

BRIDGING GAPS: THE ROLE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN BOOSTING STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN A RURAL SCHOOL

by

BREANNE SMITH

(Under the Direction of Jamon Flowers)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses action research to explore the impact of family engagement on underperforming students in a rural elementary school. It is guided by Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence theory, emphasizing school, family, and community partnerships. The study aimed to examine how specific family engagement strategies impact student achievement. It investigates the impact of family engagement on underperforming students in a Title 1 school, how families and educators conceptualize family engagement, and how rural contexts influence engagement practices. A total of ten findings and four themes emerged from data analysis throughout the study. The following themes emerged from the findings of the study: 1) The transformation impact of family engagement on student achievement, 2) Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools, 3) Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home, 4) Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources. The study emphasizes the importance of family engagement in improving student outcomes,

especially in rural areas, and demonstrates the effectiveness of action research in improving school practices.

INDEX WORDS: Family engagement, Student achievement, Underperforming students, Title 1 Program, Rural schools, Communication, Learning at home, Decision-making, Collaboration, Partnership

BRIDGING GAPS: THE ROLE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN BOOSTING STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN A RURAL SCHOOL

by

CATHERINE BREANNE SMITH

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

© 2025

Catherine Breanne Smith

All Rights Reserved

BRIDGING GAPS: THE ROLE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN BOOSTING STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN A RURAL SCHOOL

by

CATHERINE BREANNE SMITH

Major Professor:	Jamon Flowers
Committee:	Kaneshia Dorsan
	Jami Royal Berry

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2025

DEDICATION

To my family: Knox, Presleigh, Piper, and Palmer

This work is dedicated to you, the foundation of my strength and the reason behind my motivation. Knox, your unwavering love, support, and belief in me kept me grounded through every challenge. Presleigh, your encouragement to do hard things and love inspired me to push forward, even on the most challenging days. Piper and Palmer, your determination reminds me of the limitless potential for learning and growth. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and unconditional love. I hope this accomplishment reflects the endless possibilities that come from dedication and perseverance and that ALL things are possible for those who believe. Our Heavenly Father deserves all the praise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to those who have supported and encouraged me throughout this journey. First, to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jamon Flowers. Thank you for all the time you spent providing feedback, texting, meeting through Zoom, and having a listening ear. I could not have gone through this process without your support and encouragement. Thank you to my committee and UGA faculty members, Dr. Jami Berry, Dr. Sally Zepeda, Dr. Keith Simmons, and Dr. Kaneshia Dorsan. To my critical friends, Amanda and Ember, I could not have gone through this program without your continued support and motivation. Your friendships are ones I will cherish forever. To the Doctors of 2025, it has been an honor to learn alongside all of you, and I am blessed to call you all fellow Doctors of 2025.

To my Principal, Mrs. Bray, for her unwavering support and leadership, thank you for inspiring me to pursue my goals with determination and focus. To Ms. Prata, my talented editor, your keen eye and dedication have been invaluable throughout this process. To Ms. Bates your encouragement, guidance, and support through engaging every family have meant the world to me. To Mrs. Crowder, thanks for helping make my innovative communication strategies a reality with your unique expertise.

To my dear friends, Laura, Erin, Carrie, Britney, Mary Beth, and Courtney: I could not have done this without your help, encouragement, and friendship. Y'all have been my ultimate cheerleaders and my source of strength during challenging times. Your consistent prayers were not taken for granted. They were felt and appreciated. I love and appreciate you all so much.

To my family—Knox, Presleigh, Piper, and Palmer—thank you for your love, patience, and understanding. To my extended family—Mom, Dad, Caitlyn, Cristi, Claudine, and Howard—thank you for stepping in to help with my children while I wrote, studied, or attended class. Your support has made this achievement possible.

Finally, I thank my Heavenly Father for His many blessings and the opportunities that have come my way throughout this process. This accomplishment is not mine alone; it is shared with each of you who have helped me along the way.

With gratitude,
Breanne Smith

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Logic Model	12
Overview of the Methodology	13
Interventions	16
Significance of the Study	17
Organization of the Dissertation	18
2 REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	20
Family Engagement	21
Theoretical Framework.....	29
Barriers to Engagement.....	30

Family Engagement and the Leader's Role	35
Family Engagement Strategies	38
Implications.....	44
3 ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	48
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design.....	49
Overview of Action Research Methods	50
Action Research Design.....	53
Context of the Study	62
Data Sources	69
Data Collection Methods	72
Interventions	77
Data Analysis Methods	79
Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability	81
Subjectivity Statement	83
Limitations	84
Chapter Summary	85
4 FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE	86
The Context.....	87
Findings from the Case	98
Action Research Cycle One	100
Action Research Cycle Two	115
Final Interviews	126
Action Research Team Artifacts.....	128

Chapter Summary	130
5 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE.....	133
Overview of Key Findings and Themes	134
Introduction to Analysis.....	136
Research Question 1	140
Research Question 2	149
Research Question 3	154
Research Question 4	158
Chapter Summary	161
6 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES	165
Summary of Findings and Themes	166
Limitations of the Current Study	175
Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners and Researchers	176
Implications and Recommendations for Policy	178
Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts	179
REFERENCES	181
APPENDICES	
A University of Georgia Consent Form: Action Research Design Team.....	200
B University of Georgia Consent Form: Action Research Implementation Team and Participants	201
C Interview Protocols	204
D Focus Group Protocol	207

E	Family Engagement Questionnaire.....	208
F	University of Florida Literacy Institute At-Home Learning Activity.....	214
G	Student Support Team Meeting Protocol.....	215
H	Weekly Tracker Form.....	216
I	Family Guide to MTSS.....	217
J	Parent Power Newsletter.....	218
K	Family Resources	219

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1: Action Research Design Team Members	59
Table 3.2: Action Research Implementation Team	61
Table 3.3: Action Research Timeline	62
Table 3.4: Georgia Milestones Weighted Achievement	67
Table 3.5: Interview Question Sample.....	74
Table 3.6: Interventions for the Study	78
Table 3.7: Steps of Thematic Analysis and Establishing Trustworthiness	81
Table 3.8: Triangulation of Research Methods.....	83
Table 4.1: Action Research Design Team Experience	98
Table 4.2: Action Research Initial Interviews	101
Table 4.3: Action Research Cycle 1 Meetings.....	103
Table 4.4: Action Research Cycle 2 Meetings.....	116
Table 4.5: Action Research Final Interviews.....	127
Table 4.6: Alignment of Research Questions and Data Sources to Theoretical Framework	131
Table 5.1: Summary of Research Questions Linked to Findings and Themes	138
Table 5.2: Summary of Themes Connected to Research Questions and Theoretical Framework	
141	
Table 5.3: Major and Minor Codes by Research Question.....	142
Table 5.4: Triangulation Matrix.....	142

Table 5.5: Cycle 2 University of Florida Literacy Institute Progress Monitoring Data	145
Table 5.6: Cycle 2 FASTBridge Progress Monitoring Data.....	146
Table 5.7: Winter MAP Reading Benchmark Assessment Data	147

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory	12
Figure 1.2: Logic Model for the Study	13
Figure 3.1: The Action Research Process	52
Figure 3.2: The Spiraling Nature of Action Research	54
Figure 3.3: The Logic Model	56
Figure 3.4: Phases of Thematic Analysis	80

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many families remain unaware of the significant impact their engagement in their child's educational experience can have on academic achievement. Consequently, the relationship between family engagement and academic achievement has been an area of research globally (Boonk et al., 2018; Epstein, 2019; Roy & Giraldo-Garcia, 2018). Since academic achievement is a primary goal of education, enhancing family engagement is crucial for fostering student success (Erdem & Kaya, 2020). Thus, researchers continue actively exploring strategies, techniques, and methods to strengthen family engagement, aiming to boost student academic outcomes.

Family engagement strongly predicts a student's educational success and is not a new concept (Coady, 2019). Research shows that academically underperforming students benefit the most from family engagement, as they often struggle with low self-confidence, which impacts their academic and behavioral performances. Engaged parents can encourage and help their children believe in their ability to succeed (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Additionally, students praised for their efforts are more likely to take risks and have fewer insecurities (Brock & Hundley, 2016, pp. 117–128). Therefore, family engagement is a concept that schools should embrace as a critical component to achieving academic success (Constantino, 2015; Epstein, 2016).

Given the strong correlation between family engagement and academic achievement, it is imperative for schools to actively implement activities that foster learning at school and home

(Erdem & Kaya, 2020). However, many families face challenges adequately supporting their children academically for various reasons, as Hall (2020) noted. In this context, educators played a crucial role in equipping families with the necessary techniques and resources to support their students in learning at home. Families that created a conducive home learning environment and communicated high expectations have significantly impacted their students' academic achievement.

Mapp and Bergman (2021) advocated for a model where students thrive when families are empowered as true partners in their children's education. Engaged parents, as highlighted by Cai et al. (1997) and Mapp and Bergman (2021), were likely to have higher educational expectations and aspirations for their child's future education. However, it is important to note that the physical location of the family entity, such as distance from school, was a significant factor in understanding academic achievement, and the setting in which a school, family, and child reside influences performance (Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

COVID-19, Rural Areas and Family Engagement

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional family engagement practices positioned parents as school volunteers, emphasizing how families can engage with schools (Sugrue et al., 2023). However, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed schooling in the United States, and schools have been seeing adverse effects on family engagement since the pandemic. The pandemic's impact on family well-being, including stress and mental health issues, reduced parents' capacity to engage actively in their children's education (Prime et al., 2020). In addition, economic challenges brought on by the pandemic, such as job loss or financial instability, have limited parents' ability to provide necessary resources and support for their children's education (Calarco et al., 2020).

Educators, specifically rural educators, have used the pandemic as a gateway and considered the practices used during that time to be carried out post-pandemic to continue engaging families in various ways (Wilinski et al., 2023). Rural leaders have leveraged this unique opportunity of federal COVID funds to create cooperative strategies to engage families (Georgia Partnership of Education, 2022, pp. 59–65). In addition, rural learning networks have also demonstrated that rural leaders have leveraged groups that meet based on shared interests and discover practices by learning and doing (Georgia Partnership of Education, 2022, pp. 59–65). These rural communities often have mutual interests and a common purpose, resulting in opportunities for shared goals. Educators conceptualized the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink educational experiences for students and families to ensure all children are successful (Wilinski et al., 2023).

Family Engagement in Rural Areas

A layer of complexity exists when families live in rural areas. Although poverty is often associated with urban areas, poverty in rural America is higher than in urban areas (Lavalley, 2018). Rural poverty has impacted reading scores due to the influence of families on literacy. Research shows that rural students begin school with lower reading achievement (Lavalley, 2018). This could result from limited partnerships with community organizations that support education and early intervention. The limitation of lower reading achievement could result from the lack of community support in rural areas.

In addition, rural schools found it hard to staff and retain teachers due to the lack of resources and lower pay (Jerald, 2002). In addition, Green and Letts (2007) introduced the term “place and space” as a barrier to family engagement. Place and space determined resources, language support, families’ physical presence in the school, and technology. Rural schools faced

these severe challenges from isolated areas lacking resources (Hayes et al., 2021). Some additional challenges included teacher instability, salary differences, and school climate (Williams et al., 2021). These are strong predictors in high-poverty schools.

The Southside School District faced some of these same challenges as other rural schools. Two examples are families' physical presence in the school due to distance from the school and lower salaries than neighboring districts. Schools in rural areas are often farther from homes due to the amount of farmland in these areas. In addition, this impacts Southside Elementary School because the radius of the SES district spans over 20 miles. Therefore, it is more difficult for families to attend engagement opportunities. Lower salaries in rural areas are also a challenge for rural schools. Due to the lower tax base in rural areas, local school funds are limited. Therefore, local supplements for teacher salaries are lower than in urban school districts with a more extensive tax base.

In addition, the rural student body in America is changing. There is an increased poverty rate, migrant families, poorly educated parents, and single-parent homes in rural communities (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). LaValley (2018) found that poverty in rural America is higher than in its often-associated urban areas. Finally, economic changes in rural areas, such as job opportunities or downturns in specific industries, have impacted family dynamics and the availability of parents for engagement activities (Probst et al., 2018).

According to Probst et al. (2018), some rural communities experienced population decline and declining school enrollment. Therefore, to maintain essential services, schools must diversify their offerings, such as sharing resources or parenting with community organizations (Probst et al., 2018). In close-knit rural communities, individuals could be more hesitant to seek help for personal or family issues due to concerns about confidentiality and stigma. This has

made identifying and addressing needs challenging (Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, quality relationships that promoted trust between the home and school in rural settings were necessary. Establishing trustworthy relationships has opened up more opportunities for mutual support, resulting in families receiving the essential services they need.

The Problem

For more than two decades, researchers have documented families' critical role in impacting a child's educational success and connected family engagement as a primary influencer in children's academic outcomes (Constantino, 2015; Epstein, 2016; Povey et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the degree of family engagement in education was a significant concern among educators in rural areas. In earlier years, some researchers, such as Jacobson (2002), found that some educators might view parents as incapable of making a difference in their child's education because of their lack of academic vocabulary or educational background. The predictors of family engagement were the ability of the families to create a positive home learning environment, communicate high expectations, and become involved in their child's schooling (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

According to Erdener and Knoepfel (2018), family engagement in rural areas was limited due to various barriers such as time, resources, capacity, and demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics had a significant effect on engagement in education (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Families living in poverty were less likely to be as engaged as their more affluent counterparts because these families lacked the time and money to provide resources for their children and the school (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). In rural settings, parents often lack the capacity (i.e., face many competing demands) and resources (i.e., time, money, adequate supplies, lack of reliable transportation) to support their child's education (Rodrigues, 2020). In

addition, meaningful family engagement requires specific approaches carefully attuned to the local community's needs (Sugrue et al., 2023). Therefore, rural area educators must be even more intentional in building partnerships with families (Coady, 2019).

Family engagement has been shown to profoundly affect underperforming students, offering a pathway to improved academic outcomes and overall well-being. Research has indicated that when families are actively engaged in the education of struggling or underperforming students, several positive outcomes emerge, such as higher attendance rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006) and improved homework completion (Fan & Chen, 2001). High-quality education combined with strong family engagement generated long-term benefits for children. It reinforced and supported families as a critical role in their child's development and educational experience (Weiss et al., 2018).

Overview of Research Site

Southside Elementary School (SES) was a Title I public elementary school in a rural county with approximately 31,000 people. The school comprised 508 kindergarten to fifth graders. The student population was 81% white and non-Hispanic. Other race/ethnicities represented are Asian (2%), Black (5%), Hispanic (8%), and two or more races (4%). Seventy-one percent of students received free or reduced lunch at Southside Elementary School; thus, many families lived at or below the poverty level. In addition, 37% of the student body at SES was considered underperforming and qualified for the Early Intervention Program. These students were performing below the 30th percentile on the MAP and FAST assessments in reading, math, or both.

Family engagement has been an area of concern since the COVID-19 pandemic at Southside Elementary School and intensified since the return to normalcy. It was common for

families to attend open houses at the beginning of the year and attend parent breakfasts with students. However, engaging the families in academic activities and educational decisions in various ways throughout the year was challenging. In addition, impressing the importance of attendance at school was difficult for the faculty at Southside Elementary School. Examples of engaging families included participating in school fundraisers, attending school events, and providing survey feedback. However, the COVID-19 pandemic affected families being present in the building for conferences, meetings, and other academic-centered events amongst teachers and families. Title 1 data from events held post-COVID-19 at school showed a decrease in the number of parents and families in attendance at Title 1 family events compared to events held pre-COVID-19. Therefore, increasing family engagement in differentiated ways was necessary.

Improving family engagement was a part of Southside's school improvement plan during the 2024-2025 school year. During the 2023-2024 school year, professional learning centered on increasing family engagement at SES. One professional learning opportunity equipped teachers to engage parents in implementing the new English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum, Wit and Wisdom. Informing families of the new ELA curriculum provided families with an opportunity to participate in an interactive lesson in which their child participates daily. In addition, Southside Elementary School implemented family engagement strategies such as a Family Engagement Literacy Night and an English as a Second Language Informational Night. Administrators, teachers, and parents worked together to create strategies for engagement by providing families with various opportunities to engage in children's academics at school and home.

To increase opportunities for families to be engaged in the 2024-2025 school year, teachers were required to communicate with parents in two-way communication at least once a

month verbally or through written communication. In addition, during the 2024-2025 school year, several events were planned for families to be involved with their children in the school setting without other obligations. For example, parent breakfast, holiday market, and the Spring Fling allowed families to be present in the building. These events allowed families to attend a school event either during school hours or after hours with their children. Therefore, relationships with families were established in hopes of future opportunities for shared responsibility in educational decision-making. The leadership at Southside Elementary School and the Action Research Design Team felt that if families began attending various events and became more involved in activities, they would become comfortable participating in academic conversations. Therefore, they would be more likely to engage with the school's and students' educational decisions and participate in at-home learning with their children.

Purpose of the Study

This study gained perspectives from parents and educators on the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school in the southeastern United States. The focus was guided by the following question: How do family engagement strategies influence academic achievement in rural education? This question was instrumental in shaping the specific research questions that guided the purpose of the study.

The following research questions guided the inquiry:

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?

2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following key terms are defined:

“Student achievement”- is a multifaceted construct that can address different learning domains, often measured in many ways and for distinctly different purposes. It should always include descriptors that clarify the specific learning goals that were the focus of instructional activities and that students were expected to attain (Hattie & Anderman, 2013).

“Underperforming students”- students who qualify for Early Intervention Program services and are at risk of not reaching or maintaining their academic grade level based on their performance on state or national assessments or performance measures in English/Language Arts/Reading, Mathematics, or both (Georgia Department of Education, 2023).

“Family engagement”- is defined by the United States Department of Education as the participation of parents and educators in “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (United States Department of Education, 2015).

“Title 1 Program”- is a program that provides federal funds through the Georgia Department of Education to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high numbers or percentages of children in poverty to help ensure that all children meet challenging

state academic content and student academic achievement standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2023).

“Rural schools”- low-wealth school districts with low student populations in high poverty/distressed regions of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2023).

“Communication”- regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities (United States Department of Education, 2015).

“Learning at home”- providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein, 1995).

“Decision Making”- including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives (Epstein, 1995).

“Collaboration” - actively allows the community to contribute their services (Denessen et al., 2009).

“Partnership” - means that schools and families share responsibilities for children through overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

This action research focused on the effect of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students. The level of engagement of families in rural settings with students qualifying for Early Intervention Program services and performing below the 30th percentile on the MAP assessment was an area of concern for Southside Elementary School. Therefore, research on the topic was needed to see the impact of family engagement strategies on student achievement. The theoretical framework for this action research was adapted from Joyce Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory. Epstein (2011) focused on the school,

family, and community partnerships with the students in the center. Students feel cared for and encouraged to work harder when they are the main focus of the school, family, and community (Epstein, 2011).

Epstein's (1987, 1992) theory of overlapping spheres of influence combined psychological, educational, and sociological perspectives on social institutions to describe and explain the relations among parents, schools, and local environments. The three spheres were family, school, and local community; the overlapping spheres represented the partnership between these three entities, with the child at the center as the focal point (Yamauchi et al., 2017). The child's role in the school and family partnership was crucial in the model of the overlapping spheres (Epstein, 1992). The family circle centered around the family's influence on a child's education. Families were essential to their child's education across grades (Epstein, 1992). The school circle focused on the school's impact on the child and the influence on family engagement. The community circle referred to the child's home and school contexts and the wider local community of business (Epstein, 1992), in this instance, a rural environment.

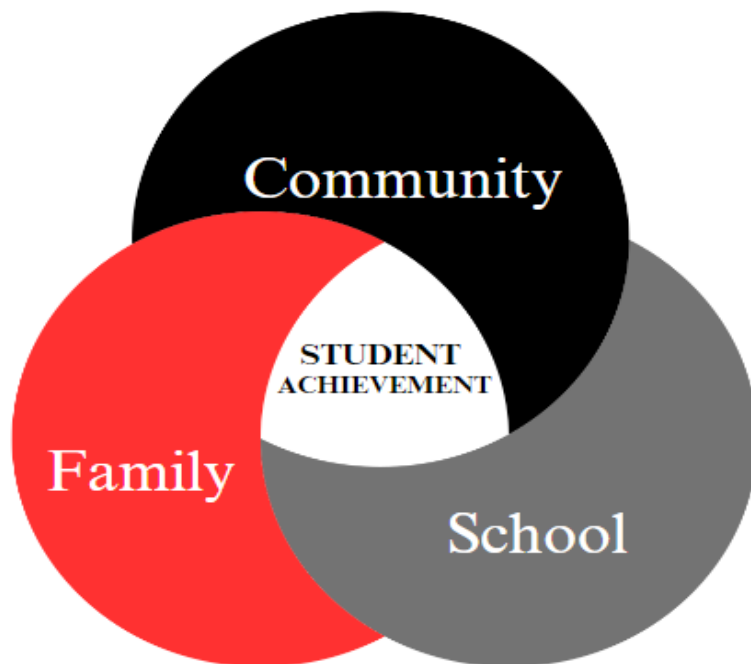
The effective connections between the spheres of influence contributed to students' academic achievement (Epstein, 1992). Therefore, this study focused on the effect of family engagement on student achievement. Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence framework will be further discussed in Chapter 3. Figure 1.1 represents the theory of overlapping spheres of influence.

