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Exploring Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Family Engagement

Samantha Arce
University of Washington, U.S.A.

As an informal teacher-leader at my elementary school, I set out to investigate the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about family involvement and engagement among stakeholders at Phoenix Charter School (PCS). I came away with three major findings: 1) There is no collective definition of family involvement, but almost all agreed that families must be proactive in reaching out to educators; 2) Linguistic differences are not being supported, making it difficult for parents and teachers to build relationships; 3) Implicit biases, assumptions and presumptions on behalf of all stakeholders are influencing the decisions and actions of parents and staff. These findings indicate a foundation on which to build stronger family engagement practices, and I will use them to propose a series of action steps for the administration of PCS to consider implementing.

Introduction

Family involvement and engagement have been demonstrated as critical links to improving academic achievement among students. Consequently, many district, state, and federal policies are requiring that schools "[afford] parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Section 1001.12). When families, particularly those from a low-socioeconomic or minority background, do not participate in traditional methods of school involvement such as volunteering or attending parent-teacher conferences, they are often viewed as incompetent or uncaring (Barajas-Lopez & Ishimaru, 2016). However, there is a mounting body of evidence to suggest that the involvement (or not) of families in schooling is the result of inequitable opportunities and experiences.

Equity in education can be viewed through multiple lenses: fairness, inclusion, and justice (Gleason & Gerzon, 2013; OECD, 2012). Equity as "fairness and inclusion" means that each student or family has access to a quality education, and can participate regardless of race, socioeconomic status, linguistic diversity, or culture. Equity as "justice" is the idea that everyone gets the resources they need to be successful. In contrast, *equality* – which is not the same as equity– is the idea that everyone should receive the same resources or treatment. An equity agenda recognizes that sameness isn't fairness, and that some families have "fewer opportunities, resources, and less power to shape policies and decision making" (Barajas-Lopez & Ishimaru, 2016, p. 5). Uninvolved and under-involved families may experience a number of inequities that act as barriers to participation in their children's education; including but not limited to socioeconomic, cultural, programmatic, and linguistic inequities.

As an informal teacher leader, I set out to understand family involvement in the context of a K-8 charter school, located in urban Central Phoenix, Arizona, where I worked as a teacher for three years. The school—which I refer to in this project by the pseudonym Phoenix Charter School (PCS)—served approximately 700 students, the majority of whom are ethnically Hispanic. This charter school had a high population of students who were eligible for Title I services, including free-and-reduced price breakfast and lunch, as well as a high population of families with limited English proficiency. In order to comply with federal mandates for Title I funding, the school made attempts to reach a minimum of 80 percent family participation—

defined as family attendance rates averaged over two meetings—through Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). The APTT model, developed by Dr. Maria Paredes (2011) in Creighton, Arizona, reformats traditional parent-teacher conferences in favor of two or three group meetings per year. Family members of the children in a single classroom meet with the teacher for 75 minutes to discuss the current academic progress of the class as a whole, and collaboratively learn new skills for working with their children at home. To make reaching out to families a priority for teachers at my school, administrators tied teachers' performance pay to family attendance rates at APTT. During the 2015-2016 school year, family attendance failed to reach the minimum stated standards for success school-wide, and it was common to hear my colleagues complain that parents were not doing enough to help their students achieve academically.

This led me to begin questioning the root causes of our school's challenges with family participation. At the time, PCS worked hard to create conditions that allowed teacher leadership to thrive formally and informally. By definition, formal teacher leaders have officially recognized roles, along with specific job descriptions; their titles and responsibilities tend to move these leaders closer to the administrative side of education. In contrast, informal teacher leaders emerge organically from the teacher ranks, and take initiative to solve problems of practice or problems within the organization itself, often owing to the trusting relationships they have built with their colleagues (Danielson, 2007, p. 14-16). As an informal teacher leader, I carried out a qualitative research study aimed at better understanding the motivations, attitudes and beliefs of families and teachers at PCS, with regard to family involvement and engagement. The ultimate goal in understanding these motivations was to find better ways for my colleagues and me to encourage family participation at the site, by building supports based on families' and teachers' needs, rather than on assumptions about what parents or teachers should know and do. For the purposes of clarity, I will be using the terms "parents" and "families" interchangeably; I intend for both to refer to any guardian involved in a child's upbringing. The following questions guided my study:

- What are the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about family involvement and engagement among families and teachers at Phoenix Charter School?
- What steps can be taken to improve the engagement of families at Phoenix Charter School?

