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The Barriers to Family Engagement in Educational Settings

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The Barriers to Family Engagement in Educational Settings

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Winston School of Education and Social Policy, Merrimack College

2022

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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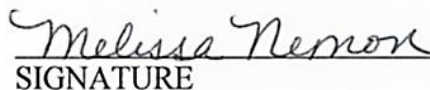
THE CAPSTONE PAPER HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

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First, I would like to acknowledge my loved ones for supporting me through this entire journey. I am incredibly lucky to have you all in my life. I would like to especially thank my mother, who pushes me always do my best in everything I do. You are the ultimate example of a strong and independent woman.

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Abstract

We assume that educators are being professionally trained to handle distinct situations, especially pretraining to families. Most specifically, training on family engagement and ways to engage hard-to-reach families. Family engagement is defined as teachers and parents sharing the responsibility to nurture and help the students learn and meet their unique educational goals. Family engagement encompasses so many different factors and through this research and project, we will be exploring the barriers that families experience when it comes to engaging effectively in educational settings. Educators, administrators, social workers, community leaders, school psychologists, and other education-system-affiliated persons were invited to participate in an interactive workshop that covered the different types of barriers that families experience and well as ways they can work through these barriers to better engage families. Finally, the workshop covered The Dual Capacity-Building Framework which emphasizes creating trusting partnerships between educators and families. This research and project uncovers the lack of attention and training on family engagement in educational settings as well as the lack of training on barriers that hard-to-reach families experience.

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The Barriers to Family Engagement in Educational Settings

Family engagement in childhood education is a topic that we know is important but lacks major publicity and information. How can educators apply practices of engagement without truly knowing or understanding their target population? Ideally, educators should receive adequate professional training and information about the community they are serving. There are many barriers to family engagement at schools that look different across cultures, economic status, and education, and a lack of understanding as to what these barriers are creates a wall between families and educators. For this reason, it is extremely important for educators and administrators to understand the community they are working in addition to understanding the barriers that families face well.

LaRoque (2013) specifically found some of these barriers to be family work schedules or other personal issues regarding scheduling, language, culture, and socioeconomic differences between educators and families. Focus groups executed by Keller and colleagues (2021) found that the greatest barrier keeping families from fully engaging in schools is their language. Lack of Spanish-speaking teachers and office administrators as well as insufficient opportunities to participate in events and PTA meetings due to language (Keller et. al., 2021). Additional barriers found were inconveniences around time, like work and personal obligations. This includes having dual working parents, parents who are working irregular hours, and parents with multiple children, having to engage them in all of their different activities (Keller et. al., 2021). Most specifically in the Spanish-speaking focus group, Keller and colleagues (2021) found that Spanish-speaking parents reported not feeling welcomed or “lack of warmth” from the office staff as they stated (Keller et. al., 2021). Other barriers found in the study groups conducted by Keller and colleagues (2021) include a lack of communication and a lack of encouragement from

staff to increase family engagement and participation. The evidence found through the focus groups that were conducted by Keller and colleagues (2021) correlates with the findings that these barriers hinder family engagement and also hinder family-to-school relationships.

When there is a lack of family engagement in education, we see how these deficits affect the students. Motivation for school work is lower and academic success follows as well. Anthony and Ogg (2019) found that school-based involvement and home-to-school communication positively correlate with achievement in approaches to learning, which were noted to include: student motivation, persistence, and student reading achievement.

Family engagement and barriers to family engagement within minorities (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color; BIPOC) should be examined and understood much further. Exploring the educational matter of BIPOC families and engagement, Chen and colleagues (2012) have found that U.S born parents reported higher instances of reading to their children on a weekly basis compared to Black and Hispanic families during the years of early education. Why do these differences exist between U.S born parents and Black and Hispanic families? When we explore the support systems of BIPOC families and engagement, African American families prefer and consider the church as their primary source for information and support, whereas Latino families prefer school-based and community-based organizations that are culturally competent for support (Latunde, 2017). Thus, making it a priority to intentionally explore and understand the cultural differences of the BIPOC families in our education system.

The relationship and trust between families and schools become distressed when families are not supported through the barriers of time constraints, language, and basic understandings of family difficulties and structure. Keller and Colleagues (2021) recommend the facilitation of open discussions and taking appropriate actions by social workers to better serve children and

their families. While I do agree with this statement, what course of action can be taken when schools lack social workers as liaisons between families, schools, and communities?

The purpose and goal of this project are to explore the barriers that families experience in educational settings and to create workshops for agencies and educators that will focus on reducing barriers to BIPOC family engagement. These workshops will provide participants with the knowledge and tools needed to increase engagement with harder-to-reach families.

Literature Review

When including parents in their child's academic life, there are differences between family involvement and family engagement. While family involvement is defined as playing a participatory role in their child's education by being involved in school events and activities, experts define family engagement as families and teachers sharing the responsibility to help their children learn and meet their unique educational goals. (Waterford, 2018). The difference between family involvement and family engagement is the level of participation from the families; family engagement encompasses and requires more than just the act of being involved (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Family involvement is the first step that leads to family engagement. Family engagement is the commitment that both parties make (families and educators) to collaborating and prioritizing the child's education (Waterford, 2018).

Family Involvement and Family Engagement

Positive outcomes of family engagement can be measured through the academic success and academic motivation that a student demonstrates. A longitudinal study that was conducted by Anthony and Ogg (2019) found that school-based involvement and home-school communication, which are considered to be important types of family engagement, showed a positive correlation in children's reading beginning in kindergarten and into later elementary

years. Another longitudinal study by Englund and colleagues (2004) indicates that family factors like family engagement and family expectations are important for children's academic achievement.

Studies have found practices of family involvement to decrease students' chronic absenteeism and build a strong foundation for student success and future engagement opportunities. Students can develop self-confidence and motivation, have better social skills inside and outside of the classroom, and have better behavior (Waterford, 2018). Family involvement can be divided into three subcategories: school-based involvement, home-based involvement, and home-school communication, the most important indicators of achievement are connected to school-based involvement and home-based involvement. Home-based involvement is measured by engaging in more academic and literacy activities like reading at home, attending community events, and creating a routine and structure at home (Chen et. al., 2012; Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill et. al., 2018). School-based involvement can be measured through family attendance and volunteering of events, and initiation of contact with teachers and administrators, which also falls into the home-school communication category (Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Fan & Chen, 2001; McWayne et. al., 2013).

