

issue brief

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SYSTEMIC, INTEGRATED, AND SUSTAINABLE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE EARLY AGE SPECTRUM IN SAN MATEO AND SANTA CLARA COUNTIES

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Overview

A growing body of evidence indicates the critical importance of appropriate supports for children and their families at early ages, as well as the potential for targeted interventions to make meaningful contributions to children's development. Family involvement in the early years of a child's learning and development can serve as a protective factor for children at risk for negative life outcomes. Indeed, family engagement has emerged as a critical strategy used especially for supporting positive outcomes for students from low-income and immigrant communities. Yet practitioners receive little training on *how* to effectively engage families. Within organizations, family engagement efforts may be haphazard; i.e., not aligned to specific goals or learning objectives. And frequently, there is little collaboration between child- and family-serving organizations in the same community, resulting in missed opportunities for sustained, systemic support to families (Weiss et al., 2010; Mapp & Kuttner, 2014).

This brief reports findings from a needs assessment study meant to inform project planning for a systemic, integrated, and sustainable family engagement initiative, the Family Engagement Impact Project (FEIP) in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. The needs assessment consisted of two surveys administered to low-income, immigrant families and the providers who engage them. Approximately 800 families and 120 providers across six communities participated. The surveys explored how families and providers think about families' engagement, what resources they utilize to support young (0-8 years) children's learning, and what resources would support a more systemic effort to engage parents in their children's learning and development.¹ While this report aims to place our findings in the context of family engagement strategies more broadly, these results should be interpreted with the specific project population and purpose in mind.

¹ While this brief sometimes uses the word "parent", the term is meant to refer to the primary adult caretaker in the child's life, who may or may not be the parent or legal guardian.

Key Findings

Our analysis of the family and provider survey responses across the six communities revealed the following key findings:

- Both participant families and service providers place high priority on family engagement interventions that support children’s learning and development. This shared goal suggests a promising implementation context for further efforts to better integrate and improve family engagement initiatives.
- While families in the study overwhelmingly report that they care about their children’s learning and development, they also report that they do not always know how to support their individual children’s learning needs.
- The kinds of programming available to families are not always aligned with what families believe they need to support their children’s learning and development, including activities that parents can do *with* their children such as enrichment activities, playgroups, and support groups.
- Provider definitions of successful family engagement emphasize participation, communication, collaboration, and empowerment. In general, providers highlighted school- or site-based participation and did not highlight children and families learning at home, or culturally shaped ways parents may support their children’s learning.
- Providers reported interest in professional development that includes specific strategies, pedagogies, and approaches to skillfully engage families in their children’s early learning, such as training in adult learning theory, creating hands-on workshops, and using strength-based approaches.
- Parents are involved in a number of practices to support their children’s school readiness. While preschool and elementary school providers support students’ kindergarten transition, there is a greater need for increased systemic collaboration among providers offering supports to children and their families across multiple settings and ages.

About the Study

This study involved a purposive sample of families with children ages 0-8 and education and service providers (e.g., teachers, social workers, principals, preschool staff) in the multiple settings that engage them. The providers selected were primarily participants in the Family Engagement Impact Project (FEIP), an initiative of the Heising-Simons Foundation aimed to support systemic, integrated, and sustainable approaches to family engagement across six Bay Area communities. The families were parents of children who received services or education at the participating provider organizations or schools. The initiative built on momentum of existing

family engagement work in each community, providing resources to spark further institutional collaboration, strengthen practices, and cohere disparate efforts to support families' involvement in their 0-8 year old children's education, including introducing new evidence-based programming and dual-capacity professional development.

Family and provider surveys were developed in October 2013 with input from the participating communities, and administered in November and December 2013 to 795 families and 124 providers. Families were asked about the resources they used to support their young children's learning and development, their experiences with education and service providers across multiple settings, and their interest in additional resources. The family survey was administered on paper, in three languages (English, Spanish, and Vietnamese). Providers were asked about the resources they offered families to support parents' involvement in their children's education, their experiences collaborating with other providers across multiple settings, and their interest in additional resources. The provider survey was administered online and included some open-ended responses.

Those completing the family survey were primarily female (89%), Hispanic/Latino (80%), and born outside the United States (81%). Of those born outside the United States, 64% were born in Mexico. Most participants (70%) identified Spanish as the primary household language: 71% completed the survey in Spanish, 27% in English, and 2% in Vietnamese. A great number of participants reported they had not finished high school (42%), and 25% reported high school diploma or GED as their highest educational attainment. Nearly half (49%) of all survey participants indicated they had attended some schooling in another country.