Epstein's (2019) comprehensive model recognized that the most significant favorable influence on a student's educational development occurs when the three primary spheres do not operate independently; instead, they operate interdependently (Epstein, 2019). In addition,

Epstein (2010) found that students are a critical component for the success of the partnership between families, schools, and community partnerships, and thus, they are the center.

Figure 1.1

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory



Note: Adapted from Joyce Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (2010)

Logic Model

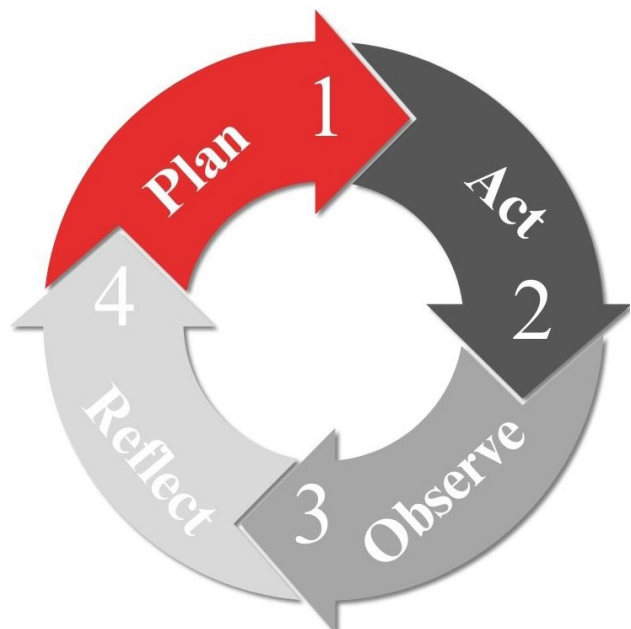
The logic model in Figure 1.2 from Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) action research model guided the study to examine how family engagement strategies impacted the achievement of underperforming students. This model provided an opportunity for improvement in family engagement, and the framework allowed school personnel to engage with the process to guide their work.

The foundation of this study was predicated on the idea that teachers and families construct their ideas of family engagement. The current study examined how educators

implemented specific family engagement strategies to impact student achievement. Stage one of the processes was the planning stage. During this phase, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) reviewed related literature and data to create a plan for improving the engagement of families of underperforming students. The second stage was the implementation process. During this process, the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) implemented the interventions based on the intent of the literature. In stage three, the Action Research Design Team observed the implementation process and made note of successes and adaptations that needed to be made. During the fourth stage, the ARDT reflected on the notes made during the evaluation process and determined the next steps. The results, reflection, and evaluation from the first action research cycle were used to make decisions for the second research cycle.

Figure 1.2

Logic Model for the Study



Note: Miriam and Tisdell Model of Action Research (2016)

Overview of Methodology

In an educational context, action research aims to be a viable tool for educators to utilize elaborate and significant approaches to solve problems in school settings (Glanz, 2014). Action research traditionally relates to the work of Lewin (1946) and incorporates a cooperative change management approach that produces original information. Action research has become a popular way to involve practitioners, such as teachers and administrators, to better understand their schools and workplaces (Glanz, 2014). It includes a process involving individual reflection on practice and is used to guide improvement in specific schools (Allen & Calhoun, 1998). Therefore, action research is applied research that practitioners use in educational settings to improve practices.

In the context of this study, the primary action researcher and student support team used the literature surrounding family engagement strategies to create action steps and a plan to improve family engagement at a Title I elementary school in a rural area. The researcher, elementary school principal, and other school personnel served as the design team. The researcher and the student support team served as the implementation team. The Action Research Design Team sought to enhance family engagement by exploring parental engagement strategies that led to actionable change based on the expressed concern from faculty and staff.

Action Research was a suitable methodology for this study because it allowed for collaborative problem-solving, reflection-in-action, and an inside-out research approach. According to Glanz (2014), reflection-in-action occurs when educational leaders reflect on their work and consider the successful practices and areas that need improvement. In addition, Benjamin (2014) argued, “data can lead to knowledge, knowledge to right action, and action to improvement” (p. 45). School improvement, as described by Walters (2014) discussed school

improvement as an “inside-out” approach. This allows practitioners to accept ownership of the enhancement process through professional examination as the schools become learning institutions for staff and students. Each school employee, parent, or guardian believes differently about what parent engagement should look like, and there are varying definitions of parent engagement from educators and the family unit. Therefore, support and strategies were needed to increase parental engagement in a Title I rural elementary school.

In addition to action research being a suitable methodology, it provided a space for the researchers, parents, and the Action Research Design team at Southside Elementary School to reflect on the challenges families face that hinder them from their ability to be actively engaged in their children’s education. It allowed for the learning taking place to be put into action and an improvement in practice. Action research was also a robust methodology that allowed the school leaders at Southside Elementary School to make decisions that supported and enhanced the engagement of families. School leaders are faced with many choices every day. However, Glanz (2014) notes that “decisions are made more intelligently and equitably” when grounded in action research (p. 11).

The integrity of a systematic problem-solving process for site-based school improvement relies heavily on the collaboration of the researcher, the Action Research Design Team, and the Action Research Implementation Team. These three entities work together to bring about change through action research (Allen & Calhoun, 1998). At the heart of action research, reflection, refining, and improving practice is essential to seeing positive change (Glanz, 2014).

The Action Research Design and Action Research Implementation Teams worked together throughout the study to implement family engagement strategies in a rural elementary school. Data from surveys, observations, interviews, focus groups, and attendance at student

support team meetings and conferences were analyzed to guide the Action Research Design Team in creating intervention strategies based on suitable literature. The two research cycles provided adequate time for implementing the parent engagement strategies and time for reflection. Surveys and questionnaires were distributed to teachers, faculty, and parents to gain appropriate perspectives and evidence to support the need for effective engagement strategies. In addition, interviews were held with participants to gain better insight into effective strategies. Bi-weekly meetings were held with the Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team to create an open dialogue around the need to increase family engagement.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study incorporated numerous qualitative methods.

These methods included:

1. Document Analysis of the following documents- the history of family engagement with underperforming students (signed meeting notices), progress monitoring and benchmark data, sign-in sheet artifacts, meeting minutes, and parent survey and questionnaire data.
2. Focus group conducted with the Action Research Design Team and Implementation Teams at the mid-point of the study to gain perspectives about the progress of the effects of family engagement strategies on student achievement;
3. Interviews with parents, teachers, and members of the student support teams after each meeting.

Intervention

The primary interventions of this action research study were adapted from Epstein's (1995) work on parent engagement. The components included at-home learning, communication,

collaborating with the community, and decision-making. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) reviewed the literature to provide the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) with best practices for increasing family engagement at Southside Elementary School. The Action Research Design Team included the primary researcher, principal, school counselor, interventionist, early intervention teacher, family engagement coordinator, and school librarian.

The Action Research Implementation Team comprised the primary researcher, the family engagement coordinator, and four teachers. The team provided families with an at-home learning activity to reinforce academic interventions at school. In addition, the parent engagement coordinator provided each family with in-person training on implementing the activity at home. The strategies were introduced during the planning stage of each cycle. During the acting and reflecting stages, the Action Research Implementation Team received feedback and support during the implementation process to make appropriate adjustments during the next cycle.

The interventions included a variety of effective practices aimed at increasing family engagement. The first was implementing at-home learning experiences for families of students with a student support team. The second intervention was implementing consistent two-way communication with parents and providing decision-making opportunities by rewriting our Student Support Team meetings protocol. Interventions also included providing families with academic resources and incorporating community resources and support. The interventions were implemented after data analysis from parent participation in conferences and meetings of underperforming students at Southside Elementary School. The interventions were designed to encourage families, schools, and communities to partner to ensure all students' success at SES.

Significance

Parent engagement positively and significantly correlates with students' academic achievement (Rodrigues, 2020). However, there is an ongoing concern among educators regarding responsive, equitable, and effective ways to engage with families, mainly post-COVID-19 in rural settings (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019; Knisely, 2011; Leo et al., 2019). In addition, family engagement was highlighted as a core component of education in the United States because of its effect on children's academic success (Gross et al., 2020). Parents have taken responsibility for the learning process by engaging with their children in the household and extending engagement to schools and communities (Gross et al., 2020). However, they may not know how to get involved or understand the processes taking place at school (Hall, 2020).

This research added to the research on family engagement in rural areas by focusing on the effects of family engagement strategies on underperforming students in rural elementary schools, grades kindergarten through fifth. There is limited research when searching for studies specific to rural, low socioeconomic, predominantly white populations. Therefore, research addressing the specific challenges of engaging families of underperforming students in a rural area with white students living in poverty is sparse. This action research added to the limited research and data in the literature.

Family engagement has been considered essential to a student's education since the 1960s (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). However, families often felt they were never invited into the classroom to learn how to contribute to their child's academic success (Hall, 2020). Therefore, this study sought to implement engagement strategies to increase family engagement of

underperforming students in a rural elementary school by providing relevant opportunities for engagement.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the study of this dissertation and outlines the research questions, the problem of practice, and the methods for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature for the research study and discusses the importance of parent involvement in education and the impact of implementing parent engagement strategies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology involved in action research and the qualitative methods related to this study and strengthens the study's context. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the action research case.

Chapter 5 details the Analysis of Findings from the Action Research Case based on the action research cycles related to the research questions that guided this study. This chapter also describes and analyzes the interventions the researcher and the Action Research Implementation Team implemented. Chapter 6 summarizes the study, discusses the findings from the research questions, and offers implications for school leaders and further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study focused on the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school. Its focus was guided by the following question: How do family engagement strategies influence academic achievement in rural education? This question was instrumental in shaping the specific research questions that guided the study's purpose.

The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?
2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

This chapter reviews the literature on family engagement in rural areas. It has four major topical sections. The first section provides context to family engagement and its effects on student achievement. It also focuses on the varying definitions of parents and educators. The second section offers insight into family engagement in a rural area. The third section examines the barriers that impact the engagement of families in rural areas. Finally, the fourth section

discusses specific engagement strategies in the literature that have positively impacted family engagement and their implications.

Search Process

The literature used to inform this action research study was limited to empirical studies and research, research and conceptual papers, and peer-reviewed articles focused on family engagement. The purpose of the limited research was to ensure a degree of adequacy in finding literature relevant to the research problem and the purpose of the study. Specific studies were identified through a search of literature using keywords and phrases. The keywords and phrases included combinations of parent engagement, family engagement, underperforming students, rural areas, barriers to family engagement, and family engagement strategies. Date filters were applied in most searches to be within five years; however, various years were included to inform the reader of the history of family engagement and how it evolved over time.

A separate search was conducted to examine the theoretical framework used for this study. The researcher chose Joyce Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence as the framework because it closely aligned with the study's purpose. However, the researcher adapted the framework better to fit the study's focus on student achievement. Epstein (1995) emphasized the focus on improving family engagement and the impact on the student, while this study seeks to improve student achievement.

The review of literature is presented under (a) Family Engagement, (b) Theoretical Framework, (c) Barriers to Family Engagement, (d) Family Engagement and the Leader's Role, (e) Family Engagement Strategies, and (f) Implications.

Family Engagement

Historical Context of Family Engagement

Family engagement in education has evolved significantly and is not a new concept. Family involvement in education during the early 20th century primarily revolved around parental control and discipline. Parents were expected to enforce rules and maintain order within the home to support their child's education (Schultz et al., 2011). The 1950s and 1960s saw a shift in the perception of family involvement. Researchers like James Coleman began emphasizing the importance of parental attitudes and aspirations for their children's academic success (Coleman et al., 1966).

However, the 1970s and 1980s marked a significant shift towards recognizing the role of parents as partners in education. In the 1990s, the federal government in the United States passed the Improving Schools Act, which included provisions for parental involvement. This legislation underscored the importance of family-school partnerships in improving educational outcomes (United States Department of Education, 1994). Joyce Epstein's influential framework, which introduced the concept of Six Types of Parental Involvement, laid the foundation for the modern understanding of family engagement in schools (Epstein, 2011).

The 21st century saw an expansion of family engagement efforts, with a growing emphasis on two-way communication, collaboration, and shared decision-making between families and schools. Technology, such as online portals and email, has made it easier for parents to stay informed and engaged in their children's education (Rodgers, 2020). In recent years, we have witnessed the recognition of the importance of culturally responsive family engagement. (Rodgers, 2020). Researchers and practitioners increasingly acknowledged that family engagement strategies must be tailored to unique cultural backgrounds to be effective (Moll et

al., 2001). Family engagement has evolved throughout history from focusing on control and discipline to a more inclusive and collaborative partnership between families and schools.

Historically, family engagement was defined broadly (Gross et al., 2020). The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (n.d.) defines parent engagement as a shared responsibility to actively support children's learning and development. Although this definition reflects a joint commitment between schools and families, it is broad and provides little guidance in designing and implementing effective parent engagement strategies (Gross et al., 2020). Also, it is unclear whether the perceptions of family engagement are the same among all educators and families. Therefore, an unclear consensus on engagement could contribute to the lack of family-school partnerships (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016).

It was also noted that "involvement" and "engagement" are often used interchangeably. However, the two terms have different meanings. According to the Annie Casey Foundation (2022), an involved parent is a parent who takes part in activities determined by the school, while engaged parents become a part of the school's decision-making process. In addition, Pushor and Amendt (2018) described parent involvement as parents doing things for educators. With involvement, educators expect them to serve the school, while family engagement is a partnership where educators work alongside parents to enhance teaching and all student learning. Understanding the difference between engagement and involvement was essential because it was through engagement that teachers shifted from being the experts to becoming partners in a student's education (Heinrichs, 2018).

Family engagement is a broad term that can be defined in many ways. It is a term in the literature that is complex and can be contradictory (Shute et al., 2011). It can simply be families asking about homework, contacting a teacher, or being involved in everything the student does in

and out of school concerning education (Knisely, 2011). Smith and Sheridan (2019) saw family engagement as the families' beliefs, attitudes, and activities of families to support their child's learning. This could be at home, at school, or in the community. However, different research studies looked at various components of family engagement. When reviewing, the United States Department of Education (2015) defined the parent-teacher relationship as regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.

Yulianti et al. (2018) believe that although there are various definitions, they all agree that family engagement is related to the parents' behaviors that impact their child's education. These ideas included several components: parenting, communicating, learning from home, making decisions, and collaborating with the community. First, *parenting* is defined as supporting children in their learning. Second, communication happens when the school and home maintain two-way communication. Third, learning from home is defined as providing learning experiences in the home environment. Fourth, decision-making was participating in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities. Finally, collaborating with the community actively allowed the community to contribute their services (Yulianti et al., 2018). In addition, Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) state, "Parents can be involved in activities taking place in schools, and they can be involved in activities taking place at home but are aimed at making the children's educational goals achievable within the school and outside" (p. 493).

In addition to the broad definitions of family engagement, it needed to be determined whether educators and parents held similar views on what engagement entails. Guardians such as grandparents, foster parents or parents, viewed family engagement as behaviors or values shared at home and transmitted to the educational setting. Also, providing homework support, reading with their children, and instilling the value of education in their children are considered

components of a definition of family engagement from a parental point of view (Jarrett & Cobarrodríguez, 2017; McWayne et al., 2008). Since parents and educators viewed engagement differently, analyzing these differences in the literature was crucial.

Parental View: Parent views on their engagement in education can differ from those of educators and among themselves. Therefore, understanding various parents' perceptions of parent engagement helped educators better understand the relationship between the family and the school (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). According to Erdener and Knoepfel (2018), family engagement from a parent's perception includes four themes: parenting, decision-making, school interactions, and learning at home. Understanding parental perception gives teachers and school leaders more insight into practical ways to engage families relatable to a parent's view. This study defined *parenting* as the awareness of child development steps. Second, *decision-making* involves parents in decisions made by the Parent Teacher Organization for school programs and events. Third, *school interactions* were defined as parents communicating with the school and volunteering for school events and activities. Lastly, learning at home was defined as parents monitoring their child's progress and the school process (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018).

In addition, a family's socioeconomic status affects the parent's perception of their engagement in their child's schooling. Results from parent surveys and voices from Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) showed that low-income parents and families living in rural areas face many barriers. Therefore, this study drew from parent perceptions and rural schools' roles in improving family and school partnerships (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Although these families faced many barriers, they were still interested in their child's education. These rural area schools encouraged parents to express that homework was a priority. Two participants in the study stated they sit with their son or daughter to ensure they are completing the homework. In addition,

spending time with the child while doing homework showed that they are supportive and interested in what their child is learning (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Teachers were pleased with this engagement because it demonstrated family investment in what the students learn at school. Helping children with homework goes beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. It involved being present and reducing the number of family chores that could take away from time spent doing homework (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022).

Educator definition: In contrast, an educator's view of parental engagement differs from a parental perspective. Educators have a broader definition of the families' critical roles in their child's education. These roles include confirming their child's learning, advocating on their behalf, guiding their child through complex school requirements and standards, and campaigning for effective schools (Weiss et al., 2018).

Throughout the years, the importance of family engagement in the overall enhancement of student achievement has been well documented (Danisman, 2017; Epstein et al., 2002). However, the engagement of parents in their children's education has been a concern among educators (Knisely, 2011), as the evidence reflects a decreasing rate of student success and educational motivation. Smith and Sheridan (2019) stated that when parents, students, and educators are engaged together in a child's education, "children's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development are indirectly supported" (p. 128). A review of research on parent engagement showed that parent engagement positively affects students' achievement (Epstein et al., 2002), higher grades and better academics (Nunez et al., 2019), self-esteem (Mapp, 1997), behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; National Middle School Association, 2003), pursuit of higher education (Kim, 2019), and emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005). Hall (2020) found family

engagement incredibly motivating for students and encourages a more strenuous work ethic and motivation.

Gross et al. (2020) noted family engagement as a core component of education in the United States due to its effect on children's academic success. Whether the perceptions of parent engagement are the same among educational leaders, teachers, and other school staff is still being determined. Therefore, educators must actively promote a clear consensus on parent engagement, as this could significantly contribute to developing meaningful and valuable parent-school partnerships and activities (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). Based on the evidence, parent engagement has been a critical component in education today (Gross et al., 2020). Specifically in Title I schools. The United States Department of Education (USDE) requires Title I schools to document parental involvement and have a policy and plan for the collaboration.

Rural Settings and Family Engagement

Family engagement in education is a crucial factor in students' academic success and is especially important in rural areas where communities often play a central role in students' lives. However, more research is needed on family-school connections in rural communities (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Therefore, rural educators' ability to understand the school-parent relationship within the context of their location is limited—a lack of clarity challenges certain forms of school-based collaborations and partnerships with community organizations. The geographic location of rural communities causes families to travel great distances to access support services and impacts the availability of coordinated family-school services because of their geographically isolated location (Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Witte & Sheridan, 2011). In addition, the distance families might have to travel to a school could limit their presence there. Many families in rural communities often have to decide whether to participate in family engagement

activities or get paid (Leo et al., 2019). Therefore, schools in rural communities need to access all available resources to provide educational, behavioral, and social support to students in the school setting and understand the individual needs of families (Witte & Sheridan, 2011).

Research indicates that parents in rural areas feel schools can have a culture that presents teachers and school leaders as superior and that in this context, parents can feel inferior (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). As a result, some parents think they need to contribute more to the schools. This perception makes relationships between home and school in rural settings and their engagement in educational decision-making challenging to achieve. Families often feel there is a stigma associated with the identification of a child or family need. Rural cultures frequently deal with internalizing problems rather than seeking additional help from outside resources. They fear judgment and that their privacy will be compromised. These factors can hinder parent engagement in school and families utilizing family engagement services from the community (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Therefore, strengthening and improving the collaboration and relationships between parents and teachers, specifically in rural areas, is essential to learners' personal and academic growth (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022).

A solid local and international knowledge on school–community partnership and parental engagement exists. However, some argue that the interpretation of the lack of parental engagement stems from the perspectives of school-based stakeholders (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Therefore, this confirms that schools may act as a barrier to parents even though the parents are interested in being engaged (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Some challenges hindering parent-teacher collaboration result from the school and not the families. Myende (2019) indicates that schools often have cultures that present themselves as superior to rural parents. Therefore, this undermines what they believe rural parents can contribute to schools

(Myende, 2019). Further research on this topic is needed to examine the effects of parental engagement strategies on parent engagement in rural elementary schools. Findings from Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) suggest that “poor parental engagement in rural schools serving poor parents can be a product of schools’ inability to engage in practices that will facilitate parental engagement” (p. 494).

Theoretical Framework

Joyce Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence is a conceptual framework that underscores the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility among educational stakeholders. The model comprises three distinct spheres representing critical components in the educational process: the family, the school, and the community. Epstein (1995) believes that family engagement would occur if we sought to develop these partnerships. As a result, schools have emphasized the importance of partnerships between the family, the school, and the community. The Georgia Department of Education’s Family-School Partnership Program ensures that families, schools, and communities working together can create meaningful partnerships that positively impact student achievement (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Many states ensure that family engagement regulations are met under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, n.d.). Since family engagement directly impacts academic achievement, schools must develop meaningful relationships with families to ensure academic success for their children (Epstein & Connors, 1995). This highlights the significance of the family-school-community partnership in achieving academic success.