Like family involvement, family engagement happens at school and in the home, making family engagement a multidimensional construct (Ogg, et al. 2021). Finn (1998) points out the three major types of family engagement that occur in the home which are associated with school performance such as actively organizing and monitoring the child's time, helping with homework, and discussing school matters with the child. Families reading with their children is noted as another set of activities of family engagement in the home. Parent engagement in school-based settings includes participation in school-based activities, volunteering, advocacy,

and building a trusting relationship between families and teachers (Finn, 1998; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Barriers to Family Engagement

We know what family engagement in educational settings and in the home encompasses, however, there seems to be a lack of knowledge from educators and administrators on the difficulties that keep families from effective engagement. Family engagement at school and in the home is extremely important and there should be an emphasis on understanding what prevents families from being engaged in both settings. In 2008, a report that was released by the U.S. Department of Education found that family engagement was the weakest area of compliance in many states (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Educators and administrators have a desire to work in partnerships with families, especially with culturally diverse families, however, they don't know how to achieve this; it is clear that their efforts show little to no progress in the area of family engagement and partnerships with families. In addition to the lack of knowledge from educators and administrators, there are many barriers that keep families from participating in engagement, especially school-based engagement. These barriers cause families to face many personal, cultural, and structural difficulties in overall school-based engagement, and also in productive partnerships with schools (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Overall barriers to engagement that were measured by Chen and colleagues (2012) can include but are not limited to demographics and language, education, political and social participation, labor force participation, literacy practices, job training and skills, family literacy, household income, welfare participation, and health. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) also point out the difficulties that families deal with when they do not understand the complexities of the United

States educational system or dealing with an incident with their child's school, which can cause feelings of distrust amongst the families.

Some of the barriers impacting parents at school can also affect their ability to engage in the home, like lack of time and or conflicting work schedules. In addition to lack of time, family literacy level, family educational attainment, and culture is also a barrier to engagement in the home (LaRoque, 2013; Mapp & Kuttner 2013; Englund et. al., 2004). Chen and colleagues (2012) compared Black and Hispanic Parents' and White Parents' engagement in the home and reported that in the area of reading at home, they found that White parents are more likely to support reading practices of their children. Chen and colleagues (2012) also found that foreign-born parents are less likely to engage in literacy practices at home compared to U.S.-born parents. This evidence supports Mapp and Kutner's (2013) hypothesis of barriers to engaging productively due to demographics of the families. Englund et al (2004) wanted to investigate the relationship between parent educational attainment and parent involvement expectation. In a longitudinal study of 187 children and their mothers, Englund et al (2004) found that mothers with higher educational attainment provided more support for their children and had higher expectations of educational attainment for their children.

Differences in culture also affect the manner in which families engage with their children at home. Hispanic families are more reluctant to take on a leadership role in their child's education because the role of working so closely with educators can be unfamiliar to parents. In other cultures, it can be viewed as disrespectful because taking initiative and demonstrating leadership can be viewed as second-guessing the educator and their abilities (LaRoque, 2013; Ramirez, 2003).

Barriers affecting families in school-based settings are noted to include language, conflicting work schedules and personal family situations, and mistrusting relationships between schools and families (Keller et al., 2021; Mapp & Kuttner, 2012; Grant & Ray, 2019). Most specifically, Keller et al. (2021) found the most predominant barrier in school-based settings amongst families is related to language. Due to the language being a major barrier being faced by families, there is an increase in miscommunication and a lack of knowledge and understanding of the educational system. Further investigation of Keller et al., (2021) study, we find that Spanish-speaking families had stated their desire to be involved, but could not due to the language barrier. Participants also stated the lack of school staff who were Spanish-speaking and identified an absence of opportunities for Spanish-speaking families to participate in school events, like PTA meetings.

Conflicting work schedules is another barrier that researchers continue to emphasize. Like Keller and colleagues (2021), Mendez et. al., (2009) also found that the most prevalent barrier to family engagement in school is time and work-life balance. Through their analyses, they found that low-income and economically disadvantaged families and caregivers have little control over their works schedule, thus resulting in less flexibility for engagement in school settings. Mendez et., al. (2009) also found a lack of accommodation from programs to engage families who have conflicting work schedules.

A difficult barrier for families to navigate through and overcome is the barrier of mistrust that families may experience with their child's school. Trust is a critical component of collaborative partnerships between families and teachers and a trusting relationship begins with teachers who are committed to and respectful of all families (Grant & Ray, 2019). Mapp and Kuttner (2013) point out that many families experience feelings of distrust and feeling

unwelcome due to incidents that may have happened between them and the school; feelings that can arise from experiencing judgement and biases from teachers and administrators.

Historically, the United States has shown indifferences toward Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in powerful institutions, and most specifically, Black families have felt unwelcomed and unsupported in educational institutions (Mills, 2021). Through their research, Manchard et. al. (2019) found that Black families continue to face the impacts of racism, even in their child's schools. Black parents feel as if they cannot enter the school and advocate for their children the same way a White parent can because "their whiteness in and of itself allows them to enter schools and expect administrators to be helpful, which gives those parents an advantage and enables them to comply deferential standard of school involvement" (Manchard et. al., 2019, p. 373).

However, engagement practices vary from family to family, for reasons like culture, education, and due to time commitment, there are families who cannot fully engage whatsoever. The implementation of better practices of family engagement in an educational setting and in the home has shown to be beneficial for children's academic success. In 1998, Jeremy D. Finn summarized groundbreaking work that was taking place then to increase family participation in schools. Major reform efforts and educational interventions list family engagement as an important ingredient (Finn, 1998). What we need to pay most attention to is the needs of the families we are working with and how we can tailor engagement to fit the barriers they currently experience.

A crucial aspect of development as an educator is knowing how to collaborate authentically and effectively with families (Grant & Ray, 2019). In order to do this efficiently, we must first make intentional strides in getting to know our families and how they feel about the

current status of their relationships with their child's schools and educators. Researcher and high school teacher Fred Ramirez discovered that many Latino immigrant families had concerns about their children's school, and so he interviewed parents from a predominant Latino community to better understand these concerns.