With these questions I aimed to elicit data from a range of stakeholders within the school. The focus was on searching for themes in the beliefs and attitudes of families and teachers as separate groups. I then looked across both groups and compared themes in order to get closer to the reality of family involvement in elementary classrooms at my school. I intended to use the constructed realities of families and staff to develop supports for both groups which I hoped would eventually result in improved participation of families at PCS.

Review of Literature

Often, schools characterize family participation by the actions parents and other guardians take to engage in activities and behaviors, both at home and school, which benefit the learning and development of their children (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Effective family participation (also referred to as family involvement or engagement) includes a range of home-

based and school-based actions, such as parent responsiveness, wide use of language (the breadth of vocabulary that parents use when speaking to their children), shared reading, demonstrating a high value on education, attending parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering (Perez Carreon, Drake & Calabrese Barton, 2005). Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, and Gordon (2009) offer a more comprehensive definition of family involvement, one which views participation as a co-constructed, shared responsibility between families and schools. By this definition, family participation is not based solely on the behaviors and actions of families in schools, it also includes the school's expectations, outreach, partnerships and interactions with families to benefit the learning and development of students. This portrayal of family participation is the definition to which I will be referring throughout my study.

Effects of Family Engagement on Schooling

Links between quality home-school relationships and student achievement have been well established over the past two decades. A number of literature reviews cite improvements in achievement and social-emotional behaviors, and decreases in absenteeism, retentions, and disruptive behaviors among students whose families have strong connections to the school (Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, & Koziol, 2013; Nokali, 2010; Williams & Sanchez, 2011). At this time, there is no consensus on the roles and forms of family engagement that most impact academic success for students, though this continues to be researched (Ishimaru, Barajas-Lopez & Bang, 2015). Most recently, research has moved from simply defining the benefits of positive family-school relationships, towards attempting to understand the factors that promote or hinder family participation.

Barriers to Effective Family Participation

The majority of more recent studies focus on barriers to participation specifically for minority families and those from low socioeconomic groups. Kim (2009) suggests that a conflict between teacher beliefs and how these views are perceived by minority groups may cause these families to experience discomfort in school settings, thereby limiting their involvement. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2011) and Kim (2009) point to the idea of "cultural capital," which they describe as the linguistic or cultural competence of minority (non-dominant) parents in a dominant culture, as further barriers to family involvement in schools. For Bourdieu (as cited in Paredes, 2011) cultural capital represents the privilege and experience of the dominant class which are passed from generation to generation. This includes the behaviors, attitudes, and actions that families from higher socioeconomic groups enter school with, which are often preferred and rewarded by educators (Paredes, 2011). Unsurprisingly, families with limited cultural capital in the United States have difficulties navigating school systems that are structured around Eurocentric, middle-class values. Since the majority of educators in the United States are from Eurocentric, middle-class backgrounds, they hold beliefs and values within the dominant system; this often results in the norms, values, and expertise of non-dominant families being overlooked, thus minimizing their abilities to influence their schools or feel welcomed within their walls (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Beyond a Deficit Lens

Until recently, the involvement of minority and low socioeconomic families has been studied through a deficit lens that has positioned parents as part of the cause behind students' low academic achievement, and led to inequitable practices that focused on assimilating non-dominant families into dominant school norms, agendas and expectations (Barajas-Lopez, 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Out of a deficit view, strategies emerged that centered on "fixing" parents and relegated participating parents to "passive listeners, clients or fundraisers" (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Current research promotes moving beyond a deficit lens, towards building the capacity of families and school staff to develop productive partnerships which support student achievement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This requires an approach which de-emphasizes traditional parent involvement activities and instead emphasizes how school environments affect the capabilities of families surrounded by inequities of race, culture, language and socioeconomic status (Ishimaru et al., 2016). However, "despite shifts away from deficit-based parent involvement discourses, the lived experience of many non-dominant families continues to be shaped by disempowering school contexts" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 5). Educational stakeholders must focus on understanding various structural and cultural inequities in order to open new possibilities for considering the roles of non-dominant families in schools (Barajas-Lopez & Ishimaru, 2016; Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander & Hernandez, 2013).