Epstein’s framework comprises the school, family, and community. However, the student was the epicenter of her framework. The Overlapping Spheres of Influence recognize that the

three primary contexts in which students learn and grow mostly interact with one another (Epstein, 1995). Therefore, this partnership creates positive outcomes for students that are central to the paradigm. The school sphere involves administrators, staff, and school-level policies and practices. It emphasizes a welcoming and inclusive culture, effective communication with families, and involving parents in decision-making processes. Epstein (1995) stated that how schools care about children is reflected in how schools care about children's families. The family sphere recognizes parents and families as the first and most influential educators in a child's life (Epstein, 1995). It emphasizes the importance of families actively engaging in their child's education, setting high expectations, and creating a supportive home environment (Epstein, 2011). The community sphere involves community organizations, agencies, and resources outside the school. It highlights the importance of leveraging community resources to support student learning, such as after-school programs and health services (Epstein, 2011).

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence model emphasizes that when these spheres collaborate and overlap, it creates a comprehensive and holistic approach to education that benefits that student. Each sphere has a role to play in supporting student success, and when they work in harmony, it leads to improved academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Epstein, 2011). Finally, VanValkenburg et al. (2021) note that when all stakeholders partner, parent engagement increases, benefiting students' well-being and academic success.

Barriers to Engagement

Understanding the complex barriers to meaningful family engagement in education is crucial for educators, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers. This knowledge equips us to explore better strategies and solutions that empower schools and families to actively participate in developing and growing their children's educational experience.

While families are increasingly expressing the desire to become more engaged in their children's learning (Baker et al., 2016), studies show some barriers affect the engagement of parents in schools, particularly in the more traditional and visible forms of family engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Educators, researchers, policymakers, and parents are crucial in addressing these barriers. A more inclusive and empowering environment can be fostered by understanding and challenging the assumptions and beliefs that can create barriers between schools and families. The attitudes of teachers and school staff towards families can be transformed to create a more welcoming and respectful atmosphere where parents feel valued and equal partners in their children's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Hornby and Blackwell (2018) identified four overarching barriers to family engagement: parent and family factors, family income, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors.

Parent and Family Factors

Parent and family factors are the parent's assumption that their child's experience will be the same as theirs and a parent's lack of ability to see the link between a successful primary experience and later chances in life (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Negative experiences of a parent may hinder their willingness to engage in school activities or follow through with family engagement activities. The parent might feel uncomfortable re-engaging with the school (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Therefore, they will not want to engage in the learning environment, possibly resulting in their children being marginalized in society's lowest rung (Milner, 2018).

Family Income

In addition, family income can play a role in the engagement of families. Low-income families tend to be less involved in their children's learning and exhibit more challenges with time and resource restraint, including limited time away from work and a lack of financial and

physical resources. Milner et al. (2017) explained that impoverished children are more likely to be exposed to environmental conditions that can negatively impact their performance at school. Moreover, higher-income families may have greater flexibility in their work schedules and fewer financial stressors. This can give parents more time and energy to participate in their child's education, attend school events, and help with homework (Roksa et al., 2021). In addition, families may have better access to educational opportunities, such as quality preschool programs and tutoring services, which can contribute to their engagement with the educational system (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013).

Parent-Teacher Factors

Parent-teacher factors focus on the issues of teachers not having enough time to focus on parents, parents' lack of understanding of open-door policies, parents' fear of criticism and judgment of a problem their child might be having, and the past belief that parents expected everything from the school. Now, we see more of a relationship and the issues of communication between children and parents. Students tell stories of school that do not reflect reality (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Therefore, ongoing professional development for teachers in family engagement strategies can enhance their skills and confidence in working with parents, providing a path for clean communication and a platform to resolve misunderstandings. Training programs and workshops can effectively provide teachers with the tools and knowledge to engage families (Kena et al., 2020; Villarreal et al., 2019).

Societal Barriers

Societal barriers include parents' ability to come to school and attend events, school attendance relating to parent engagement, and the parental engagement activities we provide given our school's area. Practical barriers include school hours, parents' uncertainty about how

to approach school staff, time restraints, internet safety or access, and parents having to work beyond school hours (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Yulianti et al.'s (2018) study showed the differences in levels of parental engagement between parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Highly educated parents are more likely to be engaged in their children's education than low-educated ones (Yulianti et al., 2018). Schools can help remove barriers by establishing home and school relationships that focus on the family instead of focusing mainly on the school (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). In addition, research has shown that parent engagement means parent interactions that are, in general, initiated by the school (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This interaction involves attending parent meetings, parent engagement evenings, homework assistance, and school events. However, Harris and Goodall (2008) suggest the aim should focus on the home learning environment. The goal should be to increase the incidence and value of conversations around learning in the home.

Moreover, evidence suggests that parents and teachers have conflicting views of parents' role in their child's education. For example, teachers might believe parents should reinforce skills being taught at school in the home, whereas parents might consider getting their child to school as their role in their child's education. Therefore, this creates a natural barrier to the engagement of a family. Although parent and family factors, family income, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors are the overarching barriers to engagement, many parents face additional obstacles in their attempts to engage in school. Some of these obstacles include differing ideas among parents and educators, unwelcoming atmospheres, minimal opportunities for involvement, poor communication, lack of parent education, time and job pressures, language barriers, cultural differences, fear of authority-based institutions, family problems, health, living

arrangement, and lack of resources (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Flynn, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

COVID and Its Impact on Family Engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered the landscape of family engagement in education, leaving lasting effects that continue to shape these domains (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). As schools shifted to remote learning models, parents and caregivers were thrust into unprecedented roles as partners in their children's education, providing much-needed support and supervision (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). This shift was specifically tricky for families living in rural areas. Rural areas may lack reliable internet access and technology, making remote learning more challenging for students and families. In addition, rural students faced disparities in accessing quality education during the pandemic due to the digital divide. They had limited access to online resources and challenges adapting to remote learning (Johnson & Herlihy, 2020). The shift in the dynamics of family engagement prompted a reevaluation of traditional practices and paved the way for more inclusive and innovative approaches. Parents became more directly involved in facilitating online learning, communicating with teachers through digital platforms, and actively participating in decision-making processes regarding their child's education (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). Educators had to provide inclusivity in rural areas to ensure all students had equitable learning opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic required teachers and parents to play different roles concerning learning and their relation to each other (Jones & Palikara, 2023). During the school closures, parental engagement became primarily digital and flexible and more centered around an individual's well-being than academics (Jones & Palikara, 2023). The pandemic brought a

positive shift towards partnerships with families in a family-centered way. However, educators need more time and training to engage families, supporting the move from a school-centric definition of parental engagement to a family-school-centric definition (Jones & Palikara, 2023).

As the pandemic recedes, the lessons learned about families' expanded roles in education are likely to endure. Schools increasingly recognize the value of sustained family engagement and are exploring ways to maintain the positive aspects of these newfound partnerships (Rodgers, 2020). This "post-pandemic normal" is characterized by a more inclusive and collaborative approach to family engagement, where the lessons from the pandemic continue to inform and shape how we involve families in education.

Family Engagement and the Leader's Role

Educational leaders, including school principals and administrators, play a vital role in promoting and facilitating family engagement in education. Their actions and strategies can significantly impact the level of engagement and collaboration between families and schools. Parents state that the principal's perception and attitude toward engagement are significant factors in determining whether they feel welcome in the building (Baker et al., 2016; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). In addition, Smith et al. (2021) evaluated the effects of collegial leadership, an "aspect of principal leadership that promotes organizational health via trusting relationships and a sense of community," and how principals influence family engagement (p. 49). A closer review of the literature reassures that leadership remains a critical component of the success of parental engagement.

School Culture

Although leadership is often associated with the principal or assistant principal, its functions may be performed by several different people in the school (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Leaders should cultivate a school culture that is welcoming to all families. A respectful culture includes acknowledging diverse backgrounds, languages, and perspectives (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2020). School leaders establish family-school partnerships and increase parents' feelings of being welcome when cultivating a welcoming and inclusive school climate (Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). School leaders play a crucial role in helping establish these parent-teacher relationships by providing environments conducive to family engagement (Yulianti et al., 2018).

Moreover, examining systematic and sustained family engagement has emphasized the importance of developing a school culture that cultivates partnerships with families and communities (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). School leaders must ensure that the school provides a welcoming environment for families. A welcoming environment creates a climate that includes a sense of safety, trust, respect, fairness, and high expectations (Rattenborg et al., 2019). When parents perceive environments where volunteering and being present in the school are not embraced, teachers find it challenging to entice parents to participate. This causes the schools and homes to become separate spheres of influence rather than overlapping spheres (Rattenborg et al., 2019).

In addition, non-traditional ways of engagement for diverse family types are needed. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) found that many families and community members feel unwelcome in school and experience only traditional engagement opportunities. School leaders need to give some power back to parents and give them opportunities to have a voice. Parental feelings about their child's school will likely affect their level of engagement. Therefore, the school's culture can promote beneficial outcomes for parent engagement (Rattenborg et al., 2019).

Leadership and Policy Around Family Engagement

Parental engagement is the centerpiece for schools as evidence shows that families significantly influence their children's achievement in school and life (United States Department of Education, 2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act (United States Department of Education, 2015) outlines that it requires family engagement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children do better in school, stay longer, and like school more (United States Department of Education, 2016). In addition, when looking at the *Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to Early Grades* (United States Department of Health and Human Services & United States Department of Education, 2016), family engagement is referring to the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children's development, learning, and wellness. Establishing local systems and programs is necessary to integrate family engagement into the school. Also, schools must engage families as essential partners when providing services that promote a child's development and learning (United States Department of Education, 2016). When parents, students, and educators engage in a child's education, "children's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development are indirectly supported" (Smith & Sheridan, 2019, p. 128).

The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (n.d.) states, "The quality and effectiveness of America's public education system rests upon a foundation of strong, engaged families and communities" (para. 1). Schools must adopt a differentiated approach that entails reflection and action and differentiates engagement policies and practices (Coady, 2019). In addition, there must be an establishment of equitable family engagement. Jacques and Villegas (2018) state that this can include a relationship with a trusted staff person who is approachable, friendly, receptive to concerns, and a champion for the student and family.

The perception that families are welcome, accepted, and valued is vital to increasing family engagement (Jacques & Villegas, 2018). However, this is not always the common approach among schools.

Professional Development

Professional development centered around family engagement is a crucial aspect of a leader's role in fostering effective collaboration between educators and families. Training will equip educators with the knowledge and skills to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. School leaders should provide professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their skills in working with families. Leaders play a vital role in supporting teacher professional development related to family engagement (Webster, 2020). In addition, leaders play a pivotal role in identifying the teachers' and staff's specific training needs when implementing family engagement strategies (Jeynes, 2018).

Family Engagement Strategies

Family engagement has become pivotal in shaping students' educational and academic development. The role of the family in supporting their child's educational journey has gained increasing significance. This section explores the diverse strategies educators should embrace to foster family engagement within the educational landscape.

The awareness and implementation of effective family engagement strategies can equip families to support their children in various ways (Baker et al., 2016). Ultimately, the shift from involvement- being present in the building- to engagement- collaboration through multiple realms of parental involvement, is critical to implementing effective family engagement strategies (Baker et al., 2016). Many scholars have studied and continued exploring the most effective engagement strategies for decades. However, Joyce Epstein, beginning in 1995,

strategized and designed the Overlapping Spheres of Influence framework centered around the most effective ways to create and sustain family engagement. Epstein focused on six strategies: parenting, communicating, volunteering, at-home learning, decision-making, and collaboration between school and home.

One of the roles is assisting families in understanding how they can support the development of their children. To do this, Goshin and Mertsalova (2018) use Epstein's (2001) typology of involvement to provide a detailed account of how school leaders can strengthen relationships with parents. First, schools should provide training for homework policies and how to monitor homework at home. This allows families to engage with their children in the home setting. Second, favorable conditions for parent engagement opportunities should be created, such as a welcoming environment promoting meaningful relationships. These could also include flexible schedules to enable parents to participate if they work. Third, recognizing parents' talents and interests should be a top priority. When identifying the strengths of others, stronger and more meaningful relationships involving two-way communication will occur. Fourth, enabling parents to participate in decision-making for the school, whether they are involved in the school governance team or parent and teacher organization. The final role is coordinating resources and services from the community, businesses, and partnerships, assisting families, and soliciting support for cultural health care and other government agencies (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022).

Parenting

Epstein (2011) recognizes parents as the first and most enduring educators in a child's life. She acknowledges that the parenting component occupies the central and foundational role of the child. Parenting emphasizes the importance of creating a nurturing and supportive home

environment that fosters the development of a child's academic and social needs. Epstein's (2011) parenting component encourages parents to be actively engaged in their child's learning journey, setting high expectations, maintaining open lines of communication with teachers, monitoring their child's progress, and providing essential resources and guidance. By recognizing the significance of parenting as an integral part of a child's education, Epstein (2011) underscores the idea that a strong partnership between parents and school is fundamental to a student's academic success and overall well-being. This component recognizes that effective parenting is not just about what happens within the school's walls. However, it encompasses parents' continuous support and guidance throughout their child's educational journey.

Communication

Kraft (2017) discussed the effects of creating better school and home communication systems. These systems could bridge the gap between the school and home. Engaging parents through more regular phone call communication resulted in an increase in student achievement through homework completion (Kraft, 2017). Communication refers to exchanging ideas between parents and children concerning issues in school, plans, or activities (Erdem & Kaya, 2020). Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) found that communication is essential to family engagement. This strategy provides a quick linkage between home and school, connecting the family to the child's teacher and their learning.

It is necessary to provide effective communication strategies to address the communication barrier in the families' engagement. High-quality, timely communication ensures clarity of information among families (Baker et al., 2016). Communication occurs regularly, not only when problems arise or when academic deficits are known. In addition, last-minute communication puts unnecessary stress on families and decreases the chances of engagement.

Finally, when teachers communicate well with parents about a student's positive or negative progress, the child does better in school (Baker et al., 2016).

Volunteering

Volunteering is another critical component of fostering strong family-school partnerships (Epstein, 2011). However, a school's actions and attitudes will send a clear message to parents whether they want them present in the building or not. A parent's sense of belonging in a school is vital to their engagement in their child's learning and willingness to volunteer. Therefore, parents should be invited into the classroom and feel welcome in the everyday nuances of the school (Baker et al., 2016).

In the context of Epstein (2011), volunteering extends beyond parents simply contributing their time and resources; it represents a more profound commitment to actively engage in school-related activities and initiatives (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Volunteering may encompass a range of activities, such as assisting in the classroom, organizing and participating in school events, serving in parent-teacher organizations, and providing expertise or resources to enhance the educational experience (Epstein et al., 2009). Research has shown that when parents volunteer in these capacities, it strengthens the sense of community within the school and positively impacts student achievement and behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Furthermore, volunteering allows parents to gain firsthand insights into their child's school environment, fostering a deeper understanding of educational goals and challenges (Van Voorhis, 2003). In this way, volunteering as a form of parental engagement represents a powerful means by which parents can actively contribute to their children's educational success and the overall improvement of the school community.

At-Home Learning

At-home learning is a strategy Epstein (2011) used to help increase the engagement of families. Brock and Hundley (2016) used the technique of feedback to engage families at home (pp. 117–128). Parents learned how to give constructive and beneficial feedback to their students. At-home learning involves parents actively engaging with their children's education by creating a supportive and enriching learning environment beyond the school's walls (Epstein & Sheridan, 2006). This type of involvement encourages parents to actively participate in their child's academic development by providing resources, setting expectations, and establishing routines that promote learning (Epstein et al., 2009). Research has consistently shown that parental involvement in at-home learning activities, such as reading with children, assisting with homework, and engaging in educational discussions, significantly impacts students' academic achievement (Desimone, 1999). By emphasizing at-home learning, Epstein's framework recognizes that parents can play a fundamental role in complementing instruction and nurturing a lifelong love of learning in their children, ultimately contributing to their educational success (Van Voorhis, 2003).

Decision-Making

The decision-making component of Epstein's (2011) framework stands as a cornerstone of effective family-school partnerships. This type of involvement goes beyond traditional notions of parent-teacher communication and participation in school events, placing parents in active roles within the school's decision-making process and specifically making decisions about their child's education that affect the school's educational processes (Epstein & Sheridan, 2006). Decision-making involvement encourages parents to collaborate with teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to shape school policies, programs, and practices (Epstein et al., 2009).

The literature underscores the transformative potential of this component, revealing that when parents are actively engaged in school decision-making, it leads to improved educational outcomes, enhanced school culture, and more equitable educational experiences (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Jeynes, 2007).

By including parents in the decision-making process, educators recognize their valuable perspectives and insights, ultimately fostering a sense of ownership and partnership that can positively impact the school community (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). This component underscores the belief that when parents have a say in essential school matters, it not only enhances the quality of education but also strengthens the bond between families and schools, creating a collaborative environment where the best interests of students are at the forefront of decision-making processes.

Collaboration

As a fundamental component of Epstein's (2011) framework, collaboration underscores the significance of fostering cooperative partnerships between parents, educators, and the broader community to support student success. The importance of the parent-school partnership is of utmost importance, according to Mapp (2017). In the parent's words: "We showed up because we feel like partners" (Mapp, 2017). When schools communicate clear learning goals to parents and provide opportunities to discuss them with school leaders and teachers, they feel they are an adequate part of their child's education (Mapp, 2017).

This type of involvement emphasizes joint efforts between schools and families in setting shared goals, designing strategies, and working collectively to achieve positive educational outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). The transformative impact of collaboration in education leads to improved performance, increased attendance rates, and enhanced school climates

(Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Therefore, school leaders need to facilitate and improve the relationships between the home and school. On the role of leaders in establishing relationships, Gordon and Louis (2009) suggest that principals and teachers need to create a culture of shared leadership and responsibility to enhance the involvement of parents. The decision-making component underscores the notion that when all stakeholders work harmoniously, it amplifies the potential for positive educational outcomes and benefits individual students and the broader school community.

Although this section focused on the research around Epstein's (2011) six types of involvement strategies, other common strategies could engage families in their child's education. Family engagement strategies are not just beneficial to a child's educational experience; they are essential. When schools, educators, and families collaborate effectively, students reap the rewards for academic success, emotional development, and overall well-being (Epstein, 2011). Family engagement takes many forms, from the foundational elements of creating a nurturing home environment to active engagement in decision-making processes and curriculum development. Engagement strategies must be differentiated to suit the diverse needs of students and their families. These strategies empower parents to become true partners in their child's education, bridging the gap between home and school (Epstein, 2018).

Implications

Family engagement in education in rural areas carries significant implications for students and the broader community. Engagement is a continuous and growing process that changes across a child's lifespan and as they grow and mature (Ladd & Dinella, 2009). Engaging families through continual communication and other effective engagement strategies will transfer across all contexts and settings, including schools, extra-curricular activities, and community-

based programs (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Research has shown that when families are actively engaged in their children's education in rural settings, several positive outcomes can be observed, such as improved academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), enhanced school climate (Heinrichs, 2018), strengthened teacher-parent relationships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006) and community cohesion (Fenton et al., 2017).

To help build transferability in the home, the data from a study conducted by Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) reveals that improved communication methods between schools and parents can help build parent capacity. In the study, parents requested enhanced communication between parents and teachers (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Previously, the school was using letters and telephone calls. Parents requested that information be sent home in multiple ways, including smartphone apps, social media, radio, and newsletters (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). Building capacity at home can result from schools providing training to help with homework and monitor schoolwork from home. In addition, providing education and training for parents, home visits, and support systems could empower parents about their essential role in their child's education (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). This underscores parents' crucial role in their child's education, making them feel empowered and responsible.

Another way to build transferability in the home is by educating parents on the online platforms schools use. A lot of what happens at school is available on these digital platforms. Therefore, parents can assist students at home with appropriate training and information on online educational platforms. In addition, informing parents on how to access grades and attendance records through the school's online program will be helpful. Informing parents of the importance of involvement and removing the barriers identified by parents is necessary to promote change and increase engagement (Knisely, 2011).

A partnership with trust as the foundation will positively affect the family, school, and community relationship. Empowered families have increased access to what the community has to offer. Family engagement provides opportunities for students to learn about things in the community context (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). The same is valid for family engagement in rural education. It has far-reaching implications that extend beyond the classroom. It benefits students academically, fosters community, supports teachers, and contributes to rural areas' overall well-being and development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Positive implications highlight the importance of ongoing efforts to promote and sustain family engagement in rural education settings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to family engagement. Five topical areas were used to describe the importance of family engagement and its effect on student achievement. The topics included family engagement, family engagement in rural areas, how leadership impacts family engagement, barriers to family engagement, strategies for family engagement, and implications.

Research indicates that family engagement can be defined in various ways. This literature section reviewed the historical context of family engagement and the perspectives of both parents and educators. Family engagement efforts have expanded throughout the 21st century. Therefore, family engagement strategies must be tailored to unique cultural backgrounds (Moll et al., 2001). Additionally, location and how leadership impacts family engagement were reviewed. Rural educators must understand the school-parent relationship within the context of their location (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). In addition to location, the educational leaders of the school play a pivotal role in promoting family engagement.