Ramirez found that families wanted to be heard by their children's schools. There was a lack of home-school communication; parents were completely unaware of what the school was doing with their children and parents were having to be made responsible for contacting other parents to relay information about school events and functions. Families also reported feeling discouraged by educators' lack of cultural awareness and ethnic differences in families. One example Ramirez gave is an educator believing that all of their families were from Mexico when they were actually from many different parts of Latin America. From his interview of families, Ramirez summarizes the importance of promoting better relationships by the school with their families through practices of enhancing human relationships (Ramirez, 2003).

Successful Initiatives in Family Engagement

A program initiative that has successfully provided support for parents is The Family Leadership Program by Avenue Community Development Corporation in Houston which worked with eight neighborhood Title I schools consisting of BIPOC students. Researchers collected surveys from parent participants highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in their child's schools. The Family Leadership Program encompasses the following elements that have made this initiative successful in the engagement of families: building relationships, practicing shared leadership, engaging in leadership training, promoting inclusion, promoting mutual respect, connecting resources, sharing a common interest, and holding regular meetings. Researchers concluded the overall success of the program by

providing parents an opportunity to be engaged by means of leadership and decision-making. Parents have also had the opportunity to learn more about the organizations and resources that are available to them, giving them autonomy over their personal growth and gratification (Eddeger & Wagley, 2014).

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships by Dr. Karen Mapp and Paul Kuttner is a framework implementation designed to build capacity among educators and families to partner with one another around student success. Mapp and Kuttner emphasize the implementation of this framework be used as a compass, by laying out the goals and conditions necessary to chart a path toward effective family engagement efforts that are linked to student achievement and school improvement. The Boston Public School system, as well as other districts across the United States, implemented this framework to connect their already existing process for family engagement strategies. The school superintendent focused on building a system that was cohesive, coordinated, and integrated across the whole district (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework was created from the research of effective family engagement and home-school partnership strategies and practices, adult learning and motivation, and leadership development. The framework is separated into four different components, each component relying on the previous component to successfully wrap up the framework. The first component of the framework looks at the challenges that hinder both families and educators from capacity-building partnerships. For educators and school staff, this can mean a lack of support and training opportunities; for families, this can look like the barriers that inhibit their engagement like the ones previously mentioned. The second component of the

framework is an articulation of the conditions integral to the success of family-school partnership initiatives and interventions. The third component is identifying goals focused on family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels. The final component of the framework is a description of the capacity-building outcomes for school and program staff as well as for families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

The current project, *Barriers to Family Engagement*, seeks to conduct a workshop educating school administrators, faculty, and staff on the barriers that families experience. In addition to the barriers, the workshop will cover The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships and how to incorporate this framework into practical use. With a series of hands-on and interactive learning, the workshop will explore the barriers for hard-to-reach families, and collaboratively design tools and systems that create more opportunities for parents to be engaged and get involved.

Project Plan

Parental engagement can look very different across cultures, particularly with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families. Examples of these barriers are language and cultural differences, most specifically with immigrant families. Through this project, we will examine and understand the barriers to parental engagement that BIPOC families may face. Understanding barriers that families experience is important so that we can understand the cultural diversity of our families and through this create strong partnerships between families and schools.

Situation Statement

Parental engagement is defined as parents and teachers sharing the responsibility to help children learn and meet their unique educational goals. Parental engagement in the home can be

viewed as parents engaging in supportive practices with their children, with engagement practices in the home looking different across families and cultures, for example, Chen et. al., (2012) found that Black and Hispanic parents engage in reading activities less than White parents. But more specifically, we want to understand the barriers to engaging with schools that families are encountering. Successful parental engagement practices in the school can be viewed as teachers encouraging family participation through meetings and events. Keller et. al., (2021) found that the greatest barriers to engagement include conflicting work schedules and language. Understanding these barriers is important so that we can create deep and meaningful partnerships between families and schools. When these partnerships are stronger, we see greater engagement by families which, in turn, increases student academic achievement and motivation.

Define Your Goals

- Goal 1: Examine and understand the barriers for BIPOC families to school engagement through group discussions and reflection
- Goal 2: Raise awareness and education on The Dual Capacity-Building Framework
- Goal 3: Encourage attendees to find solutions to these barriers with the information that was provided in The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.

Target Audience

The target audience for this project is educators who are working in communities with a large BIPOC student population like in the Merrimack Valley area of Massachusetts. It is important for educators to understand the population they are working with because it will help educators have a better understanding of their culturally diverse student population.

Incentives for Engagement

Through this understanding of barriers, attendees will gain an enhanced awareness of the families' needs that will enable them to better teach their students and engage their families in a holistic manner. This will also strengthen the school-family relationship.

Crafting a Clear Message

We are discovering that educators who are working in diverse, hard-to-reach communities have received little to no training in areas of cultural competence and the barriers that are keeping these diverse families from fully engaging in schools. How can you form a strong and meaningful partnership with these families if you lack a basic understanding of their culture and family dynamics? The Dual Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership with families to increase parental engagement in schools.

Identify Outreach Methods

In order to reach a target audience of educators, I will be partnering with MINTS (Merrimack Institute for New Teacher Support). The MINTS program will be sharing the workshop information with their pool of teachers.

Responsibilities Chart

NAME	ORGANIZATION OR AFFILIATION	RESPONSIBILITIES	CONTACT INFORMATION
Sarah Steinberg	Community Day Charter Public School- Gateway	Sarah will speak on effective engagement strategies that are currently being used at Gateway.	ssteinberg@cdcpsgateway.org

Tools/Measure to Assess Progress

Attendees of the workshop will be asked to answer a post-workshop evaluation (see Appendix F). Another tool that will help facilitate conversation amongst the attendees is the Jamboard activity (refer to Appendix E). This activity will allow participants to work in small groups and brainstorm ideas from the content they received. Another tool of assessment is the narrative log that will collect information on each section of the workshop.

