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## Family Engagement: Finding Parents' Perspectives

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: FINDING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

By Melissa Frans

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Tamara J. Williams, Ed.D.

Omaha, Nebraska

March 2018

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# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: FINDING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Melissa Frans, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Dr. Tamara Williams

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this classic grounded theory study is to define family engagement in a child's education from the perspective of a mother. This study will bring to the surface what parents believe their role is in their children's education and develop an understanding of the gap between what research says that parents should do at home and what parents believe they should be doing at home. At this stage in the research, family engagement is a recommended focus for schools, and Steven Constantino (2016) goes as far to say that schools should establish a relationship with every family.

This research will allow me to add what parents want family engagement to be to the research that has already been collected about what educators believe family engagement and school family partnerships should be for children to be successful. The research will add another perspective to parent engagement research, and I will discover new data and generate new themes. The new data and themes will be useful for practical applications and will present opportunities for future research (Glaser, 1999).

## Acknowledgements

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” (Judges 6:14). Like Gideon, I started this journey ill-equipped and without the confidence needed to meet the expectations of the program. The blessings I have received throughout this journey have far surpassed all of my prayers, hopes, and desires.

To my husband, Kyle: Thank you for your unwavering support and love throughout this journey. Even from a hospital bed in excruciating pain, you reminded me how important it was for our family to continue and finish this degree.

To my curious, courageous boys, Kraig and Tanner: We have been through a lot in the past four years as a family, and I want you to know your hugs and stories are what provided me with a sense of peace during the many storms we encountered.

To my parents and my in-laws: Thank you for your unending love and flexibility during this adventure. I could not have done it without you.

To my inner circle: I am blessed to have incredible people in my life to encourage me, pray for me, and set me straight. Without you, I would have taken an easier path.

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To my Kiewit family: Kiewit Middle School encourages its entire community to learn and grow. Twelve years ago, when I walked into this building for the first time, I would have never guessed that one day I would be pursuing my doctorate degree.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **A. Situating the Study**

We, as educators, know and understand that parents should be part of a child's educational team; however, we often assume that we know what the role of the parent should look like, and we may even draw conclusions about students after encounters (or lack of encounters) with families. Parent involvement has come under the magnifying glass because of the requirements of our state reporting system. Family Engagement is one of the four categories in our state accountability model entitled "Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Student Success." According to the Nebraska Department of Education (2016), "Engaging families and communities as partners with schools is no longer a 'good idea' but has become a necessity, as the evidence is clear: partnership contributes to children's academic and social success."

Experiences both as an educator and as a parent have helped me better understand the importance of family engagement. Intellectually, as an educator, I have always known that families play a powerful role in a child's life. However, as a seasoned veteran, I have synthesized the philosophy of families being engaged in their children's education with my own philosophy of education. Now, as a parent desiring the school to play a specific role in my child's life, I have an added perspective on family engagement that is important to me and has flavored my role as a school leader. I know there are systems surrounding children that define each child as an individual and illustrate what interventions, if any, are going to be needed for the child to be successful. The



interactions these systems directly have with a child and among themselves affect the development and experiences that a child has through life (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

States, districts, schools, and their communities need to make family engagement a priority for improving a child's education. Research, including conversations with families, needs to be conducted within each school community in order to better understand the needs of the stakeholders and their different needs. Research done at one school cannot be used to understand another school's needs (Black, 2013; Epstein, 2009; Evans, 2011).

A school leader needs to act as a visionary and needs to be intentional and specific about the changes that he/she wants to make (Grenny, 2013). He or she needs to understand where change needs to happen and how to empower others to make a difference in the community. (Fullan, 2010). Implementing techniques for improving school partnership should be done as a team of administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The team should be able to reach all teachers in the building and should meet regularly to review the implementation and how it is impacting students (Black, 2013; Epstein, 2006; Sanders, 1996; Thessin, 2015).

Techniques for improving partnerships should be specific and should deepen relationships between all stakeholders and support student learning. The benefits of a technique should be evaluated regularly by the team to understand how the students in the school are benefitting from the implementation and how it needs to be refined. Evaluation of an implementation should include data, teacher evidence, and student evidence (Epstein 2006; Fullan, 2010).

As educators, we know that family engagement is important and that students are more likely to be successful when parents are present on an educational team. We have ideas about what we would like family engagement to look like. We do not, however, have a good idea about what parents want their role to be in their children's education. The purpose of this dissertation is to interview parents to gain their definitions of family engagement; to find out what they think their role should be in their children's education.

## **B. Defining Key Terms**

My initial definition of *parent engagement* is parents/guardians being visible at school events, planning time at home to complete homework, and being responsible for building background knowledge--taking children to places like the zoo and museums, talking to them while doing everyday things like grocery shopping and housework, and regularly reading books with them. As I start this research project, my definition of *family-school partnerships* could be used interchangeably with *parent engagement* with the only difference being the focus of the relationship between home and school; therefore, the focus of this study will be on *family engagement*. There is a potential for my definitions of both *parent engagement* and *family-school partnerships* to evolve and the necessity for two separate definitions may emerge as I complete this study and more clearly define others' ideas and definitions of *parent engagement*.

## **C. My experience**

My oldest child started kindergarten this fall, and we chose a school that will help him grow both academically and spiritually. As a five-year-old, he defaults to prayer when he is worried or upset, and he regularly asks questions about how the spiritual

world interacts with our world. Because my husband and I understand that he thirsts for both secular and religious knowledge, we decided that our parish school would be the best fit for him.

This decision was made last January and was a sudden change in direction. I had recently joined this particular parish to help ease and deal with the pain of living with a chronically ill spouse. While looking through their website, I realized that Catholic school tuition was not going to be too much more than sending him to the before and after school program at the public school. As I was praying about the right decision for our family and discussing my thoughts with my husband, we came to the conclusion that this Catholic school is not only the right choice for our son, it is the right match for our family.

This particular parish has a positive presence in the community and the school seems to have strong partnerships with the parish, surrounding community, and parents of the enrolled students. It includes opportunities for parents/community members to participate in groups and on boards to support the needs of the school. The partnerships are important to me because I value teaching my son that being a part of and contributing to a community is important.

Our number one reason for sending him to Catholic school is because Jesus will be present in all of his class and all the activities that he does. My son tends to be a chameleon when it comes to my emotions; whether I am excited, calm, anxious, or sad, he mirrors my emotion. I have been teaching him to turn to prayer when his dad is sick, when uncertainty is present in our everyday lives, and when our routines are put on the backburner. My husband feels it is essential for him to be surrounded with role models

that will teach him to pray about things he cannot control and give his fears to a higher power.

Another reason we have chosen to send him to a Catholic school is because of the extra structure and routine. Our son is a natural follower and gets along with everyone. While this a wonderful trait, he is still learning the difference between good decisions and bad decisions; especially when, the bad decisions are so much more fun. We have decided this will be a great start for him. We have not decided how long he will stay in the parochial school system or whether his brother will attend the same school or our neighborhood school. When all is said and done, I have accepted that my time as a teacher and my time as a parent cannot be completely compartmentalized; the time flows interchangeably and my personal and professional ideas about education both mesh nicely together and while still colliding with each other.

Family engagement is something I intentionally started thinking about over three years ago. On the last day of my district's two-year leadership training, I volunteered to research family engagement for one of our district administrators because our state had recently published a new accountability model in which family engagement was a focus. The administrator wanted a robust and well-researched definition of family engagement before engaging school principals in the evaluation of their schools' family engagement as a part of the state accountability model. The research I did for the district led to personal reflection and many conversations about both my expectations of parents and educators as a collective whole.

There are two polar years of my career, what could be considered my best year and what was the toughest year, that have turned a work project into doctoral

research. On a June afternoon, after the close of one of the best years of my teaching career, I was thinking about these two particular years. With the first group of students, my teaching team and I had still been experiencing the honeymoon phase in April. With the latter group of students, my colleague, one of the best educators I have ever worked with, shut the door to our pod, looked at me straight in the face, and said, “What the hell is going on?”--in November--two periods into our teaching day. After comparing and contrasting both groups of students, the situations that arose throughout both years, and the ramifications of decisions that we made as a teaching team, I came to the conclusion that the main difference between the two classes was the level of parent engagement. This reflection fueled me to look for answers beyond the research I had done over a couple of summer months.

My research has provided me with confidence and determination to be more intentional with the relationships I develop with parents and to strive to do more than make parent contact just because I am required to for academic or behavior purposes. Even when I feel too busy to make phone calls or to wait for a specific parent to pick up his/her child, I do my best to make the time; otherwise, it feels hypocritical to go against the research that I have been doing for this study. The intentional relationship building has yielded positive results.

For example, after a meeting about her child, a parent told me tell me that she was so glad that her child had a “school mom” when reflecting on his three years of middle school. I couldn’t help but smile thinking back to the sixth-grade child that would hide from me, refuse to complete homework, and constantly find himself in the middle of discipline issues; and at that time, he had mom that did not trust anyone in our school, did

not attend parent teacher conferences, and made me promise that 7th grade was going to be better than 6th grade. As it turns out, each year was better than the last; and he ended the year without (too much) missing homework and with a mom that attended school meetings and seemed to feel like she was part of the team. We both laughed when I shared that I did not have issues with him in my class and that he finished the work I needed him to finish. Without hesitation, she pointed out that of course he finished my work because he knew I had no problem walking out to her car and letting her know what was going on with him in my class. He also knew she completely supported me. Looking back, I am thankful that I made time to have both difficult, deflating conversations and positive, reassuring conversations with her because it made the final interaction that much sweeter.

In another example, after having two brothers in class one morning, I called home to talk to mom about their behaviors--one child had been louder than usual, overly emotional, and too distracted to work, and the other child had been surly and refused to work. As soon as I explained the unusual behavior, she laughed and told me that I knew her boys well. Then, she shared details with me about their grandmother living with them while in hospice care. I assured her that I would share the information with the counselors and administration; she was thankful that her sons would have an extra layer of support during the day. On the way home from work not long after that conversation, I stopped at a funeral home for a visitation; shortly after walking into the assigned room and greeting the mother of the two boys that I had in my classes, I knew I had made the right decision to stop. Both boys ran to hug me as soon as they saw me; and when they returned to school, they both stopped to thank me for coming. Both boys had watched

their grandmother struggle with cancer and then spend her last days at their home. Along with watching the woman that had dropped them off at school every morning of their school careers live the last moments of her life, they watched their mom struggle with losing the strongest member of her support team. Fortunately, I had established a year before this tragic season in their lives when their mom had reached out to me after parent teacher conferences asking about how she could help her son pass his English class. Once I had given suggestions for helping at home, he found success in the classroom and mom's support proved to be extremely helpful. Having a relationship with this mother made it easier and less awkward when calling home about their new behaviors in the classroom.

In another instance, video monitors could have shown me saying, "Here's the deal. You and I are going to spend a lot of time together this year, and there are going to be things that you do not want to do; instead of rolling your eyes and making comments, I am going to need you to say, 'That could be interesting.' This will give you the opportunity to tell me that you don't like something without raising my blood pressure." I had this proactive conversation in the hallway with a child that I had three times a day in the classroom and who was also part of my after-school program. He and I had spent a lot of time at the end of his 6th grade year talking about his behavior and I wanted to make sure we started his 7th grade year off on the right foot. I quickly learned during his 7th grade year that he (and later his brother) had a lot of respect for their father. So, I made sure to stay in communication with their father as both boys learned to be successful both academically and behaviorally in middle school after having rocky elementary experiences. Over time, the conversations with their father were easier to

have, became more reciprocal and productive, and produced better results. Coming into middle school, the entire family struggled to trust the school system. Once the family had established several relationships in the school, the middle school experience improved for everyone involved.

Looking back over the last 14 years of education, when I had parent support I was able to move mountains and sometimes do the unimaginable. When I look back on the child that ended her year in a way that still brings me to tears, I now know I should have invested more time with her mom. Not having the relationship with her mom allowed the child to go home and successfully share inaccurate information; all stakeholders suffered because I did not find the time to establish a relationship between home and school. Moving forward, I know I need to find ways to improve all family relationships because it will only benefit the child involved.

As a parent, I strive to practice what I preach. I reach out and start conversations with my sons' teachers. I let them know when there are climate changes at home, and I support what they are teaching by building background knowledge, reading to them, and practicing school skills. Along with academics, I have conversations about their behavior. Sometimes, we have to spend extra time at home focusing on positive behaviors and making good decisions. The relationships that I have built with my son's teachers have helped me better myself as both an educator and a parent.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **A. School-driven family engagement definitions**

Family engagement in children's education is essential; otherwise, school and home easily become separate entities. For best results, they should operate as two overlapping systems. Schools and families should view each other as partners working to achieve the best results for all children (Epstein, 2009). Both families and schools should be responsible for the learning of a child. The community offers ample natural learning opportunities for families to further the education of their own children (Ordonez-Jasis, 2012).

Open communication and partnerships between home and school should be established at each grade level, and parents and schools should not let the communication channels or partnerships deteriorate as the children get older. Partnerships and open communication help children feel supported while ensuring both the schools' staff and families that everyone is making the best decisions for children (Epstein, 2009).

Parents often want to know that they have the tools and resources they need to raise their children to the best of their ability. When schools make sure that parents have everything they need, parents feel empowered and are more likely to be engaged in the education of their children. When parents are engaged, a healthy learning environment is established and children are more likely to be successful (Constantino, 2016). Modeling the importance of learning should be done at home. Children should live in a positive learning environment that values education. They should have opportunities to experience art museums and musicals and participate in extracurricular activities with their families (Bennett, 1999; Lam, 2010). Children should have opportunities to play and

learn how to socialize (Brown, 2002, Lam, 2010). A lot of learning takes place when children have collections, hobbies, pets, and projects (Calkins, 1997). Number sense can be developed through games such as ring toss, bowling, and pick-up sticks (Fromberg, 2006). Ideas children learn from television should be reinforced by conversations or activities with their parents (Koster, 1991, Lam 2010). Helping children with homework completion and organization is another way that parents can show that they are engaged in their children's learning (Rich, 1997; Vatterott, 2009). Parents should be responsible for teaching their children how to manage their time and how to learn. They should model for their children that education is important; and when they fall short of knowing what to, they should know that there are resources available to help. Actions speak loudly (Brown, 2001; Johnson, 1997).

Parents can also show their children the importance of education by being engaged in community activities and initiatives. Parents could research and vote for school board members, attend school board meetings, start a school support group, or write a grant to model how to actively make improvements to the school system (Kirshbaum, 1998). Community activities are a great way for parents to teach their children both educational and social lessons (Lam, 2010).

Families quickly learn the written and unwritten rules of the school; if schools want families to be engaged in their children's education, school leaders need to make sure that family engagement is a focus and part of their site plan. When this engagement is a component of a school's site plan, it becomes an essential part of all routines and processes that are established for the school. State officials, district administrators, and

all school stakeholders should be involved in the process of writing, implementing, and maintaining the guidelines of the site plan (Epstein, 2009).

In *Beyond the Bake Sale*, Davies, Henderson, Johnson, and Mapp (2007) offer a description of different levels of family engagement, and the rubrics included in the book lend themselves for self-evaluation. When a school is establishing a vision, or writing goals about family engagement, the stakeholders need to evaluate where the school currently stands on the issue of partnering with families before they start implementing plans or updating initiatives to improve family engagement.

The highest level is the “Partnership School”. Everyone--families, community members, the school--all have something to offer to ensure that every student is successful. Examples of what would be found or witnessed in a partnership school are learning materials for families to borrow, home visits being made to new families, school availability for community use, activities connected to the curriculum, collaborative reflections between parents and teachers about assessment scores, translators, shared information regarding families’ cultures, community representative parent-teacher association, processes for problem solving, regular communication between teachers and parents, and finally, important goals and major decisions made together between school and family settings.

Below the Partnership School is the “Open-Door School”. An Open-Door School is a school that is working hard to increase already high participation and where community members are most likely to respond when asked for help. Examples of what would be found or witnessed in an Open-Door School are: teachers contacting parents yearly, a parent coordinator available to communicate with families, teachers answering

questions about student success if asked, announcements being made about community opportunities, progress reports being sent home regularly (without clear translation of what the data means), and parent concerns being voiced at PTA meetings and then being communicated with the principal.

“Come-if-We-Call School” is the title listed next in the collection of rubrics. A Come-if-We-Call School is a school that welcomes families but communicates that there are limitations to how families can help their children at home and that the best way for families to help their children can be found at home. The school also knows where to find help in the community. Examples of what could be found or witnessed in a Come-if-We-Call School are: involved educated parents, the thought that “immigrant parents don’t have time to come or contribute” (Davies et al., 2007, p. 17), and staff that is selective about who volunteers at school. There is an understanding that parents should call the office to get information about what is happening in classrooms, parents should bring their own translators, curriculum information will be given one time a year, staff should not be expected to embrace change, the principal will run the parent-teacher association, and parent input is not equivalent to the school’s input.

This review of literature shows more information is needed about what parents’ think family engagement is within education in order to create an all-encompassing definition, and that grounded theory research is necessary to gain an understanding of what parents think their roles are in their children’s education. The research that has been collected before this study shares information for teachers and administrators about why parents should be members of their children’s educational teams and how they should be involved on those teams.

## **B. Benefits for the school**

Family engagement should be a focus for the education community and families because it affects student achievement. When families, no matter the socioeconomic or educational background, are positively involved in the schools, there will be positive achievement results for their children. (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Learning and family engagement does not only happen at school, it happens in a variety of spaces: through digital media, health and wellness programs, parks and recreation programs, and afterschool programs; with families or school communities at libraries, museums, or camps; and through partnerships with early childhood education and higher education. (Weiss & Lopez, 2015). Parent involvement affects a child's development. When there are breakdowns at home, changes in emotional and behavioral problems at school escalate (Sanders, 2008). Therefore, family engagement practices should be established so that all children can capitalize on learning opportunities.

Being intentional about engaging families is crucial because family and school structures have changed over the last 50 years, and there is a need for communication between home and school. Surveys of teachers, principals, parents, and students show that parents, at all grade levels, want cooperation between home and school. Achievement, including test scores, improve when there is communication between families and school, and the more overlap in learning at home and at school, the better (Epstein, 1987).

When partnerships are established, schools can communicate with parents the strategies they are using to help their children find success, and parents can contribute to the conversation before or when obstacles present themselves. Parents can share learning

experiences that the children are having at home so that the schools can continue building on those learning blocks. On the flip side, parents can continue investigating and exploring ideas that have been introduced at school. Learning experiences can take place both at home and school and the more connections a child makes, the richer the education he/she is going to receive. Communication is the key ingredient in establishing a successful partnership; it reassures the stakeholders involved that the children's best interest is the motivating factor both at school and at home (Johnson, 1997).