Strategies for family engagement link directly to addressing the barriers families face to engagement. More knowledge of the barriers equips educators, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers to explore better strategies for engaging families to participate actively in their children's educational experience. Finally, there are significant implications for family engagement in education in rural areas. Engaging families through effective strategies will transfer across all contexts and impact multiple settings (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Positive outcomes are observed when families are actively engaged in their child's learning in rural settings (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the action research study.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The challenges faced by many families in effectively supporting their children's academic endeavors often stem from a perceived lack of knowledge or expertise in educational matters. Families view teachers as academic experts; therefore, they may feel ill-equipped to work alongside their children (Hall, 2020). However, family engagement continues to be widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting academic success. According to Mapp (2017), the effective approach to family engagement is through the lens of a partnership between the family and the school. When families perceive themselves as active partners, they are more inclined to engage with their children academically. Given these insights, fostering strong partnerships with families, particularly those whose students are academically underperforming, is a necessary strategy at Southside Elementary Schools is necessary.

This study focused on the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school. It examined the impact of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students at Southside Elementary School. This focus was guided by the following question: How do family engagement strategies influence academic achievement in rural education?

The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?

2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research addresses the “what” questions and promotes a deep understanding of context, circumstance, environment, and milieu (Bloomberg, 2023). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define it as an involving and naturalistic approach that is interpretive. It is based on exploration and discovery to give participants in the study a voice (Bloomberg, 2023). Qualitative researchers study items in their natural environment to bring meaning to a phenomenon rather than measure specific data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting narrative and visual data to gain insight into a topic of interest. Its credibility is enhanced because it is a collaborative and connected endeavor rather than a solitary one (Bloomberg, 2023). Qualitative research promotes a deep understanding of a social setting as viewed from the perspective of research participants (Bloomberg, 2023). Considering these characteristics, this study's qualitative research design was most appropriate.

This study provided data-based, triangulated qualitative research on the effects of family engagement strategies on the academic achievement of underperforming students in a rural elementary school. The researcher in this study sought to understand the difficulties of family

engagement in a specific rural, low-socioeconomic elementary school. A qualitative research approach was selected because of the study's focus on the participants' perspectives on the family engagement strategies being implemented. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to be reflective about the research. Therefore, the researcher could reflect on the family engagement strategies implemented and their effectiveness, be responsive to the data gathered, and make adjustments as needed. Reflection on the family engagement strategies allowed the Action Research Design team to make adjustments to impact family engagement positively. Without being reflective, the researcher will not know the effectiveness of the intervention. Using action research methods that included interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and analysis of artifacts, the study explored the effects of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students at Southside Elementary School.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Action Research is generally identified as a qualitative research method that allows practitioners to understand their work better and allows various perspectives and voices to be heard and valued (Glanz, 2014). Moreover, qualitative research methods can also include qualitative approaches. It differs from traditional research methods in several ways. For example, practitioners primarily utilize qualitative research to solve a specific problem, and findings are not generalizable to other groups (Glanz, 2014). However, Glanz (2014) notes that action research is an invaluable tool that allows educational leaders, in this case, to reflect on “practices, programs, and procedures” (p. 25).

Bloomberg (2023) noted that action research is grounded in a social constructivist paradigm, which “attempts to understand social phenomena from a context-specific perspective” (p. 78). This paradigm focused on reality being socially, culturally, and historically constructed

(Bloomberg, 2023). Within this paradigm, researchers strive to understand the perspectives of multiple participants. The researchers recognize that their experiences and backgrounds can shape and impact their interpretations. Therefore, they position themselves to acknowledge their own experiences culturally and socially. Within the social constructivist paradigm, researchers pose questions and reflect upon data collected in their field (Bloomberg, 2023).

Action research was initially developed to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. However, it has gained favor among many entities in education, including families and the community (Glanz, 2014). The systematic action research process in this study focused on the problem of practice and potential interventions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Glanz, 2014; Stringer & Aragon, 2020). Figure 3.1 illustrates the steps of research the Action Research Design Team and researcher conducted.

Figure 3.1*Action Research Process*

Note: Glanz (2014).

The emphasis of action research allows inquiry that seeks practical solutions to complex problems in a specific organization to resolve problems by generating knowledge and taking action within a social organization (Bloomberg, 2023). In this study, the researcher addressed the lack of engagement from families of underachieving students. The action research process is iterative and participative and fosters a deeper understanding of a problem and the development of future action with intervention and evaluation (Bloomberg, 2023). The iterative and participative nature of action research positively impacted family engagement at Southside Elementary School. Action research increased learning for participants, specifically at SES, as

they situated their learning in the social context in which knowledge is socially constructed (Merriam, 2017).

Action research is a collaborative process. This study aimed to examine the effects of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students in a rural elementary school. Since action research was the chosen methodology for the study, the Action Research Design Team worked collaboratively on interventions related to family engagement strategies that helped engage families in a rural elementary school.

Individuals and families often migrate to rural areas, anticipating that the school system will support their beliefs and values (Baade, 2015). Action Research was essential in the context of this rural elementary school because when families felt the school supported their beliefs and values, they were more willing to be engaged in their child's learning. The following section explored the parameters of action research to elaborate on the use of action research.

Action Research Design

Action research projects directly affect organizational change by following an “iterative, cyclical, and participative process” (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 101). Throughout the study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) spiraled through the action research cycle of plan, acting, observing, and reflecting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process was designed to support the implementation of family engagement strategies at Southside Elementary School.

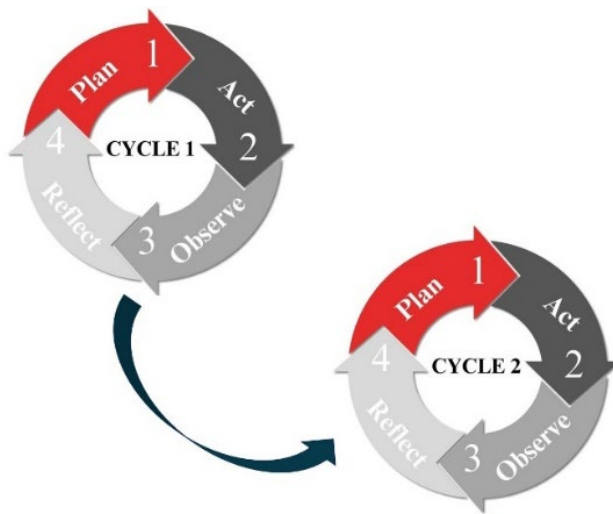
The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Fundamentally, action research requires research participants to engage in short investigation cycles. The participants are active in research settings, which generates a more comprehensive understanding that leads to effective and practical outcomes for their investigations (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). The Action Research Design Team then reflects on all

aspects of the inquiry to increase its effectiveness and meaningfulness (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). The cycles are continual activities that allow participants to change directions in minor or significant ways if needed (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). It is an iterative process where changes occur based on understandings that emerge from the reflection process. The spiraling and iterative nature of action research, as envisioned by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is depicted in Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research

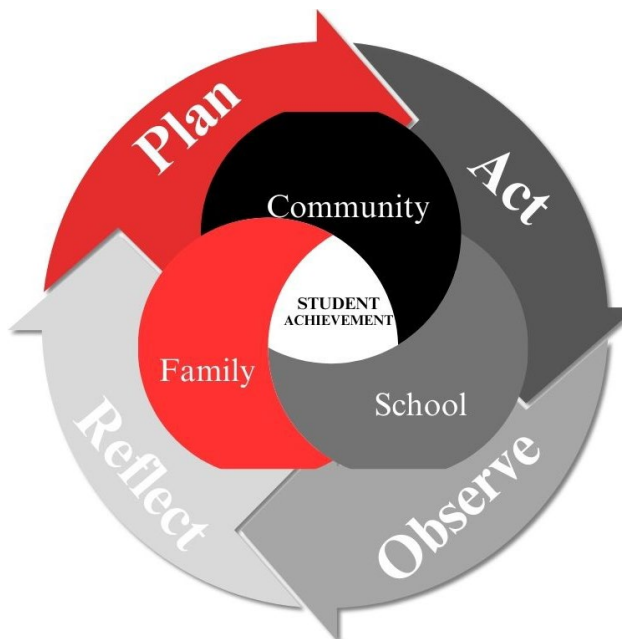


Note. See Coghlan (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

The iterations of the Plan, Act, Observe, and Reflect phases of action research cycles encouraged the researcher and participants to spiral through observation and reflection to understand the effectiveness of the family engagement strategies implemented at Southside Elementary School. In addition, the reflection of how these strategies impacted the achievement of underperforming students was evaluated. The logic model defined this study's cycles and provided a framework for the researcher and participants.

Logic Model

The Action Research Design team evaluated existing literature to gather insight into engagement and engagement strategies employed with families to promote academic success in their child's education. The first intervention was implementing an at-home learning experience for families of students with a student support team. According to Hamlin and Flessa (2018), family engagement in the home tends to exhibit the most substantial impact on student achievement. In addition, at-home programs reinforcing learning at school are positively associated with student performance (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018). The action research was framed in a cycle of continuous improvement, which provided an approach to analysis that allowed participants to analyze the information (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). The logic model guided the design team to plan family engagement strategies that included the community, school, and family. It served as a plan to effect change and frame interventions. The Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect cycle depicted in Figure 3.3 provided a structure for the Action Research Design Team to define the problem of student achievement, implement interventions, observe the implementation of the strategies and reflect upon the gathered data, and adjust and plan for the next cycle based on the feedback from the Action Research Implementation Team (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Figure 3.3*Logic Model*

Note. Derived from Epstein (2010), Coghlan (2019), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Theory of Change

The foundation of the study was based on Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which encompass community, school, and family. The theory distinguishes an interdependent view of community, school, and family influences from what could be considered a separate view of influence (Epstein, 2018). When all three entities work together, positive effects on student achievement occur (Epstein, 2010). The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) carefully analyzed and devoted time to evaluate current family engagement strategies being implemented at Southside Elementary School. After assessing current practices, the ARDT reviewed the literature on family engagement strategies that positively impact student achievement. The primary intent for engagement was for families to be involved in the decision-making processes for their child’s education and reinforce what is happening in the classroom.

Aligning with the purpose of the study and the overarching research questions, the theory of change was situated around the implementation of family engagement strategies that positively impacted student achievement. Data was collected and analyzed throughout the process. Once examined by the Action Research Design Team, the team identified successful family engagement strategies within Southside Elementary School. The team used the data and information to inform future practices of family engagement implementation.

The Case

A continuous lack of family engagement has been a critical component of the academic underachievement of students at Southside Elementary School. Therefore, the overlapping spheres of influence theory helped guide this study as the ARDT worked with school personnel and families to improve family engagement at SES. This action research study aimed to identify the barriers that create a lack of family engagement at Southside Elementary School and sought to implement strategies to improve engagement.

Case studies provide an in-depth investigation of an individual, a group of individuals, or a site (Glanz, 2014). They are written to understand a situation better so that educators can discuss implications and share findings (Glanz, 2014). They are designed to report detailed observations of individuals, groups, or school settings. Therefore, the research was bounded as a case of the experiences of an Action Research Design Team as they sought to engage families in Southside Elementary School's decision-making processes.

Investigating and analyzing family engagement strategies at Southside Elementary School allowed for a deeper understanding of ways to enhance family engagement. In this case, the researcher chose a single case study approach as the most appropriate method because it produced a detailed description of the context and participants of the study. The case study

results provided an in-depth and descriptive account of current practices, and their purpose is to generate a more profound understanding to inform future practices (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014).

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) comprised elementary school personnel, including the principal, counselor, parent engagement coordinator, school administrator, two interventionists, school librarian, and researcher. Table 3.1 lists the team members and describes their roles in the research. The primary researcher was the assistant principal of Southside Elementary School, served as the school's Student Support Team coordinator, and had a vested interest in engaging families of underperforming students. The principal served on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) because, as the school's primary and instructional leader, she has been challenged by district personnel to engage families of underperforming students.

One early intervention teacher served on the instructional leadership team at Southside Elementary School and worked with many underperforming students who received Early Intervention through the Early Intervention Program. The second interventionist implemented tier-three interventions for students with a student support team and used weekly or bi-weekly progress monitoring to track progress. They were both vested in engaging families of underperforming students because both interventionists instructed these students daily. The school's parent engagement coordinator was recently hired and was tasked with engaging families at Southside Elementary School. She was also an essential member of all student support teams. A school counselor also served on the ARDT to provide insight and knowledge about specific families of underperforming students. She interacted with many students and families at Southside Elementary School by providing resources beyond education.

Table 3.1*Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Members*

Team member	Primary role within Southside School District	Location	Action research role
Primary researcher	Assistant principal	Southside Elementary School	Led and conducted all research within the ARDT for data analysis. Brought 17 years of educational experience to the team with three years of experience as assistant principal.
Mrs. Laura Pridemore	Early intervention teacher	Southside School District	Provided context and perspective of the school-wide leadership team. Brought 26 years of experience in elementary education.
Ms. Erin Gowder	Parent engagement/ MTSS coordinator	Southside Elementary School	Provided 30 years of teaching experience in elementary education and recently obtained her MTSS endorsement.
Mrs. Brittany Creedle	Principal	Southside Elementary School	Provided context and perspective of the school-wide leadership team. Brought 27 years of educational experience with 11 years in school administration.
Ms. Carrie Whitaker	Counselor	Southside Elementary School	Provided context, experience, and perspective of the school counseling department and insight into many families.
Ms. Cristi Haygood	Interventionist	Southside Elementary School	Provided context and perspective from the interventionist point of view, who works closely with underperforming students.
Mrs. Hannah Bowles	Librarian	Southside Elementary School	Provided context and perspective for the school-wide leadership team, bringing perspective from her five years in the classroom and two years as a librarian.

Note. MTSS = multi-tiered system of support.

The Action Research Design Team members were chosen for their leadership, various instructional experiences, current relationships with families, and investment in engaging families at Southside Elementary School. The ARDT was a pivotal part of the study. During the first meeting, the primary researcher provided the Action Research Design team with an orientation focusing on the background of the study, action research, purpose of the study, research questions, and the roles of the Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation Team included one school administrator, psychologist, grade-level teachers, and parent engagement coordinator. These members were asked to participate in the study that began in August of 2024. The study was conducted during the 2024-2025 school year. Due to the nature of the study, two implementation team members were also members of the design team. The participants were chosen based on their roles within Southside Elementary School and their impact on families. Table 3.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team, their primary role in the district, their location, and their educational experience.

Research Plan and Timeline

According to Glanz (2014), data collection centered around the research questions begins after discovering a specific concern. The research study began in August 2024 and ran through November 2024. The study included two action research cycles, each lasting six weeks. The timeline enabled the researcher to analyze family engagement strategies from multiple sources during the study. Mertler (2019) stated that this method incorporates the “complex, iterative process of data collection and coding” throughout the different cycles of the study (pp. 178–179).

Reflective practice is necessary for the action research process. The timeline in Table 3.3 outlines the action research cycles used in the study.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team

Team member	Primary role within Southside School District	Experience
Primary researcher	Assistant principal	Led and conducted all research within the ARDT for data analysis. 16 years of educational experience with 2 years of experience as assistant principal.
Ms. Erin Gowder	Parent engagement/ MTSS coordinator	30 years of teaching experience in elementary education and has recently obtained her MTSS endorsement.
Ms. Roxanne Brown	Teacher	Four years of teaching experience and has successfully engaged families in Student Support Team Meetings.
Mrs. Anna Baker	Teacher	Three years of teaching experience with one of the years being in a different district in a middle school.
Mrs. Ashton Black	Teacher	15 years of teaching experience in special and general education. She offered insight from having worked in two different school systems.
Mrs. Bailey Smith	Teacher	She has six years of teaching experience in general education and offers insight from having worked in a different system before the Southside School District.

Note. All team members were located at Southside Elementary School. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; MTSS = multi-tiered system of support.

Table 3.3*Action Research Timeline*

Date	Action research activity	
	ARDT	ARIT
July 2024	Secured consent to participate in the study Initial ARDT meeting Collected artifacts, including historical family engagement surveys and teacher surveys	Secured consent to participate in the study
August 2024	ARDT monthly meeting Teacher survey Parent one-on-one interview Review surveys and interview results Primary researcher journal records	Met with the primary researcher to hear the literature findings and proposed plan Implemented a family home packet to reinforce school intervention Began implementation of engagement strategies for families with students who have a student support team
September 2024	ARDT monthly meeting ARIT monthly meeting Parent Focus Group	Family Literacy Night observation Student Support Team meeting participation
October 2024	ARDT monthly meeting Review surveys from cycle one	ARIT monthly meeting
November 2024	Review of progress monitoring data ARDT and ARIT Interviews Final debrief of study and presentation of knowledge gained to the ARDT	Progress monitoring data Interviews Final debrief of study and presentation of knowledge to the ARIT

Note. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Context of Study

The Southside School District (SSD) is in a rural county located 15 miles northeast of a college town. One of the unique features of South County is that it is made up of six smaller cities. The middle and high schools of Southside serve students in all cities. However, Southside Elementary School (SES) serves students within the Southside city limits who complete a variance form to attend the school. Out-of-city students require an approved variance by the

district to participate in Southside Elementary School. The Southside School District serves 4,958 students, of which 35% are minority and 65% are white. The SSD schools include five elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Even though Southside Elementary School draws most of its students from the Southside city limits, it has the most students who vary to a school different from their home school in the district. It is the second-largest elementary school in the district. Its enrollment is trending around 500 students from kindergarten through 5th grade.

Southside Elementary School is a Title I public elementary school in a rural county with approximately 31,000 people. The school is part of a charter school district. A charter school is a public school of choice that operates under terms of a charter, with an authorizer, such as the state and local boards of education (Georgia Department of Education, 2023). Charter schools have flexible local rules in exchange for higher accountability for raising student achievement.

Student Body Characteristics

The demographic composition of Southside Elementary School differs from that of Southside County. The school's location in the county affects the school's demographics. According to the United States Census Bureau, 95.4% of the town's population is white, while 4.6% is a minority. The Southside Elementary School's student population resides in the middle of the county and city's demographics, with 81% of the students white and 19% minority. The increased amount of minority students is a result of students who have a variance as well as students with disabilities being served at SES.

The school is made up of 508 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. The majority of the population, 81%, is white non-Hispanic. Other races/ethnicities represented are Asian (2%), Black (5%), Hispanic (8%), and two or more races (4%). Seventy-one percent of students receive

free or reduced lunch at Southside Elementary School; thus, many families live at or below the poverty level. The amount of economically disadvantaged students at Southside Elementary School increased by 2% this school year and 20% since the 2022-2023 school year. In addition, 22.3% of students at SES are considered homeless.

The students at Southside Elementary School have various learning needs. Students who qualify for special education services comprise 25% of the population. However, it should be noted that SES serves two of the county's self-contained Special Education classes that are made up of students whose home school may or may not be Southside Elementary School. Students who access accommodations for identified disabilities based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act comprise 6% of the student body. Students identified as gifted comprise nine percent of our student population. SES's ELL (English Language Learners) population is three percent of the student body.

Staff Characteristics

It is essential to note the composition of staff members during the 2022-2023 school year because SES lacked the appropriate support to serve all students appropriately. Southside Elementary School has two buildings. The primary campus building houses kindergarten through 3rd grade, and the Dawg Academy houses grades 4th and 5th. Kindergarten through 3rd grade had 15 general education teachers, three early intervention teachers, and six special education teachers, with four of them being self-contained teachers and 15 paraprofessionals, with five being self-contained special education paraprofessionals. One of the teachers was hired in early October due to an increase in the number of students in 2nd grade. The Dawg Academy had seven general education teachers, one and a half early intervention teachers, two special education

teachers, and two paraprofessionals. One of the general education teachers was hired in October due to an increase in the number of students in 4th grade.

Southside Elementary School had 84 staff members in the two buildings for the 2024-2025 school year. SES has a 90% retention rate among teachers and staff. The 2024-2025 school year staff consisted of one less support teacher than the 2023-2024 school year due to COVID-19 funds expiring. The administrative team comprised a principal, assistant principal, counselor, and resource officer. The front office staff included a bookkeeper, registrar/secretary, nurse, and receptionist for the Dawg Academy building. There was one media specialist and four activity staff members. There was one full-time certified physical education teacher, one part-time music teacher, one part-time art teacher, and one steam/construction paraprofessional. Grades kindergarten through 4th grade had four teachers per grade level, and 5th grade had three teachers. There were six early intervention teachers, two self-contained special education teachers, five special education teachers, one English language learner teacher, one gifted teacher, and 22 paraprofessionals.

During the 2023-2024 school year, Southside Elementary School hired a Multi-Tier Support System/Family Engagement Coordinator using Title 1 funds. This position allowed someone to focus on students, specifically in the tiers of intervention and their families, focusing on students who require a student support team. The goal of the family engagement coordinator was to engage families in the academic processes and decisions for their students. In addition, at-home family resources were provided to families to use at home to reinforce classroom instruction.

Impact of COVID-19

Family engagement has been a concern at Southside Elementary School since the COVID-19 pandemic. It was common for families to attend open houses at the beginning of the year and parent-teacher conferences in October and February. However, engaging the families in various ways throughout the year was challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the importance of families being present in the building amongst teachers and families. Therefore, it was necessary to increase family engagement in differentiated ways.

Academic Achievement

Results from standardized testing, the increase of students in Response to Intervention, and an increase in discipline referrals at the end of the 2023-2024 school year showed a need for families to be engaged more and/or take a different approach in their children's educational experiences. Table 3.4 shows results from the weighted content achievement for the Georgia Milestones across the years in ELA, math, and science. It should be noted that the data from the state is not yet available for the 2023-2024 school year. In addition to comparing the district and state, Southside Elementary School was ranked in the following order among the five elementary schools in the Southside School District. In ELA, 3rd grade ranks fifth, 4th grade ranks fifth, and 5th grade ranks fifth. In math, 3rd grade ranks fourth, 4th grade ranks fifth, and 5th grade ranks fourth. In science, 5th grade ranks fifth.