Implementation Timeline

January 2022	Workshop planning Create evaluation questionnaire Meet with Sarah Steinberg and present workshop information
February 2022	Continue workshop planning and finalize Finalize evaluations tools
March 2022	Hold workshop March 1, 2022
April 2022	4/19: Full capstone draft due 4/27: Submit final capstone paper for publication

Logical Framework

Holding this workshop educates school administrators, faculty, and staff on The Dual Capacity Framework by investigating why families are less engaged in education and in the community. This workshop will educate the workers in our communities to understand the barriers to parental engagement so that we can understand and form meaningful partnerships with families. By forming these partnerships between families and schools, we will see an increase in engagement both at school and in the community, thus forming a greater sense of community.

We will... Investigate reasons why families are less engaged in education and the community.
So that... We can create workshops for agencies and educators to learn of what limits families from engagement.
So that... We educate community workers through these workshops on reasons why parents cannot engage.
So that... We can better engage families in education and also in the community.
So that... Parental education and engagement increases
So that... The academic outcomes and student motivation increases.
So that... We can ultimately create a greater sense of community.

Individual Impacts:

- Understanding limits to engagement and helping families overcome these barriers
- Parents being fully supported
- Greater student achievement and motivation

Organizational Impacts:

- Allows agencies to consider implications surrounding what limits families
- Helps educators better understand their families and limits parental engagement

Community Impacts:

- Creating a greater sense of community between families and educators
- Families being educated and using their voice in the community

Methodology

The online workshop titled “Parental Barriers to Family Engagement in Schools” was held in collaboration with Merrimack Institute for New Teachers Support (MINTS) program at Merrimack College. This interactive workshop presented an opportunity for educators to explore different ways in which barriers can manifest for families trying to engage with school systems, as well as offering a framework for combatting these barriers. There were various ways in which data was collected during and post-workshop, which included logs and an evaluation. This data was analyzed using a dynamic mixed methods approach which also allows for both quantitative and qualitative data to be examined to determine the effectiveness and comprehension of the workshop and key activities.

Participants

The Merrimack Institute for New Teacher Support (MINTS) provides a supportive community for both educators who are beginning their careers in education and for seasoned educators who have collaborated with MINTS in the past. The various resources that MINTS provides include webinars, workshops, professional development training, a network of supportive teachers, and mentorship. To gauge interest in the “Parental Barriers to Family Engagement” workshop, partnering with the MINTS program was an effective way to gather an interested pool of individuals which includes educators, administrators, social workers, community leaders, school psychologists, and other education-system affiliated persons.

Materials

The presenter used various forms of materials to organize the workshop information, execute the workshop, and gather information after the workshop. These materials are listed below.

Workshop Flyer

MINTS created a workshop flyer to gather interest in the workshop (see Appendix B). MINTS shared this flyer with their contacts and provided an RSVP link.

Canva

The presentation materials for the workshop were created and organized on Canva (See Appendix C). Canva is a graphic design platform that is used to create social media graphics, presentations, posters, documents, and other visual content. The presenter selected a pre-formatted presentation and added the workshop content to the pre-formatted presentation. In addition to adding the workshop content, the presenter was also able to include various graphics and designs that enhanced the appearance of the presentation.

Zoom

In order to properly execute and hold the workshop, the presenter had to conduct the workshop virtually using Zoom. Zoom is a videotelephony software program that allows video conferencing, screen sharing, commenting, and breakout rooms.

Narrative Log

The presenter created a narrative log to collect information on the intention, action, and additional comments made by participants (See Appendix D). While the workshop was being conducted, a peer was collecting information on each of the sections of the workshop. The peer was asked to give a rating of each section and make a note of any reactions and comments by the attendees.

Google Jamboard

One of the activities the presenter organized was created through the Google Jamboard platform (See Appendix E). Jamboard is an online interactive whiteboard that allows educators

and participants to collaborate in real-time. The participants can use the “sticky” notes feature to draw out ideas collectively.

Google Forms

The presenter collected post-workshop surveys by the attendees using the Google Forms platform (See Appendix F). Google Forms allows for surveys to be created through features like scaled questions, open-ended response boxes, and multiple-response questions. Google Forms allows the survey responses to be easily assessable for data analyses by converting the responses into a Google Sheets Workbook.

Take-Home Document

The presenter created a take-home document for attendees to have once the workshop was over (See Appendix G). This document has links to the post-workshop survey, the presenter’s google site, the presenter’s capstone project, and the presenter’s personal LinkedIn profile.

Procedure

The presenter partnered with MINTS to promote, recruit, and execute this workshop. Prior to the workshop, MINTS gathered information about the barriers to family engagement workshop through a series of online questions. Once they obtained this information, MINTS created a flyer with information about the workshop and the Google Form invite to share with participants. The Google Form included demographic questions about the participant’s professional education and their professional roles. MINTS shared the marketing information with their network of educators, administrators, social workers, and other education-affiliated persons through their LinkedIn profile and sent emails to their contacts. In addition to MINTS sharing the flyer, the presenter shared the flyer with her network of educators and community

leaders. Once MINTS and the presenter received all of the information for the participants, MINTS shared the Zoom account information for the workshop. The workshop was held on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm. The workshop agenda is located in Appendix A.

Introduction

The workshop began with a quick icebreaker that focused on a brief background of the presenter, the goals of the workshop, and a general definition of family engagement.

Icebreaker: The Game of Life

Once the introduction was done and the presenter shared a general definition of family engagement, the presenter introduced *The Game of Life* as the first activity. In this activity, participants were separated into two rooms with actors that played academic administrative roles. Before randomly assigning the participants to a room, each participant was given an identity according to their last name. If the participant's last name was between the letters A-F, the participants were a part of group A. If their last name was between the letters G-L, participants were a part of group B. If their last name was between the letters M-R, participants were a part of group C. If their last name was between the letters S-Z, participants were a part of group D.

Once participants received their identity or grouping, they were assigned to be in either the principal's office or the teacher's classroom. The participant's role was to have a meeting with the principal or the teacher and ask for help with the behavior of their child. The treatment and reaction of the principal or the teacher solely depended on the letter of the participant, A, B, C or D. Participants in groups A and B were from the more privileged families who had plenty of time to be engaged in school events and activities, they were treated with respect and compassion from the principal and the teacher. Participants in groups C and D were the families who

experienced many different barriers to engagement and were treated with a cold shoulder by the principal and the teacher. Once the activity was concluded, participants were brought back to the main room with the whole group, and they were asked to debrief on the activity.