Teachers are the closest to the classroom, and those closest to the classroom make the best decisions for students. Teachers need to be trained how to involve students early in decision making, how to value parent input, and how to understand that engaging families is hard work (You, 2014). When educators are communicating with families, formally and informally, they need to convey clearly that learning is more important than testing. (Briceño, 2015). Teachers were able to reach all families, no matter the background of the family with required family engagement activities that fell into the following categories: reading books, encouraging discussions, stimulating learning through informal activities, contracting between teachers and parents, and developing parents' abilities to help with school work, (Becker, 1982).

Electronics are a vital resource for parents to be engaged. For example, there are computer programs that allow parents to virtually visit classrooms they are unable to visit and to see what is happening in the classroom. Knowing what is happening in the classroom can help parents know what to help with at home. (Winston, 2000). Sometimes, software programs have the potential to influence family engagement because parents are better informed and then able to be proactive. For example, there is

software available to communicate with parents daily about their children's attendance. This allows for parents to make sure their children are attending school. Attendance is important because it is directly linked with school success and graduation rates (Altman, 2013).

In conclusion, families' voices need to be heard and the input that is being received needs to be valued and used for the continuing improvement efforts of the school. When families are part of the decision-making process, their engagement will improve because they have a voice in the direction the school is moving, and they are able to advocate for the children in the school (Constantino, 2016).

### **C. The school the center of the community**

Every school needs to take responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating its own family-school partnership expectations and district administrators and state level leaders need to offer support. They need to write policy for school partnerships, develop partnership experts, establish funds, provide in-service, collect data and conduct research to support partnerships, and encourage processes that would require family engagement education for certification (Epstein, 2009). Schools need to have continuous, consistent conversations about what family engagement is with all stakeholders, however, keeping in mind that schools are unique and one-size-fits-all plans will not work. Each school needs to develop a plan for engaging families and the community. It is important when developing an engagement plan to communicate that accountability should not be placed on the schools' shoulders alone; families, the community, and the school should all be held responsible for student achievement and all

stakeholders should understand that everyone benefits from student success (Evans, 2011).

When parents develop partnerships with their children's schools, they show their children that education is important. Two-way communication between home and school, assisting with school-decision making, and being involved in the learning in classrooms are all ways that children can see that their parents value education. All adults in a child's life need to have a growth mindset; they need to model lifelong learning so that children know what learning requires reflection and refining and that everyone has something to learn (Briceño, 2015). Therefore, family engagement needs to be embedded into daily practice so that learning is continuous (Daniel, 2011).

Strong relationships between families and their school need to be developed for family engagement to improve; there needs to be an understanding of the differences between home and school culture. The engagement needs to be focused around critical issues; parents need to be involved directly and indirectly in the happenings of the classroom. Directly, families could for example, be involved in facilitating classroom activities and after school opportunities (Diez, 2011), or parents could give 20 minute presentations about art pieces that relate to the social studies curriculum (Epstein, 2011). Schools could indirectly engage parents in the happenings of the classroom by hosting parents' evenings to discuss school issues and by forming school planning committees. When forming committees, the schools could make sure everyone in the population is represented to help include more of the schools' families (Diez, 2011).

The goal of school organizations should be to have a well-planned program for family engagement. The plan should include ways to reach all students and ways to



include parents, teachers, administrators, district/state level leaders, and other community members. Ways for implementing the following types of parent involvement should be included in the plan: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. More can be done if everyone is working together and has the same vision (Epstein, 2006).

When researching ways to improve family engagement, schools need to gather information individually because there tends to be a lot of variability in what parents view as the most important community activities (Dunst, 2000). Furthermore, family engagement is hard to replicate from school to school because each community is unique; a school will need to develop its own plan for family engagement. When engaging all stakeholders, a vital piece of communication is that accountability is not placed on teachers alone; accountability for student success needs to be embraced by the community members because all stakeholders benefit when children are successful (Evans, 2011).

Throughout the world, there are programs, initiatives, and plans being designed to help schools engage their community. In Ontario, the FACES (Family and Community Engagement Strategy) initiative provides strategies for parents to ensure that their kindergartners hit the ground running when they start school. The project connects activities completed at school with activities completed at home and provides opportunities for parents to be involved with their children's education both at home and at school. "One educator reinforced the prevalence of parent-child interactions in FACES sessions by exclaiming, 'I'm coming in and (seeing) ENGAGEMENT! The parent is

sitting down with their child...is actually interacting physically with their child.” (Black, 2013, p. 580).

The initiative recognizes that each school community needs a project to fit their school’s needs and that a committee representing the school, the community agencies, and the families participating in the project needs to be established. The committee needs to include members from a variety of backgrounds that bring differing perspectives to the group, and a common goal with an action plan needs to be established. Committee meetings should be held regularly and provide opportunity for reciprocal communication to help participants understand and appreciate each other’s roles and responsibilities (Black, 2013).

Setting guidelines and providing a structure for learning can impact a child’s success at school (O’Sullivan, 2014). When special education services are needed, parents (or other family) should be involved in both writing goals that fit the family’s needs and determining the processes for reaching those goals. Early intervention suggests that the outcomes should be able to be reached in the child’s natural setting and need to include both natural and planned learning experience. It is important to remember natural learning environments are not necessarily places but are instead potential for experiences children may have (Dunst, 2000; Jung 2006). Children with disabilities or with risks of delays should be supported by their families, the community, and early intervention for optimal results. When the school has community resources readily available, the services can be provided to support the family within the community they reside. Interventions are more valuable to families when they fit into the routine of their lives (Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012).

Also, schools need to have action plans, frameworks, and a facilitator to create a successful family-school partnership. The plans need to include activities that will help build parents' confidence and understanding of how the school works. Because every school has its own goals and values, each school needs to be researched individually (Sanders, 1996).

Learning how to communicate with schools and understanding how schools systems work is important for all families. The *Learning Community Center of South Omaha* has programs in place to help parents support their children educationally. Their most popular classes are computers classes, reading/writing classes, and conversations classes. They also provide informational sessions about a variety of topics such as teaching parents the who's who of Omaha Public Schools, how to understand their children's report cards, preparing for parent-teacher conferences (and as a result, almost 100% of their participants attend), and how to support the curriculum at home. This is an example of a community resource that supports families and the schools (O'Hara, A., personal communication, July 5, 2015).

All in all, activities that support family partnerships should deepen the relationship between the family and the school and should support student learning. It is important for schools to be intentional about family engagement and to evaluate who is benefitting from parent involvement efforts (Allen, 2008).

#### **D. Family engagement leads to student success**

Family dynamics are strong indicators of a child's outcome as an adult. A child needs to have a strong, connected family to develop normally into a successful adult. One or more adults in the child's family need to be devoted to loving, interacting

with, and challenging the child. The adult needs to ask and inquire daily about the child's day. Along with unconditional support, the child needs his/her family to show him/her how to interact with others and how to be successful with friends at school, at work, and other places in society (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). Therefore, engagement that truly impacts children's learning happens at home (Constantino, 2016).

Parents are essential for not only teaching students how to learn but also for modeling how to manage time, stay organized, and use study strategies. When parents are engaged in their children's learning, their children are successful in school because they have the tools needed to meet the demands of the classroom. Children are more literate and ready for school when they are surrounded by conversation, when they are asked questions, and when they see adults interacting with a variety of reading sources (Ngwaru, 2014). When parents are involved with their children's academics, their children go further in school and get into better schools. Simply put, family factors are more influential than school factors. (Callison, 2004)

One of the easiest suggestions to give a parent for supporting the curriculum being taught at school is to ask them to talk to their children. UNO's Administration and Supervision students had a conversation with Dr. Karen Hayes about how engaging in conversation with a child is just as important as reading to him/her. Parents should verbally communicate with their children as much as possible when they are using the ATM, going to the grocery store, paying bills, traveling to see relatives, etc. because the conversations are building background knowledge and developing vocabulary (Hayes, K., personal conversation, April 27, 2015).

When student issues like poverty, truancy, and behavior surface, community partnerships and resources need to be available when assisting and supporting families so that children can get the most out of their educational experience. For example, because poverty is multidimensional, schools cannot address its ramifications as a silo; the entire community needs to tackle the issues related to poverty. Community activities and opportunities could help students succeed because family engagement is more important for helping children find success than focusing on socioeconomic status, race, parent education, family size, and age (Diaz, 2011).

In conclusion, families, schools, and their communities need to work together to improve public education. Students are coming to school with more diverse needs, public funding is decreasing, and the nation's faith in public institutions and the government needs improvement. Schools need to bring members of the community together to meet the needs of children they are teaching; schools can no longer do it on their own (Constantino, 2016).

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **A. Grounded Theory**

The purpose of this classic grounded theory study is to define family engagement in a child's education from the perspective of a mother. This study will bring to the surface what parents believe their role is in their children's education and develop an understanding of the gap between what research says parents should do at home and what parents believe they should be doing at home. At this stage in the research, family engagement is a recommended focus for schools, and Steven Constantino (2016) goes as far to say that schools should establish a relationship with every family.

This classic grounded theory research will allow me to add what parents want family engagement to be to the research that has already been collected about what educators believe family engagement and school family partnerships should be in order for children to be successful. The research will add another perspective to parent engagement research, and I will discover new data and generate new themes. The new data and themes will be useful for practical applications and will present opportunities for future research (Glaser, 1999).

Parents' perspective about how families should be involved in their children's education did not surface in the books and articles I was reading. I was able to find theories about why schools should make family engagement a priority and how to improve family engagement in schools, but I was not able to find what parents want their roles to be in their children's education. Usually a literature review is not completed before classic grounded theory research is conducted; however, in this particular case, the literature review was completed to show that there is a need to hear about parent

engagement from the voices of parents. More literature will be reviewed as information is collected to both support the themes that have been developed and the themes that may surface during the data collection process (Baden, 2013).

The following interview questions have been written using the theoretical framework found in Steven M. Constantino's book, *Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles*:

- Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.
- Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.
- How do you want your child to spend his/her weeknights and weekends when he/she is not at school?
- Should parents thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?
- How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

After the interview has concluded, I will ask my co-researchers to answer the following prompt, in writing:

- If your child/children's school asked you for a definition of family engagement for the school handbook, what would you write?

Before my co-researchers start answering the questions that will lead them to writing a definition of "family engagement in education", I will have them share their journeys from the end of our time in our sorority to the present. The personal stories will

showcase how women of the same age and from similar backgrounds can choose different paths in life and end up with a variety of ideas about what is best for children. I will ask them to talk about important influences that helped them choose the schools that their children are attending, and I will make special note of books, articles, and blogs that they have read so that I can simultaneously gather information for a more robust literature review while interviewing my co-researchers.

The writing of the report will be done in third person, limited, observer. I need to be removed from the results of the interview because I work in a school and am a parent and have already formed my definition of family engagement. I have had time to refine my answer; I want the answers that I report for this study to be raw and personal to each researcher.

### **B. Our Journeys from the sorority to the present: Introducing the Co-Researchers**

My sample will consist of seven of my college sorority sisters. We were all members of a sorority in Lincoln, Nebraska, and finished college in the same pledge class. After college, we all went in different directions and started our families at different times. Currently, we all have at least one child that is school-age.

All of the researchers in this project have similar young adulthood stories. We all attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and were charter members of the same sorority. In college, we ran and attended philanthropies and activities, studied and completed homework together, partied and traveled together, and set goals for life together. After graduation, we have supported each other through exciting times like first jobs, weddings, and first months home with a new baby, as well as through rough times like deaths, disagreements with our husbands' families, and bad days at work.



The researchers in this study work for corporate companies, the housing industry, the medical industry, or are stay-at-home moms. They live in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Virginia, in cities and towns both small and large. Having co-researchers, each taking a different route from Tri Delta to the present and from a variety of settings, will add layers to the study that would not be there if all participants resided in the same area.

### **C. My Story**

I graduated from college ready to start my first teaching job in Omaha, Nebraska, and was content with never getting married or having children. My first class roster consisted of 16 students. All but two students spoke another language at home and one student did not speak any English and was in his first American classroom. My eyes were opened to so much that year; one student watched the murder of her father and another child watched the police search her apartment and take her mom to jail. A unique relationship a between mother and father taught me to tell a mom what was going on and then run, literally, into the school and call dad before she got home so that everyone was on the same page. Over lunch, four boys shared with me the dilemma they were facing about being jumped and forced into the neighborhood gang. I also had a child whose parents could not attend parent teacher conferences because they worked in their restaurant from early morning until late at night. I would stop and conference with them on my way home, and they would feed me dinner. Seven years later, this child found me and shared with that I was the reason she loved and cared about school, and that she had received a full ride for college. All in all, the biggest takeaways from my first year were to actively listen and to intentionally show students and their families that they mattered and that their concerns were legitimate.

After my first year, I made a bittersweet move. I changed schools and districts because I had been accepted to a graduate program. I was hesitant to leave a job and families I loved, but I could not pass up the opportunity to complete a fully paid graduate program in 15 months. The biggest difference between my first two years were the parents; I changed from a culture that respected teachers and assumed they were always doing what was best for their children to a culture that questioned every decision that the teacher made. For example, within my first week, I was threatened in an e-mail and had to consider notifying the police over having muffins and not homemade cookies on my healthy snack list. At the end of the year, this particular parent and I were on good terms and having productive conversations, and she even stopped to share with me her child's middle school success the next year. I remember breathing a sigh of relief after this conversation because I knew, for sure, I had not ruined her child. This illustrated that at the beginning of my career I was not equipped with the appropriate skills to find the silver lining when parents were constantly questioning me; instead, I felt insulted and overwhelmed and, almost blindly, led with my love for children while hoping for the best. The culture may have changed when I switched districts but the power of relationships did not, and this is something I later connected and intentionally developed into a useful tool for student success.

After teaching elementary school for three years, I moved to middle school and faced another reality. After an honest conversation with an administrator, I knew I needed to grow and learn a lot if I wanted to be considered a good teacher. During this phase of my life, I bought a house in a neighboring school district. I had decided that if I ever changed my mind about having children, I did not want them to go to school in the

same school district that I was teaching. I didn't want my reputation to affect my children; I wanted them to be able to live separate lives. As I grew into a more confident teacher and person, got married, and had children, I started to entertain the idea of living and working in the same district.

The decision to move into the same district that held my contract happened two years before my oldest child went to kindergarten and while I was finishing my administration endorsement. I decided that I needed to live in the same district in which I was hoping to obtain a leadership position. I wanted to show that I have enough confidence in the schools where I teach, and potentially lead, to send my own kids to the schools in the system. I researched schools and found several that I thought would be the best fit for my kids. When my aunt called to say that the house across the street from her was for sale, my husband and I jumped on the opportunity. Although, my oldest son will now not be attending the neighborhood school, I will communicate my support for the school in other ways. Having a strong school is important for communities.

As the researcher, I am a 36-year-old doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I have been an educator for 15 years: two years as a fifth-grade teacher and one year as a third-grade teacher in two different elementary schools, four years as a sixth-grade teacher, six years as a seventh-grade teacher, two years as an intervention teacher, six weeks as an administrative intern in one middle school, and three weeks as a summer school principal for the district.

In college, I was a mentor through Lincoln's *Hispanic Center* for a program called the "Latino Achievement Mentoring Program". As a mentor, I met at least once a week with the same middle school student for three years, and I met with other mentors

and LAMP leaders on Thursday nights to debrief and reflect. Through this program, I learned the importance of family involvement in a child's education and what the consequences of not having family support looked like. Little did I know this was a seed that would later grow into a dissertation.

My interest in family engagement spiked when comparing two years of seventh grade students and concluding that the biggest difference between my toughest year of students and, arguably, my best year of students was the engagement of their parents in the education of their children. My next step was looking for research to support the conclusion that I made about these two years of students.

While sitting at an award ceremony for a sorority sister, I looked around and realized that my sorority sisters sitting with me and another sister that I had recently talked to are what I would consider "engaged" parents. They had all made informed decisions about their children's schooling and continued to be involved in educating them. I began to wonder if they had the same understanding of family engagement as me and whether they wanted or felt they needed to support the schools their children attended.

I believe parent engagement is being visible at school events, planning time at home to complete homework, and being responsible for building my children's background knowledge--taking them to places like the zoo and museums, talking to them while we do everyday things like grocery shopping and housework, and regularly reading books to them.

When I interview my sorority sisters, I will need to make sure that I wipe my slate clean and not go into the interview with any preconceived notions or with answers to the

questions on my mind. I will need to make sure that I am giving my co-researchers my undivided attention and not evaluating their answers while I am listening. I want to know what parent engagement means to them and what role they think they should play in their children's education.

All names, except mine, have been changed to protect the privacy of the families.

#### **D. Jasmine**

Jasmine and her husband John moved to a town of 1500, according to the 2010 Census, from a Midwestern city of 450,000, shortly before getting married. Jasmine has been a nurse since college graduation, and throughout their relationship, John has always worked in finance. When they first met, he worked at a bank; now he sells computer software throughout the United States and parts of Europe. Jasmine and John have two children that both attend their town's public schools.

According to their town's website, the mission of their school "is to provide educational opportunities in a safe, caring environment that will prepare all students to meet the challenge of the future." The town's school is growing at a rate of 15% a year and currently has 2,500 students enrolled in the district. Ninety percent of the high school graduates attend post-secondary institutions; 60% attend 4 year institutions and 30% attend 2 year or vocational institutions.

#### **E. Amber**

Amber and her husband Allen moved to a Midwestern city with a population of 175,000 when her husband finished college and joined a pediatric dentistry practice. Amber worked in three different cities as a dental hygienist until her second child was

born. At that time, she decided to stay home with their two children, a daughter and a son. Their daughter attends the public school in their part of the city.

The district Amber's daughter attends "optimizes student potential through the pursuit of educational excellence in partnership with the school community." The school district currently has roughly 4,000 students enrolled. According to a 2015-2016 profile, 94.38% of students graduate from high school, 13.1% qualify for free/reduced lunch, and the attendance rate is 96.1%.

#### **F. Danielle**

Danielle and David live in a Midwestern city with a population of 24,000. Danielle stays home with her three daughters, and helps with the family business, and sits on community boards. David owns a business that processes steel and is also visible in the community. Both of their school age daughters attend the public Montessori school in their home district.

The elementary school their daughters attend hosts grades kindergarten through fourth and has 106 students enrolled. Each year the school holds a lottery and 25 students are admitted to the Montessori elementary. The following is the mission of this school district: "To prepare all students to pursue their goals for the future." According to a 2015-2016 school profile, their school district covers 68.8 square miles, and students are encouraged to find their individual routes. The district offers advanced placement classes, dual credit classes, health and drafting academics, and several extensive career and technical education programs.

