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**What Does Involvement Look Like for Cape Verdean Families in Boston: The
Opportunities and Challenges of Being an Engaged Parent in Boston Public Schools**

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2024

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

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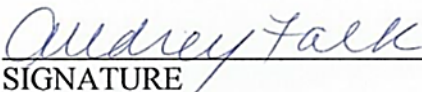
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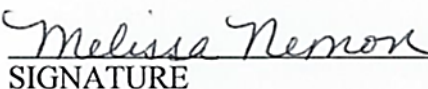
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Abstract

This community needs assessment seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities that might be serving as a barrier to Cape Verdean families' engagement in Boston Public Schools. By looking at secondary sources such as the census, Boston Public Schools reports, and other publications, and interviewing professionals based on five areas of focus, the challenges and opportunities for engagement were explored. The research focused on mutual respect between families and schools, families' confidence and capability to engage, trust between families and teachers, schools as community centers, and a sense of belonging. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2020, Massachusetts alone is home to about 70,040 Cape Verdean American people, making it the state with the largest number of Cape Verdean people in the U.S. (Silva, 2023). The growing population's needs should be met, and their voices heard. The research found that Cape Verdean families have varying levels of technological savviness, and more resources should be allocated to help with computer literacy. Cape Verdean families were found to be ranked amongst the lowest for engagement compared to other ethnic groups. Barriers including language, work hours, and cultural backgrounds are important factors in addressing the lack of engagement. Collaboration between Boston Public Schools and community-based organizations is pivotal in engaging Cape Verdean families in Boston as well as developing programming that addresses computer literacy, cultural competency, and language accessibility.

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What Does Involvement Look Like for Cape Verdean Families in Boston: The Opportunities and Challenges of Being an Engaged Parent in Boston Public Schools

All schools should be community hubs for families since children spend so much time at school and in school-based activities. Schools are important institutions where children receive quality education and learn how to become good citizens of the world. The family members of these children should also be supported and connected to broader resources that empower the whole family. Families trust that schools are doing everything in their power to provide the best education and opportunities for their children and schools must also extend these opportunities to families. Immigrant families especially might need more support when they arrive because many come to this country without knowing how the education systems work and it is the responsibility of institutions to guide them in learning these systems. Cape Verdean immigrants living in Boston, Massachusetts are one example of families that might need more support from organizations, specifically their children's school district to navigate the state resources.

Cape Verde is a group of archipelago islands off the west coast of Africa. Due to limited educational and job opportunities, there are more Cape Verdeans living outside their country than in the Cape Verdean islands (Immigrant Learning Center, 2020). According to the Immigrant Learning Center (2020), the majority of Cape Verdeans live in the United States of America with a population of about 23 thousand people in the greater Boston area alone.

Cape Verdeans in Boston make up one of the largest immigrant populations in the city (The Immigrant Learning Center, 2020) which means that most of their children attend Boston Public Schools (Boston Public Schools, 2024) Boston public school staff and educators must make every effort to engage these families once their children start school. Family engagement is important because when schools engage the whole family, the student is more likely to succeed.

Family engagement can be difficult when it comes to immigrant families due to language barriers, different cultural norms, and accessibility to resources.

Increasing educational access for Cape Verdean families is important to improving family engagement for the population in Boston Public Schools. Working with diverse families means that an organization is proactive in its approaches to best serve the population. The purpose of this community needs assessment is to identify the strengths and challenges of parental involvement for Cape Verdean families in Boston and provide recommendations to Boston Public Schools.

Literature Review

The Cape Verdean people first started immigrating to the United States in the mid-19th century due to severe drought and poverty levels to work in the whaling industry (Almeida & Nyhan, 1975). The majority of those who emigrated to the States were people from the village and those who lived in rural poor communities (Almeida & Nyhan, 1975) in search of the American dream. Those who were able to attain a higher education level provided by the Portuguese colonizers chose to remain in the islands. The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of Cape Verdean immigrants allowed to move to the United States and it was not until Congress revised the laws in 1952 that more immigrants from Cape Verde were allowed to continue traveling to the U.S. (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). After gaining their independence in 1975, many more people were able to receive visas and travel to other countries in search of a better life.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2020, Massachusetts alone is home to about 70,040 Cape Verdean American people, making it the state with the largest number of Cape Verdean people in the U.S. (Silva, 2023). Similarly to many immigrant groups, Cape Verdeans

continue to move to the United States in search of better jobs and educational opportunities. Most of the new immigrant population from Cape Verde are still chasing the American dream by moving to the States because of the poor living conditions and the lack of educational opportunities back home. According to the Boston Planning and Development Agency, the Cape Verdean population has risen 58% in the city of Boston since the year 2000 with Cape Verdean people living primarily in Boston, Taunton, Brockton, and New Bedford (Boston Planning and Development Agency, 2019).

Boston Public Schools serves about 50,000 students in 121 schools across the city. The school district is one of the most diverse districts in the United States with students coming from more than 139 different countries and one in every two students speaking a language other than English at home (Boston Public Schools, 2024). At a glance, in the school year 2021-2022, Boston Public Schools student demographics were as follows: 43.1% Hispanic, 32.2% Black, 14.5% White, 8.7% Asian, and 1.6% Other/Multiracial (Boston Public Schools, 2024). About 42.6% of the students served reported that English was not their first language, 30.1% are English learners, 20.6% have an individualized education program, 7.2% of the English learners learn with a disability, and 68.9% are considered economically disadvantaged (Boston Public Schools, 2024). Cape Verdean students made up 6% of the Boston Public Schools population in the 2021-2022 school year which is about 2,937 students (Boston Public Schools, 2024).