Content A: Barriers to Family Engagement, Solutions, and Framework

Once the first activity was concluded, there was a presentation on the different barriers that families experience when it comes to family engagement in educational settings. In addition to presenting the barriers, ideas and language on ways to engage families despite these barriers were presented. Presenting ideas of solutions for family engagement created an opportunity to present The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.

Activity: Jamboard

For the second activity, participants were divided into smaller groups of 2-3 and were separated into break-out rooms. For the Jamboard activity, participants were asked to analyze the family dynamic they had been assigned to. Their task was to note what type of barriers the family was experiencing and what solution they would provide to engage the family. Participants were asked to use the “sticky notes” feature to add this information.

Guest Speaker

Next, the guest speaker, Sarah Steinberg, was introduced. Sarah Steinberg is the Head of School for Community Day Charter Public Schools-Gateway and has held this position for 5 years. Sarah was invited as a guest speaker for this workshop to present a real-life example of what is like for administrators and educators to work with families who experience barriers to engagement. Sarah provided the participants with examples of how she has found ways to engage the families she has worked with. She also provided a few success stories of families who

were struggling to be engaged. The participants then had an opportunity to ask Ms. Steinberg questions and engage in dialogue on barriers and solutions to barriers.

Post-Workshop Evaluation

For the final 10 minutes of the workshop, the presenter conducted a wrap-up discussion and review of the content that was covered in the workshop. In addition to this, the presenter asked the participants to complete a post-workshop evaluation survey which was sent to the participants as a link in the Zoom chat feature. If participants missed the link through the chat, MINTS sent a post-workshop email reminding attendees to complete the survey.

Post-event questions included: Overall, how would you rate this workshop? Was the content delivery well executed? Were the goals of the workshop clearly stated? Did you understand the barriers to family engagement? What was your biggest takeaway from this workshop? Were there any parts of the workshop that were challenging for you? What other topics related to family engagement do you believe educators should have more training on? Is family engagement part of your professional development training? If you are being trained on family engagement, is the training helpful? Did you learn anything new from this workshop? Would you use this workshop for professional training on family engagement? The following questions were demographic questions that participants were asked to answer: Are you an educator? What school district or organization are you affiliated with? How would you rate family engagement in your school or organization? What grade level do you teach/ work with or wish to work with? What is your professional degree? What is your role or profession? What type of feedback do you have for the presenter?

Results

Once the workshop concluded, all data gathered from the survey was collated and transferred into a Google workbook. A dynamic mixed methods approach, which allows the researcher to look at the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the data in tandem to find insights, was used to explore the data. The post-event evaluation was examined quantitatively to explore descriptive data such as demographics and scaled responses to learning outcomes. The activities were assessed using qualitative data responses from the respondents and observers in the workshop. Qualitative data were first coded into various categories (i.e., positive versus negative reactions) and then the coded data were compared and interpreted to find overarching themes across the key questions. These themes were examined against the goals of the workshop, and the feedback from the post-event survey.

Qualitative Findings from Activities

The first activity was the ice breaker titled *The Game of Life*. When the participants finished meeting with either the principal or the teacher, they were brought back to the main room and debriefed on the activity. The main theme of the debrief of the first activity was the unfair treatment of participants in groups C and D. There was robust discussion on how specifically the principal was not allowing the parents in groups C or D to explain what their situation was, the principal simply stated “you are not doing enough” with no regard to what the parents had to say. For the second activity, participants were divided into groups of 2 to 3 and were assigned a family in which they had to analyze the family dynamic and which barriers the family is experiencing, and find ways to engage the family. During the debrief, each group shared their family dynamic and what approach they would use to engage the family. The overarching themes of finding engagement solutions for each family were to increase

communication, whether that required translation or not, find alternate hours and ways to hold meetings, like providing the family with virtual options, and provide the family with resources to better understand the education system.

Post-Event Workshop Survey

The data that was collected included a total of 10 out of 13 respondents that completed the post-evaluation survey which is a completion rate of 77% of the attendees. The post-workshop survey asked respondents to answer the following demographic questions, are you an educator; and what is your professional role? Out of the 10 respondents, 8 respondents reported their professional role as an educator (80%) the other 2 respondents did not respond to the “what is your professional role?” demographic question. Specifically, the professional roles of the respondents varied from teachers to program directors, and educational consultants.

Respondents were asked how they would rate the overall content and activities of the workshop using a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being poor and 4 being excellent, respondents rated the overall workshop at an average of 3.9. The most common theme respondents submitted in the area of the biggest takeaways of the workshop was the importance of learning about the barriers that families experience and how to find solutions to improve family engagement in educational settings.

Respondents were asked to rate the following statements regarding the structure of the workshop using an overall rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The first statement asked respondents to rate the content, 9 out of the 10 respondents answered strongly agreed, and 1 respondent answered agree. When asked to rate if the content was relevant to them, 4 out of 10 respondents answered strongly agree and 6 respondents answered they agreed with the statement. When respondents were asked if the goals of the workshop were

clearly stated, 8 respondents answered they strongly agree, 1 respondent answered they agreed, and 1 respondent answered they disagreed. Respondents were asked to rate if the game of life was impactful, 5 respondents strongly agreed, and the other 5 respondents answered they agreed. Respondents were asked if they understood the barriers to family engagement, 7 respondents answered they strongly agreed, and 3 respondents answered they agreed. Lastly, respondents were asked if they would use this workshop for professional development training on family engagement, 9 out of 10 respondents stated they would use this workshop for professional training, and 1 other respondent did not answer.