#### **G. Elaine**

Since getting married, Elaine and Evan have lived in a Midwestern city of 20,000. Elaine works at a bank as an auditor and Evan is a technician for a John Deere company. They have a son and a daughter, and their son attends a Catholic school in their community.

The mission of their son's school is "Growing in Spirit, Mind, and Body as Disciples of Christ." The building is a kindergarten through eighth grade building. Tuition is required, and their website states "No one will be excluded from our school because of an inability to pay." Elaine stated in her interview that there are just over 500 students enrolled in the school.

#### **H. Kaitlyn**

Kaitlyn and her husband live in a Midwestern town of just over 800 people. Kaitlyn works four days a week in the real estate industry and Kevin is an electrical linesman for the power district. They have two daughters in the local public school and one son in daycare.

Their school district supports four counties that cover over 200 square miles. The district's mission "is to educate life-long learners in a nurturing, challenging, and disciplined environment." The elementary they attend is a kindergarten through sixth grade building with two sections at each grade level and around 295 students attending the school. Ninety-seven percent of the 2017 seniors graduated from high school, and 67% of the seniors went on to a two-year or four-year college.

#### **I. Teresa**

Teresa and Timothy have lived in the United States and overseas. Currently, they reside in a suburban county of 1.142 million people located in a Southern state. Teresa

has a background in nursing and now stays home with their six children. Timothy is a foreign service officer for the Department of the State. Two of their children attend an all-male, independent, private Catholic school, and two of their children are home schooled.

According to Google, Teresa lives 12.3 miles and 21 minutes away (and across state lines) from the school that their children attend. There are 540 students, grades 3-12, enrolled in the school; 250 in the upper school, 150 in the middle school, and 140 in the lower school. The average class size is 17, the student to faculty is 7:1, and the mentor to mentee ratio is 1 to 1. According to their website, “Parents are helped to form their sons into the type of men they would want their daughters to marry—men who will be great fathers. The faculty encourage the boys to be true Christian gentleman, striving to do the ordinary things of life extraordinarily well for the love of God and in the service of others. All student programs take place in the context of a personal approach to education where cheerfulness goes hand-in-hand with hard work and striving to conquer oneself.” Tuition is required for this school, and 49% of the students attending receive financial grants or scholarships.

#### **J. Samantha**

Samantha and her husband Steve live in an annexed part of a city of 450,000. Samantha works for an insurance company in advertising compliance and Steve works for a different insurance company in their commercial real estate department. They have two children and their oldest attends their neighborhood public elementary school. Their suburban school district has 8,400 students enrolled in their schools and grows by 6% every year.



The district's mission statement states that their system "unites students, families, educators, and the community to ensure a challenging and enriching academic environment that inspires students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners." According to the district's 2015-2016 annual school report, 97.6% of the 2016 seniors graduated and 93% of the students continued at a two-year or four-year college.

## **Chapter 4: Jasmine**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** Alright, please share your journey from our time together in college, to present.

**Jasmine:** Okay, so, after college we went to Omaha, so I had an apartment with my sister, and we kept in contact as friends do, and then we decided to live together. You were in your first-year teaching, I think it was your first year, second year teaching, and I was a nurse, I guess. Lots of going out and doing silly things, and meeting boys, (laughs) all that stuff. I think over the years we both really grew professionally and personally, and I guess just kept in contact the same way friends do, and it was just one of those things where, you don't talk to somebody for a long time, but when you do finally talk to them again it's like not a lot of time has gone past. It's always been comfortable, and it's been fun; going on little trips to South Dakota, and seeing our kids grow up, and weddings and all that good stuff.

**Melissa:** How did you and John go from when we lived in our apartment together, when you and John started dating, what was your journey from our apartment to [omitted for the privacy of the family]?

**Jasmine:** So we lived in an apartment off [omitted for the privacy of the family], and when our lease was up I moved in with John, and he had an apartment in [omitted for the privacy of the family], which was [omitted for the privacy of the family]. We lived there for I guess for about a year, probably a bit longer maybe more like two years, and then we decided that part of town wasn't really for us. He grew up in a really small town. I grew up in Omaha, but I really liked the small-town feel, so we decided to go [omitted for the privacy of the family], before we got married we were in the process of building

our home, and we moved in. We moved in about six months before we got married into our house, so the transition from our apartment to our house, from our apartment on 144th to [omitted for the privacy of the family] was maybe a year-and-a-half, two years around that point.

**Melissa:** And since then you have stayed [omitted for the privacy of the family] right?

**Jasmine:** Yes, we have stayed in [omitted for the privacy of the family]. We did preschool in Omaha, I guess it's considered where the line is, but it was still [omitted for the privacy of the family], so I don't know if that's considered [omitted for the privacy of the family] Omaha, and then we started at one elementary in [omitted for the privacy of the family], built our new house and we're at another elementary, but both were in the [omitted for the privacy of the family] Public School district.

**Melissa:** Perfect, and can you talk a little bit about what you and John both do professionally?

**Jasmine:** So I am a nurse, I have been a nurse specializing in cardiology for 13 years. I worked on the cardiac unit at Nebraska Medicine for about three years, and then I went to Nebraska Heart Institute. They had a location in Omaha for one year and I worked in the cardiac cath lab. It closed, and then I went to the cath lab at Nebraska Medicine, and then I decided to stay home with the kids for about three years. It was a tough decision but it was a good one. During that time, I kept my license active. I worked at an orthopedic hospital overnight, just one or two shifts every other week, and now they're in school, I'm back working 30 hours a week, back at the med center on the cardiac unit, and then John, he's always worked in finance, he worked at First National for a long time, like 10 years.

Then he had an opportunity to go into sales, so currently, he's been traveling a ton for a like the past seven years, he's gone every, every week almost, with a couple of weeks he's at home in between there, and he basically sells computer software around the country. He's traveled to Europe and stuff like that.

**Melissa:** Awesome.

**Jasmine:** Tell me if I'm being too descriptive.

**Melissa:** No, you're doing exactly what you need to do. Please tell me about the influences that help you choose the school your children are attending.

**Jasmine:** They were a lot, and a lot of it is just, John's personal experience, my personal experience, and then a lot of things we have observed in people, and I don't know this is stereotyping or what, but there is a lot of thought into it. So I went to [omitted for the integrity of the school district] which is great, elementary I went to [omitted for the integrity of the school], I went to [omitted for the integrity of the school], I know it's not call that any more, and then I went to [omitted for the integrity of the school district], which when I was there it was okay. I liked my time there, but I could tell my senior year it was really starting to go in the opposite direction we wanted. They were from my perception they were focusing more on getting kids to graduate, and the ones that were excelling, like myself I was your typical average student that took a couple of AP classes, Mostly normal. But I met my counselor at classes. I didn't know her, which on a personal level I understand when you have 500 people in a class of students, but I thought that their focus shifted more just to getting kids not to drop out, just to get them through graduation, and I didn't like that. I knew that if we went to [omitted for the integrity of

the school] it would be fine, middle school with maybe, the kids were just kind of get lost, and I felt like that for high school too, and then John he had a class of 20 kids, 20 to 30 people. He really sold it. We were deciding, what do we do, and he really saw that in growing up in a small town, he was able to be involved in everything. He could play a couple of sports. He could be in the band. He could do a lot of things. When I was in high school, I tried out for cheerleading, I played volleyball, I swam, and I did soccer, and all of that stuff is like well you can only be a cheerleader, you can't play sports and be a cheerleader, or it would be really hard to do that, or if you're in the marching band then you can't really be in the marching band and play football. They just sold it as you have to choose one thing, and I didn't want my kids to have to do that. If they wanted to be involved in multiple things, I wanted them to be involved in multiple things.

We talked about [omitted for the integrity of the school district], and the perception I got is that they are a little bit snooty, a little bit uppity, and a little bit not my type, but I wanted my kids to be involved in, and we have several friends in that school district now, and that's just kind of the way that they are. I don't know, my personal feeling. So with all of that we knew that Bennington was a small up-and-coming, kind of like, I don't know if this was the cool place to be, or it was just a small town in the big city kind of feel. But we really did think long and hard before coming out here with the education of kids and everything like that.

**Melissa:** Perfect, thank you. Question number three, describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education?

**Jasmine:** So I think that the school should expect us as parents to continue education at home, I know there are some people, in the neighborhood whatever that we have talked to, and they're like I've paid a huge amount of taxes, that's the teacher's job is to teach them, and I'm sure it's the same in all school districts, like getting a lot of work as a kindergarten, first grader or second grader. They didn't appreciate that because that's taking up so much time at home, but my opinion is that I want my school to want me involved in their education, and in teaching them at home, and my point of view is if I'm teaching them at home, or I'm positive about their homework or whatever, if mom and dad are happy and positive about homework then maybe they'll be happy and positive about it, and they'll want to learn. Maybe it will drive them to, make mom and dad happy to get 100%, because we're talking about a spelling test all week long, and we're going over spelling words all week long, maybe that will incent them to try really hard on their homework, and I want the school to expect me to continue to do that at home with my kids.

**Melissa:** Thank you.

(laughter)

Do you think it's important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Jasmine:** I think it's extremely important to establish relationships with staff members, all the staff members at school. Last year, I was working the night shift, so I was up at school all the time. I helped in Julia's class one day per week, I was in the PTA, I was up there doing bulletin boards and doing stuff like that, and I think that if you are a familiar

face in the school, then all the teachers know who your kid is, and I don't think that will necessarily be treated differently, but I think that they'll just be recognized. And even Jenna last year when she was in preschool, a lot of the teachers, and the front desk ladies are amazing. They all know who Jenna is before she's even in school, and even just that little bit helped her feel, in my opinion, so much more comfortable going into kindergarten and everything like that, and I know that's not the situation for a lot of people and it's hard, but that was part of the reason I didn't go back to work full-time, and I'm still doing 30 hours so I can still be present in school and have those relationships with the teachers, and I think that, last year Julia's first grade teacher she was amazing, I mean she won teacher of the year, for Bennington, the entire school district last year, the teachers vote on it, so she's an amazing teacher, but her as a person, she's the type that's shy, so they come off as kind of, I don't know, not that she didn't come off as not interested. I just don't think she's the type of person who's going to make big conversation, and I'm so happy to see you, that's just not her personality, so from the beginning of the school year and first conference to our second conference, her seeing my face even for just an hour and me asking "Hi, what you want me to do today," she hands me a puzzle, I hand it back to her at the end of my hour with the kids, and just say thanks have a great weekend. I feel that little bit of interaction changed our relationship so that she can be a little bit open with me at conferences. That was my perception at least, or even myself, I felt more comfortable asking questions, not necessarily questioning her teaching, but just being able to ask why did you do it this way, or why is Julia coming home saying it this way. I think when you have that type of rapport with staff, they know

your personality, they know you're not coming off as offensive, they know that you have a relationship, and I think that's better for everybody.

I'm very into interpersonal relationships, so if you have a personal relationship I think the conversation can be more open and honest, does that answer the second part of the question too?

**Melissa:** Yes, yes it does. How do you want your child to spend his or her weeknights, and weekends, when you have girls, when they're not in school?

**Jasmine:** So earlier I said we're continuing the education at home, but I wanted to be kids too, I don't want them to come home and hit the books and be super stressed about it, so if it's a nice day outside, we go outside and play. We have a trampoline in the backyard, there's a ton of kids in the neighborhood, and I'm lucky that I'm home two days a week, and my mom is our nanny, so I'm home every day at 3:15, I know that's not typical, but for our personal situation, a typical night, would be get home at 3:15, go outside and play, and then usually we have Cross Fit Kids on Thursdays, we have gymnastics and volleyball on Wednesdays, so we're super busy, so I want them to be able to, how do I say it, be able to, just download from school, and I don't want that to be watching TV and playing on the phone, so that's just going outside to play with their toys for a little while. I think it's important to just to be able to decompress from school, and then around 4:30, 4:35, it's time to start doing supper, it's time to do homework, it's time to get to our activities. We're not very, we're pretty routine in that, and then shower time is 7:30/8:00, and then we're in bed, and we read a book every night. Our kids are spoiled, so John and I if he's in town will lay in their beds until they fall asleep,  
(both laugh)



But you know what, they're not going to want that forever, so we've got to take it while we can,

So that's like a typical weeknight, and in my personal opinion I think that's how it should be. Weekends are fun for us. We let loose on Saturday, we don't really do much as far as school work goes. Sundays are pretty much the same way, and then about 4 o'clock or 5 on Sunday we start the routine. They're done playing outside, we're making supper. We have an open concept kitchen, so I can make supper while they're doing some independent work, but I'm right there, so I can help them, then I'm right back in tune I guess.

**Melissa:** Should parents thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions the schools are making? Why or why not?

**Jasmine:** I think to a point, I don't know, I mean, I want to, the majority of teachers at, my kids schools have been teachers for quite some time. Her teacher, Gracie's kindergarten teacher has been her teacher for a couple of years, but I feel they are enough seasoned teachers at her school, and the principal is, he has a lot of experience in his role. I think that unless they are making a decision that is detrimental to my kids, I am going to trust them in their profession and their decision-making. So unless I am extremely passionate about something, I don't want to say my opinion shouldn't matter, but I feel sometimes that maybe we should just like, leave it to the people that have gone to school. That would be like you coming in and I'm taking care of your mom or dad, and you're giving me your opinions, and I'm like look I've done this for 14 years, please trust me, and I want them to say we have your kids best interest in mind, please trust us, and I give them my trust, and

I do feel like our school district is very open to, parent concerns and opinions and everything like that. The principal has always said my door is open, if you want to schedule a meeting with me, he makes himself available to parents. I've personally never had to make that appointment with him, but I've heard from other parents that if you schedule appointment with him, he will sit down and listen, so I like that open communication. I mean I know there are some parents who are extremely opinionated, who don't have any research or any backing up of those opinions. They just want their opinion heard, and they want something their way. I guess I'm just different than that, and I trust them with my kids,so I don't know if that answered it the right way are not.

**Melissa:** You're fine, and now the final question, besides the one that I emailed to you, how should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Jasmine:** Getting involved in the community, like I said we're super lucky 'cause it's a small-town community. This is different than I was, but there are always involved in everything. It's easier being a small town. We'll get flyers home to order T-shirts for the high school girls pink out, as an elementary school. When I was in high school we didn't have that, or just stuff like that, so that makes me feel involved in the school on all levels. And then in the community, we have [omitted for the privacy of the family] days, and I'm sure it was similar in Gretna, but the cheerleaders are always there, and the band always has a float, and there's always something going on. You can buy birthday parties with the cheerleaders, to come to kids parties and do their hair and make-up, teach them some cheers, and then they have an older kid to look up to. If we see them at Cubbies, little girls can be like, "Those are the cheerleaders from school." I just think that it's really positive, so I think that the school being involved in the community is really important.

**Melissa:** All right, thank you, I'm going to shut off the recording.

**Jasmine:** Okay.

## **II. Written Response**

Family engagement happens inside and outside of the school. Forming relationships with staff, as well as volunteering in the classroom and during extra curricular activities as a parent is welcomed and encouraged. At home, families should come together to discuss the day, continue learning and solve problems that may have come up. We look forward to engaging with you soon!

## **III. Comparing Jasmine's responses to Constantino's Framework**

### **A. Principle #1: A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Jasmine would support Constantino that the sense of belonging falls in the hands of the families and how families view their roles in the school (Constantino, page 57). Jasmine has found what works best for her family is for her to be visible in her daughters' school. She volunteers in their classrooms and gets to know the teachers and other school staff on a personal level. Having strong interpersonal relationships helps her open conversations to understand how she can support what is happening at school at home.

She has always felt welcomed in her school. She stated that the secretaries know her and her children's names and are always excited to see them, and the principal, if needed, would be willing to meet with her and listen to her concerns.

Jasmine mentioned that she would like her children to have the opportunity to try a wide range of activities, and this is a community that embraces families and wants them to be involved in their activities. Students of all ages are invited to be involved in high school extracurricular activities, and there are opportunities for elementary students to get to know engaged high school students.

### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Jasmine believes one way she can help build a positive relationship with the school is to positively complete the work that is sent home with her children. She also volunteers at the school so that she can get to know the school staff. She stated that building relationships helps her ask questions about her daughters' academics more comfortably. She trusts the staff members with her children.

### **C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student--their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Jasmine has a weeknight and weekend routine that works for her family. She gives her children time to play before completing school work during the week; and on Saturdays, they spend the entire day not worrying about school. She uses the layout of her home to balance cooking dinner and completing independent work. She ends each day as a family reading before going to bed. As Constantino would say, the engagement

in this family is “invisible engagement: engagement we don’t necessarily see but of which we see the results” (Constantino, 2016, p. 145).

#### **D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

Having an open-door for concerns and opinions and open communication is important to Jasmine; however, ultimately, she leaves the decision-making to the school. Within the school, there are a lot of professionals that have a lot of experience teaching and have gone to school to educate her children, so she trusts them to make the best decisions possible. This is the same respect she hopes for herself in her profession as a nurse.

#### **E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school’s governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

Jasmine stated that the school is involved in everything because they live in a small town. Her children are able to get to know other students, across all grade levels, and become more familiar with extracurricular opportunities because the school is an important part of this community. She stated that there is always something going

## **Chapter 5: Amber**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** The very first question this morning is: Please share your journey from our time together in college to the present time, so that we understand where you started and where you are now.

**Amber:** Okay. Let's see. We'll I was in History with you. Actually, I think I met you before in high school and then randomly you showed up at the sorority, so we were sorority sisters for four years and then continued to be friends after. When I graduated undergrad, I went to dental hygiene school and then I moved to Wisconsin for two years and then we still kept in contact. We would visit. And then I moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, with my husband, and my mom and dad still live in Omaha so you and I still communicate and visit every time I'm back in town.

**Melissa:** Alright, and can you tell a little bit about your background with your jobs and your husband's jobs so that we just get an understanding of your family?

**Amber:** Sure. How far back do you want to go?

**Melissa:** College.

**Amber:** College?

**Melissa:** Yeah, start with college and go to now.

**Amber:** Let's see. College I had several. I worked at the fitness center in college in the mornings.

(coughs) Excuse me. And then I worked in after school program. And in hygiene school I did dictation for a endodontist and then when I graduated I worked in [omitted for the privacy of the family] at a dental office for a few months before I moved to join

my fiancé who was doing his post-graduate work for pediatric dentistry in [omitted for the privacy of the family]. So, I worked in [omitted for the privacy of the family] for two years as a dental hygienist and then when he graduated, we moved to [omitted for the privacy of the family] where he joined his practice and I worked as a dental hygienist here for another eight years before I decided to become a full-time stay-at-home mom when my son was born. And that was a year and a half ago.