Immigrant Family Dynamics

Immigrant family dynamics are pivotal in understanding the needs of families in Boston. It is also important to understand families as a system that functions as a social system (Grant, & Ray, 2019). Schools cannot separate students from their families because they are influenced by their families' values and culture. Understanding a family's worldview is especially essential

when working with immigrant families such as Cape Verdean families. Families come up with boundaries that the whole family follows and help them remain a unit (Grant & Ray, 2019).

Families of color especially might have boundaries that may relate to the way they are treated in a world where racism and discrimination are always present. Migrating to a new country might impact family structures and influence the way families value their cultural norms and the ways they can assimilate into their new setting. All these transitions affect the whole family especially the children because they are not the ones making the decisions on the trajectory of their lives but must adapt to a new place and its systems. Children enter new education systems that might result in Americanization of these children that might conflict with their families' cultural values. Cape Verdean Families move to the United States with their cultural values and children enter a new school system that might not match exactly with their family dynamics and must navigate a duality between home and schools. The decision to move as a family to a new country does not come lightly for immigrant families and most of the time families make the difficult decision with the intention of providing better educational opportunities for their children (Hook & Glick, 2020). Families face language barriers and might not be able to fully integrate into a new school system because of the language barrier. The way immigrants are treated in this country might also affect the ways families view systems and this might discourage them from interacting with their children's school districts.

Changes in socio-economic status, low English proficiency, and low parental education affect the way immigrant families engage with their students and the schools their students attend (Jung & Zhang, 2016). Cultural values such as family support and obligations affect the way children interact with educational opportunities because schools might be sending them one message, but their families might be telling them a different message (Jung & Zhang, 2016).

Cape Verdean families in Boston work jobs that might not afford them the privilege of having their children attend after-school programs because their children might have to help with the household responsibilities and working jobs that are not as flexible affect the way families engage with schools. Families might work more than one job or work hours that do not align with schooling hours, and this might prevent them from attending family-teacher conferences or other school events.

Barriers to School Engagement

Some of the barriers that Cape Verdean families face when trying to engage with their children's education include language barriers, lack of familiarity with the education system, families' work schedules, and limited resources among other factors. Immigrant families place very high educational expectations and aspirations on their children (Hook & Glick, 2020) but might not have all the resources that can increase their school engagement. Research shows that when there is quality communication and teacher-family solidarity as well as having teachers who look like the families, they serve family engagement is stronger (Li et al, 2023). Working with diverse families means that an organization is proactive in its approaches to best serve the population. Baker et al., (2016) found five common themes that both families and school staff found were essential for increasing family engagement. These were, providing opportunities for families to be involved, focusing on quality communication, being welcoming to families when they choose to come to school buildings, making sure school events are at times that work with families' schedules, and going beyond involvement to engagement.

Language barriers can influence the way parents interact with schools because if families are not confident and feel capable of engaging because they cannot speak English, they will not respond proactively to school events (Calzada et., 2015). Schools and teachers rely on students to

be the interpreters for family communication due to limited resources and students should not bear that responsibility. Families' work schedules also serve as a barrier because Cape Verdean families are working jobs that are not flexible and do not allow them to be available after school to be present at their children's parent conference meetings. Work challenges can prevent family involvement because parents are not able to be present during normal school hours and this is seen as parents not wanting to be involved in their children's education (Calzada, 2015). Teacher and school communication with families is pivotal in addressing the barrier of work schedules because they can work together to agree on a time that works best for both parties. Not working together with families to figure out the best times to meet can lead to families' insight being dismissed by school staff and teachers which also feels alienating for parents (Larocque, 2013). The education system in the United States is not the same as the one in Cape Verde and not knowing the language makes it difficult for parents to learn the education system. This unfamiliarity can also affect families' confidence levels and feelings of the capability to be an engaged parent or guardian.

Impact on Student Success

Parents are their kids' first teachers and therefore play a vital role in shaping their educational journey. When parents are involved in their children's education, their children are more likely to succeed academically and emotionally (Baker et al., 2016). It is integral for parents to be involved in their kids' education because these factors contribute to their students' academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and overall well-being. Parental involvement at their children's schools also positively impacts students' attendance, and reading levels and creates a sense of belonging for children (Baker et al., 2016). Families who volunteer at their children's schools also impact retention rates and play a role in the reduction of detentions and

suspensions (Baker et al., 2016). Having engaged families also helps how students view teachers and schools and contribute to school satisfaction for both families and students (Larocque, 2013).

Family engagement also helps address cultural dissonance that may exist between families and schools. Boston Public Schools serves a diverse group of students from all over the world and each student brings different cultural and family values with them when they attend school. Family engagement allows schools and teachers to learn more about these different cultures and address the disconnect that might happen at schools and at home (Larocque, 2013). The education system is still very much white, and teachers and school staff might lack cultural competency that would help them better serve diverse communities. Students of color have historically been disproportionally represented across educational achievements and families of color have been left out of the conversation for so long because it is assumed that they lack the intelligence to bridge the gap (Li et al., 2023). Schools must address these issues because family engagement not only improves academic performance but also improves family-teacher relationship which helps debunk stereotypes and assumptions that may exist between teachers and families.