The providers surveyed represented fifty-seven different schools and organizations across the participating communities. Eighteen percent indicated they worked in a preschool program, 35% in an elementary school, and 47% in an "other" setting, such as an afterschool program, mental health clinic, family resource center, community center, or human services program. The sample included teachers (40%), administrators (29%), mental health providers (7%), childcare providers (2%), and other staff (23%). The providers completing the survey were mostly female (90%) and from the United States (79%). Nearly half (46%) identified as white, followed by Latino (28%), and East Asian or multi-ethnic (each 7%). In terms of highest educational attainment, 67% have a master's degree or higher, 24% a bachelor's, 8% some college, and 2% a high school diploma. For 69% of providers, English is the primary language, followed by 20%, in which English/Spanish is primary and 6% in which Spanish is primary.

The results presented here provide important information about the experiences of the parents and service providers in six San Mateo and Santa Clara county communities who participated in this study. However, in interpreting the results it is important to keep in mind that the respondents do not constitute a random sample, but rather a purposive sample of a select

family and provider population, and thus the results presented here should not be interpreted as representative of all parents or all service providers in these communities. Similarly, while the demographics of these communities may mirror other communities with low-income and high immigrant populations, the experiences of participants in these communities are not necessarily representative of all communities in California or the country at large.

Background

Increasingly, many policymakers, program funders, and service providers seeking to improve outcomes for low-income children are focusing on the early ages. Prior research indicates that interventions that reach low-income children and their families early—such as prenatal services, early childhood education, and other parental involvement strategies—are key levers for promoting child development and addressing gaps in life outcomes in later years (Schorr & Marchand, 2007; Naughton, 2004; Weiss et al., 2006). Studies show that parent involvement is associated with a host of positive developmental outcomes for children, including improved literacy, motivation to achieve, and pro-social behavior (Best & Dunlop, 2011; Van Voorhis et al., 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Especially for children at risk of poor academic and life outcomes by virtue of race, class, ethnicity, income-level, home language, or immigrant status, family engagement may serve as an important protective factor (Dearing et al., 2006; Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

While many conceptions of family engagement exist, this study draws on the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), which defines family engagement through three core principles.

First, family engagement is a *shared responsibility* in which schools and other community organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development. Second, family engagement is *continuous across a child's life* and entails an enduring commitment but changing roles as children mature. Third, effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the *multiple settings where children learn*—at home, in prekindergarten programs, at school, in afterschool programs, at faith-based institutions, and in the community (HFRP, 2010, p.2).

Additionally, following both the design of the FEIP and the U.S. Department of Education's framework for family engagement (Mapp, 2012), we include the importance of family engagement that is *linked to learning* (e.g., programs linked to supporting families' engagement with their children's learning and development) and *dual-capacity-building* (e.g., families and providers develop the skills and abilities necessary to support children's learning and families' engagement in that learning).

Findings

Based on the conceptual framework discussed above, this study reports on five elements of effective family engagement as follows: family engagement that is 1) based in partnership; 2) linked to learning; 3) continuous across the developmental spectrum; 4) coordinated across multiple settings; and 5) involves dual-capacity-building. These are reported, below.

Family Engagement Partnerships

Research has demonstrated that when underlying relationships of trust, respect, and partnership are present between families and providers, family engagement initiatives are much more likely to flourish (Mapp & Kuttner, 2014). Research also indicates that families and providers often have distinct ideas about what it means for parents to be involved in their children's learning and development (Westrich & Strobel, 2012). This section describes how providers conceive of family engagement, and how parents and providers experience current family engagement practices across participating communities.

Defining Family Engagement. When asked to describe what successful family engagement would look like, the majority of teachers and service providers described successful engagement as parent participation in provider/school initiated activities, such as attending student-teacher conferences or participating in workshops or activities at the school site.² Many providers also indicated important features of the *quality* of participation. For example, one service provider highlighted the importance of “interactive and purposeful activities” that “share a common vision... to benefit child and community.” Other providers stipulated that participation should support parents in practical, actionable ways. For example, “families attend workshops, learn certain skills like public speaking and go out and use the skill to advocate.”