**Melissa:** Alright. So right now you're a full time stay-at-home mom?

**Amber:** Correct.

**Melissa:** Second question. Please tell about the influences that helped you choose the school your children are now attending.

**Amber:** When we moved, so we moved in the house we are in now almost two years ago, and we chose this particular house because we liked the house, but we liked the school district. We have quite few friends whose kids go to this school district that my daughter is now in and they had nothing but good things to say about it and so that's why we decided to move here. I think if we were to move even across the street we would have been in a different school district, and I probably then would have chosen Catholic School instead of the public school my kids are in now.

**Melissa:** Alright. Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.

**Amber:** Our school district doesn't really have a set amount of time that they expect but through a lot of various different activities, parents are given every opportunity to come into the classroom to meet them for lunch. Stella's first grade class just had a pumpkin-carving activity with their dads or a male role model and in May they have one for

mothers. They have, they call them parent liaisons. So the PTO emails one parent in the class and then that parent then emails the rest of the parents in their student's class.

We're also asked if we're willing to help tutor any students who may need extra help. I've been asked to come into the classroom to cut out shapes and different things like that to help the teacher so that they don't have to do it, so I've gone in to do that. They'll ask you to come in and read books. There's no limit on how many times you can join your student for lunch. So you just sign in, and they'll let you sit with them at lunch.

There's a lot of fall activities where you do a lot of donations, and they have bingo. They have, it's called pizza bingo night, and so all the families are encouraged to come and it's a fundraiser for the school. They also have a walk-a-thon where parents can come and walk with their kids and raise money that way. There's just so many ways they ask for help but if you're not able to, it's not frowned upon. It's kind of based on what you want to do and what you can do.

**Melissa:** Alright. Describe what you think your child's school should expect. Oh, I already said that one, sorry. Oops. Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Amber:** I think it's important because if my child is spending time with this person more than they are with me, then I want to know who it is, and what they're like especially if, you know, luckily my daughter doesn't get in trouble a lot, but if she did I'd want to have an open line of communication with whoever the teacher was to make sure that what I'm doing at home and what they're doing in the classroom is what's best for my child.



I also like going into the classroom because I need to know who my child surrounds themselves with. And if they are in a group that maybe is not the best for them. I want the teacher to feel comfortable coming to me and saying, "I think this person and this person may not be the best influences on your child. You may want to steer them in a different direction." Or something like that. And I think going forward, that's my main concern is just who they surround themselves with, the best influence, and an open line of communication so that I can do what's best for my kids.

**Melissa:** Alright. How do you want your child to spend his or her weeknights and weekends when he or she is not at school?

**Amber:** Well, I've been trying to establish at least on weeknights to my daughter's dismay, we do come home from school, there's no electronics, nothing, right when we get home because she has spelling words to do. And so I'm trying to establish a good study habit for her. So we do that right away. My son who's in preschool at the same time will doodle. I ordered him little coupon workbooks. So he's been doing those and he loves them.

They're allowed one hour of their iPad each day. It's on a timer, so it'll shut off after an hour. And then they're allowed to maybe watch an hour of television at night. On the weekends, we try to do different activities, like soccer, my son's going to do wrestling. So I try to keep them involved in some sort of extracurricular activity to kind of burn off some extra energy.

My daughter and I practice reading for 20 minutes every night before bed. And then, I don't know, we just try to do anything outdoors. Shut the TV off. We play board games, we play Twister, things like that, to just have fun on the weekends.

(child shouting in the background)

(laughs)

**Melissa:** Should parents' thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?

**Amber:** Based on their own child, I think that a parent's input would probably be helpful. However, I didn't go to school to become a teacher. I leave that to the professionals. So I usually refer to them, or defer to them whatever they think, or what they think my child needs. It's just like I wouldn't go to a psychiatrist to ask if my child had a cavity. So if I'm going to have a question about my child's education, I'm going to go to the teacher and trust what they have to say.

**Melissa:** Alright. How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Amber:** Well, I like, our school does a lot of fundraisers not just for the school itself, but we do, like the walk-a-thon is for, I think it's the March of Dimes, something like that. And then if there's a person in our community that's not necessarily a teacher they do fundraisers for that. So one of the bus drivers just had health issues and so they did lollipops for Larry. So you ask parents to bring in whatever monetary donation and then all that money would go to his healthcare.

We've also had several children that have lost parents to cancer. There was a building collapse downtown Sioux Falls. So then they ask, they do different fundraisers for that. It was a couple classmates who have cancer. So they do that.

So I feel like they give back. And our community is quite large. The [omitted for the privacy of the family] school system is very big. So there's a lot of opportunity for us to do something good for those that are in our little circle here, I guess.

**Melissa:** What is the name of your school district again?

**Amber:** [omitted for the privacy of the family]

**Melissa:** Okay. I'm just writing it down.

**Amber:** Yep.

**Melissa:** Alright. That is all of my questions.

**Amber:** Awesome.

**Melissa:** I am going to send you an email with a final question so that I can get a written response.

**Amber:** Okay.

**Melissa:** I will email that to you probably in the next ten minutes or so. I am going to shut off the recording.

**Amber:** Okay.

## **II. Written Response**

At our school we fully support parent involvement. We believe the more the parents are invested in their child's education, the further that child will go. We understand the busy schedules that families face may not lend to a lot of extra time outside of school, however our teachers are fully committed to work with every child's parent or guardian to come up with a plan tailored for that student. Our teachers and administrators have an open door policy so always feel free to stop in and discuss any

concerns. Our students are our number one priority and parent/guardian involvement goes hand in hand with each student's success, we appreciate any and all involvement.

### **III. Comparing Amber's responses with Constantino's Framework**

#### **A. Principle #1: A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Amber's daughter's school encourages parents to be visible in the school. They have events for a variety of audiences; for example, family events, events for moms, events for dads, and community fundraising events. Parents are welcomed to eat lunch with their children and to help in the classroom. This setting fits what Amber is looking for in a school; she wants to be welcomed in the school and to be able to see, first hand, what is happening in her daughter's classroom and school.

#### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Amber appreciates that open lines of communication are encouraged at her daughter's school and that she is able to bring her thoughts and concerns to the table. Amber believes that parents need to open communication with the teachers and let them know that a collaborative relationship is wanted to make sure the plan is in place for her daughter both at school and at home. Amber wants to make sure that her daughter's

teacher is comfortable sharing any concerning behaviors with her so that she can address them at school and follow-up with them at school.

### **C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student--their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Amber knows what is best for her child; and along with being a visible parent, Amber is also an invisible parent. She has a plan in place that sets ground rules for studying and completing schoolwork and has her daughter engaged in formal and informal activities that ensure her daughter will get a good night's sleep. And, before her daughter goes to bed each night, she practices reading with her mom.

### **D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

Amber believes parents should be able to give input about their own children, but that ultimately, the teachers are the professionals and the decisions should be made by them.

### **E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the*

*school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

The school reaches out to help members of the community. They have fixed events, for example, a March of Dimes walk; and they also hold timely events, for example, raising money for a bus driver with cancer. She stated that the community takes care of their “little circle”.

## **Chapter 6: Danielle**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** Please share your journey from our time together in college to now, so what your career paths have made, and what's some big decisions that got you to where you are now?

**Danielle:** Um, wow. That's a lot of years. When I left college, I was a, I went to [omitted for the privacy of the family]. I wasn't married, obviously. Lived in, bought a house. Was a management trainee at the bank, and then moved into their IT department, and worked there. And then about the same time, I left First National Bank, I got married, and went to work for a company called [omitted for the privacy of the family], which was technical recruiting, so I recruited really specialized technical people to work for other companies. So like, Union Pacific was one of my biggest clients.

And then after about three years there, so about seven years after we graduated from college, we decided it was time for David to come back and work with his family, and so I quit my job about the exact same time we had a baby. We had a baby, quit my job, and moved to [omitted for the privacy of the family] all at the same time. And since then, I have been, excuse me, mostly a full-time mom.

We have a family business, and so I do some things within the business, and I also sit on a lot of boards in our community, now that we live in a small town, but do not technically work.

Since we moved here, we've had daughters. We've lived here nine years now, so we have a nine-year-old named Diana, a six-year-old named Dawn, and a one-and-a-half-year-old named Danica. And that was all of it in a really fast synopsis.

**Melissa:** Can you tell us a little bit about what your husband does?

**Danielle:** Sure. My husband owns the company that processes steel. So we, it's a family business. It's been in his family for more than a hundred years, and so we take in steel, like a whole reel of steel, and then we cut it down to the specs that our customers need. So we don't actually make steel. We just process it.

**Melissa:** All right. Please tell about the influences that helped you choose the school your children are attending.

**Danielle:** Here in [omitted for the privacy of the family], we are blessed to have a public Montessori, and so that was really, really important to me, that my kids had. When we lived in [omitted for the privacy of the family], I thought my kids would go to a private Montessori. It's just kind of the education method that I really believe in, and I like the hands-on-ness of it, and the teacher, I've done a lot of research, so here, it's a lottery system, and so thankfully, my oldest daughter got in, and so now, all of my kids get to go there. And it's K through 4 Montessori, and then they go back into the mainstream public school.

**Melissa:** All right. Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.

**Danielle:** What it should be? Well, again, this is probably slightly skewed by the fact that they go to a Montessori and that we live in a little bit of a smaller community. I think there are some expectations that parents be involved in what's happening day to day in the classroom, maybe.

This year, we've actually instituted a no homework policy. Community wide, in our elementary schools, and so I think that maybe that has removed parents a little bit



from some of the things that they were expected to do. I am very involved in my kids' school, but there are lots of parents who aren't at all, so I think you know, my kids' teachers would tell us that their expectation is that we have our kids ready to be at school and to learn, and that we are doing things at home like making them read and do their math facts, and working on their spelling lists. You know, kind of those weekly things, but not day to day work.

**Melissa:** All right.

(pages rustling)

Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Danielle:** Yeah, for sure. I've had great relationships with not only my kids' teachers, but with the staff in their buildings, and it was helpful. My oldest daughter, especially, is a worrier, and she's a kid who just gets herself all into a frenzy about things, and it's been so nice to be able to reach out to those different people and say, "Hey, what was she like in this situation?" or "Hey, what happened here?" Just so I have some idea how to help her, and how to make her more comfortable. It also just provides for communication. When one of my kids is getting in trouble, or is sick or something's going on. I pretty regularly will get a text from someone in the building that says, "Hey, this is happening," and I don't think that would happen if I didn't have a relationship. I'm guessing that will get harder as they get older. We have K through 4, and then we have middle school, which is 5th and 6th grade, junior high is 7th and 8th, and then high school.

And from middle school on, we only have one building for our whole district, and so there's a lot more students than in their little elementary schools, and I'm guessing, you know, there's a lot less mom in the classroom. Even in my daughter's 4th grade class, I've always been able to help in her classroom, and this year, in her 4th grade class, her teacher just doesn't really need the help. And so, I think as they get older, it will become less just because they're supposed to be doing more on their own, and their teachers want less moms around telling them what to do, probably.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** How do you want your child to spend his or her weeknights, and weekends when he or she is not at school?

**Danielle:** I want them to spend them with me. I'm a big proponent, I hate when they come home and have hours of schoolwork, cause I felt like they were there all day. And so I want them to do either extracurricular things. We kinda keep those to, well, sort of a minimum.

My girls both ride horses, and so that takes up a lot of our time, but it's something we can do as a family. But otherwise, I just want them, home having dinner with us, around the table and talking to us, and you know, working on things together as a family. And reading. I mean, we read a lot, but otherwise, I don't want them to have to do homework all day.

**Melissa:** Should parents' thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?

**Danielle:** Um. Not really. I think that schools and school districts, and school boards and all those things have to make decisions about curriculum they're gonna use and what they're gonna do, and I think as a parent, my role is to support that.

If I don't believe in what they're doing, I think I can take my kids someplace else. But I don't think in a classroom of 25 kids, or a building of 300 kids, I can be telling them what to do, necessarily.

**Melissa:** And how should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Danielle:** Mm. Hmm. I think that's hard, because in a small town, a school is an important part of, like the school is the community. Like, everybody goes to the high school basketball games, and everybody is a Panther in [omitted for the privacy of the family] because that's all we have, and so, I think the more services that are offered through schools, the more a part of the community they become.

You know, here, our kids eat breakfast and, can eat breakfast and lunch at school, they can home weekend food, they can get referrals to see different doctors and dentists and whatever they need, and so I think that establishes them as a part of the community.

So when they're doing things beside educating our kids, I think that's how they become established, probably in a community. I think in a small town, it'd be way hard, I mean, in a big city, it'd be way harder than it is in a small town here.

The first place people actually go to ask questions is their school, and I don't know if that happens in a big city. That didn't really answer your question, but I don't really know the answer.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** You are fine, and actually, you have answered all of my questions.

**Danielle:** Well, that was quick.

**Melissa:** That was really quick. Are there any more, like anything else you're thinking, like you wanna add to any of the questions I asked?

**Danielle:** No, not really. Not that I can think of off the top of my head.

**Melissa:** Perfect. I'm going to stop the recording.

**Danielle:** Okay.

## **II. Written Response**

Family engagement is working to support both your child and your child's teacher. My responsibility as a parent is to ensure my child is ready to go to school each morning and learn. This means they've had adequate sleep, food, hygiene and emotional support. I need to work to support the teacher and what he/she is teaching and how he/she manages the classroom. If there is assigned homework or weekly tasks our family needs to make sure there is time allowed to accomplish those tasks. If my child is a behavior problem or distraction in the classroom, I need to be a support to both the child and teacher as we work to solve the problem. The more time parents can spend in the classroom, at school, or communication with teachers, the better understand they will have of their child's life and the teachers success and struggles.

## **III. Comparing Danielle's responses with Constantino's Framework**

### **A. Principle #1: A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Danielle and David's daughters' school embrace families. Parents are welcome in the school and communication is reciprocal. They have clear expectations for how families can support the school day, and they value their families' time away from school by not assigning homework until after the fourth grade.

**B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Danielle believes open communication between the teacher and the parents leads to support for the both teacher and the child in the classroom. Parents are their children's emotional supports; if something is causing distress for the child or the teacher at school because of the child, parents need to be involved to help the child and the teacher through the situation.

**C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student--their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Danielle did a lot of research before her children started school and concluded that the Montessori method is the best educational model for her children. Her oldest daughter was accepted through a lottery; and now, all of her children will be able to attend the public Montessori program in their district. The school is a small community and there is a level of understanding that parents need to be involved.

Danielle is both a visibly and an invisibly engaged parent. She has built relationships throughout the building and can be found volunteering in the school. When

at home, she helps her children complete school but wants to keep homework to a minimum. Ideally, Danielle wants her children to spend as much time as possible as a family engaging in formal and informal activities and reading. She feels it is her responsibility to make sure her children are ready to be at school and learn.

**D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

As a parent, Amber has the choice to move her children to another school if she does not believe in what they are doing. The schools, school districts, and school boards make the decisions about how and why they do what they do, and it is a parent's responsibility to support the decision.

**E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

In a small town, the school is an established, important part of the community. When there is a high school basketball game, the whole town goes and associates themselves with the school. Danielle and David's school district has breakfast, lunch, and weekend food options. Students can also get referrals for doctors and dentists from the school. When the someone has a question, they start at the school

when trying to find an answer. All in all, the more services a school has, the more established it will be in the community.

## **Chapter 7: Elaine**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** Please share your journey from our time together in college to present. So, from [sorority name omitted for the privacy of the family], to where you're living and what you're doing now.

**Elaine:** Let's see here. From [sorority name omitted for the privacy of the family], I went to school for one more year before I graduated with Finance, and a minor in Management. From there, I worked at [omitted for the privacy of the family], in their tax area before I got a full-time job at [omitted for the privacy of the family]. I was a financial analyst in various levels for well, up until 2015, and then in '15, I decided that I wanted to be in internal audit, so now I'm an auditor, which has been very interesting.

See ya! (door closing) Saying bye to my sister.

And I love it. I learned a lot about the bank, in that time, personally, I got married. I lived in [omitted for the privacy of the family] the whole time. We have, Evan and I have two kids. Erik is eight. Evie: will turn five next month already.

**Melissa:** Can you talk a little bit about what Evan does?

**Elaine:** Evan has worked, so let's see here. We're 36. Evan's worked with John Deere company for at least 20 years, so he was on the Ag side until we were getting married, and in 2004, he moved to Omaha, and got a job with Murphy Tractor, which is John Deere Industrial, and he has been there ever since May of 2004. So, and he loves it. He's moved up, there's different levels of technicians so he's kind of, I think, pretty much one of the longest guys there right now. So he's out in the field. It's great customer service.



**Melissa:** All right. Please tell about the influences that helped you choose the school that your children are attending.

**Elaine:** That comes from probably both of our upbringing. I grew up Catholic. My parents, my dad was super sick when I was getting ready to go to kindergarten, so they couldn't afford parochial school for me, so I went to public, but I still went to CCD, and was involved. My aunt was the director of religious education at St. Peter and Paul forever, and Evan grew up Lutheran.

He went to Lutheran school in his small town, through 8th grade, and there's not really a nearby high school, so he transferred over to public school for his high school education. But when he came to [omitted for the privacy of the family], we talked about, or when we were getting ready, thinking about having kids, we talked between public versus Catholic private, and my only experience was public. Evan really wanted the small school feel, and the kids to get more religious education than they would with CCD, so we toured the school, and asked for a private tour, cause I wanted to be comfortable that they're gonna get the same accelerated classes should they need them, and we found out they do need them, but we'll just start more in 3rd grade.

So, that's kind of, we just together, it was the best fit for us, so we joined the church near to our house, and have since become pretty involved with the school and the parish.

**Melissa:** Okay. So just to clarify, your son goes to?

**Elaine:** [omitted for the privacy of the family]

**Melissa:** Which is a Catholic school?

**Elaine:** Yep, Catholic private.

**Melissa:** All right. Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.

**Elaine:** Okay, specifically our situation? Not in general?

**Melissa:** What you think you and Evan should do, like what should your roles be?

**Elaine:** So I would say what we're doing. We work all closely with the teachers, the staff, the principal, assistant principal. I don't know how I did in public school, because I'm amazed how everybody knows everybody, and we are expected, which I think is great, to be involved, after school doing homework, reading. Uh, sorry, got text from one of our volunteers.