Parental Engagement Theories and Frameworks

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 made family engagement mandatory at both the state and federal levels (Grant & Ray, 2019). When servicing newcomers' schools must use a culturally responsive framework for family engagement. Culturally responsive family engagement at schools looks like establishing mutual respect between families and schools as well as using the lived experiences and perspectives of these families to enhance education for all students and their families. Shriberg et al. (2012) studied ways of developing effective family-school collaboration practices through the promotion of culturally responsive

collaboration practices. By promoting culturally responsive collaboration families and schools can share information and resources that benefit both parties because both entities are being heard in the process.

Joyce Epstein's research about the benefits of family engagement demonstrated that for schools to effectively work with families, they need to invest in getting to know the families' cultural backgrounds (Epstein, 2011). Epstein developed a framework for family and school partnerships in which six types of involvement are necessary for successful partnerships.

The first type of involvement focuses on parenting and Epstein argues that schools must help parents understand the different stages of growth their children go through while growing up. Understanding families' backgrounds and goals is important for this type of involvement. One challenge that can arise from assisting with parenting is that schools might not be presenting culturally relevant information which is why getting to know cultures is imperative. The second type is communicating in a way that informs parents about programs that schools offer as well as academic progress and making sure that the information is translated into the parent's native language and using a variety of methods of reaching out to families (Epstein, 2013). The third type is volunteering meaning schools must try to invite families to become a part of working with students by training them and working with their work schedules (Epstein, 2013). The fourth type is learning at home which means that schools should provide engaging academic homework that families can do together at home (Epstein, 2013). Decision-making is the fifth type of involvement which is a way for schools to offer families opportunities to have a say in their child's education (Epstein, 2013). The last type of involvement is collaborating with the community which is an opportunity for schools to put together services for families by connecting them with community organizations (Epstein, 2013).

Family engagement also positively impacts families' abilities and confidence which can lead to more family members becoming interested in pursuing their education and leadership positions in a school setting. Grant and Ray (2018) wrote about how imperative it is for schools to know their students' families so that they can figure out why students are showing up to schools the way they are. When working with diverse families, schools must try to understand their cultural norms and be conscious in their efforts to make students and families feel welcomed and supported.

Schools play an important role in shaping a student's future, and their role is to provide educational opportunities not only for students but for families as well. Schools should also serve as community centers that offer families resources that empower them. The family empowerment model recognizes that students' development and learning styles are strongly influenced by their family's lived experiences (Grant & Ray, 2018). Children are more likely to become successful if their families have the appropriate resources for achieving goals (Grant & Ray, 2018).

Teacher-family framework can also be used as a tool for understanding the barriers that schools and families might be facing when it comes to communication and collaboration. Hong et al. (2022) found that there was a disconnect between the teacher's and parents' relationships and discussed how the relationship between the two is indispensable. Understanding how the relationships between Cape Verdean families are with their children's teachers should be of importance to Boston public schools in their attempt to promote family engagement. Building solidarity between the two stakeholders is important for creating a trusting and positive relationship.

The Sense of Community theory was first conceptualized in a working paper by community psychologist, David W. McMillan in 1976 and later developed and presented by McMillan and David M. Chavis in 1986. When McMillan first wrote the definition of sense of community theory, he relied on literature about group cohesiveness (McMillan, 1978). McMillan and Chavis reviewed Doolittle and MacDonald's (1978) development of the 40-item Sense of Community Scale to help with their definition and theory. Twenty years after the definition was published, McMillan expanded the four elements offered by the theory (membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection) by rearranging and renaming them as spirit, trust, trade, and art.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define a sense of community as a feeling of commitment, shared interest, and trust that by being a member of a group the needs of the members will be met. Essentially, it is based on the feeling of belonging through emotional connection. Members feel like they matter not only to that group but to each member of the group and all members share faith that their needs will be met because of their commitment to help each other out. Sense of Community theory includes four core elements that are used to measure a sense of belonging: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership means that there are clear regulations to determine who is and who is not part of the specific group/community. Influence means that each member feels that they have some type of authority to impact the group's norms and the individuals in the group/community just like the group has the same authority over the members. Integration and fulfillment of needs refers to a feeling that each member has a network of people who also share their values and that they could use their connection to access resources to meet their needs. Shared emotional connection means that members can identify with each other's plight and form positive

relationships and there is a lot of bonding that comes with being a member of the group as well as celebration of one another.

The framework has four components that can be used to understand the opportunities and challenges that Cape Verdean families face by being members of the Boston Public Schools (BPS). First, membership helps us understand that by registering their children to attend BPS, families are automatically enrolled in membership and have a right to belonging and the benefits that come with belonging. Second, influence gives families the ability to impact how BPS works not only for the students but also for the families that BPS serves. Integration and fulfillment of needs mean that families' needs are important to the Boston school district and that families are receiving services that improve their overall well-being and increase their connection to the school. Learning more about the ways that Boston Public Schools are creating space for shared emotional connection between Cape Verdean families will determine the ways families feel a sense of community. The sense of belonging is relevant in identifying specific ways that Cape Verdean families feel they are supported as well as the areas of growth in the Boston Public School system. It is important to learn about ways that Boston Public Schools are listening to Cape Verdean families' voices what needs are being met by BPS and which ones need more attention. When parents register their children in BPS, they automatically become members of the system, but how loyal do families feel towards the system, would they be willing to make any sacrifices to keep their memberships? When it comes to shared emotional connection, historically BIPOC families have been neglected by institutions.