Figure 1: Respondent's Overall Rating of the workshop

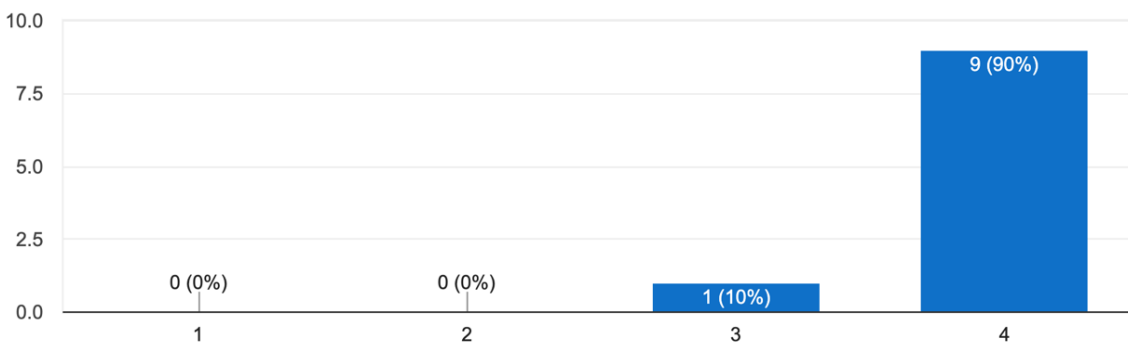
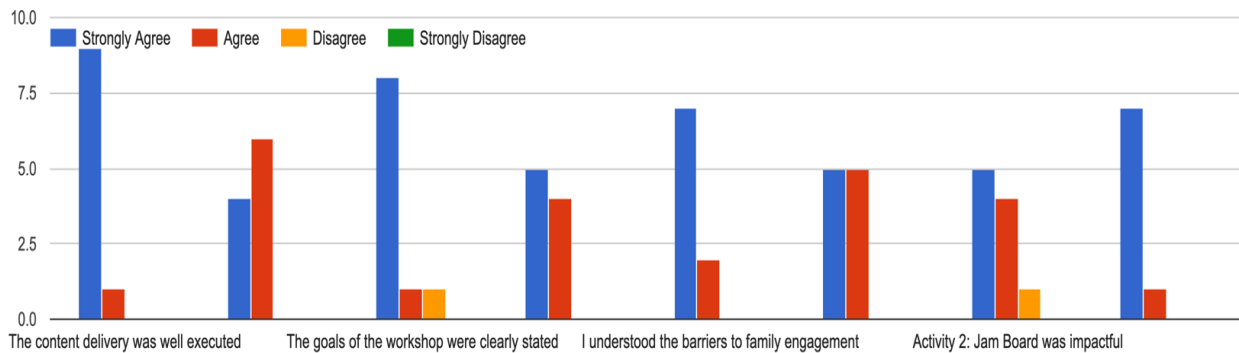
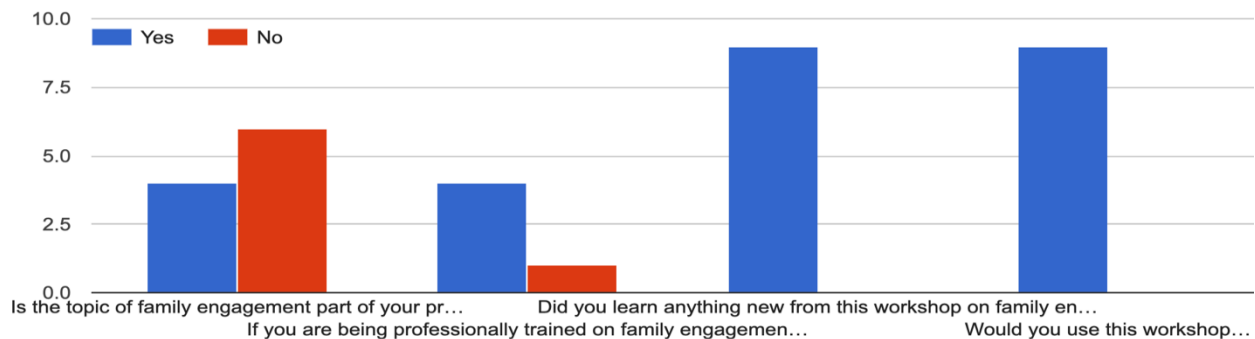


Figure 2: Respondents' statements on the overall structure of the workshop



The data that correlates with the findings from the literature that has been previously reviewed was the respondents' statements of family engagement practices in their professions. A total of 6 out of 10 respondents reported that family engagement was not part of their professional training. There were 4 respondents who reported receiving training on family engagement as part of their professional training, however, one respondent found that the professional development training that was being provided was not helpful. When respondents were asked to rate family engagement in their school or organization on a scale of 1 to 5, 2 of the respondents who reported receiving professional development training on family engagement rated family engagement at 2 and 3.

Figure 3: Respondents' statements on family engagement in their profession



Discussion

The intentions of the *Barriers to Family Engagement* workshop were to bring awareness to the importance of family engagement practices in educational settings and to explore current family engagement practices in schools and how successful they are at engaging families. This workshop brought forward the barriers to family engagement that families may experience at schools and ways in which educators can work with families to increase engagement practices despite the barriers they face. In addition to bringing these barriers forward, the most important

fact that was discussed was increasing family engagement by using a strength-based approach for each family.

By looking through the post-evaluation survey that respondents were asked to complete, we were able to identify what the respondents learned from the workshop as well as to measure the family engagement practices that respondents have been or are currently a part of through their district or organization. The major findings from the post-workshop evaluation survey were respondents' statements on the lack of professional development training on family engagement and low ratings of family engagement practices in districts and organizations that were already being professionally trained on the importance of family engagement.

In addition to bringing awareness to the barriers to family engagement, we wanted to investigate the current family engagement training that is being provided to educators and administrators and how effective the professional training is in engaging hard-to-reach families. A total of 10 respondents completed this survey, and 8 respondents reported their roles as either an educator or an administrator. Out of these 8 respondents, a total of 4 of them reported working with grade levels K-12 as either an educator or an administrator. A total of 75% of respondents who identified as working with K-12 stated that family engagement is not part of their professional development training. This information received from the respondents supports our conclusion that educators and administrators are not receiving training in family engagement, let alone barriers to family engagement that hard-to-reach families may experience.

Both Grant and Ray (2019) and Ramirez (2003) mention the importance of authentic collaboration with students' families and effective collaboration begins with understanding and respecting the diversity of all families. Grant and Ray (2019) suggest the development of

implementation and training on a variety of engagement strategies that fit today's diverse families' lifestyles, issues, and beliefs.