Providers also highlighted the importance of communication, partnership, and empowerment as key to successful participation. Communication was described as needing to be “two-way,” consistent, and focused on relationship-building (i.e., more than simply sharing information or announcements). Many providers articulated the importance of partnership between families and teachers/providers, and empowering parents as leaders, recognizing parents' strengths, and encouraging parents to advocate for themselves and their children's needs. Few providers mentioned family engagement as it relates to parents engaging in learning activities with their children.

These findings suggest that while many providers have embraced a partnership mentality, their responses still preference a school/site-centric understanding of family engagement. Research

² The provider survey included several open-ended questions, which the family survey did not. Therefore, responses for defining family engagement only include provider perspectives.

has shown that parents are often involved in their children's education in ways not readily evident to school/site staff. For example, engagement that occurs in the home, or, especially in culturally diverse populations, may reflect cultural forms of engagement (e.g., parents giving children "*consejos*" to do well, making sacrifices so their children can be successful) (Zarate, 2007; Ramos, 2014). Furthermore, research also suggests that home-based practices may have the greatest impact on students' outcomes (Shumow, 2010). Recognizing the multiple ways that parents may support their children's learning and development outside the school or program site is essential to authentic partnership to support children's learning, and may offer the opportunity to more deeply align provider supports with existing family needs and experiences.

Current Family Engagement Practices. Both family and provider surveys drew on a selection of scales reflecting research-informed programmatic "best practices" across early childhood and elementary school settings; e.g., creating a welcoming environment, regular two-way communication, developing partnerships between families and program staff (Epstein, 1995; Henderson et al., 2007; Mapp, 2012). Parents were asked about their experience with staff in their child's preschool and elementary school settings. Providers across preschool, elementary, and "other" settings were asked to evaluate themselves on the same set of practices. Parent and provider responses indicate a high level of agreement on the prevalence of these "best practices" across the various settings. There were, however, two exceptions, which indicate potential areas for growth.

- Approximately 40% of parents and 70% of elementary school providers indicated that elementary school staff often cannot speak with families in their primary language.
- Approximately 30% of preschool providers and 40% of "other" providers indicated there were few opportunities for families to participate in governance and decision-making in their program or organization.

In sum, while there are a few potential areas of growth, parents and providers both indicated a high level of programmatic, research-informed "best practices" being used across educational and service sites in the six participating communities. These results suggest a promising implementation context for further efforts to better integrate and improve family engagement initiatives.

Family Engagement Linked to Learning: Supporting Families' Engagement in their Children's Learning and Development

Utilizing a strength-based approach, the needs assessment study inquired into the community resources families use to support their children's learning and development and the services and supports providers offer to families. Additionally, families were asked what resources they

would like more of. These results are discussed below.

Community Resources. Results from the survey indicated that families draw on a variety of social supports and community resources to support their children’s learning and development.

- The local library was indicated as the most frequently utilized community resource by families across the communities. Food pantry/distribution sites and health clinics were also frequently indicated (among the top five in each site).³
- Parents most frequently relied on a family member or relative (61%) or their spouse (57%) for advice related to their children. Less frequently they said they relied on a friend/neighbor (29%), a teacher (27%), or a doctor or health worker (22%).
- Parents indicated the most frequent provider of childcare for their 0-8 year olds was a relative. This trend was most prominent for parents of 0-2 year olds, but continued across the preschool and elementary school age spectrum.

These findings suggest potential strengths and sources of resilience for a vulnerable population. In terms of practical implications, these frequently utilized community touch points—libraries, food pantries, and health clinics—may be important partners to include in system-building family engagement efforts. Additionally, the strong role friends, relatives, and social supports play in parents’ lives might inform responsive engagement strategies (e.g., utilizing peer-to-peer education, offering expanded/kinship groups for children’s families).

Resources Providers Offer Families. Providers who participated in the survey indicated they offered an array of resources to support parents’ engagement in their children’s learning.

- Preschool staff most frequently reported offering resources to help parents understand how to manage their children’s behavior and support their child’s social development, language, and growth.
- Elementary school staff and staff in the “other” setting most frequently indicated helping parents connect with resources in the community, supporting their children’s literacy and learning, understanding their child’s growth and development, and providing families with books.
- Providers across all settings indicated that the most frequent type of activity offered to parents were *parent education classes* (73%). The next most frequently offered activities were parent-child education classes (45%) and parent support groups (with children) (43%).