Building Capacity

Academic Parent Teacher Teams (Paredes 2011) is one method being used to build the skills, knowledge, confidence, and belief systems— or capacity—of families and school staff in order to partner productively on behalf of students' academic achievement. Research into effective capacity building interventions identifies "a set of process conditions [which] must be met for adult participants to come away from a learning experience…with new knowledge [and the] ability and desire to apply [it]" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 9). These conditions, which are embedded in the APTT model, include connecting families to the teaching and learning goals for students; focusing on relationship building between home and school; empowering families and school staff to be confident, knowledgeable, and informed; conducting learning in group settings that promote opportunities for shared learning; and providing opportunities to practice and apply new skills.

Research Methods

Type of Qualitative Approach

I engaged in action research, which Mertler (2012) describes as the study of a real-world situation, focused on solving a specific problem and improving the quality of practice, or helping to make a decision at a single, local site. In other words, action research attempts to answer the following question: Why are things at this school as they are, and what can be done to improve them? (Johnson, 2008, as cited in Mertler, 2012). Since school leaders at PCS had already identified the problem of limited family participation, this was an appropriate approach. In the first phase of my research, I sought to pursue a deeper understanding of the situation and its causal factors. This was followed by a collective synthesis of the data and discussions of possible interventions, suggested by various stakeholders. The cyclical nature of action research lends itself to this type of context-specific, stakeholder-driven inquiry.

Setting

At the time of the study, Phoenix Charter School served 670 students with a "majority-minority" population. During the 2015-2016 school year, 80% of the student population identified as Hispanic, 11% identified as Black, 3% as White, 2% as Asian and 4% identified as Other. The typical school in Phoenix is comprised of 60% Hispanic students, while the typical Arizona school comprises 44% Hispanic students; thus the ethnic distribution at Phoenix Charter School is significantly different than most schools in the state. Of the total student population, 25% are classified as English Language Learners, and 99% qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Given the grade level I taught and the pragmatic need to focus on teachers I interacted with regularly, my research at this time focused on elementary classroom teachers and the families of elementary students in grades K-3.

Sampling

The first phase of my action research sought to gain an understanding of the issues surrounding family involvement for both families and educators on campus. Participants included teachers and families of K-3 students. I used convenience sampling to select three to five teachers in grades K-3 who were willing to participate in the study and interested in attempting to increase family engagement in their classrooms. I selected four K-3 teachers who met these criteria, and I refer to them throughout the findings section by their pseudonyms: Linda, Ashley, Josie and Hannah. I then used typical case sampling—which Patton (2003) defines as a process of selecting cases which are not extreme or particularly unusual—to illustrate what is characteristic of the parents and families within the selected classrooms. This was conducted using a questionnaire and demographic data which was completed by 41 parents/families of K-3 students, and that, when analyzed, illuminated key issues to consider when attempting to increase the participation of parents and families of K-3 students.

The second phase of my research sought to develop supports for families and educators to improve family participation within PCS. In order to gain a deeper understanding of each group's necessary supports, I used criterion sampling, defined as the selection of cases based on predetermined criteria for further study (Patton, 2003). Criterion sampling helped identify parents within the typical sample for in-depth follow ups. Parents who willingly supplied contact information on their questionnaire, and whose responses indicate cultural or structural barriers to participation, were included in this sample.

Data Collection and Analysis

I used four data collection approaches over the course of 4 months (November-February) during the 2016-17 school year—observations, interviews, and focus groups as well as a questionnaire. During classroom observations I paid attention to interactions and behaviors on a typical day, primarily focusing on areas of the school that families frequented, as well as special events on and off campus to see if the interactions and behaviors of families and teachers differed based on the setting. I conducted one-on-one interviews with the teachers to discuss their current beliefs about family participation in more depth, and to inquire into improvements they wished to see. I also conducted one focus group with 10 family members and the parent-liaison, who offered interpretation services. The group consisted of participants who met the criteria of having experienced barriers to participation in schools, as indicated on the initial questionnaire sent to all K-3 families. We had an in-depth discussion of the barriers they have experienced, as well as the improvements they wished to see. All data were transcribed and

analyzed using an open-coding scheme to identify themes and patterns within and across each data set. I used member checks throughout the data collection and analysis phases. This involved bringing my interpretations back to the participants so they may "recognize their experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) in my findings and be able to clarify their perspectives if necessary.

Findings

As I analyzed the data in relation to the first question which aimed to uncover the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about family involvement and engagement among families and teachers at PCS, the following themes began to emerge: a) defining family involvement, b) communicating among stakeholders, and c) implicit biases, assumptions, and presumptions. The attitudes and beliefs described within these themes sheds light on the nature of family involvement at PCS.