Capstone Focus

The purpose of this capstone will be to conduct a community needs assessment to identify the strengths and challenges of family engagement for Cape Verdean families in Boston

Public Schools. The findings of this assessment will offer some insights as well as community resources and support suggestions for facilitating school engagement among Boston Cape Verdean families.

Methodology

The purpose of the community needs assessment was to identify the opportunities and challenges of family engagement for Cape Verdean families in Boston Public Schools. It was also to provide recommendations for Boston Public Schools to improve family engagement. Secondary data analysis helped with understanding the needs of Cape Verdean families, including census data which helped with identifying the number of Cape Verdean families being served by Boston Public Schools. Interviews with Cape Verdean professionals working for BPS, offices dedicated to fostering family engagement provided insight into the efforts that BPS has taken to best serve the Cape Verdean Families community.

Community

The community of focus for this community needs assessment is the Cape Verdean community in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. Cape Verdean families come from a small island off the West Coast of Africa where educational resources are limited which is a big factor in their decision to move to other countries with better educational opportunities. Westin et al., (2010) call emigration for Cape Verdeans an economic strategy because it has become an important aspect of their social identity. Cape Verdeans are one of the most diverse groups of people in the world because of their racial makeup which complicates the way they identify on census. Their identities emerged through slavery and slave trading because of Portuguese colonization (Westin et al., 2010). Cape Verdeans have both African and Portuguese lineages that impact the way they identify when they move to the United States and are also referred to as

crioulo or mestizos. The official language is Portuguese, but most people speak a dialect called Criolo at home. These factors contribute to the ways Cape Verdean families are able to interact with their children's schools. If a family does not speak Portuguese, but the school is trying to advertise services to families only in Portuguese, families may miss these opportunities due to language barriers.

Areas of Focus

The focus of this community needs assessment is family engagement in education, specifically family engagement in education for Cape Verdean families in Boston Public Schools. Within this focus, the following areas will be explored to better understand the needs of the Cape Verdean families in Boston.

- First, mutual respect between families and schools is an important variable for understanding the relationship between families and schools. This area will give more insight into the ways schools and families value each other's input and how schools include families in the decision-making process because both voices are integral to children's learning.
- Second, families should feel confident and capable of engaging with schools. Families should have all the resources they need to improve their capacity to engage with their children's schools. The ways that schools provide these resources are important when it comes to servicing immigrant families. Immigrant families might have barriers like language that might affect their confidence levels. Families might also not be capable of accessing the necessary tools that engagement requires and teachers should play a role in bridging that gap.

- Third, all schools should be community centers. Research shows that schools as community centers make a positive difference in the lives of the children, families, and community members they serve.
- Fourth, there should be trust between families and teachers. Immigrant families who are still new to the city might not know the education system and language and technology barriers might play a part in them not showing up to parent-teaching conferences. Trust between families and teachers would help foster a relationship where parents are informed about what's going on in the classroom and encourage parents to show up. Teachers should offer in-person home visits and virtual Zoom meetings with interpreters to build connection and empathy. Teachers must build a relationship with their students' families just like they build one with their students in the classroom.
- Fifth, a sense of community where everyone belongs should be felt by families in the Boston Public Schools district. Schools must make efforts to make Cape Verdean families feel welcomed and included in the education of their children. Schools can use cultural capital to build a sense of community for families. Cultural capital is the knowledge and resources that are unique to cultural groups and can serve as assets for its members (Wegman & Bowen, 2010). Cultural capital can be used to foster a home-to-school connection and promote a sense of belonging not just for families but for students as well. One of the elements of cultural capital is the atmosphere which signals to families whether they are welcomed and what type of treatment they can expect from schools (Wegman & Bowen, 2010). Schools can create a sense of community using the element of the atmosphere by promoting an identity-safe environment where families from all backgrounds feel like they can belong, greet families warmly, get to know what

issues families care about, and engage in these conversations and make sure that families that experience a language barrier are not left out by providing translators (Wegman & Bowen, 2010).

Materials

Data for this community needs assessment came primarily from secondary datasets such as census, Boston Public Schools reports, and other publications on the topic. Interviews with different organizations and professional people in the Boston area were also used for the focus areas of mutual respect between families and schools, families should feel confident and capable of engaging with schools, all schools should be community centers, there should be trust between families and teachers and a sense of community where everyone belongs should be felt by families in the Boston Public Schools district. The U.S Census Bureau updates the system every 10 years and Boston Public School reports are not updated as often therefore data from previous years were used for the project. Based on the focus areas, interview questions were written to gather more information on the opportunities and challenges Cape Verdean families face while being members of Boston Public Schools. Questions for interviews were about ways that the programs were improving families and school's relationships, increasing families' confidence and capability to engage with their children's schools, their thoughts about community centers and their beliefs on community schools, the trust between families and teachers and how important is it for families to feel a sense of community and belonging at their children's schools. The list of questions that were asked during the interviews can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure

First, secondary data research was conducted to understand the immigrant trends and the current population of Cape Verdean families in Boston. Census data and information on websites

that serve the community were also collected to understand the range of Cape Verdean families. After gathering data and understanding theories that would help with a community needs assessment, an interview protocol was developed that asked questions based on five focus areas. Then various individuals at community-based organizations that either work with Cape Verdean families or work around family-school relationships were contacted for an interview. All the interviews took place in person and afterwards, a thank you note was sent to each individual via email. The interviews were all recorded with the consent of all the participants and were then transcribed, and the feedback was placed in categories which were then analyzed thematically.