³ Note that each of the community surveys was designed specifically for that community, in consultation with the lead agency. Across the communities, the surveys included slightly different lists of local resources available. Thus, these results are based on the communities that listed each of these specific resources.

Programs supporting at-home learning (25%), parent-child activities or classes (24%), and playgroups (23%) were least frequently offered.

These findings paint the picture of a robust service-provision environment across multiple settings, including a proliferation of parent education opportunities.

Resources Parents Want More Of. Parents indicated a strong interest in a number of resources to support their children’s learning and development. We highlight some of their responses here.

- 85% of parents indicated strong interest in resources to help them *understand their children’s learning needs*. They were also interested in resources to help them manage their child’s behavior (83%), support their children’s literacy (80%), and help with their elementary-aged children’s homework (79%).
- Parents indicated the highest degree of interest in activities they could do *with their children*. Parent-child activities (e.g. music class, gym) (72%) was most frequently reported, followed by parent support group (with child) (55%) and playgroup (53%). Parent education classes received much less interest (42%).
- The most frequently identified barrier to supporting their children’s learning and development was *not knowing how* (65%). While other barriers were also indicated (e.g., conflicting responsibilities during the day and evenings, difficulties with language and transportation), not knowing how to help their children’s learning and development was perceived as a barrier by more parents than any other.

**CONTENT and
DELIVERY MATTER**

Parents articulated a strong interest in activities that include their children.

Implication for practice: align offerings to the needs and experiences of families.

These results demonstrate that while families are very interested in supporting their children’s learning and development, they often do not know how. While many resources exist to support families, there is still a significant gap between the types of opportunities families are interested in (e.g., participating in enrichment and learning activities *with* their children), and the opportunities available to them (e.g., parent education classes). While education opportunities may still be an important resource for families, these findings suggest that importance of delivering education opportunities in a manner that responds to families’ needs and interests.

Engaging Families Across the Developmental Spectrum: School Readiness and Kindergarten Transitions

In order to inform family engagement system-building across the early age spectrum, we examined select school readiness indicators developed by the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005) to explore how families, communities, and schools are preparing children across the early age spectrum for school readiness and success. Here, we discuss families' reported use of health, early care and education, and school services known to be important to school readiness; we also discuss service providers and school staff practices to support children's transition into kindergarten.

Parent School Readiness Practices. Almost all families with 0-2 year olds (99%) said they took their child to see a primary care doctor for well-baby visits. The majority (87%) of all mothers who completed the survey also indicated that they had received regular prenatal care.

The majority of parents (59%) with children ages 3-4 indicated their child attended a preschool or childcare center. Most parents reported they received information about their child's preschool from a friend or neighbor (38%), followed closely by family member (29%). Most parents with children enrolled in preschool (94%) indicated they saw their child's preschool as a supportive and safe place. For those who did *not* enroll their children in preschool, the most common reasons were high cost (26%), no available space (21%), and parents unsure of how to find out about preschool/center-based programs (16%).

For families with kindergarten-aged children, almost all (97%) indicated they were involved in preparing their children for the transition in some way. Most parents (75%) visited the kindergarten classroom, 68% met their child's teacher, and 67% worked with their child on skills to help them prepare. Almost all parents (95%) took their child to the doctor before the child started kindergarten. Most parents received information about their child's transition from the elementary school where the kindergarten was located (50%) or the child's preschool or childcare center (45%). Most parents with elementary-school-aged children (91%) indicated they saw their child's school as a supportive and safe place.

In sum, most parents are actively involved in preparing their children for school, including receiving regular prenatal care, taking their child to the doctor, and communicating with their child's school and preschool. However, nearly 40% of preschool-aged children are not enrolled in preschool. Additionally, parents who did not enroll their children in preschool cited high cost, lack of space, or lack of information as reasons why. Given the importance of preschool attendance to future student achievement (Naughton, 2004; Sanchez, 2014; Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005), these barriers present important systemic issues to address to support families' involvement with their children's early education.

Provider Practices Supporting the Transition to Kindergarten. Staff across elementary schools, preschools, and “other” settings indicated they were very involved in supporting families with their child’s kindergarten transitions. The most frequently mentioned practices were sharing information with parents about kindergarten enrollment, talking with parents to prepare them for the transition, and supporting families with kindergarten readiness activities at home. Preschool providers were the most likely to support families with kindergarten readiness activities at home. Less frequently mentioned was providing families opportunities to meet the families of other children who will be enrolled in their child’s kindergarten class.