Defining family involvement. The teachers I spoke with at PCS espoused similar beliefs about the value of having parents who are involved in their child's education, citing this as a necessary component of a child's success in school. As one teacher, Linda, told me during an interview:

> Of course kids who have super involved parents are going to do well. J's mom always returns his forms the next day and comes to APTT [Academic Parent Teacher Team] meetings and field trips. He is soaring! He's doing so well.

Citing similar examples, other teachers seemed to collectively share an inherent belief that engaged parents will lead to better academic and social outcomes on behalf of students. However, they differed in what they defined as "parental involvement." When asked separately what parent involvement looks like, Ashley described it as:

> A parent or guardian who does not put full responsibility on the child's teacher to [let them] know how [the child] is doing, but makes every effort to communicate with their child's teacher. Also, they try to help out when they can and make it to school events.

Hannah stated her belief that parent involvement is reflected in students' behavior:

> I can tell when a parent is involved based on behavior. That's usually the number one give away…Or, I can usually tell by their demeanor in class; how quickly or efficiently they finish an assignment and whether or not things come back…tells me that mom and dad are on it.

Finally, Linda noted overall engagement and support as key elements of parent involvement:

> An engaged parent attends school meetings, keeps open communication with their child's teacher, engages their child in learning activities at home and supports the teacher in their efforts to personalize their child's education.

These quotes in particular describe the teachers' views of parental involvement as a set of actions or behaviors owned by the families, in support of their child and the teacher. The role of the school and actions that can be taken by members of the staff—both critically important facets of parent engagement—were not considered in these teachers' explanations of parental involvement. The focus of involvement for these teachers seemed to be on what the families themselves are willing to do. The teachers in this study seemed to expect involved parents to help manage student behavior, to reach out when they have questions or concerns, and to attend school meetings or events—in other words, to be highly proactive.

In January, after families had a semester of interactions with teachers and administrators, and after the completion of the first APTT meeting, 41 PCS parents in grades K-3 completed a series of questionnaires and engaged in informal conversations with me, using translation services as needed. When asked what they perceive their roles to be in their children's education, all parents insisted they have an important part to play. As one parent simply stated, "My role is very important because the education of my girls always starts in our house. We as parents are the first teachers." (Translated from Spanish, Parent Questionnaire, Jan. 2017).

Parents primarily saw their roles occurring outside of the school, and mainly in the home. They viewed their roles as crucial for making sure their child succeeds not only in the present but in the future as well. For most parents, being involved in their children's education revolved around more traditional and "time-honored" tasks such as "be[ing] aware of our children's education, to help them at home, to take 15-20 minutes to do homework, and to ask how they did at school." (Translated from Spanish, Parent Questionnaire, Jan. 2017). Other parents saw themselves reinforcing and extending the academic learning that goes on at school:

> I have to follow up what she learns in class, and give [my child] the support and help she needs to evolve. She needs to keep practicing what she learns in school, so she needs to go over it at home. [Then] we can see better where she needs to improve or where she is struggling. (Parent Questionnaire, Jan. 2017)

Data collected from parents on questionnaires revealed 43 separate instances where a family member described their role using the words "help" or "support." These words were always directly connected to their own children. The data suggested that most parents, like the teacher-participants, perceived involvement as a set of actions that families must take in order to help their children. Where they differed was in the specific actions that each group included as examples of involvement. While teacher-participants tended to include "supporting the teacher"—via behavior management, volunteering, or donating supplies—as components of family involvement, very few parents included similar actions when discussing their roles.

Communicating among stakeholders. The teachers shared the belief that having good communication is the key to building a working relationship with families. Given that there are no schoolwide protocols for this at PCS—beyond a directive to contact three families per week—the methods used to communicate with parents varies widely from teacher to teacher. A couple of the teachers use daily logs to write notes to students' families; another uses apps like Class Dojo; and one other recently began sending weekly academic reports home through children's take-home folders. Written communication translated into multiple languages was favored due to the large population of families who do not speak English and the limited access to interpreters.

Consistent communication early on was seen by the teachers as a way to ease into discussing larger behavioral or academic problems that may arise as Ashley explained,

> If I have to come to them [parents] for any behavior issues or something, that ice is already broken. They're already involved and they're more apt to being receptive of something that's going on because I'm already talking to them about their child and their progress.

Hannah described her use of communication as a way to "ward off that angry parent; the angry conversation like 'why is my kid failing; it's your fault'."