We're, as a two-parent family, because there are still single parent families within the parish, for us two parent family, we're expected to do at least 50 hours of service to the school each year, so we're involved in that respect. I guess there's just so much communication, and everybody knows what's going on. There's no question. I mean, sometimes there's hiccups, but it's minor hiccups. Like not knowing there's a dress down day.

(giggling)

I mean, that's the little things, but other than that, it's like a little community, and I think it's great, because everybody's looking out for each other's kids, too. And we're all wanting the same for our kids, so that helps. So I mean, we know we're not gonna be with another family within the school that doesn't care, or school's not important, so.

**Melissa:** Do you think, and you answered this a little bit, but do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Elaine:** Oh, absolutely. I think it's really important to build that relationship, so they understand you, and sometimes the behavior of your child is not necessarily a reflection of you. You want the same, I guess I can give an example on that. Erik and his friends were sent to detention, and we got a call from his principal, and he's just, okay, boys will boys. I have to give him detention, but I kinda understand what's going on. They were trying to see who was the strongest, so they were punching each other. They weren't in a fight. They were just punching each other, but just from him knowing Evan and I so well, and Evan working on the school grounds to make sure things are picked up or pruned, and me volunteering in the classroom, they know we would never condone that type of behavior, so I would always want somebody to give us a call with anything so we can work together.

And like right now, Evan and I tend to not talk a lot about our kids and school and boast, so to speak, because there's a lot of, we see a lot of parents who do that, and we don't wanna come off that way, but for the sake of this interview, our son is extremely smart, so with that, he has behavioral problems, and we're working with a counselor, because if he doesn't get anything perfect, or if somebody's not following the rules exactly right, he can't handle it, so we're working with a counselor and the teacher and having sessions with Gordon just to know good sportsmanship, and we're all still learning how to play the game.

So we hope that always continues. So academically, we don't have to worry about a thing, but we're working on handling things if you get something wrong. I'm not, did I answer that right?

**Melissa:** You did. Do you think your relationship with school members will change as Erik gets older?

**Elaine:** I think the relationships will just either, I think they'll get stronger. There's no doubt, cause nobody leaves, the teachers hardly ever leave, and we've noticed Gordon's kindergarten teacher's 5th grade this year, so it could be potential that they'll have a teacher again, and if we haven't, and there's only just over 500 kids in the school, so if we haven't met them yet, they likely already know about the family, and especially when Honora starts next year. So everybody always seems to know who somebody is.

And we find that a lot with all the kids involved in sports are all definitely know each other, and we can reprimand each other's boys.

(laughing)

Dude.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** How do you want your child to spend his or her weeknights and weekends when he is not at school?

**Elaine:** Okay, so weeknights we come home, well, I pick him up after school, and Erik goes to afterschool care, unless I'm able to pick him up right after school. But at afterschool care, they have, it's very structured, it's fairly structured, where they have about an hour or so of just run, playtime, burn energy, and then it's snack and homework

time, and if he doesn't get his homework done at aftercare, we do it after dinner. Or before dinner, depending on what's going on. Then, we typically have an activity, either Cub Scouts, basketball, soccer, baseball, depending on the season, and swimming. Swimming's important. But he might be getting that pretty much mastered if he doesn't wanna do competitive, if ever.

Anyway, so if there's no activity that we're pushing it on, then they'll have a little bit of downtime. Gordon is expected to do at least 20 minutes of reading every night. They encourage us to do flashcards for their math facts. Erik breezes through those fairly quickly, so he's kinda bored. Like I said, I don't tell a lot of people this, so we work on spelling. We always do their spelling, go through spelling tests and make sure he's got them all, and bonus words he has down, which are typically what's going on, like September or the month of October, or Thanksgiving, just more of a fun word as opposed to what else is going on on the list of 12.

Reading, he might get a little iPad time, or he might get a little PS4 time. Or he's heavily, heavily into sports, so if it's, well, now it's not just Monday night football. It's every night football.

(laughing)

He wants to watch. He gets to watch that before it's bedtime, and we try to have electronics off, up in bed, reading, whether he's reading to us again, or we read to him and then lights out, so. If there's an activity, there's really no play time. And I know I'm talking primarily about Erik, but I don't know how Evie really would, we intend to treat her the same way when she starts.

I mean, she's in Pre-K now. Our problem now is everything's fairly communicated, but it's a daycare, so it's not as structured. Well, it's actually pretty structured. They've been structured since birth. Seriously, they were doing Baby Can Read at six months, so they're just not as formalized with letting us know.

They test her every few months on things, and she's already mastered her sight words, and everything, so we're not too worried. But her bedtime's just a little different, because she still gets a two-and-a-half-hour nap. Which, I can't wait until that's over.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** What kinds of things do you do on the weekends?

**Elaine:** Weekends, oh, I forgot about that one. Oh, gosh, okay. Weekends, let's see. Up until last month, we had Erik's flag football games on Saturday. Gosh, there's always something going on. We were out of town, well, this is Thanksgiving, the weekend before it was a blessing because it was very low key, so putting up Christmas lights and getting ready for Thanksgiving.

And Eriks birthday.

Um, we're in Branson. What else? We'd like to take a weekend trip to go see Evan's parents, since they're out of town, when we can. But we've had Erik's flag football. I don't know. We're cleaning and running errands, or making a bunch of food, so people just come over and eat it, because we like to cook.

(laughing)

We go to church either Saturday night or Sunday morning, get ready for the week. I mean, it's different every weekend, but it's mostly family time. I mean, as a couple, Evan and I never go out. So it's all family.

**Melissa:** Should parents' thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?

**Elaine:** Um, I think that parents' concerns should be heard. Ultimately, the school needs to do what's best for the school and the kids and their own responsibility for educating the kids.

I think in certain ways, I'm sure parents can make more of a, I think all they can do is suggest, and then let it just be known, like we have the Home and School Association. They meet every month or so, but they're primarily making sure all the extra activities are getting done like the school parties, stuff for the teachers.

There's not a ton of concern that we've heard as far as decisions the school is making on behalf.

I mean, I don't know.

**Melissa:** How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Elaine:** How? I guess our school's been around forever.

(laughing)

I guess, the school has a lot of publicity. I know it's [omitted for the privacy of the family], it's kind of a bigger town, but in ways, it acts like a small town, and everybody kind of, it's recognized and they do a lot for the community, between the [omitted for the

privacy of the family] Food Pantry, and community day cleanups and things like that. So we try to do what's best in the surrounding area.

I mean, it hurts, though, because there's a lot we do, and collect, and send money for, so they can pay \$2 to have a dress down day, and it goes to something that's going on with the food bank, or we had a member of the community who has terminal cancer, so the kids got together and had a lemonade stand during recess, and all the kids could bring 50 cents or a dollar or whatever extra to raise money to donate.

I mean, albeit small, but every little bit helps, so they try to do that, and it's sad, because you get a lot of opinions on those who don't go to Catholic school, and they are very negative

as far as they don't want their, I guess there's something going on now where their tax money could potentially help the private schools as well, so they are a little bit more vocal, but I know of the crowd Evan and I stick around, we keep our opinions to ourselves, and just stay quiet.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** All right. Do you have anything else you wanna add, that you think I missed?

**Elaine:** I don't think so. We're pretty involved with the school, so I hope I answered those adequately.

**Melissa:** All right, I am going to shut off the record button.

**Elaine:** Okay.

**Melissa:** So it should go away.

## **II. Written Response**



Family engagement is when the parents/guardians are involved with a child's education. When the school has a need, the parent/guardian is engaged to step in and assist in fulfilling that need. When their student requires some attention, the parents/guardians are there to assist with getting the child the help they need. Additionally, when the school is setting goals, it seeks parent suggestions to work together to ensure both the school and parents/guardians are similar in their desired outcomes for the child's education. Overall, there is a commitment towards a child's education from their family to support the commitment on behalf of the school for ongoing future growth and well-being of the child.

### **III. Comparing Elaine's responses with Constantino's Framework**

#### **A. Principle #1; A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

A small school feel, knowing staff members well, and like-minded parents are all reasons why Elaine and Evan are confident that they have made the best school choice for their family. The school has also been able to support their son both when he is excelling academically and when he is struggling socially/behaviorally.

#### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Communication is reciprocal at this school. Elaine reported that the principal has called her to share with her information she would want to know, and she feels she can reach out to staff members at any time. She stated that the school has a lot of effective communication in place, so parents know everything that is happening at the school. There is also a strong Home and School Organization, which is another way for parents to get involved in the happenings of the school.

**C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student--their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Parents are not only welcomed in Elaine and Evan's son's school, they are required as a family to spend 50 hours a year volunteering at the school. Elaine has a routine at her home that works for her family and supports her son's school. He participates in extracurricular activities, spends time with his family, and completes required schoolwork.

**D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

Elaine and Evan believe the school will value their input, but there has not been a time or a need to share their thoughts and opinions. They do not have a lot of concern about the decisions the school is making.

**E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that*

*influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

The school reaches out to the community; for example, the students have raised money for the local food pantry and for a community member with terminal cancer while also participating in community clean-ups. However, Elaine said she has been feeling some push back from the community with recent political discussion involving tax money going to private schools.

## **Chapter 8: Kaitlyn**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** Can you see it? All right.

**Kaitlyn:** Yes, sorry.

**Melissa:** Please share your journey, from our time together in college to present. So how did you get from Lincoln, Nebraska to where you live now?

**Kaitlyn:** After college I lived down by [omitted for the privacy of the family] for about five years. Got married. Had two of my children down in that area. When they were three and two, I think, we moved up to the [omitted for the privacy of the family] area and have been here since.

And I stayed home with the girls and did real estate part time for a couple of years, while they were young, and then once they went to school I got a part time job, so I work four days a week and we had a third child who's now four, so he goes to daycare and now the girls go to school.

**Melissa:** Perfect. Please tell about the influences that helped you choose the school your children are attending.

**Kaitlyn:** They attend a school that I grew up at, [omitted for the privacy of the family], and that's where my kids go, so part of that was a big influence. I knew it was a small school and I wanted my children to go to a smaller school. I knew a lot of the teachers, so that helped. And I knew, because I had gone there, that it was a good school system. And it helped that my brother-in-law and his wife moved back to this area. Actually, it would be like my husband's sister's husband. So my sister in law's husband got a job as a superintendent up at [omitted for the privacy of the family] right

before my girls started school there, so that was another positive influence that made us decide that was a good place for our kids to go to school, because we had family in the system as well.

**Melissa:** Was your husband supportive as well about going to a small school?

**Kaitlyn:** Yes, he grew up in a small school system as well. I think he only had like 10 or 15 kids in his class, so both of us knew, from the time we got married, that we wanted our kids to be in a smaller school system, and he was supportive to move back to this area and I think we just moved back to this area, our kids would just go to [omitted for the privacy of the family], and we found a house. Our goal was to find a house in this school system, somewhere. So that was kind of the driving force of where we ended up living.

**Melissa:** Perfect. Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents, to be in your child's education.

**Kaitlyn:** I think it's important to ...Like for kids with homework and stuff. I see a lot of parents who aren't involved in their kids' homework and it doesn't get turned in and that affects everybody in the class, because they can't move forward as fast as they could be able to if everybody did their homework and turned it in, so I think parent involvement should include making sure that the kids get their homework done at night, staying in constant contact with the teachers so that they know if there's an issue in your kids' classroom or if there's something that they need to be aware of so that they can teach more effectively. Like if somebody in your family died or something like that, that you're keeping the teachers informed, so they know what's going on in your personal life.

And then also, I think it's important for parents to be active in the school system, as far as PTA groups and stuff like that, because then you get to know the other parents,

you get to know the other students that your kids are going to school with and you get to know the teachers better as well. I think that's a positive thing and an important thing.

**Melissa:** You kind of answered this already, but I'll ask anyway. Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? And explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Kaitlyn:** Yes, I think it's important to have a relationship with the teachers and staff at the school. For us it's been super easy to do that, because I know a lot of the teachers, because a lot of them were people that I went to high school with or had siblings in high school with me, so a lot of the teachers grew up in this area, so we already knew most of them, but I think it's important to have a relationship there and be able to have a good, easy conversation and feel like you can contact them at any time. I think it makes it easier for the kids and for the parents, because if they have an issue then they're not afraid to contact you, as a parent, because they already know that you're open to hearing the feedback about the student versus somebody scared to contact a parent, because the parent isn't gonna be open to listening what might be going on with the kids. What was the second part of your question?

**Melissa:** Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Kaitlyn:** I think it might change some as the kids get older, just because in elementary you have to be so involved, I feel like, to make sure that your kid is learning what they need to be learning and getting the fundamentals of ...My oldest, Kali, is really hard about making sure she gets everything signed at night and getting everything turned in to the teacher. She's just kind of a scatter brain, so I think we have to be more involved with her, because of that fact, but I think as they get older we might not be quite as involved

with the teachers, as they get to high school and stuff, just because they're more self-sufficient, but I still think it's important to have somewhat of a relationship and attend parent teacher conferences and know who your child's teacher is and be able to contact them and know if there's any issues or anything like that.

**Melissa:** How do you want your child to spend his or her weeknights and weekends when she is not at school?

**Kaitlyn:** My oldest is in fourth grade, just this year she got hit with a ton of homework. The teacher says it shouldn't take more than 40 minutes at night, but it's more like two hours' worth of homework every night, which becomes really problematic, because she has zero free time, between activities that she's doing, and I want my kids to be able to do sports and dance and things like that, but then it becomes a fine line of how much is too much, and I want her to be able to have evenings at home doing whatever she wants, being a kid.

If it's playing with some toy that she likes or watching her favorite show or something like that, being able to have downtime to relax, but this year it's been a lot of basically just homework at night, and then she gets done with her homework and goes to bed. I'd like to see it be more having an hour of just downtime to be a kid, not necessarily technology, because I try to limit that at home, because I don't feel like that necessarily using their imagination and being a kid. If they get on their iPads and that's all they do at night. We try to limit that. I would like to see them, in their free time at home, just being a kid.

**Melissa:** Should parents' thoughts and opinions make a difference in decisions that the schools are making? Why or why not?

**Kaitlyn:** That's a good one. On some level, I think parents' thoughts and opinions need to be taken into consideration. I don't think parents should decide how the school system functions and what decisions they make, because I know there's a ton of behind the scenes stuff that parents never see or hear about and they don't understand why a decision got made, because all they see is their kid and how it affects their kid. Me personally, because my brother in law is a superintendent, I hear things or he'll say, "You know, it's not as easy as the bus can't take a kid here and there or whatever, because there's so much more that goes into it."

So, I see two sides of it, and yes, I think that they should take into effect parents' opinions and stuff, but I don't think it should be 100% based on that, because I think there's a lot more, like I said, that goes into it.

**Melissa:** How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Kaitlyn:** I don't know.

(laughing)

It's important for the school to be a part of the community and just like be there and be strong and have kids in activities within the school and if everybody has some sort of connection to the school, it's automatically a part of the community and if they offer various activities for the kids to be involved in then I feel like everybody kind of becomes a member of that or they're just automatically a part of the community, because if you've got music opportunities or sports opportunities or whatever within the school it just automatically kind of a center of the community. Which in a small school, I think that's easy to do, because there's so many different things that every kid can do. In our case, the school is automatically kind of a huge thing in the community.



**Melissa:** All right. That is it. All I have left is to email you the final question.

**Kaitlyn:** Perfect. I must talk really fast or really short.

(laughing)

**Melissa:** Hold on; I can't find the stop button. Oh, there it is.

## **II. Written Response**

Family engagement is important to their child's success in school, and it is very important that all members of the family are engaged in their child's learning. This includes open communication between staff and parents, parental involvement in school activities, as well as ensuring their child is meeting school expectations with homework, classroom involvement, etc.

## **III. Comparing Kaitlyn's responses with Constantino's Framework**

### **A. Principle #1; A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Both Kaitlyn and Kevin grew up in small communities and attended small schools, and they wanted the same experience for their children. They moved back to Kaitlyn's home community where she knows teachers at the school, has family in the district, and where her brother-in-law leads as the superintendent.

### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Kaitlyn believes parents should make sure homework is completed so that the class can continue without being stalled. She also believes there should be open communication between parents and teachers so that if there is a change at home, the school is aware of what is happening and can support the child and classroom teaching can continue to be effective.

### **C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student--their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Parents should be involved school activities and organizations because it gives them a chance to get to know the schools' families and teachers. Kaitlyn would like her children do spend time at home finishing homework, participating in extracurricular activities, and being a kid. Kaitlyn struggles with the amount of homework her daughter has because she is not getting as much downtime as she needs.

### **D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

School districts should have an open door for input from parents about what they believe is best for students; however, the schools should be able to make the final decisions because they are aware of all the moving parts and what is happening behind the scenes.

### **E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

In a small town, the school is automatically the center of the community because people get involved with the community through the school district's activities.

## **Chapter 9: Teresa**

### **I. Interview**

**Teresa:** I see it.

**Melissa:** Awesome, the first question is please share your journey from our time together in college to present. So where you moved, jobs you've had, that sort of thing.

**Teresa:** Let's see, so I spent a fifth year in nursing school. Graduated in '05, no, sorry '04. (laughs) Got my nursing license, and got married. Worked for about a year. Had a baby. Worked a little bit more and then moved to the [omitted for the privacy of the family] area. Let's see, at that time, I did go back to nursing for a little while. I was working weekends, and raising children. Baby born in, so in '05, '07, '09.

In 2010, we moved to [omitted for the privacy of the family] for two years. Had a baby in 2012. We moved back with that baby to the [omitted for the privacy of the family] area. Same house we were living in before.

I guess I didn't say, but by the time, in 2009 I quit working completely. I wasn't working anymore after that. Baby in 2014, and 2016. Yeah, that's where we're at.

**Melissa:** Sounds good and you talk a little bit about when you got married and what your husband's done during that time just briefly. Touch on that as well please.

**Teresa:** Okay so married in '04, July of '04. Tim was a financial advisor for awhile. And now he's a foreign service officer for the Department of State.

**Melissa:** Alright, please tell me about the influences that helped you choose the school your children are attending.

**Teresa:** Okay, so I have a seventh-grade son, and a fourth-grade son in school. And I have a second-grade son, and a kindergarten daughter home schooling at this time. We've done a variety of other options over the years, but that's what's happening right now.

The school that my sons go to is an independent private Catholic school. We chose it because of a number of factors. But the most important one to us is the spiritual formation that we really like, the philosophy of the school in general. It's got an all-male faculty.

And these are teachers who, we have found, to be really excellent. They have to have a lot in common with the mission of the school to provide a classical, comprehensive education to the boys. They really seem to understand boys in a way that I haven't seen just in general, not just in education, but like just in general.