The majority of providers in the preschool and “other” settings also indicated high levels of coordination across early childhood education settings. For example, they communicate with local kindergarten classrooms about expectations for kindergarten enrollment; participate in joint meetings, site visits, and trainings with local elementary school staff and other early childhood programs in the community to improve kindergarten readiness; and have regular communication with elementary schools where the majority of their children are expected to transition.

In contrast, elementary school providers indicated low levels of agreement with similar questions regarding coordination across settings (e.g., that they communicate with preschools on expectations, participate in joint meetings). This could possibly be due to reporting from elementary school providers in the later grades (beyond kindergarten) who may not be aware of pre-K and kindergarten coordination practices.

In sum, survey results indicate that providers are very involved in supporting families with their children’s transition into kindergarten, especially providing individualized support. Results also suggest the need for increased resources and attention to practices strengthening coordination between elementary schools and early childhood providers.

Engagement Across Multiple Settings: Coordination Between Providers

An essential element of our framework for family engagement is that it occurs *across the multiple settings where children live and learn* (HFRP, 2010). Integral to building a systemic effort to engage families is coordination and communication between participating institutions. The needs assessment study sought to ascertain the extent of current communication between participating providers, as well as elicit provider perspectives on what resources would facilitate increased coordination.

Communication. Overall, study results indicate communication between providers in different settings (e.g., schools, preschools, afterschool programs) is infrequent. While many providers indicated they had regular communication with the other providers in their own role group or

setting, the responses were significantly lower for communication with providers outside of one's own setting (for example, elementary school staff with preschool staff). Providers at community-based organizations, mental health clinics, after school programs, etc., had the highest degree of regular cross-constituency communication.

Factors that Facilitate Coordination. In response to open-ended questions on what factors facilitate coordination, providers articulated the need for dedicated resources (e.g., staff release time, infrastructure); consistent opportunities for communication and relationship-building (e.g., monthly meetings among providers, professional learning communities); and shared, accurate, and up-to-date information about other providers and resources in the community (e.g., what services/supports other organizations offer and updated contact information).

Survey responses indicated providers' interest in greater coordination with other providers in their communities. Specifically, they highlighted an interest in consistent opportunities for communication, relationship-building, and learning together with other providers. These results concord with research that indicates the importance of alignment and coordination between providers serving children as they cross from the early childhood to elementary school years (Bogard & Takanishi 2005).

Culturally Responsive Engagement: Dual-Capacity-Building for Families and Providers

Effective family engagement transforms families, and must also transform the institutions where children live and learn (Thompson & Hong, 2011). Building the capacity of both families and the staff who serve those families and children is a critical ingredient to systemic, sustained, and integrated family engagement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2014). In this section we report provider perspectives on dual-capacity-building needs for both families and providers.

Resources and Practices to Support Families. When asked what additional resources would support families' engagement with their children's education, providers indicated the following:

- content information on *children's development and learning needs* (e.g., developmental milestones, kindergarten readiness, supporting social skills);
- information to reinforce the *importance of parental involvement* (e.g., the implications of early involvement for later life and learning outcomes);
- specific strategies, resources, and approaches to help parents *support their children's learning at home* (e.g., accessible activities to do with children at home, information on low cost learning resources such as libraries).

Providers also highlighted the importance of their own strategies and approaches in positively impacting parents' involvement, emphasizing approaches that engage parents with their children, providing opportunities for hands-on learning (e.g., working on activities parents can do at home), and reflecting families' strengths and experiences.

While earlier provider responses suggested that providers may prefer site/school-centric definitions of family involvement, responses here suggest a more robust conception; specifically, a keen awareness of the importance of the families' own knowledge, roles, and involvement with their children's learning beyond the classroom wall. Furthermore, these responses offer keen self-reflection on the part of many providers, who recognize the importance of their own approaches and strategies to support families' involvement. Taken together, these responses reinforce the critical importance of capacity building for both families and providers in order to support children's achievement.

Resources and Practices to Support Providers. When providers were asked about what resources would help them better support families' engagement, the most frequently mentioned theme, by far, was professional development for teachers/providers around *practices and approaches* to use when engaging families. Specifically, providers were interested in capacity-building around leading hands-on workshops, using strength-based approaches with families, adult learning theory and pedagogy, creating authentic partnerships, developing experiential learning opportunities for families, and supporting parent leadership.