The parents, on the other hand, viewed consistent communication as a way to check-in on their children's academic progress and learn ways to bolster their overall achievement. As one parent stated, "I think [communication] is very important since we can know the level of study of our children as they go. And it gives us the opportunity to work with the teacher and learn more about our children" (Parent Questionnaire, Jan. 2017).

In addition to the benefits described above, my conversations with these parents and teachers also revealed certain challenges that were perceived to be affecting their abilities to communicate effectively. For some of the teachers, this was the first year they have had English Language Learners in their class, and they had not developed strategies to manage this. Primary language differences between parents and teachers presented the biggest barrier to involvement as the participants defined it, because it severely limits fluent two-way communication between parents and teachers at PCS. The teachers in this study separately reported that they do not feel adequately prepared to work with linguistically diverse parents. Linda's description of the lack of strategies, resources, and support demonstrated how teachers may be feeling an attitude of resignation:

> Maybe I should just go teach in a higher income population where more parents speak English; it'll probably be easier…I just feel like I can't do my job right now. Nothing gets done without the parents, and that's such a big part of being a teacher: talking to the parents. It's so hard to do that right now.

Families who speak a language other than English at home were described by the teachers as harder to reach than those who do speak English. In her interview, Josie, explained, "[Parent involvement] is a little tough due to the language barrier. But I wish my parents would be more involved with their children's education. It seems lacking this year, but it's probably due to the language thing." PCS has taken steps to try and mitigate the language barrier by hiring bilingual staff members to act as liaisons between parents and teachers. However, the need for their services outweighs their availability and this leaves parents and teachers feeling like there aren't enough ways to communicate meaningfully. Linda explained how limited access to qualified interpreters means additional effort to communicate with non-English speaking parents:

> We don't have enough translators, and the ones we do have, we have to schedule [time with them] and coordinate with the parents. And this conversation that is supposed to be a quick five minute chat, has now turned into this long drawn out thing. We're doing this not for one or two parents; it's almost every parent. It's exhausting.

The parents in this study were also feeling the strain of having too few interpreters. As noted by one family member in a survey response: "I think an interpreter willing to translate when needed would help, so that I can communicate more with the teacher. It's hard to find someone." (Translated from Spanish, Parent Questionnaire, Jan. 2017).

Implicit biases, assumptions, and presumptions. Another clear theme affecting family involvement at PCS revolved around the implicit biases that unconsciously influence the understanding, actions and decisions of staff and parents. Each of the teachers acknowledged the many challenges that families in the PCS community face in their home lives. Factors such as minimal formal education and low income were understood by the four teachers to have an influence on the involvement levels of families. Despite an outward understanding of the challenges facing families at PCS, assumptions are still being made about parents who are viewed as uninvolved, as illustrated by this teacher's statement:

> I know this class of parents struggle in their own day to day life, but I feel somehow, someway you need to make time as a parent…I got pregnant young…I was a teenager, and I still made time for every parent teacher conference and volunteering in the classroom; whatever my kid needed. So I believe you either want to be involved or you got other priorities.

The teachers seemed to have been operating under the assumption that parents who are not visible in schools—or "involved" by their definition—must not care enough about their child. As one teacher mentioned in an interview: "Many parents see school as a holding place until they have to deal with them again. I think that many parents simply don't care until it's too late. That's my honest opinion" (Hannah). This assumption that "involvement" is synonymous with "caring" seems to move the problem of engagement into the families' domain as shared by Linda, "I can't make someone care about how their kid is doing in school. I'm sorry, but it's true; it has to come from the parents." Implicit bias can develop over time through a compilation of personal experiences, each leading to similar outcomes, which cause the participant to expect the same result time and time again (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Until the cycle is broken and experiences that counter the perceived narratives are presented, teachers are likely to continue believing that enhancing family engagement is beyond their control (Ishimaru et al., 2015)

Teachers are not the only stakeholders whose implicit biases and assumptions are preventing deeper levels of family involvement. Through informal conversations with the bilingual parent liaison in the focus group, I learned that many non-English speaking parents are hesitant to approach the teachers and ask for help understanding something their child is working on. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons parents struggle to communicate with teachers is because of a lack of available interpreters to support everyone who needs or wants to have a conversation. They explained, "I get a lot of parents telling me that they don't want to go to APTT because the teacher makes them do the activity like a kid, when they can't read the words in English. And a lot of the math is harder and they don't understand. They don't want to look stupid." As a result, many of these families explained that they end up staying silent in their confusion, and leave APTT without really understanding the skill that they are supposed to go home and help their children with. Some families may try to muddle through their confusion and attempt the activities, or they seek out a parent liaison, for help. Other families may choose to set APTT activities aside rather than "look stupid" in front of their children.