Results

The U.S. Census Bureau between 2012 and 2016 found that in Boston specifically, foreign-born Cape Verdeans are not proficient in English (Boston Planning and Development Agency, 2019). Additionally, most Cape Verdeans in Boston work in cleaning, maintenance, production, and transportation (Boston Planning and Development Agency, 2019). The Boston Planning and Development Agency (2019) also found that Cape Verdean workers earn less than the Massachusetts median wage. Boston Public Schools (BPS) has an office of Multilingual and Multicultural education which provides many programs and services for students learning English. On the office's website, there is a section called, "we dream together" where there is an audio recording giving instructions on how to access online learning platforms in the languages most prevalent in the school district (Boston Public Schools, 2024). BPS also has a District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) that used to hold in-person meetings regularly but has now moved the meeting remotely, to provide recommendations to schools and district officials on how to run programs and services for English learner students (Boston Public Schools, 2024). The meeting is open to the public and interpreters are available as well. In 2014,

Cape Verdean students made up 49.2% of high schoolers, 19.7% of middle schoolers, and 31.1% of elementary school students in BPS (2014). Many Cape Verdean students do not get represented because many are labeled as just black and therefore lose the ethnic identifier (2014). In 2014, Cape Verdean Creole speakers were the third fastest-growing native language (33.5%) in BPS following Vietnamese (42.8%) and Somali (38.8%) (BPS, 2014). Only about 25% of Cape Verdean-born Americans had a high school diploma as their highest educational attainment (BPS, 2014) and about 48% aged 25 and older have not completed their high school degree (BPS, 2014).

Four professionals from organizations that serve Cape Verdean communities and organizations that promote family engagement were interviewed in this community needs assessment. A deputy director of the programs for a nonprofit that primarily serves Cape Verdean families in Dorchester, a family resource specialist at Boston Public Schools that serves a large number of Cape Verdean students and families, a family support advocate at an organization that works with families to instill responsive parenting so parents can raise children who thrive at home, and in school and a director of adult education at an organization that promotes dual language education and has implemented a parent university model where parents learn how to become dual language educators and learn English so they can best support their children's education were interviewed.

To begin, all the interviewees were asked to describe their role in their organization, how long they've been working there, the mission of the organization or department, and the services they provide to families. The deputy director of programs has been with the organization for about five years and shared that the organization works with a lot of families to tackle the needs

of these families. They partner with schools with large Cape Verdean populations to recruit students for their leadership programs and have an English Learner Parent Education Program.

The family resource specialist has been with their department for about two years, and they shared that the goal of their office is to give the families as many resources as they can to help them succeed in life and also to integrate into the community. Their office works mostly with multilingual learners, and their goal is to help families navigate Boston Public Schools and explain to the families all the bilingual programs that they provide. They offer English classes, and computer classes to these families, and also give parents a free iPad as well as a year of free internet once they complete both classes.

The family support advocate has been with their organization for more than twenty years and shared that the organization seeks to strengthen the overall aspects of the community by addressing systemic barriers to raising healthy children offering programs for families that are trauma-informed, promoting school readiness, and connecting families to resources. They also mentioned that the organization has adapted its programs according to its demographics because many families speak Spanish, Cape Verdean Kriolu, Haitian Creole, and other languages, and the programs, services, and staff reflect that community.

The director of adult education has been with the organization for about two years and the organization promotes dual language education at a Boston Public School. They lead a paraprofessional program called Primeras Maestras program for parents wanting to become dual language educators. These participants take classes in English, math, job preparation, and interviewing skills. They also lead programs for adults that parents have asked for which include English classes, citizenship classes, computer classes, parent support groups, health, and wellness classes, etc.

After answering questions about their role and the services they provide to community members, interviewees were asked questions focusing on the five focus areas. It is important to note that the interviewees were not asked all the questions but just the ones related to their role and expertise on the subject and focus areas.

Mutual Respect Between Families and Schools

When asked about how their programs have improved relationships between families and schools the family resource specialist who does not work directly with schools but on a district level answered that when a parent needs help with the school and it's been happening a lot, they offer themselves as a resource to go with the parents to the school to try to solve the issue but made it clear that it is not part of their work description to be a liaison between families and school. They mentioned that they find time to go in with parents to translate and help the families understand what's going on because, at the end of the day, the focus is always to help the student and the family. The deputy director of programs shared that they work with schools that have large populations of Cape Verdean students to recruit students for their leadership program and that is a way for them to get close to parents so they can teach parents how to be more technologically savvy so they can be more engaged with Boston public schools. They also clarified that this initiative came from the organization which saw the need for families to be more involved in the education of their children. This has resulted in more families knowing about how Boston Public Schools works and thus slightly improving the trust between families and schools.