They, even the little guys, they have, just a really outdoor exercise balance with academics. Which I really, really like for the little ones, especially because I feel like that's, it's, research shows how kids in the United States are missing that in a lot of public schools, and even other schools too. And how it improves retention and just enjoyment of school.

And yet that the public school in our neighborhood we live in, [omitted for the privacy of the family], we have, we're in one of the best school districts in the whole United States. The schools here are excellent by the measures of standards of learning.

We have had a good experience there when we've had kids at that public school ourselves. But they get a 20-minute recess after lunch. And I just don't think that that is for kindergartners and second graders the time that I had kids there. I don't think that's

sufficient for for any child. Now they've both had, well one of them, the second grader at the time had a teacher who was getting them up and moving around in the classroom. But I just feel like, it's that she was taking it into her own hands to work with the system that she had. But yeah, it would be really teacher dependent.

The school that my sons go to now. It's called [omitted for the privacy of the family]. It's in [omitted for the privacy of the family]. The third through fifth graders, they have three recesses a day, plus PE every day. Plus they take natural history as their only science in those years. And they take a lot of nature walks.

I think they have natural history four times a week. And at least a fair part of the year, a couple of those classes they're taking some kind of nature hike.

They also quite regularly abandon class for football, or soccer, or kickball competitions against other classes. There's a lot of in school competition between groups of students, or grades, or other classes, or whatever.

So the rewards for, they tend to be based on getting outdoors. Which I think is really good. And I feel like they can expect more academically from the students because they have this really nice balance between exercise and outdoors.

And they don't have, what do I wanna say, it's a three through 12 school. And they have just one gym. Now it's not a huge school, 550 total enrollment. But with one gym, PE, and all of the kids going to PE a lot. They definitely go to PE everyday at least through middle school.

I don't know exactly what the high school requirements, what the high school classes include, because I have not had anyone. I know that high school boys can go to PE. But I don't know if they have to. But at least the third through eighth graders are all

going every single day to PE.. So they have PE outdoors most of the year. Which I think is great. I love that. I tell them to dress appropriately.

So the school choice for us, started because we had seen, we knew some of the teachers personally. We knew some of the graduates personally. And then we knew some of the families who were sending their kids there. The more, we really liked what we saw in those people, in those families as far as how they were formed in a kind of men or boy than they were, or boys they were raising. So the more we found out about it, the more we sort of gravitated towards this holistic form of education. With kind of, I feel like respecting the entire person, especially for a young male. So that was why we chose the school. That was a really long answer.

(laughs) I probably gave the longest answer so far. (laughs)

**Melissa:** You are absolutely okay. The third question today is, describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.

**Teresa:** Okay that's a good question. Let me see here. I think that my role, jointly with my husband should be to help the school to understand my child, what works for my child, what doesn't work for my child. What I'm seeing at home, so that that information can be used to teach the child in a way that is most effective.

I feel like there should be lines of communication should be open so that if something major is going on at home, that could impact the student at school.. That that would be welcome feedback, you know for the teacher, that the teacher would be interested in finding out what things are impacting the student's life.

For involvement, at the school right now, they really don't have, they don't have parents volunteering in the classrooms. But the public school that they were going to before you know, often asked for chaperones and volunteers and things. I think that's fine. It just depends on what's needed. I guess they do occasionally.

I can't think, it seems like there was a time when we had, when we were asked to volunteer. I don't mind being asked to volunteer. We also, as a private school, I think there's a greater expectation for parents to help with fundraising, and other kinds of things to support the school. Although the PTO at our public school was also doing things like that. I think there's a volunteer expectation, and that's fine.

What do I wanna say? So parent involvement, so I would say, that what I think is reasonable, is having really good communication with the teacher. The parent's responsibility to reach out to the teacher and to be receptive to the things the teacher has to say that as a parent you need to be supportive of what's happening in the classroom.

Also at home by reiterating messages that come from the teacher. And supporting and respecting the teacher at home. And then being willing to support the school in whatever way I'm able. Whether that be volunteering in the classroom, or helping with fundraiser, the other needs of the school. I don't know, is that?

**Melissa:** Sounds good.

(laughs)

Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older. Or children get older.



**Teresa:** I think it's essential. I think that any time the parents are away, or the children are away from their parents, you know they're gonna be influenced by the people they're around. And that's fine as long as everybody is kind of on the same page. And I think that the more the teachers or staff members of the school, and the parents get to know each other, the more trust that can be built up. And the greater collaboration that can happen that really benefits the students most of all.

The children benefit from having the teachers understand more fully a complete picture of what goes on in their home life. And the parents can support the child's education more completely at home if they understand what's happening at school. So I think it is important for parents and school staff members to know each other as much as possible and to be in communication, you know, at least, I don't know, a lot.

(laughs)

Not a very good answer but I do think it's important. I do, I think that staff school staff and parents benefit, the student benefits from school staff and parents being in collaboration as much as possible.

**Melissa:** Alright. Do you think it will change as the kids get older?

**Teresa:** Oh yeah, sorry I forgot that part.

**Melissa:** That's okay.

**Teresa:** I don't think that it should change. I think it gets harder logistically when there are more teachers to get to know. But on the other hand, just the growth and development of junior high, and high school students, you know, as they grow, they naturally begin to look for other sources of information. Other, you know, a mentor, a role model of some kind.

Of course you're still hoping that they're being influenced by their home environment. But you wanna have really good mentors and role models in place so that they have you know, a solid person to look to, and I think that if, that teachers are very natural, mentor for young people and that, that makes it even that much more important for parents to know the teachers that are spending time with their children.

And maybe it's not possible for everyone. But you know, especially if there's a teacher that your child seems to really enjoy, or it's a subject, or something, you know, that might be a good place to start as far as kind of helping to follow and you know, in whatever way, sort of assist a role model for your child that will you know, provide some positive mentoring.

Or just you know, a good example for them. So maybe it starts with whomever the child is most interested in, like I said. Or somebody they seem to really look up to. And you know, if a parent reached out to that teacher, and got to know them a little better. It just seems like the child is the one who's gonna really benefit from the parents and the teachers being in more contact.

**Melissa:** Alright. How do you want your child to spend his weeknights and weekends when he is not at school?

**Teresa:** Okay. So just time away from school even during the school year? The times of day he's not at school? What I want, (laughs) don't always get. But what I want is that, I want them to spend the time, several ways. Investing in their family relationships. Playing outdoors. Doing their homework and instrument practice and reading.

I would say those are kind of for me the priorities. And prayer, some time for family prayer. But that kind of falls underneath our family time.

So I would say that you know, for me the expectation is that when the kids come home from school there needs to be a plan for how they're gonna get the things that need to be done, like what homework they have, when they're gonna practice their instrument, and what work they have for the day, or for the evening.

Usually in our family it falls for preparing dinner and cleaning up dinner. In the afternoons and then on the weekends there's different you know, ways that kids contribute. In the mornings there's different ways they contribute. But there's a plan for that. So you know, kind of just reiterating what the kids, what's their plan for that day. If there's time they can go out and play with their friends. I like them to be outdoors, running around. I think it's really good even after a day at school where they had more breaks than other kids.

They still really benefit I think from fresh air and you know. Just another, and more social experience. Person to person, I feel like that's really important. And then just the benefit of being outdoors, navigating. You know maybe it's building something, working out a game.

There's a lot benefits that come from both the physical exercise, and the interpersonal relationships. I think just from being out of the house physically. Especially in the months were maybe they're not getting a lot of time otherwise. Whether it's really cold or something,

I think everybody gets kind of claustrophobic in the house all the time. So I like to see them get out for awhile. Then when they're inside, I want them to be contributing to the house. And in building up their family relationships. Also to set some time aside for praying as a family. And doing other fun things like games, or just spending time together. I think that's everything.

Did I say, homework, instrument, family, play time, yeah, reading. Oh and they should spend some time reading. Ideally, I would say I mean 30 minutes to an hour a day, I would say is my goal. Sometimes they don't, sometimes they would spend more than that if I count audio books, but some of them are more inclined to listen to something then they are to pick up an actual book. But I probably would count it all.

**Melissa:** Alright. Should parent's thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?

**Teresa:** I think so. The parents are the primary educators of the children. They're there, the parents are the ones who are ultimately responsible for their children and for their children's education. The education system is meant to support the parent's role as primary educator. As in the parent's the primary educator. The school is supporting the parent's role by helping to educate the children.

But a lot of times I feel like, what do I wanna say here. I think that some of these, I think that the problems can be a lot of times prevented with more open communication between schools and parents. Sometimes what the schools are doing. Maybe the parents don't understand because they haven't seen the research, or they don't understand why the decisions are being made.

Of course, there's gonna be situations where the parents are uninterested, and they're just disengaged. But for parents who are interested in why certain educational changes are being made, I think that information could be more available. Because I think sometimes schools make changes that don't make sense to parents. And then there's a frustration there.

Sometimes, schools also make changes the parents don't agree with. We've had some, rather divisive decisions going on in [omitted for the privacy of the family] that you know, even when parents spoke out, the school board did not take their comments into consideration, or did not give them time to respond, appropriate amount of time. I think that it, I think that it is in everyone's best interests if there's collaboration between parents and schools. And that both share what's important to them, and the reasons they came to those conclusions, and then work together.

(coughs)

**Melissa:** Sorry I'm making notes of some things.

**Teresa:** No you're fine, yeah. I think too it comes, a little bit of a, you know, maybe it's a perspective. You know, in my perspective, I said from the beginning that I think the parents are the primary educators. You know I think that some people defer to the government to take care of the education of their children. But I prefer a more holistic approach that you know, academic learning that they're doing at school is just part of the picture of developing a human being. From a child into an adult. And so that part, the parent is necessary for that part. If the school and the parent are gonna work together to help grow a child from, childhood into a productive, you know productive member of

society sounds like so cliché, but, at the same time, you know fulfilling their highest potential as an adult in contributing in whatever way is fit.

Then that takes both the school and the parents working together in collaboration. In my opinion.

**Melissa:** Alright. And how should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Teresa:** Hm, okay. So let's see. I think that one of the most natural ways is for schools to have service projects as part of what they do as a school. You know, whether that be food drives, or serving in a food distribution center, or just opportunities where service is part of what the school does. Our public school down the street, they have a day where everybody like they have all the families contribute something. And then they have the kids pack, I don't know, like hundreds or thousands of bagged lunches and then they take them to underprivileged schools.

The school my kids are at right now, they have service opportunities to help at stocking food distribution centers, and serving in soup kitchens. There's also things like coat drives. Maybe when they have a school event they ask people to also bring coats, and hats, and mittens, things like that. Some of the, it doesn't mean, I think the service aspect is important for again this holistic view of helping develop children into adults who are service minded also. So I think it's good not only for the people who are directly benefited in the community from that particular activity. But also it helps to more fully develop the child into a service minded person. I think other ways that the community

can be involved are things like having some of the events be available to the community at large.

Maybe it's a speaker, or sporting games, or a fair, or something like that. I think most of the schools I know of have one or all of those options, and probably it depends on what, whether it's an elementary, middle or high school. And then again, I think just opportunities for communities to make decisions or have a voice about schools. So school board meetings that allow parents or community members to comment on what's being taught or done in schools I think are essential.

I think, you know, we talked about service at the beginning, you know, just keeping the school and neighborhood clean. Like the environment clean as a contribution to the entire neighborhood and community because it's a shared space, and it's being a good steward of the resources that have been given or you know, are in the care of the school and the students and families who use it. Let's see, how else to be a good member, what was the actual question Melissa, now I'm sort of.

**Melissa:** How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Teresa:** Establish itself as an important part of the community. Yeah I think, I think, so I would say service and then hosting events that are open to the community, appealing to different types of members of the community and, and I'm probably forgetting something, but that's all I can think of right now.

**Melissa:** Alright well that was all of my questions. So I'm going to turn it off.

**Teresa:** Okay.

## **II. Written Response**

Family engagement is the partnership between the family and the school that aims to assist each student on his or her path to personal development, a rich education, and a lifelong love of learning through frequent communication between the parents and the school, opportunities for parent involvement in the life of the school, and the development of a strong school community.

### **III. Comparing Teresa's Responses with Constantino's Framework**

#### **A. Principle #1: A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Teresa would agree that families should be the core component of the students' success. Parents should be thought of as the primary educator and should take the lead in educating their children. Children need to be developed as a whole person; socially, emotionally, and academically. Academic education is just a piece of what a child needs to meet their highest potential as an adult.

#### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Open, reciprocal communication between the teachers and home is extremely important to Teresa. She wants to be able to establish a sense of trust between the school staff and home, to support the teacher at home, and support the child's education. Having



good role models in place for her boys is also important to Teresa, and these relationships could be a consequence of strong communication between home and school.

### **C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student-- their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Teresa and Timothy chose their boys' school because they felt like the school really knew how to educate boys. The school day has lot of opportunities for the boys to be physically active and spend time outdoors. Teresa and Timothy, as parents, have an idea of the men they would like their boys to become, and they chose this school because of other families and men they know that are affiliated with the school that they consider good role models for their children. When they are not at school, Teresa would like her children creating a plan to invest time in family relationships, socialize, contribute to the home, practice their instruments, read, and pray.

### **D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

Teresa believes there should be collaboration with schools and families and that schools should support parents as the primary educators of their children. Information should be available to parents so that they can make informed decisions about what is happening in schools. Problems could be prevented if there was more open communication between schools and home.

**E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

Service is an important aspect of helping children grow holistically that schools could encourage. Participating in food or clothing drives, stocking distribution centers, or serving in food kitchens are all ways that children can give back to the community and develop as service-minded people.

Schools could also host events that include the community. The events might be a sporting event, a speaker, a fair, or a neighborhood clean-up. School board meeting are a possibility for giving parents the opportunity to voice their concerns. Collaboration between schools and their communities is what is best for children.

## **Chapter 10: Samantha**

### **I. Interview**

**Melissa:** All right. Will you please share your journey from our time together in college to the present, talking about what jobs you've had in your move, that's it.

**Samantha:** Wow, I'm going to have to think about this for a second. So this is including jobs in college, or just after, like everything that happened after?

**Melissa:** After college.

**Samantha:** Okay, after I graduated I took a couple of victory laps, so yeah, after I got my degree I got a job within a couple of months at a company called [omitted for the privacy of the family], which I now known as [omitted for the privacy of the family]. It's an internet marketing company and it's kind of like Amazon-ish, but it's like, niche specialty online shopping. And I did a lot of data input basically, data entry for that, just an entry level job.

It didn't pay that great, but it was a job. And I did that for about a year and a half. And then I got a job very, very briefly at the [omitted for the privacy of the family] because I was heavy into running then as you might remember, and I wanted to do something kind of athletic related. But me and the director did not mesh at all. I found it was a difficult office for me to work in so... Great organization, but it just, it wasn't for me and then I actually quit, which was a lot easier then. I can't imagine quitting a job and then not having something lined up now, but I did at the time and fortunately in a few months, I got a job at my current position at [omitted for the privacy of the family]

I work in advertising compliance and make sure all our forms apply all the state and federal regulations that you have to put in any kind of advertising in order to be honest.

Yeah Sarah's crying in the background so I'm distracted. But yep, I've been doing that for 10 years.

**Melissa:** Can you talk a little bit about when you got married and what your husband does?

**Samantha:** I got married in 2009. In September of 2009, I guess, to be specific. When's my anniversary? (laughs)

And Steve also works for an insurance company, but he doesn't really do anything with insurance. He's at [omitted for the privacy of the family]in their commercial real estate department. So he does lease negotiation and what do you call it, your resolution of facility issues, all that...

**Steve:** Facility management.

**Samantha:** Facility management. There we go. (giggles)

**Melissa:** Perfect. (chuckles)

**Samantha:** Good thing he's here to help me out.

(both laugh)

**Melissa:** It should be a joint interview. So question number two, please tell about the influences that helped you choose the school your children are attending.

**Samantha:** That is a good question. Well, not really a question, but something to talk about because Steve and I were in, when we bought our first house, that was in [omitted

for the privacy of the family] and the elementary school, actually, the [omitted for the privacy of the family] Elementary School was just over in [omitted for the privacy of the family], I think? Yeah, [omitted for the privacy of the family]. And those are actually, from what we knew, really good schools.

I didn't really have any concerns, but I find in living in [omitted for the privacy of the family], there's a lot of stigma around [omitted for the integrity of the school district], which I think is really unfortunate because I have a friend who's a teacher at [omitted for the privacy of the family] at I know you taught in [omitted for the integrity of the school district] and I don't really like the, ya know, anytime you see on Facebook when people ask, "What school district is the best?" People always leave [omitted for the integrity of the school district] out and I think that's really upsetting.

At the same time though, when we were building, Steve and I decided to build a new home a couple years after Sam was born, when I was pregnant with Sarah, we were considering where to live and it was also going to be in [omitted for the privacy of the family]. And we had a choice of being in, picking a house over in [omitted for the privacy of the family] or in [omitted for the privacy of the family], and we felt swayed to be in the [omitted for the privacy of the family] just because it had such a great reputation and I think we would have been fine in [omitted for the privacy of the family], but [omitted for the privacy of the family], just...

We kinda like the location better, obviously where this house is, but we felt really confident sending him, well both our kids, to the [omitted for the privacy of the family] elementaries. But, I mean, overall we were just looking for, ya know, not huge class

sizes, you know, a good teacher to student ratio and ensure they got a really good education and were in a district that had a lot of good resources available to the students.

I don't know if that answers that well enough. (chuckles)

**Melissa:** It does. Describe what you think your child's school should expect you and your husband's roles as parents to be in your child's education.

**Samantha:** Sorry, I have a cat in my lap now. (giggles)

Our roles?

What the school expects our roles to be?

**Melissa:** Yep, what should the child's school expect your roles to be?

**Samantha:** I think any school is going to expect the parents to keep the lines of communication open. I mean, you know, the teachers and the parents, the principal, any applicable staff. It's obviously collaborative relationships. Sam's a really good example of this because he has some, I mean I'd still consider them, minor behavior problems.

More just very, very talkative, ya know, working quietly is not always his strong suit. And so I'm constantly, I told his teacher at the beginning of the year, please let me know, 'cause I think some teachers maybe don't tell the parents as frequently. I don't know, maybe some parents maybe are defensive or what not. I let his teacher know when he started first grade like please let me know if he's had a bad day. Just let me know what's going on. And so she's been really good about that, and I try to work with her to come up with like good positive reinforcement ideas, sometimes consequence kind of stuff.

Just the other day, just this past week, we came up with the idea of having him have a sticker chart at his desk, which sometimes is tough because I don't want him to stand out from other students, but his teacher and I kinda work together to come up with ways that are sort of discreet, but keep him motivated.