A third major assumption that impacted family engagement at PCS comes from key administrators. Through informal conversations about how teachers involve parents on campus, an administrator told me: "Some teachers have it. The ones who are really good at communicating with their parents, it's in their personalities to be outgoing. But others don't take to working with parents because it's not their personality; that's not going to change." This view that the ability to engage parents is inherent, seemed to inadvertently excuse the need to create a plan for supporting teachers who are seen as less competent at communicating with parents.

Additionally, there seemed to be a disconnect—likely due to a combination of communication challenges and assumptions about inherent ability—between teachers' perceptions of their own abilities and administrators' perceptions of teachers' abilities. For example, during an informal conversation with an administrator, a teacher was descried as being seen as a competent communicator with her students' parents, "She is so outgoing and usually has parents coming in to volunteer. She has wonderful relationships with her families." It was interesting to note that this teacher was in this study but spoke about her own perceptions of ability, in which she voiced concern and a lack of comfort with engaging parents who speak languages other than English. This is an example of how assumptions may be a barrier to seeing a valuable opportunity to help a teacher set and reach self-selected goals for family engagement. Implicit biases, lack of resources, and communication and time challenges played a role in how these teachers and these families experienced challenges to family involvement.

Discussion

Throughout the course of this project, I made a concerted effort to ask the parents and the teachers what they wanted to see as improvements (related to family involvement). I provide an overview of what I learned and then conclude with a series of suggested action steps for the PCS community to consider as they move forward.

What steps can be taken to improve the engagement of families at Phoenix Charter School?

Family Requests:

1. More frequent communication about their child's behavior and academics. While the frequency that parents desire varies greatly, from daily to monthly updates, the wish to stay connected with what their children are learning is consistent.
2. More opportunities to learn how to help their children succeed academically.
3. More parent input in planning times for family events, to make sure that most families are able to attend.
4. More interpreters on campus who can help them connect with their teachers in a timely manner.

Educator Requests:

1. Reducing the number of meetings that limit their available time to contact parents.
2. More timely communication from administration about school events which parents are expected to attend.
3. More access to reliable interpreters who can help teachers connect with families.

Keeping my findings and these thoughtful contributions from participants in mind, I suggest the following action steps be taken by PCS in order to further improve family engagement:

1. All stakeholders take part in developing a collective vision of family involvement, with training and support provided to teachers to actualize it.
2. Increase and improve capacity building structures for parents and teachers that reflect more focus on academic partnerships between these groups, while ensuring they are culturally relevant.
3. Build a reliable network of bilingual parent liaisons—from their existing parent community—to assist in translations between parents and teachers. With training and support, these liaisons can be available in person, by phone or by a telecommunication service.
4. Establish families as "educational leaders who contribute and help shape the agenda" (Ishimaru, 2014, p. 208) particularly on decisions which impact students and families.

Limitations

It is important to note that these findings should only be applied to this particular school community, whose culture and climate are both created and interpreted by the stakeholders who are currently a part of PCS. Should the school get new administration, or new teachers who perceive or value family involvement differently from the teacher-participants in my study, the findings described here may no longer be applicable. This would also be true if the school's demographics were to change dramatically, in which case there is the potential for new and different challenges perceived by those parents.

An additional limitation concerns the grade level of parents and teachers included in my study. Since the study was conducted with parents and teachers of K-3 students, the perceptions and beliefs of upper grade parents and teachers may differ from what I have found at the lower grade levels. Additionally, due to the small size of the sample, these findings may not be generalizable across the primary grades. It will be important to have ongoing discussions within the PCS community regarding parent engagement perceptions, beliefs, and goals to determine school-wide trends and develop appropriate interventions for the community as a whole.

On Teacher Leadership

Informal teacher leadership opened the door to a desperately needed conversation at PCS. It is clear to see that parents and teachers had a strong desire to connect and collaborate on behalf of children, but the findings from this project might not have come to light if I thought I needed to wait for a committee to be formed, or for an administrator to assign me the task. While I hope this project acts as a catalyst for changing how educators at PCS interact with families, ultimately, I want it to be a testimony to the power of informal teacher leadership to push for systemic change.

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