The 2023-2024 school year results demonstrate a need for improvement. In 2023-2024, SES was below the district average in two areas: ELA and math. In addition, Southside Elementary School's ELA-weighted achievement score was below the state and district scores. One way SES will address these results is by uniquely engaging families in their students'

education. Teachers will participate in family engagement professional learning opportunities to ensure they engage families appropriately.

Table 3.4

Georgia Milestones Weighted Achievement Data for Southside Elementary School (Grades 3–5 Combined)

Area	School	District	State
2021–2022			
English language arts	68	70	60
Math	76	81	64
Science	76	74	59
2022–2023			
English language arts	63	68	62
Math	69	78	68
Science	64	73	60
2023–2024			
English language arts	63 ^a	66	65
Math	80	84	72
Science	72	70	62

^a Score below the state average.

School Improvement Plan/Professional Learning Goals

In addition, improving family engagement was a part of Southside Elementary’s school improvement plan during the 2024-2025 school year and extended in the five-year professional learning plan. During the 2024-2025 school year, professional learning opportunities were provided, focusing on increasing family engagement at SES. Southside Elementary School implemented family engagement strategies and interventions to provide families with opportunities to engage in the school, home, and community. Administrators, teachers, and

parents worked together to create strategies for engagement by providing all families with various opportunities to engage in their children's academics.

Teachers communicated with parents at least once a week to increase family engagement. This communication included academic conversations that allowed families to help make educational decisions for their children. In addition, opportunities were provided for parents to initiate and run parent-led academies that focus on the needs and concerns that families identify.

Several events were planned during the 2024-2025 school year so families could be involved with their children in the school setting without other obligations. For example, Parent Breakfast, a holiday meal and market, and the Spring Fling allowed families to attend an event with their child at school to spend time with them. These events allowed families to participate in school events during or after hours with their children. Although these events showed involvement in school events, the objective for the 2024-2025 school year was to move from involvement to engagement, where families were actively a part of the decision-making for their child's educational experience.

During the 2023-2024 school year, two academic focus nights were provided for families to engage in their child's learning experience. A fall family literacy night was held to give families insight into the new curriculum. The families also participated in a model lesson. This experience allowed families to experience daily what their child was doing in the literacy classroom. During the 2024-2025 school year, Southside Elementary School participated in the Rock Your School initiative led by the Malcolm Mitchell Foundation. This initiative was introduced during the fall family literacy night. Families were encouraged to engage with their children at home, reading and recording books read together or independently by their children.

Southside Elementary School held a family math night in the spring of 2023-2024. This night allowed families to participate in math activities and games together. The games reflected standards being taught in the classroom across grade levels. Allowing families to engage in math games and activities together provided them with examples of things they could do with their child at home to reinforce math skills being taught in the classroom. It also provided the families with lessons and examples of how standards are taught in the school.

Data Sources

This study sought to examine the effects of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming at a rural elementary school. Varying data sources were used to gain a wholesome view of family engagement strategies and their effectiveness. Data were collected from primary sources (participants in the study) and secondary sources (district and school documents, artifacts, and surveys) (Stringer & Aragon, 2020).

Participants

The Action Research Design Team comprised school personnel from Southside Elementary School. Members included the primary researcher (Assistant Principal), the principal, the school counselor, the librarian, an interventionist, an early intervention teacher, and the family engagement coordinator. All staff who served on the ARDT brought a wealth of knowledge and different perspectives to develop interventions addressing the identified research questions. The interventions were used within each cycle based on the Action Research Implementation Team data.

The ARIT was comprised of the family engagement coordinator and four classroom teachers. The Action Research Implementation Team members shared perspectives of effective family engagement strategies Southside Elementary School could use to engage families in their

children's educational experience. The Action Research Design Team analyzed data collected from members of the ARIT to inform the interventions implemented and future adjustments needed. The research cycles allowed members of the ARDT and ARIT to reflect on the implemented interventions.

Families of students in tier three of response to intervention were the focus of this study. In tier three of response to intervention, students are well below the 20th percentile on the Measures of Academic Progress and FastBridge (FAST) assessments. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment is a nationally normed test measuring a child's reading and math knowledge. The FAST assessment is within the FastBridge platform. The Southside School District purchased this computer-based assessment to track reading, math, and social-emotional behavior data. FastBridge helps educators identify students' needs and make data-driven decisions. In addition, these students required more intense intervention, which occurred five times a week. These students had a student support team and were the most at-risk underperforming students other than students receiving special education services. The target grade level for the study was families of students in second and third grade. Focusing on students in second grade helped the transition from second to third grade. Third grade is the year that students in Georgia begin to take a standardized state assessment. Georgia standards in third grade also become more rigorous, and students and families at Southside Elementary School often feel the weight of these changes. Often, the term the shift from learning to read to reading to learn is used. Therefore, this study focused on families of underachieving second and third-grade students with a student support team.

Selection Criterion

Qualitative research requires purposeful and intentional sampling. These requirements allow a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Action research occurs in unique contexts and includes a specific participant (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Participants are selected based on who could provide the most relevant information for the study. This study used purposeful sampling choices that allowed for an in-depth investigation of the problem of practice within the study's context (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

The Action Research Design Team and the Action Research Implementation Team members were intentionally selected based on their unique backgrounds, experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives on family engagement. Given the nature of the study, selecting family participants was purposeful and targeted to our most vulnerable families. The families chosen to participate in the survey and at-home learning experience were students with a student support team. They were in tier three of the response to intervention process, and the specific nature of the criterion allowed for the most in-depth investigation of the problem. The sample size was based on the number of students placed in SST at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year and the families willing to participate.

Families of students placed in SST at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year were invited to participate in the study. These families were selected based on this criterion alone, and no other considerations were considered. The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this action research study.

Data Collection Methods

This study used a qualitative approach and analysis. The theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, and the research questions guided the data collection methods. The purpose of qualitative was to gather data to promote a deep understanding of perspectives from what people say and observe (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative research emphasizes a triangular approach (Glanz, 2014). The researcher used multiple data collection methods to achieve data triangulation to ensure accuracy (Mertler, 2019). A coding system was used to organize data collection and generate patterns that emerged in the data analysis process (Glanz, 2014).

The researcher incorporated various qualitative methods to collect data for this study. These methods included:

1. Individual interviews with caregivers and participants at the research process's beginning, middle, and end.
2. Conduct focus groups with the Action Research Design Team and the Action Research Implementation Team at the study's beginning, middle, and end to gain staff perspectives about the effectiveness of the implemented family engagement strategies.
3. Observations of student support team meetings of students in Tier 3
4. Documents, including artifacts, provided additional data about the study's focus and the longitudinal data on parent engagement.
5. Parent Questionnaires

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most common sources of qualitative data collection in qualitative research. They provide the researcher with participants' perspectives, obtain detailed descriptions, and allow probing for additional information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Demarrais (2004) defines a research interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55).

In this study, the researcher interviewed teachers and families of students in Tier 3 of response to intervention and had a student support team. A student support team comprises the student's teacher, assistant principal, school psychologist, family engagement coordinator, and guardian. The team meets every six to eight weeks to review progress monitoring data and make informed educational decisions about the student. Families were included in these decision-making processes. The researcher chose semi-structured individual interviews with the parents and teachers. Individual semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions and probe the interviewee with additional perspectives or questions if necessary (Denscombe, 2017). Individual interviews allowed parents to answer with more autonomy and be able to answer honestly (Glanz, 2014). In this study, parents needed to provide in-depth and honest answers to the questions to help the researcher understand the lack of engagement of families of underperforming students. Table 3.5 shows the interview questions asked to address each research question.

Table 3.5*Interview Question Sample*

Research question	Interview questions
1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?	How can the school help equip families to engage in their child's education? Are you satisfied with how often and how the school communicates with you about your child and their academics? Do you feel welcome in your child's school?
2. How do families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children's educational outcomes?	What challenges have you observed regarding families being engaged in the decision-making processes for their child's education? What would you like to do to help your child in their schooling but do not know how?
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the overall educational experience of underperforming students?	What do you consider to be the parent or family's role in a child's education? How does the school ask families to be engaged in a student's education? What do you feel we should do to engage families more?
4. What impact does a rural area have on family engagement?	What challenges do you face regarding attending family engagement events? What community resources could the school provide to help families be more engaged in their child's education?

Focus Groups

The focus group consisted of the action research design and implementation teams, who shared their views on the research questions (Glanz, 2014). This method was chosen because it was not formal, like an interview. However, it allowed the researcher to gather data from participant interactions (Mertler, 2019). The participant interactions allowed the researcher to gather information from the Action Research Design Team members and the Action Research Implementation Team. These teams were made up of individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, gathering data from their interactions was necessary to strengthen the research

process and implementation of the interventions. The focus groups took place in the middle of the study in October 2024. The focus group discussions allowed the researcher to gain perspective on the design, interventions, and implementation. The focus groups allowed the researcher to ask questions while observing body language between participants, which could not happen in a one-on-one interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Speaking directly with staff offered insight into teachers' challenges with engaging families of underperforming students. It allowed staff to be open with others and share their feelings when discussing ways to engage families of underperforming students and their challenges. The questions used were designed to better understand the difficulties of engaging families. The Action Research Design Team used the data from these focus group discussions to reflect on current strategies and those needed to make future changes.

Observations

Observation is a fundamental method of data collection in qualitative research. It involves observing participants in their natural social setting to discover and explain complex interactions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Semi-structured observations allowed the researcher to freely observe while taking notes in the research environment (Mertler, 2019). In addition, observations enabled the researcher to obtain information by evaluating someone firsthand rather than relying on someone else's perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

In this study, the researcher collected data through semi-structured observation of the Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team meetings and parent training on at-home learning activities. The researcher required intentional attention to detail and active participation during these meetings and training. Also, the researcher conducted semi-structured observations during student support team meetings. This data collection enabled the

researcher to observe interactions between the parents and the student support team members. The parent engagement coordinator set the tone for the meeting, and through observation, the researcher ensured the team followed through with the level of interaction expected by the design team.

Artifacts

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2009), documents pair well with interviews, focus groups, and observational data. Documents provide data that can give the study full autonomy and be valuable (Mertler, 2019). In this study, the researcher used two artifacts and evaluated them carefully. The documents were analyzed and contributed to the study's findings.

The artifacts utilized were longitudinal data from Title 1 parent surveys, questionnaires from participants in the study, and the parent engagement plan for the district and school. The parent engagement plan provided a guide to the team and, if implemented with fidelity, would provide parents with new engagement opportunities. The Title 1 parent surveys and the questionnaire provided by the participants in the study allowed the Action Research Design Team to take feedback from families and apply it to the interventions. Parents must have input and are a part of the decision-making process. By allowing parents to have input and decision-making authority, the parents have ownership of what happens with students at Southside Elementary School (Sanders-Smith et al., 2020). Parents took part in decisions for their children during Student Support Team meetings. Implementing a new Student Support Team meeting protocol during Cycle 2 helped with this process.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are one of the most common types of data collection used in action research projects (Glanz, 2014). Two types of questionnaires are used in data collection: open-

ended and closed-ended (Glanz, 2014). Open-ended questionnaires allow the participant to elaborate on the given question. Therefore, open-ended questionnaires are often used in qualitative data to determine critical information for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

As part of the school improvement process, specifically looking at family engagement, SES regularly uses a variety of questionnaires to gain data for its school improvement plan. One questionnaire is for the faculty and staff of Southside Elementary School and is an internal anonymous questionnaire. This survey provides leaders with ways to improve instructional processes and enhance family engagement. In addition, parents have an opportunity to participate in an anonymous Title 1 family engagement questionnaire each year. The Southside School District sends out the questionnaire, and each school uses this questionnaire to inform decisions made regarding the district improvement plan and the individual school improvement plan. In addition, to inform interventions for the study, the primary researcher provided a questionnaire to participants at the beginning and end of the study.

The primary researcher used questionnaires as a data collection method because questionnaires are an efficient way to gain helpful information. The data received will be displayed in a format that simplifies coding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In addition, questionnaire data provided the researcher with current and previous data to compare during the study. Data compiled during the study will be compared to document improvements.

Interventions

Glanz (2014) defined interventions as a “specific instructional practice, program, or procedure that is implemented by a researcher” to study its effect on a problem of practice (p. 64). This study focused on parents of underperforming students to investigate the reasons for their lack of parental engagement and ways to engage them successfully. The interventions in

this study were based on Epstein's six types of family involvement and developed by the Action Research Design Team. The focus areas were at-home learning, communicating, collaborating with the community, and decision-making, as demonstrated in Table 3.6. Figure 3.2 shows the iterations of the Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect phases. The implementation team followed this cycle when implementing interventions. In this study, the interventions were critical to the action research process.

Table 3.6

Interventions for the Study

Epstein's type of family involvement	Intervention	Target group	Frequency
At-home learning	Provided families with at-home learning packets to reinforce classroom instruction. The parent engagement coordinator provided parent training for the at-home activity.	Parents of students in SST	Weekly
Communicating	Create conditions for effective two-way communication and provide a variety of communication techniques	Leaders Teachers Parents of students in SST	Weekly
Collaborating with the community	Provide families with community resources and events	Family engagement coordinator Parents of students in SST Community organizations	Weekly
Decision-making	Parents serve as active members of their child's student support team and offer input into future educational decisions	Parents of students in SST Leaders Teachers	Monthly

Note. SST = student support team.

Data Analysis Methods

In qualitative research, data analysis is the interpretation of visual material. Interpretation is used to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and to define what is represented in the material (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). According to Glanz (2014), data analysis is threefold. It “describes or summarizes data collection, is used to search for consistent patterns or themes among the data, and enables us to answer our research questions and hypotheses” (Glanz, 2014, p. 138). Using a coding system, the researcher reduced the data into themes (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the data was looked at holistically to determine trends or patterns in it (Glanz, 2014).

Coding

Coding is defined as assigning a shorthand designation to various aspects of data so that it can easily be retrieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). In addition, making notations in the transcripts struck the researcher as relevant for answering research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). Coding promoted deductive analysis as categories were established from the literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Themes were identified and interpreted in the data due to the deductive analysis promoted by coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analyzing the qualitative data was time-consuming but fascinating (Glanz, 2014).

Thematic Analysis

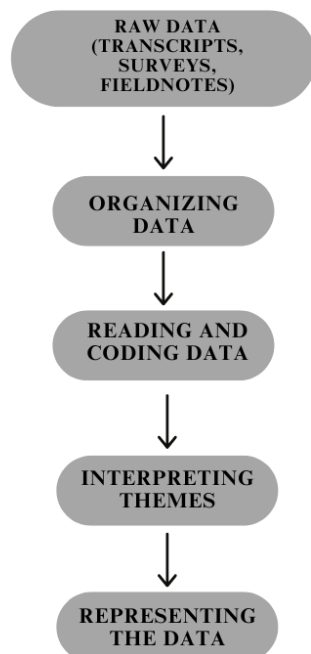
Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning within qualitative data that can be used to identify patterns within and across data. Finding patterns or themes allowed the researcher to interpret the data quickly (Glanz, 2014). It was important that data analysis “required that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons

and contrasts” (Creswell, 2003, p. 146). Figure 3.4 models the phases of Thematic Analysis, while Table 3.7 demonstrates the steps of thematic analysis and establishing trustworthiness.

Figure 3.4

Phases of Thematic Analysis

VALIDATING THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION



Note. See Creswell and Poth (2018).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2024), it was essential to do data analysis simultaneously with data collection to ensure the final product was shaped by the data collection and analysis that entails the whole process. Early in the study, systems for organizing and managing data were established. The steps to data analysis were collecting raw data, organizing data, reading and coding data, interpreting data, and representing the data visually (Creswell, 2013).

Table 3.7*Steps of Thematic Analysis and Establishing Trustworthiness*

Step of thematic analysis	Means of establishing trustworthiness
1. Read and reread the data	Get to know your qualitative data Note where data intersects with the theoretical framework Create an initial categorization scheme
2. Generate codes to sort data	Make note of categories within the data Reread your data and make sure it is coded correctly Some pieces of data may be coded in multiple categories
3. Describe the main themes in the data and make connections between the data and the research questions.	Begin to make connections between the research and the data Ask yourself how information in this category helps you understand your research topic and answer your question
4. Interpret the data and define how it impacts future practice.	Look for information in your data that may contradict patterns and trends Search for relationships and similarities in the data Look for data that answer your research questions Look for data that provides challenges to current or future practice

Note. See Mertler (2019).

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Action Research focuses on producing valid and reliable information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). Ethically conducting the research ensured validity and reliability in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). In addition, in qualitative research, the researcher must provide evidence that the results and analysis provided from the study represent “the reality of the situations and persons studied” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 202).

Qualitative researchers strongly emphasize the accuracy of the data to establish the validity of their results. This concept, often called trustworthiness, was a cornerstone of qualitative research (Mertler, 2019). Trustworthiness was built when a researcher meticulously designed the study and adhered to rigorous standards. It was further solidified when the

following characteristics were thoroughly examined: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Mertler, 2019). Qualitative researchers enhanced trustworthiness by developing studies incorporating authenticity in the data collection methods, organization, and analysis (Glanz, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017).

This study employed a comprehensive set of strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. The strategies utilized in the study encompassed:

1. Member Checking: The ARDT and ARIT reviewed the collected data, engaged in data analysis, and “solicited feedback on emerging findings from people being interviewed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217).
2. Peer Debriefing: Peer debriefing is consultation with peers outside a designated research team (Merriam, 2009).
3. Triangulation: The researcher used data from individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and artifacts to triangulate and confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2009).
4. Recognizing and Addressing Researcher Bias: The creation of a subjectivity statement highlighted the researcher’s biases, which were used in the study’s analysis (Holmes, 2020).

Triangulation of the research methods is presented in Table 3.8.

This study was context-specific and not generalizable to all settings. However, transferability can occur due to sampling and thick descriptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection mechanism; therefore, the thick description aided the researcher in addressing bias throughout the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Table 3.8*Triangulation of Research Methods*

Research question	Methods of data collection
1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?	Parent interview Teacher questionnaire Focus group
2. How do families conceptualize impact of family engagement in supporting their children's educational outcomes?	Parent interview Parent questionnaire
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the overall educational experience of underperforming students?	Parent interview Teacher and parent questionnaire Focus group
4. What impact does a rural area have on family engagement?	Observations Artifacts Focus groups

Note. Coding analysis was the method of analysis used for every method of data collection. The approximate timeline for every method of analysis was August–December 2024.

Subjectivity Statement

I was the researcher for this study. As a school administrator for Southside Elementary School, I conducted focus groups with the ARDT and the ARIT and facilitated interviews with participants related to family engagement. I collected data throughout the study, documenting survey data, questions, and reflections as the study progressed through the two cycles.

My experience as an educator in multiple school districts provided perspectives from various schools with different levels of family engagement. I began my career as an educator in a special education classroom in a small school district that had a varying amount of family engagement and served as a co-teacher. I then moved to a different district and served as a kindergarten teacher and a second and third-grade special education teacher. Family engagement was a strength in this school district, and the community fully supported everything the school

did. My current position as an assistant principal in the Southside School District provides a new viewpoint on family engagement and the need for improvement.

This was my third year in administration at Southside Elementary School, and I came from a district where family engagement was a strength. Therefore, the demographics and school population at my previous school caused me to have a skewed view of what family engagement should look like in all schools. Different demographics, community, and school populations can require different family engagement approaches.

In addition, coming from a family fully engaged in my education, my biased opinion could have impacted my expectations of family engagement. My parents were educators and valued the importance of families being engaged in their children's education. Therefore, to mitigate any potential biases on my part as the research, I collected data from multiple sources to examine each of the research questions. Interviews, focus groups, and observations helped to ensure that I accurately captured the thoughts and perspectives of the participants in the study.

Limitations

This study's limitations arose from the study's context and the nature of the research. One limitation of this study was that the study took place in a rural elementary school in the Southeastern United States. The population of students at the school was predominately low-socioeconomic white students. Therefore, results may not transfer to other locations. Due to the nature of the research, a limited number of cycles were conducted. Additional cycles could have provided more data to support further or contradict the findings. Another limitation is that the researcher served as both a participant and an observer. This could result in an increased researcher bias. In addition, the researcher held a position of authority in the building, limiting

the findings. This could lead to participants' unwillingness to be honest in interviews or focus groups. Participation in the family engagement study was completely voluntary.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the action research methodology used for this study, including the data collection and analysis methods, data sources, interventions, reliability, validity, and generalizability. School leaders and other personnel worked together to identify areas of weakness and reflect on current family engagement strategies implemented. Interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and observational data were used as data sources. Interviews from families and teachers were used to capture the perspectives from the home and school. The focus group's purpose was to gather perspectives from the action research design team members on how Southside Elementary School can better engage families based on existing literature. All of the data collected were coded and analyzed for themes and patterns related to the effects of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students.