Families Will Feel Confident and Capable to Engage

The deputy director of programs shared that the programs they offer parents make families feel confident and capable. They initiated a parent education curriculum in partnership

with Boston Public Schools after the COVID-19 pandemic in which they curve out 36 hours of programming over 12 weeks to give out information about using Zooms, using a computer/Chromebook, using Boston's student information system (Aspen), and how to use google classroom/google meet. The deputy director shared that through these programs families have felt more empowered to navigate the education system. The director of adult programs also shared that the computer classes help families feel confident and capable of engaging because a lot of the information that comes from Boston Public Schools comes through their computers and if they do not have a computer or know how to use one it can be difficult to engage. With the skills that the program provides, families can access the information and they also get to keep the computer and one year of free internet. The English and Spanish classes also increase families' confidence because parents can help their kids with homework in both languages since the school their children attend is a dual-language school. The program also keeps track of families' confidence by giving out surveys at the beginning of the program, at the middle, and at the end to assess confidence and capabilities. The director gave an example of parents not feeling confident at the beginning and then giving speeches to hundreds of people, leading pieces of training, and teaching in the classroom where they had no previous experience in the classroom at the end of the program. The director identified language barriers as a factor affecting families' confidence and capability to engage with their children's school. They also mentioned that if meetings are not in parents' preferred languages, if they do not have the computer skills, or if the parents themselves have had a bad school experience, these are things that might turn them away from engaging with their children's schools. The director believes that Boston Public Schools could improve parent engagement for immigrant families specifically by providing support for the types of programs that exist at their organization. The program that they run is funded through a

nonprofit that fundraises for that specific dual language school and if Boston Public Schools were funding more of these programs, parent engagement would improve. In terms of special considerations for working with immigrant families, the director answered that assumption should not play a role in determining the needs and wants of these families but in surveying them and giving them options. In their programs, they have tried many programs that parents have not engaged in, and they made an effort to change these programs and listen to what parents want.

In terms of special considerations for working with Cape Verdean families, the consensus was that engagement for these families has been difficult for a long time. The specialist shared that in comparison to other countries, Cabo Verde is a country that does not invest in technology, and that has made parents' knowledge about technology usage limited. It was also brought up that Cape Verdean family structures need to be considered many families have only one provider while relying on extended family for help and support. Many families move to the country without their significant other and must work long hours to not only support their children but also support the family members they left behind. The deputy director and the specialist both mentioned that some parents just aren't interested even with incentives and wanting to be engaged is important for family engagement. The family support advocate believes that Cape Verdean families can make the time even while working long hours but do not feel like they need help or support in raising their children and instead rely on schools for education purposes. The advocate believes that the culture of not needing help plays into the reasons why Cape Verdean families are not involved because it is seen in the community as a weakness to ask for help.

Schools Should Be Community Centers

The consensus from the interviews was that all schools should be community centers and to do that work schools should be opened to different types of classes and health-related services like vaccine clinics, dental services, parent support groups, and things that families have a hard time finding. The benefits of having community centers include more investment from kids in their education because they see their families involved and volunteering at schools and most importantly visible in the buildings. If students see their parents in their school building, children become proud of their parents and parents also have more resources to help their kids with their schoolwork. Some hub schools are operating as community centers that are a part of Boston Public Schools. There are many organizations in Boston doing similar work and having schools as community centers presents an opportunity for organizations to come together to maximize their impact by reaching more people and also not repeating services. It is also important to keep in mind that having schools as community centers means that schools would need more staff and that requires a larger budget from the city.

There Should Be Trust Between Families and Teachers

Interviewees agreed that having families in the classroom and seeing how hard the teachers work every day shows families the incredible care that teachers have for their children. The director of adult programs shared that one way that dual language teachers are fostering trust is by communicating with families in their preferred languages. All agreed that teachers should be sending more positive information home about what's going on in the classroom, but teachers have too many kids in the classrooms and are overworked. Having parents who are already engaged speak to other parents about what's going on would foster trust between families and teachers. The responsibility should be on the administrators to bring families and teachers

together to promote trust. Most agreed that the responsibility of family engagement should not be put on teachers because they are already overworked and underpaid and many do not speak multiple languages. In terms of what might be contributing to a lack of trust, interviewees said that when parents are not engaged, and their children have any issues they find someone to blame which is most likely the teacher. This assumption creates distrust between the teachers and parents.

Families Should Feel a Sense of Belonging

The interviewees shared that a sense of belonging is a feeling of having ownership over a place, and feeling like you're feelings, voices, and opinions, are being listened to and being heard and respected. Adult educational programs have helped parents build community by bringing them together for classes which requires them to spend many hours together. The director of adult education shared that they have started pairing up parents from the English classes and Spanish classes so they can help each other practice the language and the director has started to. Families need to feel like they are being integrated into the community. The family resource specialist created nurturing circles for Cape Verdean parents to come together, and share space, feelings, and experiences about raising children in a new country that is different from where they were raised. They also shared that when parents find people from their own culture, they can let their walls down, connect with other parents, and accept help and support from organizations like theirs.

