal research. Her interest in literacy education to avoid future social problems led her to pursue the thesis track in her Master's program. She is hopeful that her contribution to the knowledge base will improve literacy education practices and protect at-risk populations from the consequences of illiteracy.