The next chapter of this dissertation presents the findings of the family engagement study at Southside Elementary School. The action research study, interventions, and cycles of action are described in detail within the context of family engagement strategies in a rural elementary school.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The challenges faced by many families in effectively supporting their children's academic endeavors often stem from a perceived lack of knowledge or expertise in educational matters. Families view teachers as academic experts; therefore, they may feel ill-equipped to work alongside their children (Hall, 2020). However, family engagement continues to be widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting academic success. According to Mapp (2017), the effective approach to family engagement is through the lens of a partnership between the family and the school. When families perceive themselves as active partners, they are more inclined to engage with their children academically. Given these insights, fostering strong partnerships with families, particularly those whose students are academically underperforming, is a necessary strategy at Southside Elementary Schools is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?
2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?

3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

Chapter 4 describes the study's context and the case study's findings. The context describes the school, student body characteristics, staff characteristics, current family engagement practices, policy around Title 1 schools and family engagement, and the problem-framing in the context of Southside Elementary School, the action research site. The chapter continues by telling the story of the action research study, the twelve weeks of progress, and its outcomes. The timeline of data collection methods, including interviews, focus groups, and reflective questionnaires, are described as they occur within the two-cycle action research study. The researcher additionally describes the alignment between the research questions and theoretical framework.

Context of the Study

The Southside School District (SSD) is in a rural county located 15 miles northeast of a college town. One of the unique features of South County is that it is made up of six smaller cities. Southside Elementary School serves students in the Southside city limits and with a variance to attend the school. Out-of-city students require an approved variance by the district to participate in Southside Elementary School. Even though Southside Elementary School draws most of its students from the Southside city limits, it has the most students on a variance in the district and is the largest elementary school. Its enrollment averages 520 students from kindergarten through 5th grade.

Southside Elementary School (SES) is a Title I public elementary school in a rural county with approximately 31,000 people. The school is part of a charter school district. A charter school is a public school of choice that operates under terms of a charter, with an authorizer, such as the state and local boards of education (Georgia Department of Education). Charter schools have flexible local rules in exchange for higher accountability for raising student achievement. In addition, being a part of a charter requires schools to have a school governance team. The school governance team consists of nine members from the school (4), parents (3), and community members (2). The governance team helped to link the overlapping spheres of influence by engaging in decision-making processes for the school, including the school, family, and community.

The demographic composition of SES differs from that of Southside County. The school's location in the county affects the school's demographics. According to the United States Census Bureau, 95.4% of the town's population is white, while 4.6% is minority. The Southside Elementary School's student population resides in the middle of the county and city's demographics, with 81% of the students white and 19% minority. The increased amount of minority students is a result of students who have a variance as well as students with disabilities being served at SES.

Student Body Characteristics

The school is made up of 516 students from kindergarten-5th grade. This is an increase of 30 students since the 2023-2024 school year. The majority of the population, 81%, is white, non-Hispanic. Other race/ethnicities represented are Asian (2%), Black (5%), Hispanic (8%), and two or more races (4%). Sixty-five percent of students receive free or reduced lunch at Southside Elementary School; thus, many families live at or below the poverty level. The number of

economically disadvantaged students at Southside Elementary School increased by 17% this school year. Based on results from parent questionnaires (Appendix E), families want a variety of forms of communication from the school. They desire to be engaged in their child's education by being present at school and reinforcing skills at home. Families feel welcome at school and appreciate their encouragement to engage in Southside Elementary School activities. However, some families expressed their inability to be present in the building. Therefore, an increase in opportunities to engage in at-home learning is necessary.

The students at Southside Elementary School have various learning needs. Students who qualify for Special Education services are 23.37% of the student population. However, it should be noted that SES serves two of the county's self-contained Special Education classes that are made up of students whose home school is not Southside Elementary School. Students who access accommodations for identified disabilities based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act comprise four percent of the student body. Students identified as gifted comprise four percent of our student population. SES's ELL (English Language Learners) population is three percent of the student body.

In addition, 28% of SES's student body is considered underperforming and has qualified for the Early Intervention Program. These students perform below the 30th percentile on the MAP and FAST assessments in reading, math, or both. Southside Elementary School's goal was to engage the families of these students to impact their academic achievement positively. To do so, strategies and interventions were implemented during the 2024-2025 school year. These activities included at-home learning activities such as math practice activities, phonics practice, and independent reading activities to reinforce the family sphere of the overlapping spheres of

influence. In addition, increased communication through multiple modes continued engaging the school sphere of the overlapping spheres of influence.

Staff Characteristics

It is essential to note the composition of staff members during the 2024-2025 school year because SES lost a 5th-grade teacher and a support staff previously funded through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds. Although there was an increase in students for the 2024-2025 school year, there was a decrease in staff. Therefore, the assistant principal utilized an early intervention teacher to reduce the class sizes in 5th grade. In addition, utilizing the family engagement coordinator to increase family engagement to impact student achievement positively was a vital part of the 2024-2025 school improvement plan.

Southside Elementary School has two buildings. The main campus houses grades kindergarten through 3rd grade, and the Dawg Academy houses grades 4th and 5th. Kindergarten through 3rd grade had 17 general education teachers, three early intervention teachers, and five special education teachers, two of them being self-contained teachers and 15 paraprofessionals, with five being self-contained special education paraprofessionals. An additional 2nd-grade teacher was hired for the 2024-2025 school year to reduce class sizes. The Dawg Academy had seven general education teachers, three intervention teachers, three special education teachers, and two and a half paraprofessionals. One of the intervention teachers was used solely in 5th grade to help reduce the number of students in each class by utilizing a pull-out early intervention model.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires Title 1 schools to have robust strategies to build capacity to engage parents in an effective partnership with schools and to share and support high levels of student academic achievement (Georgia Department of

Education, 2023). Georgia's ongoing family engagement process increases active participation, communication, and collaboration between families, schools, and communities to educate the whole child (Georgia Department of Education, 2023). Southside Elementary School is required under Local Educational Agency policy to review and update its Family Engagement Policy annually. In addition, Southside Elementary School distributes its Family Engagement plan and policy to stakeholders at the beginning of each year. The 2024-2025 plan and policy included strategies to engage families in the academic decisions of their child's education, specifically students who are in Tier III of the Response to Intervention process, and have a student support team.

Family engagement has been an area of concern since the COVID-19 pandemic at Southside Elementary School and intensified since the return to normalcy. It was common for families to attend events held at the school. However, engaging the families in academic activities and educational decisions in various ways throughout the year was challenging. Examples of involving families included participation in school fundraisers, Title I informational events, field days, and providing feedback on surveys. However, the COVID-19 pandemic affected families attending conferences, meetings, and other academic-centered events among teachers and families. Title 1 data from events held post-COVID-19 at school showed a decrease in the number of parents and families in attendance at Title 1 family events compared to events held pre-COVID-19. Therefore, increasing family engagement in differentiated ways was necessary to impact student achievement positively.

Improving family engagement was not just a goal but a pivotal part of Southside's proactive school improvement plan during the 2024-2025 school year. Professional learning opportunities were centered on increasing family engagement at SES, with teachers equipped to

engage parents in implementing the new English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum, Wit and Wisdom. The school also implemented family engagement strategies such as a Family Engagement Literacy Night and an English as a Second Language Informational Night. These proactive approaches, involving administrators, teachers, and parents, aimed to create strategies for engagement by providing families with various opportunities to engage in their children's academics.

Teachers were required to make positive phone calls twice a semester to increase opportunities for families to be engaged. The administrators provided designated time for teachers to make these contacts with families. In addition, during the 2024-2025 school year, several events were planned for families to be involved with their children in the school setting without other obligations. For example, parents' breakfast, holiday market, and the Spring Fling allowed families to be present in the building. These events allowed families to attend a school event either during school hours or after hours with their children. Therefore, relationships with families were established in hopes of future opportunities for shared responsibility in educational decision-making. The leadership at Southside Elementary School felt that if families began attending various events and became more involved in activities, they would become comfortable participating in academic conversations. Therefore, they would be more likely to engage with the educational decisions for the school and students.

Based on historical data, the percentage of parents engaged in their child's education at Southside Elementary School was an area of concern. For example, only 23% of families attended student support team meetings during the 2023-2024 school year. After data analysis and the desires of the administrative team, the team determined the need to improve family engagement to positively impact student achievement and the partnerships between the family

and school. A family engagement coordinator was necessary. After hire, the administrative team and the family engagement coordinator began developing a family engagement plan.

The school improvement plan for the FY25 school year aimed to engage families to impact student achievement positively. The administrative team provided teachers with professional development focused on family engagement. In addition, teachers were provided time to make positive contact with families within the first two weeks of school. The family engagement coordinator supported teachers with the connections between teachers and families. The Action Research Design Team used the context of the study to build on current practices to help shape the interventions that best meet the needs of families at Southside Elementary School. The qualitative action research study included an Action Research Design Team and an Action Research Implementation Team.

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) was essential to this study. The ARDT met every two weeks to discuss progress on the family engagement interventions. The team discussed the progress the students were making with their progress monitoring data compared to students whose families were not participants in the study. The ARDT reviewed questionnaires, achievement data, participation data for the at-home learning activity, and interview data to plan and implement interventions for families of underperforming students. The reflective and iterative nature of the study allowed the ARDT to continually review the family engagement practices and questionnaire data to ensure the family engagement strategies implemented met the needs of families. Details of the Action Research Design Team are provided in Table 3.1.

The Action Research Design Team consisted of key stakeholders from Southside Elementary School, each of whom brought diverse expertise and experiences to the project.

Their collective knowledge and skills provided a robust foundation for addressing family engagement and literacy interventions at SES. Below is a summary of their roles and contributions:

School Leadership

Principal: The SES principal was in her fourth year in this role, following five years as an assistant principal and nineteen years as a classroom teacher. Her deep knowledge of the school's history and families provided valuable historical and contextual data for the team. She is committed to improving family engagement based on her understanding of its impact on student success.

Assistant Principal (primary researcher): The assistant principal, who holds an educational specialist degree in special education and is pursuing her doctorate, has two years of experience in this role and thirteen years of classroom teaching experience (four in special education and nine in general education). Her previous school's success in family engagement inspired her to lead efforts to strengthen engagement at SES.

Instructional Staff

Interventionist: The interventionist is in her 20th year in education. She works with multiple grade levels, bringing context from various-aged students. She provides daily intervention to Southside Elementary School's underperforming students from kindergarten to third grade. She has extensively researched implementing the University of Florida Literacy Institute's (UFLI) reading intervention. Her desire to work with underperforming students and implement the UFLI intervention with fidelity brings value to implementing family engagement strategies targeting students who receive this intervention.

Early Intervention Teacher (EIP): The EIP teacher is in her 26th year in education and five at SES. She provides intervention to students in multiple grade levels and collaborates with multiple teachers in the building. She brought context from professional learning experiences with literacy interventions such as Orton Gillingham. In addition, she was utilized as an instructional leader in the school. Her desire to increase student achievement and engage families brought a unique perspective to the team.

Support Staff

Family Engagement Coordinator: The family engagement coordinator was in her first year but retired with thirty years of experience as a classroom and early intervention teacher at SES. She brought a unique perspective by having taught many parents of the students at Southside Elementary School. In addition, she taught family engagement classes at a local college and provided the Action Research Design Team with context from her experiences with teaching. Her experiences with families and Southside Elementary School and her understanding of family engagement strengthened her desire to improve attendance and achievement by engaging families at SES.

Librarian: The librarian was in her fifth year in education, with three years in the classroom and two years as a librarian. Working in the library and with all students, she provided insight into our students' literacy needs. In addition, she provided many resources for implementing the interventions. She had a strong background in technology integration and provided the Action Research Design Team with innovative ideas for incorporating technology into family engagement practices.

Counselor: The counselor was in her fifteenth year in education, with six years as a counselor. Through many conversations and experiences with children at Southside Elementary

School, she built strong relationships with families. Therefore, she brought a unique perspective to the Action Research Design team by providing relevant information about families' histories and home lives. technology into family engagement practices.

Individual Roles

The six Action Research Design team members were essential members who each brought individual perspectives and skills. These educators served as formal or informal leaders at Southside Elementary School. Mrs. Bowles, Ms. Gowder, and Ms. Haygood provided Tier II and Tier III reading intervention support to students. Ms. Haygood provided progress monitoring data and information to general education teachers and the student support team (SST). Ms. Whitaker, as the school counselor, frequently met with students and families, thus bringing information to the meetings that were valuable in the school and family connection. Mrs. Creedle, as the school principal and Southside Elementary School's staff member for over 25 years, also provided invaluable information about families and students. Her direct analysis of school data to drive the School Improvement Plan influenced many of the decisions of the Action Research Design Team. Ms. Gowder served as the family engagement and multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) coordinator and brought a plethora of knowledge to the table as a member of the SES staff for more than 30 years. Her prior relationship with families allowed her the opportunity to strengthen the partnership between families and classrooms. She participated in all SST meetings and helped to lead many of the family engagement strategy initiatives. Her involvement in the ARDT and the ARIT was invaluable as she was able to provide firsthand information and experience with family engagement strategies to inform the action research.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation team (ARIT) comprised one member of the ARDT described above, along with two second-grade teachers and two third-grade teachers. These teachers were assigned a pseudonym throughout the study to ensure confidentiality. The primary researcher invited teachers of students who had a student support team and were in the University of Florida Literacy Institute intervention in August of 2024. These four teachers committed to participating in the study, and consent was obtained in August of 2024 (Appendices A and B). The goal of the Action Research Implementation team was to create a collaborative group to implement new and innovative family engagement strategies. The ARIT provided the primary researcher and ARDT feedback through individual interviews, a mid-study focus group, and final individual interviews. The Action Research Implementation Team members had varying years of teaching experience, as noted in Table 4.1.

The primary researcher invited study family participants based on their Tier III reading status in response to the intervention process and their participation in the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) intervention. This intervention provided students with an explicit and systematic reading intervention that teaches students the foundational skills necessary to read. Two second-grade students and five third-grade students' families consented and participated in the study. These family participants had varying relationships with the students. Six students had participating mothers; one was a grandmother who adopted her grandson, and one was an aunt of the students with guardianship.

Findings From the Case

The Action Research Design Team developed two iterative intervention cycles for family engagement strategies, which the Action Research Implementation Team carried out with participant families over 12 weeks.

Table 4.1

Action Research Implementation Team

Member	Primary role at SES	Action research role
Primary researcher	Assistant Principal	Led and conducted all research within the ARDT for data analysis. Brought 17 years of educational experience to the team with three years of experience as assistant principal.
Roxanne Brown	Teacher	Provided four years of teaching experience, all at SES, and has successfully engaged families in Student Support Team meetings.
Erin Gowder	Family engagement/ MTSS coordinator	She had 30 years of teaching experience in elementary education and recently obtained her MTSS endorsement. She also brought insight from being familiar with many families at SES as she has taught multiple members of SES families.
Anna Baker	Teacher	Provided three years of teaching experience, one of the years being in a different district in a middle school. She brought insight from teaching multiple age groups in a variety of settings.
Ashton Black	Teacher	Provided 15 years of teaching experience in special and general education. She offered insight from having worked in two different school systems.
Bailey Smith	Teacher	Provided 6 years of teaching experience in the general education setting. She offered insight from working in a different system before the Southside School District.

Note. SES = Southside Elementary School; ARDT = Action Research Design Team; MTSS = multi-tiered system of support.

Each action research cycle involved planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This process allowed the Action Research Design Team to plan future interventions based on data collected. In this study, the following findings emerged:

1. Participants and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students.
2. Participants indicated that family engagement strategies improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school.
3. Teachers and participants indicated that effective communication strategies increased parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education.
4. Participants expressed that family engagement enhanced parent and child relationships.
5. Participants and teachers indicated that family engagement enhanced the trust, communication, and partnerships between families and the school.
6. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families' involvement in their decision-making processes for their children.
7. Teachers expressed that parent training improved academic support by families at home.
8. Teachers indicated that family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support meetings.
9. Participants indicated that increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student success.

10. Participants expressed a need for more out-of-school learning experiences from community resources.

Information from each data cycle gave insight into the study's overall research purpose: to examine the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school.

Action Research Cycle 1

Initial Interviews

Initial individual interviews were held with each participant at the beginning of Cycle 1, which started in mid-August of 2024. The interviews were held face-to-face at Southside Elementary School. The researcher reached out to the participants to arrange a convenient time for them to meet. They both agreed on a mutual time and date. The researcher sent a message through the Remind application, a form of communication Southside Elementary School uses to communicate with families, or reached out via phone to them to schedule the interview and confirm the date and time. The researcher recorded the confirmed time on Google Calendar. Initial interviews began on August 19, 2024, and concluded on September 3, 2024. It should be noted that Mandy Fitz joined the study at the beginning of Cycle 2. Therefore, her initial interview was held on September 30, 2024, after her child's Student Support Team meeting. Table 4.2 shows the dates of the initial interviews.

The primary researcher asked 11 questions (Appendix C) of the seven participants participating in the study. To help inform research question two, the 11 questions on the interview protocol targeted families' descriptions of current family engagement practices and the perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, and how they conceptualize effective family engagement strategies. Each interview included open-ended questions, such as: What challenges have you

observed regarding families' engagement in the decision-making processes for their child's education, and what additional family engagement strategies would you like to see implemented? Open-ended questions allowed the primary researcher to gain insight into future professional learning activities and strategies about engaging families for teachers, principals, and other leaders, what would improve families' participation in family engagement events/opportunities, and what the school should do to support you in helping their child achieve academically. To address research question one, the question addressing satisfaction with how often and how school staff communicate with you about school activities and the decision-making process was asked.

Table 4.2

Action Research Initial Interviews

Participant	Primary role	Name	Date completed
1	Mom	Carlie Pierce	August 19, 2024
2	Aunt	Ann Holmes	August 21, 2024
3	Grandmother (adopted mom)	Sandy Less	August 19, 2024
4	Mom	Lucette Tucker	August 21, 2024
5	Mom	Tasha Byrd	August 21, 2024
6	Mom	Tonya McClean	September 3, 2024
7	Mom	Mandy Fitz	September 30, 2024

The primary researcher used Otter AI to record and transcribe the interviews. The participants were reminded that they would be recorded using a program that transcribed the interview. The ARDT team used the information in the transcriptions to inform decisions, such as interventions about family engagement interventions. In addition, the primary researcher used interview results to address how families conceptualize the impact of family engagement

strategies on their children's educational outcomes. The participants were asked if they would like to review the transcriptions. None of the participants felt it necessary to review them. The primary reason was that they felt comfortable with their responses and how the researcher interpreted them.

Each interviewee articulated families' views on family engagement practices, articulating that family engagement strategies enhance trust, communication, and partnerships between families and the school. In addition, the participants expressed their desire for future opportunities to be engaged. Furthermore, the interview results showed that parents wanted to help their children at home but did not know how. In addition, families wanted to be engaged in their children's educational decision-making process, for example, if their child should continue to receive the same academic support or if changes need to be made. However, they lacked the knowledge to do so and wanted more consistent communication about educational processes to be provided in multiple ways.

The responses and reactions from the interviews suggest that families would appreciate at-home learning experiences, parent training, and multiple modes of communication. The one-on-one interviews between the primary researcher and the participants reflect on current family engagement practices while being honest about their needs to support their child in the educational process. The primary researcher gathered information from the initial interviews to share with the Action Research Design Team at their first meeting.

To address families' needs and plan for intervention, the Action Research Design Team met every other week to analyze participant data. Based on the data, they planned additional strategies to discuss with the ARIT during their next meeting. Table 4.3 visually represents the bi-weekly alternating meetings and briefly describes each focus.

Table 4.3*Action Research Cycle 1 Meetings*

Meeting title	Date	Focus
ARDT 1.1	August 14, 2024	Planning for Cycle 1 family engagement intervention
ARIT 1.1	August 21, 2024	Implementing Intervention 1 with families
ARDT 1.2	September 4, 2024	Reviewing data from the At-Home Learning Intervention
ARIT 1.2	September 6, 2024	Continuing implementation of Intervention 1
ARDT 1.3	September 25, 2024	Review data from the At-Home Learning Intervention and feedback from participants
ARIT 1.3	September 27, 2024	Review data from the At-Home Learning Intervention and complete a reflective questionnaire

Note. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Action Research Design Team Cycle 1 Meeting 1

The ARDT met for the first time on August 14, 2024, for meeting ARDT 1.1 (Cycle 1, Meeting 1). The primary researcher, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Brittany Creedle, Carrie Whitaker, Cristi Haygood, and Hannah Bowles, were present. The primary researcher began the meeting by informing the ARDT about the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, logic model, and a brief synopsis of current research on family engagement and its impact on student achievement.

After the action research study overview, the family engagement coordinator began the planning portion of the meeting by discussing attendance concerns for underperforming students, specifically those of families participating in the study. Attendance is a key component to students' success because when students miss school, they miss necessary instruction, negatively impacting their academic achievement.

After the initial underperforming student attendance conversation, the ARDT began discussing the Cycle 1 intervention. Based on research by Epstein (2016), at-home learning has

positive implications for student achievement. In addition, results from initial participant interviews showed families' desire for more at-home learning experiences. Therefore, the ARDT team discussed the importance of providing families with opportunities to help their children at home. The at-home learning activities would reinforce in-school intervention and classroom instruction and provide resources for families to work with their children if they are not at school. At-home learning experiences were implemented based on interview results and Epstein's (2016) six types of parent involvement. Before implementing the at-home learning activity, the ARDT discussed the importance of providing families with implementation training.