Discussion

The most prevalent themes that emerged from the interviews were Cape Verdean families have varying levels of technological savviness and computer classes have helped families feel more confident and capable of engaging with their children's schools. There was also a

consensus that Cape Verdean families' willingness to be engaged is a contributing factor to low engagement. The types of work Cape Verdean families have in this country limit the time they spend with their children which contributes to families not knowing what is going on with their child at school and schools are also not doing enough to let parents know what is going on. Children are being labeled at schools and families are not given enough resources to understand these labels. Language access was brought up during the interviews as critical to family engagement. Having schools as community centers could bring together organizations doing similar work and form needed partnerships between schools, families, and the community.

The goal of this community needs assessment was to understand the ways that Boston Public Schools (BPS) engage Cape Verdean families by focusing on mutual respect between families and schools, families' confidence and capabilities in engaging with schools, how schools can be community centers for these families, the trust between families and teachers and the sense of belonging that Cape Verdean families feel at schools. Regarding mutual respect, BPS has done some work to engage and hear from parents by creating positions like family liaisons and Cape Verdean resource specialists, however, the number of family liaisons who speak Cape Verdean Kriolu is a small amount. Not having a family liaison who speaks Kriolu can discourage families from attending events or even meetings regarding their children. Grant and Ray (2019) discussed the importance of understanding the family as a system and understanding how students and their families cannot be viewed as separate entities. Therefore, having family liaisons is important and there still needs to be more work in providing Cape Verdean liaisons and specialists that understand familial values and the Cape Verdean culture to make the mutual respect between families and schools stronger.

The language barrier is still an issue for immigrant families in BPS. McMillan and Chavis (1986) claim that by having a membership to a group a member's needs are met, however, many Cape Verdean families still feel a disconnect from Boston Public Schools. Hook and Glick (2020) explored the circumstances that might influence families to move to a new country and the difficult decision it is for many because of barriers such as speaking the language. Offering classes for families would be a way to address this barrier and fully integrate them into the education system. According to the Cape Verdean resource specialist, Cape Verdean families are among the lowest in terms of school engagement and many of the interviewees attributed it to the fact that family liaisons are either not connecting Cape Verdean families to the right resources or are not communicating with parents about what is going on at schools. In terms of membership, families know that they are a part of the BPS community but are not given the tools necessary to access the resources the district has to offer.

Cape Verdean families' influence which is essential to feeling a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) seems to be still missing from the conversations and implementation of programs at Boston Public Schools and this might be because they have not been fully integrated into their community and work hours that have limited them from proactive interactions with their children's schools. One of the special considerations that came up a lot during the interview is that many Cape Verdean families do not have the technological skills to navigate the systems that schools use to communicate with parents. Organizations and Cape Verdean professionals are the ones initiating programs to keep the community up to date and are even writing grants to be able to provide tablets, and laptops for parents to have access to technological systems used by schools. Community-based organizations have taken the role of positively impacting families' ability to feel confident to engage with their schools.

In terms of trust between teachers and families, the findings were interesting because although the theories say that the relationship between the two is important to family engagement, many of the interviewees believe that teachers have enough on their plate to manage the classroom. The overall feeling was that teachers do not have the capacity to foster family engagement but still should keep parents informed about what's going on in the classroom generally. The family support advocate also shared that many families blame the teachers for what goes wrong with their students at school. Hook and Glick (2020) discuss the high educational expectations that immigrant families place on their children and when teachers call home to give undesirable updates, parents might not trust the teachers because no rapport has been built between them and this can create distrust between teachers and families. 48% of Cape Verdean-born Americans ages 25 and older have not completed their high school degree (BPS, 2014) which could be addressed with better family and teacher partnership. Family and teachers should be partners in education because they are the people responsible for developing children. Collaboration between teachers and families could look like what Epstein (2013) described as learning at home where teachers send home academic homework that engages the whole family instead of just the student. The school district plays an important role in fostering the relationship between families and teachers and must be responsible for building the capacity for families and teachers to work together.

All the interviewees agreed that schools should become community centers because that is the easiest way to get parents to show up to the building. Schools as community centers would ensure parents are also being thought of because they can access resources through the school system instead of finding organizations on their own which could be more difficult for families that do not speak English. Finally, when it comes to belonging it is important to have people at

schools and organizations who speak the languages and have cultural knowledge of the people they are supporting. Baker et al., (2016) described characteristics that are essential for improving family engagement including providing constant opportunities for families to be involved, having quality communication systems, welcoming families at the school building, and working with families to find the best times for school events and these were also themes mentioned by the interviewees. According to the interviewees, many Cape Verdean families work long hours and are not aware of everything that is going on with their children at school and this might be affecting their interactions with schools. Focusing on quality communication and surveying families for the best times to meet would help families feel a sense of belonging.

Boston Public Schools must be proactive in reaching out to organizations that are getting Cape Verdean families involved in their programs and fund projects that would help with engagement. The district should start thinking of having at least one dual language school where children are learning Kriolu and English. Boston has many dual language schools that teach in Spanish and English and Haitian Creole and English. So why not add to the diversity of schools and implement a system where parents will be more engaged. This would ensure cultural competency and improve the relationship between schools and families.

Limitations of the Project

One of the challenges of completing this project was the lack of data about Cape Verdeans in Boston Massachusetts and the lack of published data from Boston Public Schools. Another challenge was not being able to interview parents to get their experiences and hear from them directly about what changes they would like to see in schools. Due to time constraints of this project, only four people were interviewed for this project and only three of them identified

as Cape Verdeans. Talking to teachers who teach Cape Verdean students would have added more perspective on the trust between families and educators.