And I think it's essential to constantly be working with his teacher to find things, you know, instead of her just applying whatever she's always done. It's good for her to work with me and see what personally works for us at home and find ways to get that to help him at school. So, I don't know. (laughs)

**Melissa:** Alright. Do you think it is important to build and establish relationships with staff members at your child's school? Why or why not? Explain whether this will change as your child gets older.

**Samantha:** Any staff members, are far as teachers?

**Melissa:** Any staff members, it's similar to the last question.

But...

**Samantha:** I was about to say I feel like I kinda answered that.

**Melissa:** You did.

(both laugh)

**Samantha:** But, I think, I mean to answer that question, I think that year, the counselor would be another one, not just his teacher and I actually, in kindergarten, talked to the school counselor quite a bit because she ran a small group for, I don't wanna say the troublemakers, but some of the, it was kinda like a boys group, and I think there were two boys from each of the kindergarten classes.

I mean also does things like, they call it pack time, in elementary, where kids in different grades get together and they you know, do an activity or whatever.

But it was helpful for me to talk to the counselor a lot about what she was doing because that stuff, you know, is applicable to Sam's behavior. But, I mean, as he gets older, both my kids obviously, as they get older and like, when they're in high school, I'm totally okay with talking to their teachers about anything that would come up.

I hope when they're a lot older that they're really good about going to the teacher themselves and collaborating.

But, I mean, throughout school, I think it's always important to stay in contact with the teachers and have a good relationship with them just because you know your child best and that way you can, you know, help the teacher collaborate with you to see what works best for teaching your child and keeping them on task and all that.

**Melissa:** Thank you. How do you want your child to spend his or her week nights or weekends when he or she is not at school?

**Samantha:** Hi Sarah. (laughs)

**Sarah:** Hi.

**Samantha:** That's Melissa. I don't know if you can even see her. Say hi.

**Sarah:** Hi.

**Melissa:** Hi.

**Samantha:** You go play okay, I gotta talk.. Yeah okay, you can sit right over here. Okay, how do I want my kids to be spending their free time, basically, nights and



weekends? I mean, things that keep them active and help them sleep at night are always good. (laughs)

Lots of outdoor time, when the weather permits, that's real important. I try to keep them off of screens and iPads and stuff, like obviously they get to play with these things, but we really limit screen time at our house.

They do get to watch TV in the mornings when we're getting ready for work or you know, watch a movie on the weekends, or whatever. But and I think kids need to learn technology obviously but we (laughs) but we limit screens and try and teach them activities that are creative and they... I'm not afraid to let my kids be bored. Sometimes, I like them to figure out how to entertain themselves. Sarah does cause dance and tumbling, Sam's in Cub Scouts and they both do swimming lessons. Seems like the our weekends are usually filled with like a birthday party or you know, doing something seasonal, obviously, we do Santa things and all that. But yeah, I just like to keep them busy using their imagination, whether they're just coloring or building something with magnet tiles or...

At nights, we always read together. Sam is an independent reader at this point in first grade, but obviously needs an adult to help with some of those words. Usually he reads a book at night and I read a book to him.

So we, always reading, nights are full of reading. That's probably the single best thing I think I've done as a parent with them. Probably we'll do that until they're sick of me reading to them because I like spending that time with them. Excited to get him reading Harry Potter. He's not there yet, but it'll happen.

**Melissa:** Perfect. Should parents thoughts and opinions make a difference in the decisions that schools are making? Why or why not?

**Samantha:** Well, yeah, because the decisions the school makes directly affects your children and as their parent you obviously care strongly about their education and behaviors and attitudes of the school as a whole. You know, that's why Parent Teacher Organizations exist so you can find input on things that are activities, fundraising, and everything that's being done within the school.

I have yet to go to a PTO meeting, but I imagine at some point I may have a strong opinion on something, and I'll want to voice that at this meeting. But, I mean yeah, the parents are behind the children that are being educated, so their opinions are extremely valid.

You know, I'm sure I could think of some stuff that's been in the news in school districts that parents have...

What sweetie?. Shh.. It's beautiful, (laughs) lovely.

Yeah, I'm getting long winded but yes, the parents need to be heard.

Obviously, educators, many of them have been doing their job for a long time and kind of know what works and what doesn't. But the children have parents and those parents, their opinions need to be heard as well.

(laughs)

**Melissa:** How should a school establish itself as an important part of the community?

**Samantha:** I don't know why. I need more coffee.

(laughs) Obviously a school is an important part of the community because they're educating the next generation. These kids are gonna grow older and directly affect their communities.

(laughs)

I can't think of anything very profound at the moment. I mean I think a huge thing right now going on is schools working to keep bullying from being an issue. Teaching kids to be respectful and tolerant and inviting, you know, human beings.

I think that's, you know, teaching kids how to accept each other. There's so much stuff with social media and bullying and stuff right now, that freaks me out, and from what I know our school's doing a good job to try and prevent that from happening at least at the elementary level. Hopefully most of those kids in elementary are not on Instagram or what not, but who knows?

I don't know what it's like at our middle school. I imagine they have some good programs in place, but I mean I think that's a huge thing right now is teaching kids, schools need to be teaching kids to be respectful, kind people, in addition to educating them.. Obviously, the parents play a huge role in this, too, but kids are you know, different, when they're at school and not with their parents and so I think enabling kids to make good choices and be good people is hugely important. (chuckles)

**Melissa:** Perfect. I am gonna push the stop button.

## **II. Written Response**

The collaboration between a child's teachers and his or her parents/legal guardians (and siblings in some situations) to promote a healthy and supportive learning

environment for the child. Family engagement should consist of open communication and the exchange of ideas between family and educators on how to best support the student.

### **III. Comparing Samantha's responses to Constantino's Framework**

#### **A. Principle #1: A Culture that Engages Every Family**

*The collective beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, actions, and assumptions of the school organization explicitly embrace and are committed to the notion of families as a foundational core component to improvement and greater student learning and performance. The culture is reflected in actions of those in the organization, in the artifacts, and the organizational practice.*

Samantha and Steve chose their children's schools because the district has a great reputation. The schools have a lot of resources for the children, the class sizes are not huge, and the student to teacher ratio is good.

#### **B. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships**

*There is consistent evidence that effective communication and relationship building creates environments in the schools that are welcoming, respectful, and conducive to family engagement. The school places an emphasis on effective communication with every family and stakeholder within the learning community and seeks to build trusting relationships with every family.*

Lines of communication between school and home should be kept open. Parents know their children best, and teachers should be willing to work with parents to make the best decisions for their children. Having opportunities to reach out to other staff members when faced with obstacles is also helpful.

#### **C. Empower Every Family**

*Families are recognized as essential members of the learning team for each student-- their participation is welcomed, valued, and encouraged by the school. The school understands that families are important and influential resources, because they know their children best.*

Samantha's children spend their time away from school participating in extracurricular activities, playing and engaging in creative activities, and reading. She

knows her children well and collaborates with teachers and the school counselor when needed.

**D. Principle #4: Engage Every Family in Decision Making**

*The school recognizes the entitlement of families to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children. The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision making. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, educators, and administrators.*

If Samantha develops a concern about something happening at the school, she knows that she could go to a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting and her voice would be heard. Parents' opinions should be considered valid because they are the driving force behind their children. Educators should use both their experience and parent input when making decisions.

**E. Engage the Greater Community**

*The school places strong focus on building and creating partnerships external to the school. The school recognizes the strengths and talents that exist in the communities that influence student learning and development and seeks to use these to strengthen and support the school, students, and their families. It also recognizes that the school can be a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building and renewal. The school views itself as an important community asset and has community representatives on the school's governing body. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.*

Students need to be taught to be respectful and kind and how to accept others and how to value their community. Both the schools and parents should have roles in developing children into people that make good decisions.

## Chapter 11: Themes

The purpose of this dissertation is to interview parents to gain their definitions of family engagement. Each mother was tasked at the end of her interview with responding to the following writing prompt: If your child/children's school asked you for a definition of family engagement for the school handbook, what would you write?

A collective definition of family engagement, according to the mothers interviewed for this research study is: **Family engagement happens both at school and at home. Strong partnerships between families and schools form when a strong school community is prevalent, and open, reciprocal communication is established, and the whole child is developed. Parents should be valued as the primary educators of their children and their ideas should be invited and welcome in schools, and the importance of education should be supported by families at home (Frans, 2018).**

The following is support for each sentence of the collective definition:

### **Family engagement happens both at school and at home.**

- Family engagement happens inside and outside of the school. Forming relationships with staff, as well as volunteering in the classroom and during extracurricular activities, as a parent is welcomed and encouraged.
- At home, families should come together to discuss the day.
- Responsibility as a parent is to ensure a child is ready to go to school each morning and learn. This means they've had adequate sleep, food, hygiene and emotional support.
- The collaboration between a child's teachers and his or her parents/legal guardians (and siblings in some situations) is needed to promote a healthy and supportive learning environment for the child.

### **Strong partnerships between families and schools form when a strong school community is prevalent, and open, reciprocal communication is established, and the whole child is developed.**

- Work is needed to support the teacher and what he/she is teaching and how he/she manages the classroom. If there is assigned homework or weekly tasks, families need to make sure there is time allowed to accomplish those tasks. If a child is a behavior problem or distraction in the classroom, support is needed for both the child and teacher as the problem gets solved.

- When the school has a need, the parent/guardian is engaged to step in and assist in fulfilling that need. When their student requires some attention, the parents/guardians are there to assist with getting the child the help they need.
- This includes open communication between staff and parents, parental involvement in school activities, and children meeting school expectations with homework, classroom involvement, etc.
- Family engagement is the partnership between the family and the school that aims to assist each student on his or her path to personal development, a rich education, and a lifelong love of learning through frequent communication between the parents and the school, opportunities for parent involvement in the life of the school, and the development of a strong school community.
- Family engagement should consist of open communication and the exchange of ideas between family and educators on how to best support the student.

**Parents should be valued as the primary educators of their children and their ideas should be invited and welcome in schools, and the importance of education should be supported by families at home.**

- Students are the number one priority and parent/guardian involvement goes hand in hand with each student's success. Any and all involvement is appreciated.
- Teachers and administrators have an open-door policy, so parents should always feel free to stop in and discuss any concern
- The more the parents are invested in their child's education, the further that child will go.
- Schools look forward to engaging with you soon!
- The more time parents can spend in the classroom, at school, or communication with teachers, the better understanding they will have of their child's life and the teacher's success and struggles.
- When the school is setting goals, it should seek parent suggestions to work together to ensure both the school and parents/guardians are similar in their desired outcomes for the child's education. Overall, there is a commitment towards a child's education from their family to support the school's commitment for ongoing future growth and well-being of the child.

According to the derived definition in this dissertation, each of the mothers interviewed could be described as an engaged parent. Each parent follows a different set of guidelines for her family and each family formula seemed to contain different amounts of the same variables. The following themes emerged from the data collection process of this research of parents' roles in their children's education:

### 1. Parents should be present in their children's education as their primary educator.

- It's good for her to work with me and see what personally works for us at home and find ways to get that to help him at school.
- ...I think it's always important to stay in contact with the teachers and have a good relationship with them just because you know your child best and that way you can, you know, help the teacher collaborate with you to see what works best for teaching your child and keeping them on task and all that.
- ...the parents are behind the children that are being educated, so their opinions are extremely valid.
- I also like going into the classroom because I need to know who my child surrounds themselves with. And if they are in a group that maybe is not the best for them.
- And so I am trying to establish a good study habit for her. So we do that right away.
- Based on their own child, I think that a parent's input would probably be helpful.
- My oldest, Kali, is really hard about making sure she gets everything signed at night and getting everything turned in to the teacher. She's just kind of a scatter brain, so I think we have to be more involved with her, because of that fact, but I think as they get older we might not be quite as involved with the teachers, as they get to high school and stuff, just because they're more self-sufficient.
- On some level, I think parents' thoughts and opinions need to be taken into consideration. I don't think parents should decide how the school system functions and what decisions they make, because I know there's a ton of behind the scenes stuff that parents never see or hear about....
- ...I want them to spend time, several ways. Investing in their family relationships. Playing outdoors. Doing their homework and instrument practice and reading. I would say those are kind of for me the priorities. And prayer, some time for family prayer. But that kind of falls underneath our family time.
- ...for me the expectation is that when the kids come home from school there needs to be a plan for how they're gonna get the things done that need to be done, like what homework they have, when they're gonna practice their instrument, and what work they have for the day, or for the evening.
- The parents are the primary educators of the children. They're there, the parents are the ones that are ultimately responsible for their children and for their children's education. The education system is meant to support the parent's role as primary educator. As in the parent's the primary educator. The school is supporting the parent's role by helping to educate the children.
- You know, in my perspective, I said from the beginning that I think the parents are the primary educators. You know I think that some people defer to the government to take care of the education of their children. But I prefer a more holistic approach that you know, academic learning that they're doing at school is just a part of the picture of developing a human being. From a child to an adult. And so that part, the parent is necessary for that part.



- ....but that was part of the reason I didn't go back to work full-time, I am still doing 30 hours so that I can still be present in the school and have those relationships with the teachers....
- ....I don't want them to come home and hit the books and be super stressed about it, so if it's a nice day outside, we go outside and play.
- ....we are blessed to have a public Montessori, so that was really, really important to me, that my kids had. When we lived in [the larger city], I thought my kids would go to a private Montessori. It's just kind of the education method that I really believe in, and I like the hands-on-ness of it, and the teacher, I've done a lot of research....
- ....so we toured the school, and asked for a private tour, 'cause I wanted to be comfortable that they're gonna get the same accelerated classes should they need them, and we found out they do need them, but we'll just start more in third grade.
- ....it's like a little community, and I think that's great, because everybody's looking out for each other's kids, too. And we're all wanting the same for our kids, so that helps. So I mean, we know we're not gonna be with another family within the school that doesn't care, or that school's not important, so.
- I think parents' concerns should be heard. Ultimately, the school needs to do what's best for the school and the kids and their own responsibility for educating the kids.
- The school that my sons go to is an independent Catholic school. We chose it because of a number of factors. But the most important one to us is the spiritual formation that we really like, the philosophy of the school in general.
- We have an open concept kitchen, so I can make supper while they're doing some independent work, but I'm right there, so I can help them, then I'm right back in tune I guess.

## **2. Children need to spend time outside of school with their families and friends.**

- Usually in our family it falls for preparing for dinner and cleaning up dinner. In the afternoons and then on the weekends, there's different you know, ways that kids contribute. In the mornings there's different ways to contribute. But there's a plan for that day. If there's time, they can go out and play with their friends. I like them to be outdoors, running around. I think it's really good even after a day school where they have had more breaks than other kids.
- They still really benefit from fresh air and you know. Just another, and more social experience. Person to person, I feel like that's really important. And then just the benefit of being outdoors, navigating. You know maybe it's building something, working out a game.
- There's a lot of benefits that come from both the physical exercise, and the interpersonal relationships. I think just being out of the house physically.
- Then when they're inside, I want them to be contributing to the house. And in building up their family relationships. Also to set some time aside for praying as a family. And doing other fun things like games, or just spending time together.

- I want my kids to be able to do sports and dance and things like that, but then it becomes a fine line of how much is too much, and I want her to be able to have evenings at home doing whatever she wants, being a kid. If it's playing with some toy that she likes or watching her favorite show or something like that, being able to have downtime to relax.
- I would like to see them, in their free time, just being a kid.
- I want them to spend time with me. I'm a bit proponent, I hate when they come home and have hours of schoolwork, cause I feel like they were there all day. And so I want them to do either extracurricular things. We kinda keep those to, well, sort of a minimum.
- My girls both ride horses, and so that takes up a lot of our time, but it's something we can do as a family. But otherwise, I just want them, home having dinner with us, around the table and talking to us, and you know working on things together as a family.
- We were deciding what to do, and he really saw that growing up in a small town, he was able to be involved in everything. He could play a couple of sports. He could be in the band. He could do a lot of things. When I was in high school, I tried out for cheerleading, I played volleyball, I swam, and I did soccer, and all of that stuff is like well you can only be a cheerleader, you can't play sports and be a cheerleader, or it would be really hard to do that, or if you're in the marching band then you can't really be in the marching band and play football. They just sold it as you have to choose one thing, and I didn't want my kids to have to do that. If they wanted to be in multiple things, I wanted them to be involved in multiple things.
- We have a trampoline in the backyard, there's a ton of kids in the neighborhood, and I'm lucky that I'm home two days a week, and my mom is our nanny, so I'm home every day at 3:15. I know that's not typical, but for our personal situation, a typical night, would be get home at 3:15, go outside and play, and then usually we have Crossfit kids on Thursdays, we have gymnastics and volleyball on Wednesdays, so we're super busy, so I want them to be able to, how do I say it, be able to, just download from school, and I don't want that to be watching TV and playing on the phone, so that's just going outside to play with their toys for a little while. I think it's important to just be able to decompress from school.
- And we find that a lot with all the kids involved in sports are all definitely know each other, and we can reprimand each other's boys.
- Then, we typically have an activity, either Cub Scouts, basketball, soccer, baseball, depending on the season, and swimming. Swimming's important.
- Up until last month, we had Erik's flag football games on Saturday. Gosh, there's always something gone on. We were out of town, well, this Thanksgiving, the weekend before it was a blessing because it was very low key, so putting up Christmas lights and getting reading for Thanksgiving.
- We'd like to take a weekend trip to see Evan's parents, since they're out of town, when we can.
- We go to church either Saturday or Sunday morning, get ready for the week. I mean, it's different every weekend, but it's mostly family time. I mean, as a couple, Evan and I never go out. So it's all family.

- Lots of outdoor time, when the weather permits, that's real important.
- ...but we try to limit screens and try and teach them activities that are creative and they...I'm not afraid to let my kids be bored. Sometimes, I like them to figure out how to entertain themselves. Sarah does dance and tumbling. Sam's in Cub Scouts, and they both do swimming lessons. Seems like our weekends are usually filled with like a birthday party, or you know, doing something seasonal, obviously, we do Santa things and all that. But yeah, I just like to keep them busy using their imaginations, whether they're just coloring or building.
- On weekends, we try to do different activities, like soccer, my son's going to do wrestling. So I try to keep them involved in some sort of extracurricular activity to kind of burn off some extra energy.
- We play board games, we play Twister, things like that, to just have fun on the weekends.
- And then also, I think it's important for parents to be active in the school system, as far as PTA groups and stuff like that, because then you get to know the other parents, you get to know the other students that your kids are going to school with and you get to know the teachers better as well. I think that is a positive thing and an important thing.