In addition to the previously mentioned findings, the post-evaluation survey also showed respondents reporting receiving professional development training on family engagement and found the training they are receiving useful. Yet they reported low rates of family engagement in their district or organization. This data supports Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) implications that many educators and administrators identify family engagement as an important ingredient in successfully cultivating positive relationships between schools and families, yet they fail to do so because of the complexities of working with families of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

In conclusion, this workshop was a successful tool for exploring and discussing the barriers to family engagement. The way in which the topic and information was presented, how the activities were arranged, and having a guest speaker share her real-life experiences opened the space for participants to ponder and have meaningful conversations regarding barriers to family engagement and how they can personally and professionally relate. Specifically, the activities were critical at enhancing understanding and participants indicated the effectiveness in helping them understand the content.

Limitations of the Project

The limitations of this study were related to the low number of participants that attended the workshop. Originally, there were a total of 30 respondents who were interested in attending the workshop. Out of those 30 individuals, 13 respondents attended the workshop.

Another limitation is related to the duration of the workshop. The workshop had to be presented in two hours. This presented limitations on the amount of material that could have been covered. This also presented limitations in having guest speakers; since the workshop was

two hours, this meant that it was not possible to have another speaker share their experiences with family engagement in their district or organization.

Implications for Future Projects

Future studies and research should include in-depth investigations of the family engagement practices that are currently taking place in schools and organizations. This investigation will include a series of interviews with various stakeholders on engagement practices in their schools and organizations. Future projects should also take into consideration the demographic and population of said school and organization and will further look into the barriers that families experience when it comes to engagement. In addition, studies of schools, organizations, and families of the community should also be examined to further understand their unique dynamics and situations for a better understanding of how to engage them. Looking back at the data that was collected from respondents of the workshop, a total of 75% of attendees who reported not receiving any form of professional development training on family engagement. Future projects should consider implementing and providing this type of information for educators.

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Appendix A: Workshop Agenda

BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

March 1, 2022

4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

The goal of the workshop: The goal of this workshop is to understand the barriers that hard-to-reach families may experience in the school system. We will discuss how we can improve the current engagement practices that are being used to successfully engage hard-to-reach families.

+	<p>4:30 PM – 4:50 PM</p> <p>20 mins.</p>	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Ice Breaker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro about myself and goals of the workshop • Introduce Sarah Steinberg • Introduce barriers to family engagement and the importance of understanding the barriers. • Introduce Game of Life 	<p>Computer or mobile device with access to zoom</p> <p>Paper</p> <p>Pencil or Pen</p>
	<p>4:50 PM – 5:30 PM</p> <p>40 mins.</p>	<p>Activity 1- Game of Life break out rooms and Debrief: 30 minutes of activity, 10 minutes of debrief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The goal of this game is to allow attendees to experience either privileges or difficulties that families experience in the education system. • Questions for debrief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were your initial thoughts on this game? - Was everyone treated fairly? - How did you feel when you had to explain yourself to the principal and teacher? - Do you see this happening in your place of employment? 	<p>Computer or mobile device with access to zoom</p>
	<p>5:30 PM – 5:45 PM</p> <p>15 mins.</p>	<p>Topic 1- Barriers and Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting content on barriers to family engagement in schools and how these barriers affect the children involved • Present the Dual Capacity-Building Framework and how it can be applied in schools 	<p>Computer or mobile device with access to zoom</p>
	<p>5:45 PM – 6:00 PM</p> <p>15 mins.</p>	<p>Activity 2- JAM Board <u>break out room</u> and Debrief: 10 Minutes of activity 5 minutes to debrief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each JAM Board will have a different type of family. Attendees will be split into different groups. Their task is to find ways to engage the family they've been assigned with by recognizing and understanding their barriers and using the framework to engage them. • Questions for debrief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was it hard for your group to find ways to engage your family? - Were there any disagreements between group members? 	<p>Computer or mobile device with access to zoom</p> <p>Access to JAM Board</p>
	<p>6:00 PM – 6:20 PM</p>	<p>Q&A With Sarah Steinberg</p>	<p>Computer or mobile device</p>

Appendix B: Marketing Flyer by MINTS

**The Merrimack Institute for New Teacher Support
(MINTS) Co-Sponsors:**

Barriers to Family Engagement in Schools



**Tuesday, March 1, 2022
4:30-6:30 p.m. EST
Zoom**



In this workshop, we will be exploring a variety of barriers and solutions for families that are the hardest to engage with schools and academic institutions. The goal of exploring these barriers is to more fully understand our diverse family population and create lasting, meaningful partnerships between schools and families.

Once you fill out the RSVP, you will receive reminder emails with a Zoom link for this session. Space is limited.



Julielys Ortiz-Leger graduated from UMass Lowell with a degree in Psychology. She is in the M.Ed. in Community Engagement program at Merrimack College, and she is the graduate fellow at Hands to Help in Lawrence, MA.

Appendix C: Barriers to Family Engagement Workshop

BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In schools

March 1, 2022, 4:30–6:30 P.M.



Julielys Ortiz-Leger
Master of Education in
Community Engagement

WORKSHOP REMINDERS

- Please keep your microphone muted unless you are ready to speak
- If possible, please turn on your cameras
- Be respectful of all participants and their sharing.
- Please use the chat to interact! Any questions that will come through will be addressed at the end
- If the workshop goes over 6:30 pm and you cannot stay, I completely understand! You will receive an email with a take-home document.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

Our agenda this evening

- Introduction
- Activity 1: Game of Life & Debrief
- Barriers to Engagement and Framework
- Activity 2: Jam Board & Debrief
- Q & A With Sarah Steinberg
- Closing & Evaluation

ABOUT ME



Call me Jules

I am currently obtaining a master's degree of Education in Community Engagement through Merrimack College's Fellowship Program. Before applying to this master's program, I worked as an administrator in a Charter School for seven years while obtaining a bachelor's degree in Psychology. Through the administrative experience, I found my passion in helping families and their children be successful.

Why Family Engagement?

I realized there was a disconnect between families and schools and so I wanted to explore exactly what this disconnect is and how we can work with families and educators to build trusting and effective relationships.

WHAT IS FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?



Family Engagement is defined as educators and families sharing the responsibility to help children learn and meet their unique educational goals

GAME OF LIFE

Time to roleplay!

Each participant will be given an "identity". You will be grouped by your last name, this group is your identity.