Implications for Future Projects

Future projects should consider partnering up with organizations serving Cape Verdean families and explore the five focus areas of mutual respect, feelings of confidence and capability to engage, trust between teachers and families, schools as community centers, and a sense of belonging from the parents' perspectives. Boston Public Schools should find more ways of engaging the Cape Verdean families as the population in the city continues to grow and should also partner with the District English Learner Advisory Committee to create criteria for measuring family engagement on a regular basis. There also needs to be more research on how public schools engage immigrant families and how the district understands their educational needs and support with special considerations on cultural norms, language barriers, the historical context of their home countries, and the types of jobs they have. Dual Language education where students learn in both Cape Verdean Creole and English should be discussed and considered as a way to increase engagement. Investment in adult education for Cape Verdean families should also be considered as a method of increasing involvement, engagement, and participation.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Email template:

Hello,

My name is Losangela Batista, and I am a graduate student in the Community Engagement Master's program at Merrimack College. I am conducting a Community Needs Assessment for my Capstone project on what parent engagement in education looks like for Cape Verdean families in Boston. Specifically, I am looking for the educational opportunities offered to these families and the challenges that might be serving as a barrier to their engagement.

I am emailing you to request an interview to learn more about what your organization does to address the needs of Cape Verdean families in Boston. The purpose of this interview is to collect data relevant to educational opportunities and challenges for families and learn more about the services/resources provided to Cape Verdean families in the Boston area.

Please know that your responses will be confidential and no identifying information will be shared in my capstone paper—you will be referred to as “Program 1” with only the designation of your professional position and general demographics.

Please let me know if you are available in the coming weeks for a possible interview. Although I would prefer an in-person interview, it can also be done remotely on Zoom. Thank you for reading this email, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Losangela Batista

Overall theme: Family Engagement in education
Five areas of focus
1. Mutual respect between families and schools
2. Families should feel confident & capable of engaging
3. School should be community centers
4. There should be trust between families and teachers
5. Families should feel a sense of community / belonging

Questions

Questions for everyone:

1. What is your role at the organization?
 - a) How long have you been working here?
2. Can you tell me more about what your organization does? When did the organization start, and what is its mission?

Focus area 1: Mutual respect between families and schools: (Boston Public Schools Family-School Engagement Practices, Smart from the Start, Cape Verdean Association of Boston)

1. What are some ways that you have improved family and school relationships?
 - a) What are some challenges?
 - b) What are some successes?
 - c) Is your office/program doing any work that might foster trust between families and schools?
 - d) If yes, how has this worked?

- e) If not, how will you do the work of fostering trust between families and schools?
 - f) Why is this the approach?
2. In what ways have you tried to engage Cape Verdean families before?
 3. What theories guide your family engagement approaches?
 4. How do Cape Verdean families overcome challenges? How do schools overcome challenges when it comes to engaging families?

Focus area 2: Families will feel confident & capable of engaging (Smart from the Start and Adult Education director)

1. What are some ways that your program helps families feel confident to engage with BPS?
2. What are some specific approaches that you've used in the past?
 - a) What have been some challenges and successes?
3. Why don't families feel confident and capable of engaging at this moment?
4. What could BPS do better to engage CV families?
5. What are the particular considerations for engaging CV families compared to other families?

Focus area 3: Schools should be community centers (Office of Community Engagement, Boston Public Schools Family-School Engagement Practices, Cape Verdean Association of Boston, Johanna)

1. What are some ways schools could become community centers?
2. What are the benefits of schools as community centers?
3. Are there any BPS schools that are operating as community centers already?
4. What are some pros and cons that you have seen with these community centers?

5. What does it mean to you that a school is a community center?

Focus area 4: There should be trust between families and teachers (Smart from the Start and Adult Education director, BPS Family-School Engagement Practices)

1. What are some ways that your program/BPS helps build trust between families and teachers?
 - a) What does trust look like between families and teachers?
2. What are some of the reasons families and teachers do not trust one another?
 - a) Do you think culture plays into trust between families and teachers? Why or why not?
How?
 - b) Why is trust between families and teachers important?
3. How could teachers reach out to create that trust? How could families reach out to create trust as well?
4. What outside resources could help foster trust between families and teachers?
 - a) Are there interpreting services readily available?
5. Do you see a difference in engagement between immigrant/non-immigrant
 - a) Are there repercussions due to a lack of trust between families and teachers?

Focus area 5: Families sense of community (Office of Community Engagement, Boston Public Schools Family-School Engagement Practices, Cape Verdean Association of Boston)

1. What are some ways that your program helps build a sense of belonging for Cape Verdean families?
 - a) Why is belonging important for families? Immigrant families specifically?

- b) Is there a difference between a sense of belonging for immigrant families and non-immigrant families?
- 2. What does a sense of belonging mean to you? What does it look like?
 - a) What are the repercussions of families not feeling like they belong?
 - b) How does one build a sense of belonging among families?
- 3. How can schools build a sense of belonging?
 - a) Are there events that BPS does to foster belonging?
 - b) What are some events that BPS could do to promote belonging for families?
 - c) Are these events advertised in different languages? How? Where?