### **3. Families and schools need to collaborate to develop the whole child.**

- ....so we're working with a counselor and the teacher and having sessions with Erik just to know good sportsmanship, and we're all still learning how to play the game.
- ...and we are expected, which I think is great, to be involved, after school doing homework, reading.
- We always do their spelling, go through spelling tests and make sure he's got them all, and bonus words he has down.
- ...and we do a lot for the community, between the [name omitted] Food Pantry, and community day cleanups and things like that. So we try to do what's best in the surrounding area.
- They, even the little guys, they have, just a really outdoor exercise balance with academics. Which I really, really like for the little ones, especially because I feel like, it's, research shows how kids in the United States are missing that in a lot of public schools, and even other schools too. And how it improves retention and just enjoyment of school.
- So the rewards for, they tend to be based on getting outdoors. Which I think is really good. And I feel like they can expect more academically from the students because they have this really nice balance between exercise and outdoors.
- The more, we really liked what we saw in those people, in those families as far as how they were formed in a kind of men or boy than they were, or boys they were raising. So the more we found out about it, the more we sort of gravitated towards this holistic form of education. With kind of, I feel like respecting the entire person, especially for a young male.

- I think that any time the parents are away, or children are away from their parents, then you know they're gonna be influenced by the people they are around. And that's fine as long as everybody is on the same page.
- Of course, you're still hoping that they're being influenced by their home environment. But you wanna have really good mentors and role models in place so that they have you know, a solid person to look to....
- If the school and the parent are gonna work together to grow a child from, childhood into a productive, you know productive member of society sounds like so cliché, but, at the same time, you know fulfilling their highest potential as an adult in contributing in whatever way is fit. Then that takes both the school and the parents working together in collaboration.
- I think one of the most natural ways is for schools to have service projects as part of what they do as a school. You know, whether that be food drives, or serving in a food distribution center, or just opportunities where service is part of what the school does.
- I think the service aspect is important again for the holistic view of helping develop children into adults who are service minded also. So I think it's good not only for the people who are directly benefited in the community from that particular activity. But also it helps to more fully develop the child into a service minded person.
- ....just keeping the school and neighborhood clean. Like the environment clean as a contribution to the entire neighborhood and community because it's a shared space, and it's being a good steward of the resources that have been given or you know, are in the care of the school and the students and the families who use it.
- However, I didn't go to school to become a teacher. I leave that to the professionals. So I usually refer to the, or defer to them whatever they think, or what they think my child needs. It's just like I wouldn't go to a psychiatrist to ask if my child has a cavity. So if I'm going to have a question about my child's education, I'm going to go the teacher and trust what they have to say.
- Well, I like, our school does a lot of fundraisers not just for the school itself, but we do, like the walk-a-thon is for, I think it's the March of Dimes, something like that. And then if there's a person in our community that's not necessarily a teacher they do fundraisers for that. So one of the bus drivers just had health issues and do they did Lollipops for Larry. So you ask parents to bring in whatever monetary donation and then all that money would go to his healthcare.
- ....teaching kids to accept each other. There's so much stuff with social media and bullying and stuff right now, that freaks me out, and from what I know our school's doing a good job to try and prevent that from happening at least at the elementary level.
- ...school's need to be teaching kids to be respectful, kind people in addition to educating them. Obviously, the parents play a huge role in this, too, but kids are you know, different, when they're at school, and not with their parents and so I think enabling kids to make good choices and be good people is hugely important.
- So I think that the school should expect us as parents to continue education at home. I know there are some people, in the neighborhood whatever that we have talked to, and they're like I've paid a huge amount of taxes, that's the teacher's

job is to teach them, and I'm sure it's the same in all school districts, like getting a lot of work as a kindergartener, first grader or second grader. They didn't seem to appreciate that because that's taking up too much time at home, but my opinion is that I want my school to want me to be involved in their education, and in teaching them at home, and my point of view is if I'm teaching them at home, or I'm positive about their homework or whatever, if mom and dad are happy and positive about homework then maybe they'll be happy and positive about it, and they'll want to learn.

- I think that unless they're making a decision that is detrimental to my kids, I am going to trust them in their profession, and their decision making. So unless I am extremely passionate about something, I don't want to say my opinion shouldn't matter, but I feel sometimes that maybe we should be like, leave it to the people who have gone to school. That would be like you coming in and I'm taking care of your mom or dad, and you're giving me your opinions, and I'm like look I've done this for 14 years, please trust me, and I want them to say we have your kids best interest in mind, please trust us, and I give them my trust...
- ...my kids school would tell us that their expectation is that we have our kids ready to be at school and to learn, and that we are doing things at home like making them read and do their math facts, and working on their spelling lists. You know, kind of those weekly things, but not the day to day work.
- I think that schools and school districts, and the school boards and all those things have to make decisions about curriculum they're gonna use and what they're gonna do, and I think as a parent, my role is to support that.
- I see a lot of parents who aren't involved in their kids' homework, and it doesn't get turned in and that affects everybody in the class, because they can't move forward as fast as they could be able to if everybody did their homework and turned it in, so I think parent involvement should include making sure that the kids get their homework done at night....

#### **4. Communication between home and school should be reciprocal.**

- ...staying in constant contact with the teachers so that know if there's an issue in your kids' classroom or if there's something that need to be aware of so that they can teach more effectively.
- ...as they get older we not be quite as involved with the teachers, as they get to high school and stuff, just because they're more self-sufficient, but I still think it's important to have somewhat of a relationship and attend parent teacher conferences and know who your child's teacher is and be able to contact them and know if there's any issues or anything like that.
- My oldest daughter, especially, is a worrier, and she's a kid who just gets herself all into a frenzy about things, and it's been so nice to be able to reach out to those different people and say, 'Hey, what was she like in this situation?' Or 'Hey, what happened here?' Just so I have some idea how to help her, and how to make her more comfortable. It also provides for better communication. When one of my kids is getting in trouble, or is sick or something's going on, I pretty regularly will

- get a text from someone in the building that says, 'Hey, this happening,' and I don't think that would happen if I didn't have a relationship.
- I feel that little bit of interaction changed our relationship so that she can be a little bit open with me at conferences. That was my perception at least, or even myself, I felt more comfortable asking questions, not necessarily questioning her teaching, but just being able to ask why did you do it this way, or why is Julia coming how saying it this way.”
  - ....luckily my daughter doesn't get in trouble a lot, but if she did I'd want to have an open line of communication with whoever the teacher was to make sure that what I'm doing at home and what they're doing in the classroom is what is best for my child.
  - I want the teacher to feel comfortable coming to me and saying, 'I think this person and this person may not be the best influences on your child. You may want to steer them in a different direction.' Or something like that. And I think going forward, that's my main concern is just who they surround themselves with, the best influence, and an open line of communication so that I can do what's best for my kids.
  - ....so I would always want somebody to give us a call with anything so we can work together.
  - I think my role, jointly with my husband should be to help the school to understand my child, what works for my child, what doesn't work for my child. What I'm seeing at home, so that information can be used to teach the child in a way that is most effective.
  - I feel like there should be, lines of communication should be open so that if something major is going on at home that could impact the student at school That that would be welcome feedback, you know for the teacher, that the teacher would be interested in finding out what things are impacting the student's life.
  - The parent's responsibility to reach out to the teacher has to say that as a parent you need to be supportive of what's happening in the classroom.”
  - “Also at home by reiterating messages that come from the teacher. And supporting and respecting the teacher at home.
  - The children benefit from having the teachers understand more fully a complete picture of what goes on in their home life. And the parents can support the child's education more completely at home if they understand what's happening at school. So I think it is important for parents and school staff members to know each other as much as possible and to be in communication, you know, at least, I don't know, a lot.
  - ....and I think that if, that teachers are a very natural, mentor for young people and that, that makes it even that much more important for parents to know the teachers that are spending time with their children.
  - So maybe it starts with whomever the child is most interested in, like I said. Or somebody they seem to really look up to. And you know, if a parent reached out to that teacher, and got to know them a little better. It just seems like the child is the one who's gonna really benefit from the parents and the teacher being in more contact.

- I think any school is going to expect the parents to keep the lines of communication open. I mean, you know, the teachers and the parents, the principal, any applicable staff.
- I let his teacher know when he started first grade like please let me know if he's had a bad day. Just let me know what is going on. And so she's been really good about that, and I try to work with her to come up with like good positive reinforcement ideas, sometimes consequence kind of of stuff.
- But it was helpful for me to talk to the counselor a lot about what she was doing because that stuff, you know if applicable to Sam's behavior.
- I think that some of these, I think that the problems can be a lot of times prevented with more open communication between schools and parents. Sometimes what the schools are doing. Maybe the parents don't understand because they haven't seen the research, or they don't understand why the decisions are being made.
- ...even when parents spoke out, the school board did not take their comments into consideration, or do not given them time to respond, appropriate amount of time. I think that, I think that it is in everyone's best interests if there's collaboration between parents and schools.

##### **5. Children should spend time reading at home.**

- And reading. I mean, we read a lot, but otherwise, I don't want them to have to do homework all day.
- At nights, we always read together. Sam is an independent reader at this point in first grade, but obviously needs an adult to help him with some of those words. Usually he reads a book at night, and I read a book to him.
- So we, always reading, nights are full of reading. That's probably the single best thing I think I've done as a parent with them.
- Oh and they should spend some time reading. Ideally, I would say I mean 30 minutes to an hour a day, I would say is my goal. Sometimes they don't, sometimes they would spend more than if I count audio books, but some of them are more inclined to listen to something then they are to pick up an actual book. But I would probably count it all.
- ...and we read a book every night.
- Erik is expected to do at least 20 minutes of reading every night.
- ...up in bed, reading, whether he's reading to us again, or we read to him and then lights out.
- My daughter and I practice reading for 20 minutes every night before bed.

Each of these themes could easily be a dissertation of its own. A researcher could approach each theme from a number of angles, different audiences' perspectives, and with a variety of different measurement tools. Educators and parents could use each theme to reflect about their own practices and develop their own formulas for

success. Therefore, the themes of this research lend themselves to food for thought rather than answers for a school community.



## **Chapter 12: Conclusion**

Family engagement needs to be prioritized on the top of every leader's school improvement list in order to build a community that is welcoming and family-friendly. Learning is most optimal for students not only when they are supported both at home and at school but when the two systems work well together. Just as every family needs to figure out how to support academic learning, every building needs to figure out what family engagement looks like for their school community. Family engagement is not a one-size-fits all plan, and it is a concept that needs to be revisited regularly to make sure the plan is continuing to support the families of the school.

A school community needs to define the role of the parent in a child's life. Over the course of researching and collecting this information and living and breathing family-school engagement, parent engagement, family-school partnerships, and community engagement, finding something tangible to suggest as a starting place for parent engagement improvement or reform has been difficult. During Teresa's interview, she named herself the "primary educator" of her children. The phrase "primary educator" is the place that all educators and parents need to personally define what that means to them and what that newfound definition means for how they educate children.

School leaders need to understand where change needs to happen and how to empower others to make a difference in the community (Fullan, 2010). After school leaders define what the term "primary educator" means to them, they need to act as a visionary and be intentional and specific about the changes that they want to make (Grenny, 2013). Each school deserves its own plan because every school community is unique. Research, including conversations with families, needs to be conducted within

each school community in order to better understand the needs of the stakeholders and their different needs. Research done at one school cannot be used to understand another school's needs (Black, 2013; Epstein, 2009; Evans, 2011).

Parents should have a voice in major decisions that are being made at a school. School leaders need to have a process for soliciting ideas from their school communities. Suggestions could include forming committees for parents, having parents sit on boards, or utilizing an electronic means for collecting information and feedback from families. Families typically have an active interest in the building. They have children that will benefit from a successfully ran school building. Families have the potential to deliver raw facts, new perspectives, and insight unavailable otherwise.

Empowering parents to be the primary educators of their children is instrumental for teachers. Teachers and parents that work together to develop the whole child will develop positive results. Communication should be on-going and reciprocal between school and home and should be non-negotiable. How this looks from classroom to classroom and family to family will vary, but there should be opportunity for children to know that their teachers and parents have a relationship that centers around them being successful.

Families at one school could be tasked with making sure that students are practicing flashcards, running around outside, establishing routines for studying, reading, and completing homework, and building background knowledge that will help build connections with what they are learning at school. In contrast, parents at another school could be asked to make sure their children are getting adequate sleep and are arriving at school early enough for breakfast. The expectations for how families support their

children will vary between schools and families within the same community. School leaders, teachers, and parents that work together and make decisions that will best benefit students will be able to determine what the best formula is for their school communities.

As educators, we need to treat parents like experts; they know the most about their children and their families. The information they hold is invaluable to schools because educators want to know children as well as possible so that they can meet every child's needs. Every mother I interviewed knows exactly what her children need to be successful, and each woman stated something worthy of reflection as both an educator and a parent.

For example, Amber brought to light that parents should be concerned about who their children are choosing as friends when she stated, "I also like going into the classroom because I need to know who my child surrounds themselves with. And if they are in a group that maybe is not the best for them."

As a parent, I need to continue having conversations with our sons about choosing friends that they enjoy being around and that make them want to be better people. I need to surround myself with people that push me to be a better person, I need to be kind to people that I choose not to have in my close circle, and I need to listen and ask questions to further understand others' perspectives. I also need to make sure that my children understand what kinds of people I trust and choose to spend my time with when I am not with the family.

In my classroom, around my school, and in meetings with other educators, my role is to model how to establish, improve, and maintain relationships. I also need to be aware of the many peer interactions that are taking place so that if parents ask, I can

discuss with them the decisions their children make regarding interactions in class. This is especially important when children are undergoing a major change or struggling with something very difficult.

“So we, always reading, nights are full of reading. That’s probably the single best thing I think I’ve done as a parent with them.” Yes! Like Samantha and her children, my boys and I love to read together. I, too, believe this is one thing I have done well as a parent and an aunt: to share the love of reading.

As a teacher, I share the love for reading with each and every one of my reading classes. I spend 10 minutes a class period reading to them from a variety of genres with hope of finding a type of book that each student enjoys. My hope is that the reading we do at school goes home and generates discussions with families. Being interested in what children are reading at school is one way for parents to be engaged with their children’s education. Conversations are a great way to build background knowledge and make connections with the reading so that recall of information is more likely.

As a parent, I enjoy going on trips to the zoo and museums, trying different parks, and reading books with my family. My goal, as a mother, is to create experiences for my children that will help them relate to what they are reading and learning at school. I also want my children to play with their cousins and their friends, I want them to go to church with our family and attend Sunday School, and I want them to help their neighbors.

As a teacher, I have decided not to give homework as an exchange for 43 minutes of undivided attention. I want my students to be able to read, write, listen, and speak during every class period they are with me. As Danielle would say, “I want them to spend it with me.” And as Kaitlyn would say, “I want them to be kids.” All in all, I will

continue to be present in the moment and give my audience the attention they deserve whether I am at home, at school, or spending time with friends or family.

Danielle shared that, “David really wanted the small school feel.” Feeling like you belong is important for both families and teachers. As a parent, I want to feel welcome in my children’s schools, and I want my children to feel like they are surrounded by people that want to build them up. My husband and I want to be confident that our children’s names are known, that decisions are being made in the school that will best meet their needs, and that if we have any concerns, we will be greeted with an open door. We want to simultaneously be a champion for our children and a member of the teacher’s team.

As a teacher, I want my students to feel safe in my classroom and comfortable to take risks to learn. As a future administrator, I know I will strive to create a village that supports and empowers entire families. A village that inspires teachers, students, and families to continuously learn and grow.

“.....so if you have a personal relationship, I think the conversation can be more open and honest.” Jasmine identified something I take very seriously. At the beginning of this school year, I asked myself to focus on extending grace and mercy to all people I interact with at work, at home, and in the community. This focus has deepened relationships and opened doors to new relationships I had not considered before. Establishing open, honest relationships can help move mountains and establish new communities. Building a community starts with establishing strong relationships.

Sometimes, experts join other experts at the table to make situations better; and sometimes, experts enjoy coming together because they thrive on continuous

growth. This is where parents and educators overlap. They need to work together to do what is best for children.

Researching and discussing family engagement with women that I respect and hold in high regards has been a blessing. The research has given me opportunity to reflect upon and improve my practice as an educator, and has me thinking about ways to improve how we run our household. Now, after having ample opportunity to be introspective, it is time for me to use this research to influence others.

The themes and ideas that surfaced in this research will be used to empower parents to be more engaged in their children's education. This will look different for each family. For one family, being invited into the school may be the push they need to start asking questions and sharing information. Another family may need to be reassured that they can be engaged in their children's education without ever stepping into the building. Engagement looks different for each family, and as a school leader I will make sure I am communicating this whenever it seems to fit; legislative meetings, strategic planning meetings, site planning meetings, parent-student meetings, and other formal and casual meetings with a captive audience. It is my personal mission to educate as many people as possible about how invaluable a resource parents are, and the need to ensure we include them when putting the right practices in place to meet the needs of all of our students.

This research is a launching pad and not an end. The seven mothers and the researcher all started out as adults in a similar way. We graduated from college and then we started our careers and families. We all raise our children in two-parent households, are middle to upper middle class, and our beliefs about our responsibilities as parents are extremely similar. When a situation of concern arises involving our children, we all know how to research to find answers to our questions, and we all feel empowered

to advocate for our children.

There are families in our communities with backgrounds that differ from the families highlighted in this research. The definition of parent engagement may vary if collecting information from fathers, parents falling in significantly higher or lower socio-economic ranges, single parent families, or families from different cultures.

School leaders, whether it be secretaries or teachers or administrators, need to reach out to families and listen to their praises, concerns, and needs. All families want to know their children are spending their school days with professionals actively seeking ways for children to be successful. In conclusion, schools and families should work together to yield the best possible results for children.

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Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

September 28, 2017

Melissa Frans, Masters of Science  
Educational Leadership  
UNO - VIA COURIER**IRB # 593-17-EX****TITLE OF PROPOSAL:** *Family Engagement: Finding Parents Perspectives*

The Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) has reviewed your application for *Exempt Educational, Behavioral, and Social Science Research* on the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable HRRP Policies. It is also understood that the ORA will be immediately notified of any proposed changes for your research project.

Please be advised that this research has a maximum **approval period of 5 years** from the original date of approval and release.

If the research is completed prior to 5 years, please notify the Office of Regulatory Affairs at [irbora@unmc.edu](mailto:irbora@unmc.edu). If this study continues beyond the five year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Signed on: 2017-09-28 12:27:00.000

Gail Kotulak, BS, CIP  
IRB Administrator III  
Office of Regulatory Affairs