Additionally, a substantial proportion of educators and service providers indicated interest in language and culture training for themselves and their colleagues. Specifically: training on working with parents from diverse backgrounds, learning to understand Latino/immigrant families' social context, availability of materials that are culturally grounded (i.e., not just translations), and on-site translators and language instruction for staff. The interest in language training (Spanish) was highest among staff in the elementary school setting.

In sum, both sets of responses suggest a strong interest on the part of providers to increase their own capacity to provide culturally responsive and strength-based supports to the families and children they serve. This offers a promising implementation context for systemic, integrated, sustainable, and dual-capacity-building family engagement initiatives.

Implications for Policy and Practice

While the findings outlined above should be interpreted with the specific project population and purpose in mind, the discussion below endeavors to extract these findings into lessons to inform the field more broadly.

- *Both the policy environment and participant preferences support family engagement activities that are purposefully linked to student learning.* Parents indicated a strong interest in supporting their children’s learning and development, an interest in engaging in play and learning activities *with* their children, and an interest in strategies and resources to help them do this. Practitioners in the field also indicated an overwhelming commitment to partnering with families and supporting children’s learning and development. This goal alignment creates an optimal implementation environment for family engagement that is systemic, integrated, and specifically linked to learning.
- *Families desire resources and supports that are aligned with their needs and experiences.* Overall, providers were offering an impressive number of family supports and services to bolster families’ engagement with their children’s learning and development. At times, however, these resources did not align with parent interests. The discrepancy was most significant in the case of *types* of supports offered. Parents indicated overwhelmingly that they are interested in activities they can do *with* their children—enrichment activities, playgroups, and support groups. Provider responses to the parallel question indicated almost the converse proportion of offerings. These results may suggest that just as *content* is important, so is the *mode of delivery*. Ensuring that the types of services and supports offered to families are being done in a manner that responds to their needs and interests is imperative. This also includes ensuring that underpinning conceptions of family engagement recognize families’ culturally shaped and home-based involvement.
- *Strategies that address increased systems coordination are beneficial to families and providers.* Analysis of parent responses indicates that families draw on a number of key resources outside of their children’s educational institutions. In every community, the local library emerged as the most frequently used resource by parents. Local health clinics and food pantry/distribution centers were also consistently indicated. These community institutions are important touch points in families’ lives and represent potential key partners to be included in system-building efforts to coordinate and align family engagement around children’s early learning. Additionally, study results suggest a strong provider interest in increased coordination (and resources to support coordination) across the early age spectrum. Resources to support coordination include staff release time, consistent meetings to communicate, opportunities to build relationships and learn together with other providers in the community, and shared information.

- *Family engagement strategies that focus on dual-capacity-building (of families and family-serving institutions) receive the highest community support.* Our family surveys confirm that despite the challenges posed by poverty, low-income and immigrant families remain deeply involved and committed to their children's learning and youth development. Likewise, provider responses suggest that they are generally committed to building on families' strengths, expanding their own knowledge, and transforming practice to be responsive to families' needs. By providing resources to simultaneously build the capacity of families, schools, and community providers, the Family Engagement Impact Project presents a unique opportunity for dual-capacity-building of some of the most important entities in a child's world. As many scholars concur, family engagement is not only about influencing families' home-based practices, but also transforming schools and communities to be more inclusive of and responsive to families (Mapp & Hong, 2010; Thompson & Hong, 2011; Henderson, 2007).

Conclusion

The results presented here provide important information about the experiences of the parents and service providers in the six San Mateo and Santa Clara county communities who participated in this study. While this study was designed with the specific FEIP project purpose in mind, we believe it offers important lessons to inform the field more broadly. For the parents who participated in this study, the majority of whom were low-income, Spanish-speaking, and had immigrant backgrounds, there emerged a clear story of strong support for their children's learning and development despite what at times are overwhelming obstacles. And from the provider participants, it is clear that across multiple organizations and contexts, there is a robust community of practitioners committed to transforming themselves, the families they work with, and the settings where children live and learn. Taken together, these two perspectives reinforce the critical need in the field for novel approaches to family engagement that are systemic, integrated, and sustainable over time. Furthermore, they reinforce the necessity of ensuring family engagement is linked to learning, dual-capacity-building, and culturally responsive to families' needs and experiences.

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