To plan for the at-home learning experience and the parent training session, the ARDT focused on implementation strategies. Due to the various needs of the families, the ARDT felt it was necessary to provide the families with in-person training that included written instructions, video instructions, and in-person modeling of the activity used during the daily lesson. Before the parent training sessions, the primary researcher prepared a resource packet for families. This packet included the materials needed to implement the daily activities with fidelity.

At the end of the meeting, all members of the ARDT were dismissed except the family engagement coordinator and the primary researcher. The two of them then gathered the necessary materials for the at-home learning activity and found instructional videos for the training. The resource packet for the families included a dry-erase board, dry-erase markers, a UFLI sound mapping map, letter tiles, stickers, and the at-home learning tracker form.

Intervention for Action Research Cycle 1

The overall purpose of the intervention during the first cycle of the Action Research was to implement a research-based family engagement strategy by providing families with an at-home learning experience. Results from the initial interviews suggest that families desire to

engage in their child's learning but often lack the knowledge to help with content-specific material. Therefore, the ARDT provided families with an at-home learning experience that reinforced the intervention at school by the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI). Before the at-home activity (Appendix F) was sent home, the family engagement coordinator and the primary researcher completed parent training with the families.

Parent Training

During the parent training, the family engagement coordinator walked through each day's activity with the families. In addition, she showed a video example of a teacher completing the nightly UFLI activity with a student. After the training on the UFLI nightly activities, the primary researcher went over the weekly tracker form. She explained to the families the importance of being honest on the weekly tracker form when they completed the at-home learning experience. The primary researcher wanted the tracking form to accurately reflect the number of days the participants completed the at-home learning activity to understand the impact the at-home learning activity had on student achievement. The participants were rewarded for completing the tracking form (Appendix H), and the number of days they completed the activity would not impact the student being reinforced. The students would turn in the weekly tracker form on Fridays to receive reinforcement (Comet Cash). The purpose of the tracker form was to see how often the families completed the at-home learning activity.

At the end of the training, participants expressed their appreciation for the in-person explanation of implementing the at-home learning activity. Mrs. Pierce stated, "Thank you for this informative training. It will help me know exactly what to do with my child, and the tracker form will hold us accountable for consistently completing the activity."

Action Research Implementation Team Cycle 1 Meeting 1

The ARIT met for the first implementation meeting on August 21, 2024. All members attended, including the primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Roxanne Brown, Bailey Smith, Ashton Black, and Anna Baker. The primary researcher described the timeline of the two-cycle research project and articulated the four guiding research questions. The purpose of the study, theoretical framework, and logic model were shared.

Following the explanation of the research questions and the study's purpose, the primary researcher and family engagement coordinator shared the intervention for the at-home learning experience with the team. The team was provided with an example of the weekly activity sheet (Appendix F) given to families by a member of the ARDT. In addition, the primary researcher went over the activities for each night with the ARIT. The primary researcher and family engagement coordinator wanted to ensure that each Action Research Implementation Team member knew exactly what was being reinforced during the nightly activity. This was an important component as they would know how to answer questions about the activities if families were to ask.

The primary researcher also shared the tracking form participants would use to track the days they completed the at-home learning experience. It was explained to the ARIT that participants who turned in their tracking form each Friday received tangible reinforcement. The primary researcher wanted the tracking form to accurately reflect the number of days the participants completed the at-home learning activity. The ARIT would share this information and provide the ARDT with appropriate data to see if the completion of the nightly activity positively impacted the weekly progress monitoring data.

The family engagement coordinator explained to the participants' teachers that they would be responsible for communicating with families regularly with updates on progress monitoring data and delivering reinforcement if the tracking sheets were returned on Fridays. An Action Research Implementation Team member expressed concerns about some families completing the at-home learning activity. The primary researcher noted this concern and emphasized the importance of consistent communication and accountability for families. Hopefully, consistent checking in would motivate families to complete the activity. The first ARIT meeting was recorded through Otter AI, and the researcher recorded personal notes and reflections in the observation journal.

Action Research Design Team Cycle 1 Meeting 2

The ARDT met for the second time on September 4, 2024 (ARDT 1.2). The primary researcher, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Britney Creedle, Carrie Whitaker, Cristi Haygood, and Hannah Bowles were present. The team reviewed the tracking form data for the at-home learning experience. Two participants completed the at-home learning activity 100% of the time, two participants 77% of the time, one participant 40% of the time, and the final participant 23% of the time. It should be noted that the last participant had a death in the family that caused him to be displaced from his house for a week. The ARDT discussed the participants who were not completing the activity consistently. The family engagement coordinator (Erin Gowder) recommended contacting the two families who had completed the at-home learning experience less than 50% of the time in the past two weeks. However, Ms. Gowder called all the participant families to touch base on September 5, 2024. When she called, she shared the progress monitoring data with the families and checked how the at-home learning activity was going for

them and their children. Information from the conversations is articulated below and was shared at the next ARDT meeting:

Sandy Less- explained that her child thought the at-home learning activity was fun.

However, he was not rewarded for turning in the weekly tracker form.

Ms. Gowder said, “I will talk to the teacher who reinforced the at-home learning activity to ensure he receives it in the future. For the week, he did not receive it.”

Carlie Pierce said, “She is enjoying the at-home learning activity and supplementing it with additional resources from her time as an EIP teacher.”

Tasha Byrd, the mom, shared that the at-home learning activity was going well. However, when working with her child, she believes he might be showing signs of dyslexia. Ms. Gowder explained that an SST meeting would be set up soon, and we would begin the referral process for the Special Education evaluation.

Tonya McClean- shared that the at-home learning activity was going well for her and her son. She said that it was a productive time together, and she was able to help him appropriately. She liked the scripted and structured nightly activities.

Lucette Tucker admitted they had not been consistently completing the nightly activity, and she was hoping to get back on it. However, a death in the family set them back a bit.

Ann Holmes stated that they enjoyed the activities. She does not consistently get the new words for the week because her child loses things quickly. Ms. Gowder explained that the primary researcher would email her the weekly activity on Mondays.

Ms. Haygood was a member of the ARDT. Each week, she provided participants with an at-home learning activity to reinforce the intervention she provided to the students. She shared

the progress monitoring data with the ARDT, comparing the data from participants and non-participants in the UFLI (University of Florida Literacy Institute) intervention.

Although there was only one data point, the data showed that students participating in the at-home learning experience and completing the activity consistently had higher scores on the UFLI weekly assessment. The team discussed the results and ways to help families who did not consistently complete the nightly activity. The ARDT asked the primary researcher to address consistent communication with the ARIT at their next meeting. Consistent communication would be another strategy to hold families more accountable for completing activities regularly. The primary researcher confirmed that she would discuss progress monitoring data with the ARIT and the importance of consistent communication. The primary researcher recorded the meeting on Otter AI and reflected in the observation journal afterward.

Action Research Implementation Team Cycle 1 Meeting 2

The ARIT met for the second meeting on September 6, 2024 (ARIT 1.2). The primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Roxanne Brown, Bailey Smith, Ashton Black, and Anna Baker were present. At the beginning of the meeting, the team looked at the weekly tracker forms and progress monitoring data from the participants. The tracker forms accurately reflected the data discussed during the ARDT 1.2 meeting. The primary researcher also shared data from the weekly UFLI assessments. She explained that the data showed that students who consistently completed the at-home learning activity scored higher on UFLI weekly assessments compared to those who did not complete it consistently and were non-target students.

The primary researcher then asked the ARIT how they felt the at-home learning activity was going and its implications on classroom performance. Roxanne discussed its positive impact on the consistency of the students completing other homework, too. Ashton explained that the

students came in on Fridays excited to show the tracker form even if they had not completed the activity every night. The students enjoyed receiving their Comet Cash and were motivated to continue participating in the UFLI learning activities at home. She believed this also positively impacted the relationship she had with the students. Anna described the at-home learning experience as positively impacting her students' behavior. Bailey believed the participants from her class and their families began to build a stronger bond around the at-home learning experience. Overall, the ARIT agreed that the at-home learning experience helped improve families' academic support at home.

To conclude the meeting, the primary researcher used this time to remind the teachers of the implementation team that consistent communication with the participants is critical to building strong relationships with families and providing them with accountability. Ms. Gowder shared that she called the families to touch base on September 5, 2024; overall, they had positive things to say about the at-home learning experience. However, some families expressed concern about their child not receiving the Comet Cash when they turned in the tracker form. She also shared her feelings about the importance of the ARIT consistently communicating with families. Communication coming from the teachers had a more significant positive impact based on participant feedback. The primary researcher asked if there were any questions or additional feedback the ARIT wanted to provide based on data shared and conversation throughout the meeting. The researcher took minutes from the meeting and recorded personal notes and reflections in the observation journal.

Action Research Design Team Cycle 1 Meeting 3

The ARDT met to review the data from the at-home learning tracker form, progress monitoring data from UFLI and FAST, and notes from the ARIT 1.2 meeting on September 25,

2024. The primary researcher, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Brittany Creedle, Carrie Whitaker, Cristi Haygood, and Hannah Bowles, were all present.

Ms. Haygood shared the progress monitoring data from the participants compared to the non-participants. Students who participated in the at-home learning experience scored an average of 92% on UFLI weekly assessments compared to the non-target students, who scored 77%. On FAST progress monitoring that measured words read per minute (wpm), students of families who participated in the study had an 11 average wpm increase. In contrast, non-target students had an average increase of 14 wpm. Six students who participated in the study were compared to six non-target students. One of the students who participated in the study had a much higher baseline than other students; therefore, he did not show an increase from August to September. These results showed that the participants scored higher on weekly progress monitoring on UFLI assessments than non-participants. However, the non-target students scored higher on FAST progress monitoring data. The primary researcher explained that she believes this to be the case because the UFLI weekly assessment directly correlates with the intervention and the at-home learning experience, while FAST is a universal progress monitoring tool used to assess if students are generalizing skills learned to other assessments.

Next, the ARDT looked at the completion data from the tracker forms. The primary researcher explained that all participants completed the at-home learning activity more consistently. The ARDT discussed the positive implications of consistent communication with families. Also, the ARIT was more consistent with providing students with Comet Cash if they turned in the weekly tracker form. The primary researcher also noted to the ARDT that she had checked in on all the students and encouraged them to continue working hard to help improve

their academic confidence. The meeting was recorded on Otter Ai, and the researcher reflected on it in the observation journal afterward.

Action Research Implementation Team Cycle 1 Meeting 3

The final ARIT meeting of Cycle 1 (ARIT 1.3) was held on September 27, 2024. The primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Roxanne Brown, Bailey Smith, Ashton Black, and Anna Baker, were present. The primary researcher began by sharing progress monitoring data with the team. She shared that students participating in the at-home learning activity scored 92% on weekly UFLI assessments compared to non-target students, whose average score was 77%. However, students participating in the at-home learning activity had 11 average words per minute on the FAST progress monitoring assessment compared to the non-target students, who increased an average of 14 words per minute. The ARIT quickly realized the reason for this and addressed that the UFLI weekly assessments directly reflected what was being taught in the intervention compared to the FAST progress monitoring assessment, which is more generalized and based on grade-level content. Overall, the participants scored higher on UFLI weekly assessment data than non-target students. However, non-target students had a higher average increase in words read per minute on the FAST progress monitoring assessment. The primary researcher also told Mrs. Black that one of her students had a high baseline; therefore, his wpm did not increase from August to September. Mrs. Black reminded the primary researcher that he was one of the participants who did not consistently complete the at-home learning activity at the beginning of the study. She said, “I do see increased participation in class and a desire to improve his reading rate and accuracy.”

After reviewing the progress monitoring data from UFLI and FAST, the team reviewed the at-home tracker form data. Data from the tracker forms showed increased consistency in

completing the at-home learning experience across participants. The primary researcher expressed her appreciation for the increased communication with participants and the consistent disbursement of Comet Cash when students turned in the tracker form on Fridays. The ARIT members felt the at-home learning experience had positive implications for participants regarding academic achievement. They noticed positive impacts in the classroom, too. The members of the ARIT were asked to fill out the reflective form questionnaire to help guide the ARDT's decision about interventions within Cycle 2. The researcher took minutes and recorded personal notes and reflections in the observation journal.

Action Research Design Team Mid-Point Focus Groups

Focus groups with both the ARDT and the ARIT were held with both teams at the end of Cycle 1 during the first week in October. These focus groups aimed to get a mid-study assessment of the current family engagement intervention and its impact on the achievement of underperforming students. Specifically, the researcher used the collected achievement data for Research Question 1 and the perception data for Research Questions 2 and 3 to inform the perceived effect of family engagement strategies, specifically concerning at-home learning.

These focus groups were held in person according to the focus group protocol. The researcher also probed additional follow-up questions as the meeting went on based on an assessment of the conversations. The primary researcher recorded the meetings using Otter AI, and a transcription of the meeting was created from the program. The transcriptions were analyzed through coding to contribute to the data collection and analysis (Barbour, 2014).

Action Research Design Team Focus Group

Members of the ARDT team met during the school day on October 2, 2024. During the meeting, the primary researcher asked the group the questions from the Focus Group Protocol

(Appendix D). The primary researcher, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Carrie Whitaker, and Cristi Haygood were present. Brittany Creedle and Hannah Bowles were not present due to other meetings. The questions asked during this meeting were the same as those from the initial planning meeting for Cycle 1 (Appendix D). How we ask families to engage in a student's education was addressed. The ARDT expressed that throughout Cycle 1, we expected families to consistently complete the at-home learning experience and track their completion on the weekly tracker form. In addition, the expectation was for families to be engaged in the decision-making processes for their children. This can be done through Student Support Team meetings and two-way communication between teachers and families. The ARDT agreed that consistently completing the at-home learning activity can positively impact student achievement. The learning activity provides students with reinforcement of the in-school intervention at home.

Discussing ways to engage families increased the conversation about Cycle 2 interventions. Based on initial interviews and questionnaire data, families would like various modes of communication, resources, and ways to be engaged in their children's decision-making processes. The ARDT brainstormed ways the family engagement coordinator could support these efforts.

Based on feedback, Cycle 2 interventions would include innovative communication methods, providing families with additional resources, and a new Student Support Team meeting protocol to increase family engagement in the decision-making processes. At the end of the focus group meeting, the ARDT began brainstorming intervention ideas; however, interventions would be finalized during the ARDT 2.1 meeting.

Action Research Implementation Team Focus Group

Members of the ARIT met during the school day on October 4, 2024. During the meeting, the primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Roxanne Brown, Bailey Smith, Ashton Black, and Anna Baker, were present. The primary researcher asked the group the Focus Group protocol questions (Appendix D). These questions were the same as the initial focus group questions. These questions focused on the teachers' perspectives of family engagement strategies and helped inform data for Research Question 3. The researcher also probed additional questions based on the conversation and received feedback from cycle 1.

Action Research Cycle 2

Action Research Cycle 2 began at the beginning of October 2024 after the completion of the focus group meetings. Cycle 2 lasted approximately six weeks and concluded towards the end of November, before Thanksgiving break. Again, the ARDT met bi-weekly to debrief the current family engagement interventions. They continued to discuss the progress monitoring data from the at-home learning experience and the interventions for Cycle 2. During Cycle 2, the ARIT met once at the beginning and once at the end. The ARDT meetings and ARIT meetings would end the week before Thanksgiving to ensure time for final interviews the day before Thanksgiving Break. Table 4.4 visually represents the bi-weekly ARDT and the two ARIT meetings and describes each meeting's focus.

Table 4.4

Action Research Cycle 2 Meetings

Meeting title	Date	Focus
ARDT 2.1	October 9, 2024	Planning for Cycle 2 family engagement intervention
ARIT 2.1	October 11, 2024	Implementing Intervention 2 with families

Meeting title	Date	Focus
ARDT 2.2	October 23, 2024	Reviewing reading and math resources and podcast implementation
ARIT 2.2	November 5, 2024	Continuing implementation of Intervention 2
ARDT 2.3	November 13, 2024	Review data from the At-Home Learning Intervention and podcast implementation

Note. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Action Research Design Team Cycle 2 Meeting 1

The ARDT met on October 9, 2024 (ARDT 2.1), reviewed cycle one data, reviewed the theoretical framework, and planned the intervention for Cycle 2. The primary researchers, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Brittany Creedle, Carrie Whitaker, Cristi Haygood, and Hannah Bowles, were present. The primary researcher began the meeting by noting that the ARDT and ARIT provided positive feedback about implementing the at-home learning activity during Cycle 1. In addition, the participants provided feedback from the implementation and found the at-home learning activity beneficial from an academic standpoint and on family relationships between the caregiver and child. Therefore, the intervention from Cycle 1 continued throughout Cycle 2. It should be noted that based on conversations held in a Student Support Team meeting, an additional participant joined the study at the start of Cycle 2.

The primary researcher then continued the meeting by reviewing the ARDT and ARIT focus group notes, which included information about potential interventions for Cycle 2. Based on the focus group discussions, families want additional resources to help their children academically and in terms of community resources, multiple modes of communication, and opportunities to be engaged in their children's decision-making processes. Therefore, the ARDT began planning the interventions for Cycle 2.

The intervention discussion began with additional resources we could provide participants and the families of Southside Elementary School. The family engagement coordinator started by saying she would create resources that would assist families in helping their children at home with reading and math. In addition, the primary researcher expressed a concern that families are potentially unaware of some of the processes and acronyms used during Student Support Team meetings. Therefore, she noted that she would create a resource regarding the Multi-Tiered Support System because students with a Student Support Team are intensely involved in this process. In addition, she will create a new Student Support Team meeting protocol to engage families more in the conversations about their child and decision-making processes.

Based on conversations between the researcher and her dissertation chair, the communication intervention will address the need for more modes of communication utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI enables computers to simulate human learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. It is a technology that can create original text, images, video, and other content (IBM, 2024). The primary researcher discussed her conversation with her dissertation chair about implementing a podcast while utilizing AI to create podcast content. This provided families with an innovative communication tool to receive relevant information. that communicated innovatively with families.

The ARDT team discussed the benefits of this innovative communication and brainstormed the topics to be addressed on the podcast. The topics brainstormed were family-school partnerships, the impact of family engagement strategies, and the National Family Engagement Week celebration. In addition to the conversation on topics addressed in the podcast, the ARDT discussed the importance of having students involved to bring a personal

touch to students and insight into what they are doing in the classroom. The primary researcher concluded the meeting by summarizing the interventions for Cycle 2. These interventions included supportive resources for families, innovative modes of communication, and a Student Support Team meeting protocol. The researcher recorded the meeting using Otter AI and recorded personal notes and reflections in the observation journal.

After the ARDT meeting concluded, the primary researcher, principal, and librarian remained behind to discuss the logistics of the podcast implementation. The three of them worked together to create the podcast's name. They came up with the name Comets Connect: Bridging Families and Classrooms. The primary researcher then began using ChatGpt to create an image for the podcast. The podcast image was created with a few separate correspondences with ChatGpt (Appendix E). After the image was created, the three ARDT members worked with the director of technology to have a podcast program vetted. Spotify was used to air the podcast.

The primary researcher then used ChatGpt to develop the information for the first podcast. The first podcast included information about school and family partnerships. Once ChatGpt gave the information to share, the primary researcher uploaded the information into NotebookLM and asked the program to create a podcast. NotebookLM used the information uploaded to create dialogue for a podcast. It also created a podcast with anonymous voices; however, the ARDT believed using the voices of staff members from Southside Elementary School was more valuable. This would provide a more personal touch to the podcast. After creating the podcast content, the researcher, principal, and librarian recorded the first episode.

Interventions for Action Research Cycle 2

The overall purpose of the interventions for Cycle 2 of the action research study was to implement effective communication strategies, supportive resources, and a Student Support

Team meeting protocol. The cycle two interventions provided the participants with additional resources to positively impact their child's achievement.

Supportive Resources

Based on initial interviews and questionnaire data, families wanted more resources to support their children academically. Therefore, the family engagement coordinator created a math and reading resource sheet (Appendix K) for families that were differentiated for different grade levels. The reading and math resources provided families with information on ways to support their children at home. In addition, the resources provided families opportunities to reinforce what was being taught in the classroom. She also designed a Parent Power Newsletter (Appendix J). She created the Parent Power Newsletter each month, which included a behavior support lesson, upcoming community events, conversation starters, parenting tips, and an activity on the back to complete as a family. These activities allowed families to complete activities within the community and at home.

The primary researcher also created a resource for families to explain the Multi-Tiered Support System process and support their understanding of it. The resource included information on response to intervention, family engagement in response to intervention, the four Tiers of intervention, and universal screening and progress monitoring.

Student Support Team Meeting Protocol

The primary researcher also created a Student Support Team meeting protocol to assist families with engaging in the decision-making processes for their children. These decisions included feedback on current interventions, movement within the Tiers of intervention, and next steps within the Response to Intervention process. The protocol included background information (parents), Tier II information (teachers/interventionists), and Tier III intervention

planning and next steps (teachers and parents). This document assisted the primary researcher and Student Support Team in staying focused during the meeting and gain insight from all participants.

Innovative Communication

The ARDT implemented a podcast as an innovative way to communicate information with families. The primary researcher utilized an AI resource, ChatGpt, to develop content for the podcast. She then uploaded the content to NotebookLM, which turned the information into a podcast format. To make the podcast more personalized for Southside Elementary School, the podcast utilized the voices of staff members from SES. They provided a more personal touch to the podcast.

The purpose of the interventions for Cycle 2 of the action research study was to implement effective communication strategies and supportive resources and provide opportunities for decision-making in the student support team process. In addition to the added interventions, the at-home learning activity intervention continued throughout Cycle 2.