As a parent, your goal is to figure out why your child has been having difficulties in school and ask the teacher or principal which resources or what type of help they could provide to help your child.



GAME OF LIFE

Debrief

- What were your initial thoughts on this game?
- Was everyone treated fairly?
- Have you personally experienced or witnessed a situation similar to that of the game?



BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Time conflicts and limitations
- Mistrust between families and educators
- Language and communication barrier
- Lack of knowledge on the education system and or importance of Engagement



WAYS TO ENGAGE FAMILIES DESPITE THE BARRIERS

"A crucial aspect of development as an educator is knowing how to collaborate authentically and effectively with families " (Grant & Ray, 2019)

- Community Walk-through with educators
- Opportunities for educators and families to interact through engaging activities
- Opportunities for families to be a part of important decision making
- Educators participating in one to one family meetings and home visits
- Events that are organized during more convenient hours for families
- Transparent information and conversations between families and educators

THE DUAL CAPACITY BUILDING FRAMEWORK





JAM BOARD ACTIVITY

For this activity, you will be assigned a breakout room and jam board slide. Your breakout room will be the slide you must work on.

You must work together to analyze the family dynamics and find what barriers the family experience and then find ways to engage the family. Please use the sticky options when adding your answers to the jam board.



JAM BOARD ACTIVITY

- Was it hard for your group to find ways to engage your family?
- Were there any disagreements between group members?

SARAH STEINBERG



Community Day Charter Public School-
Gateway, Head of School

- Briefly tell us about your experience with hard-to-reach families.
- What kind of engagement practices do you find useful?
- How have you engaged hard-to-reach families? Give an example of a family or situation that was difficult but successful.

"We should aim to explore and recognize individuals' strengths and qualities and how they can contribute to better practices of engagement, whether they are educators, administrators, or parents"



THANK YOU!

Please do not forget to complete
the post-workshop evaluation

Appendix D: Narrative Log

Barriers to Family Engagement
Workshop Narrative Log

Observation	Time	Intention, action, comments	Execution (rate 1 poor- 5 excellent)
Introduction	4:30-4:50	The presenter will introduce herself, the goals of the workshop, and Sarah Steinberg. Briefly introduce family engagement importance of understanding barriers to family engagement.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:
Activity 1: Game of Life	4:50-5:30	The presenter will explain the Game of Life and instructions for the game followed by a debriefing of the activity.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:
Topic 1: Barriers and Framework	5:30-5:45	The presenter will explain barriers to family engagement and explain the dual capacity-building-framework.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:
Activity 2: Jam Board	5:45-6:00	The presenter will explain the Jamboard activity and instructions for the activity followed by a debriefing.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:
Q & A With Sarah Steinberg	6:00-6:20	The presenter will introduce Sarah Steinberg. There will be a series of cues that Sarah Steinberg will ask her. In addition, we will open up the Q & A for participants to ask questions.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:
Closing and Evaluation	6:20-6:30	The presenter will wrap up the presentation and ask participants to complete the post-workshop survey. The presenter will also hand out take-home materials for the participants.	Rating: Reactions: Notes:

Appendix E: Jamboard

Welcome to the Neighborhood

Instructions:

- Analyze the family and family dynamics
- Figure out what types of barriers the family is experiencing
- Find ways to engage the family

Family 1: The Lopez Family

Moved from Nicaragua 6 years ago

Dual parent household. Parents are older. Don't speak English. Have trouble using technology. There is a parent that stays at home

Family 2: The Charles Family

Single-parent household. English speaking parent.

Parent works multiple jobs to maintain household

Parent tries to attend meetings and activities but does not have the luxury of calling out of work

Family 3: The Smith Family

Single-parent household. English speaking parent

Parent maintains household with one income.

Parent has had various incidents with school staff

Family 4: The Ramirez Family

Moved from the Dominican Republic 3 years ago.
Dual parent household
Family trust that the school is doing everything
correctly and feel no need to be involved

Family 5: The Devi Family

Family has been living in the United States for many
years but can only communicate in basic English
Single-parent household
Parent works multiple jobs to maintain
household

Appendix F: Post-Evaluation Form

4/13/22, 4:52 PM

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

Thank you again for attending the Barriers to Family Engagement workshop. Please take a moment to complete this post-workshop evaluation. This information will be used to measure the effectiveness of this workshop. All of your responses are strictly confidential.

- Overall, how would you rate this workshop?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

- Please answer the following statements regarding the structure of the workshop.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The content delivery was well executed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The content was relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The goals of the workshop were clearly stated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Activity 1: Game of life was impactful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understood the barriers to family engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Dual Capacity-Building Framework is useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Activity 2: Jam Board was impactful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Q&A with Sarah Steinberg was informative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4/13/22, 4:52 PM

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

3. What is your biggest takeaway from this workshop?

4. Were there any parts of the workshop that were challenging for you?

5. What other topics related to family engagement do you believe educators should have more training on?

4/13/22, 4:52 PM

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

6. Please answer the following statements on family engagement in your profession.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Yes	No
Is the topic of family engagement part of your professional development training?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If you are being professionally trained on family engagement, do you find that the training is helpful?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you learn anything new from this workshop on family engagement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Would you use this workshop for professional training on family engagement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics

Please answer the following questions. These questions will not be used to identify you

7. Are you an educator?

Mark only one oval.

Yes
 No
 Other: _____

8. What school district or organization are you affiliated with?

4/13/22, 4:52 PM

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

9. How would you rate family engagement in your school or organization?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

10. What grade level do you teach/ work with or wish to work with?

Check all that apply.

- Pre K
- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- Higher Education

11. Professional Degree

Check all that apply.

- High School
- Bachelors
- Masters

12. What is your role or profession?

4/13/22, 4:52 PM

Barriers to Family Engagement- Evaluation

13. Please provide any feedback or questions regarding this workshop.

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix G: Take Home Document

RESOURCES

Barriers to Family Engagement

Thank you again for taking the time to attend this workshop

[Post-workshop survey](#)

Please remember to complete this post-workshop evaluation

You can visit my google site page for more information and resources. *Currently under construction*

[Google Site](#)

[Capstone](#)

You can access my capstone research through Scholarworks. Search for my name or capstone title
Available in May 2022

Let's connect!

[LinkedIn](#)

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