Action Research Implementation Cycle 2 Meeting 1

The ARIT met on October 11, 2024 (ARIT 2.1), to discuss implementing the interventions for Cycle 2. The family engagement coordinator began the meeting by sharing the template for the monthly newsletter with the ARIT. She went over each section of the newsletter and its content. The content included behavior tips, community resources, attendance advice, and a family activity on the back to complete a nature walk at a local park with their family. Ms. Gowder shared with the ARIT team that if students complete the family activity and return it to school, they will receive a prize. She also shared the math and reading resources she had created

for families, asking for additional ways to support their children at home. These resources could be adapted based on the grade level and needs of the students.

In addition, the primary researcher shared the new meeting protocol that would be implemented at student support team meetings beginning in October. The Action Research Implementation Team members expressed their appreciation for the protocol. Mrs. Black said, “I believe the meeting protocol will help focus the meeting and allow the parents to have more input into decisions.” Also, the primary researcher showed the ARIT the Family Guide to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support she created to support families’ understanding of the process. She explained to the ARIT that the resource would be a quick visual resource for families of students with a Student Support Team. The ARIT shared that they thought this guide would benefit teachers, too. The primary researcher and family engagement coordinator agreed and planned to share the guide with all teachers at Southside Elementary School.

In addition, the primary researcher shared the Comets Connect podcast, which will be airing soon. She explained that the goal of the podcast was to provide families with information about educational experiences in a unique way. For example, the first podcast episode described what it means to have a partnership between families and schools. Hence, the podcast title is “Bridging Families and Schools.” The primary researcher asked for the ARIT to listen to the weekly podcast so they would be informed if families had additional questions. The researcher recorded the meeting using Otter AI and recorded personal notes and reflections in the observation journal.

Action Research Design Cycle 2 Meeting 2

The ARDT met on October 23, 2024 (ARDT 2.2), to debrief and reflect on the reading and math resources, Parent Power Newsletter, and the first podcast. In addition, they looked at

data from the weekly tracker form from the at-home learning experience. The primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Brittany Creedle, and Hannah Bowles, were present. Not all members of the ARDT were present due to the nature of the meeting. The members present were the ones who were directly involved with the resources provided to families and the delivery of the podcast.

First, the primary researcher reviewed the data from the weekly tracker forms. Three participants completed the at-home learning activity 100% of the time, two completed it 84% of the time, one completed it 77% of the time, and the final (new) participant completed it 92% of the time. Therefore, this data shows that more participants consistently completed the at-home learning activity as the study progressed and families recognized positive implications.

The primary researcher then asked the members present if they had all seen the reading and math resources the family engagement coordinator created. Mrs. Bowles had not seen the resources. Therefore, Ms. Gowder shared the resources with her so she could provide insight into reading sources as the librarian. The primary researcher shared that she would ensure the ARIT was aware of the resources and had seen them at the next meeting. Ms. Gowder also shared the November Parent Power newsletter with several members of the ARDT. In addition, the primary researcher communicated with all members of the ARDT to listen to the first Comets Connect Podcast. In an individual conversation with the primary researcher, Ms. Haygood provided feedback on the podcast because she has prior experience with recording podcasts. The feedback was insightful, and the primary researcher and Mrs. Creedle implemented the advice in the next podcast.

After the ARDT reviewed the current resources and needs of parents expressed in questionnaires and at Student Support Team Meetings, the team discussed providing more parent

training. The family engagement coordinator gathered materials for an at-home math practice packet and an at-home reading practice packet. When families asked for help with specific skills, Ms. Gowder had a packet of resources ready and scheduled a time to train the caregiver on the practice activities. The ARDT closed by reviewing the resources and podcast content, giving additional insights, and asking questions. The researcher recorded the meeting using Otter AI and reflected on the transcription in the observation journal.

Action Research Implementation Cycle 2 Meeting 2

The ARIT met on November 5, 2024 (ARIT 2.2), and reviewed the data from the Cycle 1 intervention as it continued into Cycle 2. The primary researcher, Erin Gowder, Roxanne Brown, Bailey Smith, Ashton Black, and Anna Baker, were present. The primary researcher reviewed the at-home learning tracker forms. She noted that three participants completed the at-home learning activity 100% of the time, two completed it 84% of the time, one completed it 77% of the time, and the final (new) participant completed it 92% of the time. She asked the ARIT if they were continuing to communicate with families consistently. They reported that the majority of the time, they can reach families; however, there are a few times when families do not answer. The primary researcher recommended that they email or use the Remind App to communicate progress monitoring data. The Remind App is a communication platform that helps educators reach students and parents where they are. Messages are sent quickly and can be sent to individual families, whole classes, or the whole school.

The primary researcher then showed the ARIT the math and reading resource sheets, the November Parent Power Newsletter, and the information shared in the first podcast episode. In addition, the primary researcher explained to the ARIT how Artificial Intelligence helped to organize and generate information for the podcast. More specifically, the primary researcher

shared how they used ChatGpt to assist with organizing the content for podcasts. It is important to note that while ChatGpt provided organization, the researcher created the prompts and edited and revised the suggested content. The primary researcher generated content for the first podcast on partnerships between families and schools, tailoring it to a fourth-grade comprehension level. After refining and revising the content, the researcher utilized NotebookLM to structure it into podcast format, incorporating a dialogue between two individuals to enhance engagement and accessibility.

The ARIT expressed their appreciation for the resources they could provide to families and the information shared on the podcast. The primary researcher concluded by asking the ARIT to reflect on the two-way communication they implemented while communicating with families about the progress monitoring data from the UFLI intervention. The ARIT felt the communication positively impacted the relationship between the teacher, student, and caregivers. The researcher took meeting notes and wrote reflections in the Researcher's Journal.

Action Research Design Team Cycle 2 Meeting 3

The ARDT met on November 13, 2024 (ARDT 2.3), to review the data from a questionnaire included in the November Parent Power Newsletter and the assessment data from UFLI assessments and FAST progress monitoring data. The primary researcher, Laura Pridemore, Erin Gowder, Brittany Creedle, Carrie Whitaker, Cristi Haygood, and Hannah Bowles, were present. The questionnaire data showed that families wanted more opportunities to be involved in parent training sessions. The types of training they shared they would like to attend included helping children with emotions and behaviors, information about new ELA standards, learning new math techniques, helping children at home, and improving parent/child relationships at home. To address the need to help children with emotions and behaviors, the

family engagement coordinator and the counselor worked together, separately from the other ARDT members, to brainstorm parent-training ideas for families. Ms. Gowder also noted that she would continue to utilize the school's behavior specialist to provide behavior tips in the monthly Parent Power Newsletter. Families communicated their appreciation for the activity on the back of the newsletter, allowing the family to complete an activity together. Therefore, ARDT also discussed ways to enhance parent/child relationships at home by continuing to provide families with activities to complete together in the monthly Parent Power Newsletter.

Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, educators must teach new English Language Arts Standards; therefore, the principal and primary researcher have discussed ways to inform families about these new standards. In preparation for these new standards, both school-based administrators coupled with the family engagement coordinator will provide families with information on the new standards before next year. In addition to providing information to families about ELA standards before the next school year, the administration team will work together to help families learn new math techniques to assist their children at home. The team will continue brainstorming and planning ways to communicate with parents and train them beyond the study's timeframe.

Mrs. Bowles shared that future podcast topics could focus on the types of training families requested. The podcasts could also include family members' reflections on the parent training after they occur. The team brainstormed additional podcast content to deliver over the next few weeks. The topical areas include two-way communication, information about National Family Engagement Week, winter holiday activities and fun starring students from Southside Elementary School, and goal setting.

To conclude the meeting, the primary researcher reviewed the achievement data Ms. Haygood provided her. On weekly UFLI assessments from August to November, targeted students scored an average of 92% compared to non-target students, who scored an average of 78%. On FAST progress monitoring, target students demonstrated a 20-point average increase in words per minute compared to non-target students, who had an 11-point average increase. The ARDT was pleased with the results, showing there seems to be a causal relationship between the at-home learning experience and student achievement.

The researcher recorded the meeting using Otter AI and reflected on the transcriptions in their journal.

Final Interviews

Final interviews were held with each ARIT member and study participants at the end of Cycle 2 in late November 2024. These interviews were held face-to-face with all ARIT members. Six of the seven participant interviews were held over the phone, and one was face-to-face. The primary researcher and interviewee mutually decided on the time and date. Table 4.5 shows the dates of the final interviews. The primary researcher asked the ARIT members seven questions and participants 11 questions. These questions came from the interview protocol (Appendix C). All interviews were recorded using Otter AI, and transcriptions were generated. The transcriptions were offered to the participants to ensure accuracy. However, the participants agreed with the transcriptions and did not want to review them. The interview process gave insight into ARIT members' perception of family engagement strategies and their impact on the achievement of underperforming students. In addition, the interviews gave the researcher insight from participants on the impact of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students and the impact a rural area has on family engagement.

Table 4.5*Action Research Final Interviews*

Member	Primary role at Southside Elementary School	Action research team role	Date of final interview
Erin Gowder	Family engagement coordinator	ARIT	November 20, 2024
Roxanne Brown	2 nd -grade teacher	ARIT	November 20, 2024
Bailey Smith	3 rd -grade teacher	ARIT	November 20, 2024
Ashton Black	3 rd -grade teacher	ARIT	November 20, 2024
Anna Baker	2 nd -grade teacher	ARIT	November 20, 2024
Carlie Pierce	Parent	Participant	November 20, 2024
Ann Holmes	Parent	Participant	November 20, 2024
Sandy Less	Parent	Participant	November 21, 2024
Lucette Tucker	Parent	Participant	November 21, 2024
Tasha Byrd	Parent	Participant	November 21, 2024
Tonya McClean	Parent	Participant	November 22, 2024
Mandy Fitz	Parent	Participant	November 22, 2024

Note. ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Teachers shared that parent training positively impacted families' ability to help students at home. Also, providing families with resources, increasing two-way communication, and implementing a new Student Support Team meeting protocol increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings. Mrs. Smith said, "Parents are more responsive to the SST meeting notices and try their best to attend the meetings, whether in person or via phone." This is a positive change since the first round of SST meetings.

Families shared that family engagement strategies positively impacted their relationships, trust, and partnerships with the school. Also, the at-home learning activities enhanced parent and child relationships. Mrs. Byrd stated, "My relationship with my child has improved, and we enjoy completing the at-home learning experience and the family activities included in the Parent

Power Newsletter.” In addition, participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families’ engagement in Student Support Team meetings, helping make decisions for their children. In responses to questions about how the rural context impacts family engagement, participants indicated increased collaboration with the community through community resources provided in the Parent Power Newsletter, and the partnership with the local library was helpful. Due to the limited resources in a rural community, participants expressed their appreciation for the out-of-school learning experiences provided by the family engagement coordinator.

The one-on-one time allowed the ARIT members and participants to reflect on the family engagement practices before and during the study and provide additional input for future family engagement interventions. The private conversations with the researcher allowed participants to articulate their thoughts accurately in a comfortable setting. The final interview summed up the experiences of the ARIT members and participants during the two-cycle study. Based on transcriptions, the researcher wrote interview notes in the researcher’s journal. Table 4.5 summarizes the timeline for the final interviews.

Action Research Team Artifacts

The primary researcher met with the Action Research Design and Implementation teams and the family participants throughout the twelve-week study. The Action Research Design Team met every other week to create family engagement interventions and review study data from the at-home learning experience and assessment data. The Action Research Implementation team met three times during Cycle 1 and at the beginning and end of Cycle 2. The primary researcher and family engagement coordinator met with the participants at the beginning of the study for parent training sessions and touched base throughout the study.

The Action Research Design and Implementation Teams used Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 2010) as the theoretical framework for the action research. The logic model of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) guided the planning and implementation of family engagement strategies to impact the achievement of underperforming students (Figure 1.2). The ARDT members designed interventions for the Action Research Implementation team to implement with participants based on research surrounding effective family engagement strategies.

The action research team's artifacts included the theoretical framework and logic model. Other artifacts collected included IRB documents, consent forms, questionnaire data, progress monitoring data, the at-home learning tracker form, ARDT focus group questions, transcriptions, meeting notes, ARIT meeting notes, transcriptions, transcribed initial and final interviews, and researcher journal notes. The primary researcher used artifacts from the study to extrapolate findings and themes. The primary researcher noticed common themes when reviewing questionnaires, transcriptions, and the researcher's journal. She began by making notes throughout the transcriptions to find common words or phrases being used continuously. These common phrases included improved academic achievement, effective communication, building trust and relationships, parent resources, decision-making, parent-child relationships, collaboration with the community, barriers to engagement, parent training, and academic support at home. The primary researcher used these phrases as the codes during the coding process. The coding system used for this research study was the Delve Tool.

Results from the coding process and the achievement data analysis informed the study's four themes and ten findings. Research Question 1: To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students? resulted in three findings. The

overarching theme of the three findings was the transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Research Question 2: How do families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children's educational outcomes? resulted in three findings that encompass the theme: strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. Research Question 3: How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students? resulted in two findings that supported the broader theme: Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Research Question 4: How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement? resulted in the two final findings for the study, which encompassed the overall theme: Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources. Table 4.6 summarizes the alignment between the research questions, collected data sources, the theoretical framework, and findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 described and framed the problem within the context of Southside Elementary School. It further detailed the twelve-week, two-cycle action research study and the data artifacts collected, including progress monitoring and benchmark data, at-home learning completion data, initial and final interview responses, questionnaires, focus group responses, and transcriptions. The researcher further described the themes, findings, and alignment between the research questions and theoretical framework.

Table 4.6*Alignment of Research Questions and Data Sources to Theoretical Framework*

Research question	Collected data sources	Alignment to theoretical framework	Findings
1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?	Progress monitoring data Tracker form for at-home activity Benchmark data ARDT focus group Questionnaires	“School” sphere of influence	1. Participants and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students. 2. Participants indicated that family engagement strategies improved students’ ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school. 3. Teachers and participants indicated that effective communication strategies increased parents’ knowledge and understanding of their child’s education.
2. How do families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children’s educational outcomes?	Questionnaires Participant interviews Researcher’s journal	“Family” sphere of overlapping spheres of influence	4. Participants expressed that family engagement enhanced parent and child relationships. 5. Participants and teachers indicated that family engagement enhanced trust, communication, and partnership between families and the school. 6. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families’ involvement in their children’s decision-making processes.
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational	Progress monitoring data Tracker form for at-home learning activity ARIT focus group Teacher interviews	“School” sphere of overlapping spheres of influence	7. Teachers expressed that parent training improved academic support by families at home. 8. Teachers indicated family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings.

Research question	Collected data sources	Alignment to theoretical framework	Findings
outcomes of their students?			
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?	ARDT focus group Artifacts Researcher's journal	"Community" sphere of the overlapping spheres of influence	9. Participants indicated that increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student success. 10. Participants expressed a need for more out-of-school learning experiences from the community.

Note. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Chapter 5 will present the case findings chronologically as the study progressed during the two action research cycles, with the perspectives of the action research design team, the action research implementation team, and the participants. This chapter will provide an in-depth description of data collection, findings, and analysis. Triangulation of multiple data sources, including responses from initial and final interviews, achievement data, focus groups, family engagement questionnaires, meeting transcriptions, and the researcher's journal, will be used to generate themes. The themes and findings will be used to answer the four action research questions.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The challenges faced by many families in effectively supporting their children's academic endeavors often stem from a perceived lack of knowledge or expertise in educational matters. Families view teachers as academic experts; therefore, they may feel ill-equipped to work alongside their children (Hall, 2020). However, family engagement continues to be widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting academic success. According to Mapp (2017), the effective approach to family engagement is through the lens of a partnership between the family and the school. When families perceive themselves as active partners, they are more inclined to engage with their children academically. Given these insights, fostering strong partnerships with families, particularly those whose students are academically underperforming, is a necessary strategy at Southside Elementary School is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on the role of family engagement in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?
2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?

3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

Chapter 5 presents the case findings related to research questions and themes. The perspectives of the Action Research Design Team, the Action Research Implementation Team, and the participants are highlighted to illuminate the findings. This chapter will comprehensively discuss themes and findings related to the four research questions. Triangulation of multiple data sources, including information from artifacts, observation journals, initial and final interviews, action research design team meetings, action research implementation team members, focus groups, achievement data, and questionnaire data, will be used to determine themes.

Overview of Key Findings and Themes

Through the action research process that will be described in depth in this chapter, the primary researcher identified the following ten key findings:

1. Participants and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students.
2. Participants indicated that family engagement strategies improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school.
3. Teachers and participants indicated that effective communication strategies increased parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education.

4. Participants expressed that family engagement enhanced parent and child relationships.
5. Participants and teachers indicated that family engagement enhanced the trust, communication, and partnerships between families and the school.
6. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families' involvement in their decision-making processes for their children.
7. Teachers expressed that parent training improved academic support by families at home.
8. Teachers indicated that family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support meetings.
9. Participants indicated that increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student success.
10. Participants expressed a need for more out-of-school learning experiences from community resources.

Further, after thoroughly analyzing the findings and their alignments with the research questions, the primary researcher articulated four themes connected to the research questions.

Those themes are as follows:

1. The Transformative Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement.
2. Strengthened Family and School Relationships, Enhancing trust, Communication, and Partnerships between families and schools.
3. Improved Parental Knowledge, Support, and Capacity to provide academic support at home.
4. Increased Collaboration with the Community to Leverage Community Resources.

The primary researcher will describe the process used to extract the themes and describe them in this chapter.

Introduction to Analysis

The action research case study examined the role of family engagement strategies in boosting student achievement in a rural school. Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence framework was the theoretical foundation for this action research study. From this framework, the overlapping spheres of family, school, and community were used to address student achievement. The family sphere emphasizes the family's role in their child's education and their impact on student achievement. The school sphere articulates the school's role in impacting student achievement, and finally, the community sphere examines the community impact on student achievement in a rural area. Intervention cycles were used to design and implement family engagement strategies to bridge gaps and boost student achievement in a rural school.

In early August 2024, pre-cycle work began by gathering consent from the Action Research Design Team, Action Research Implementation Team, and family participants. The study participants were families of students in Tier 3 reading of the Response to Intervention framework. These participants received support from a Student Support Team (SST) and participated in the University of Florida Literacy Institute intervention program. The families who participated in the study desired to positively impact their students' achievement by engaging in family engagement strategies. In mid-August, initial interviews were conducted with the seven families participating in the study. The primary researcher selected interviews as a data collection source as participants were not part of a focus group and provided feedback through individual interviews.

The ARDT met to discuss the data collected from the initial interviews and questionnaire data to design interventions and plan the implementation of family engagement strategies. The primary researcher, ARIT, and participants implemented the first intervention cycle from mid-August to late September. Meetings with the ARDT were held every other week throughout Cycle 1. The ARDT met to review achievement data and participant completion of the at-home learning activity. In addition, the team discussed adjustments that needed to be made and planned for future interventions. In all, Cycle 1 contained three meetings of the ARDT and three meetings of the ARIT. At the end of Cycle 1, early October, the primary researcher conducted focus groups with the ARDT and ARIT as a mid-point check-in in the middle of the study. Cycle 2 began the second week of October. It included three meetings of the ARDT and three meetings of the ARIT. At the end of the study, final interviews were held individually with members of the ARIT and participants.

The primary researcher used the data collected from the research cycles to identify the findings outlined in Chapter 4. The data told the story of family engagement strategies impacting student achievement and partnerships between families and schools. The researcher identified key findings using an open-coding process, utilizing data collected from initial interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, transcriptions from bi-weekly ARDT meetings, final interviews, and historical data. Notes from the researcher's journal confirmed themes from the coding process and informed the findings. The study uncovered four themes and ten findings. Table 5.1 summarizes the findings and major themes linked to the research questions.

The findings and themes align with the study's theoretical framework and research questions. The findings for Research Question 1 point to the impact of family engagement

strategies on student achievement. The theme supports the transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement.

Table 5.1

Summary of Research Questions Linked to Findings and Themes

Research question	Findings	Themes
1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?	1. Participants and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students. 2. Participants indicated that family engagement strategies improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school 3. Teachers and participants indicated that implementing effective family engagement strategies increased parents' understanding of how to provide academic support at home.	The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools.
2. How do families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children's educational outcomes?	4. Participants expressed that family engagement enhanced parent and child relationships. 5. Participants indicated that family engagement enhanced the trust and communication between families and the school. 6. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families' involvement in their decision-making processes for their children.	Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home.
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the	7. Teachers expressed that parent training improved academic support by families at home. 8. Teachers indicated that family engagement strategies increased	Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools.

Research question	Findings	Themes
educational outcomes of their students?	attendance at Student Support Team meetings.	The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources.
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?	9. Participants indicated that increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student success. 10. Participants expressed a need for more out-of-school learning experiences from community resources.	The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources.

For educators, the first theme highlights the need for effective communication, resources to support students at home, at-home learning experiences, and parent training. For participants, theme one highlights how effective family engagement strategies enhance students' ability to complete assignments at home and increase their participation in academic tasks at school.

Findings for Research Question 2 point to how families conceptualize family engagement strategies. The second theme demonstrates how family engagement strategies impact family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. These findings impact the overlapping spheres of influence in the school and home spheres. Findings for Research Question 3 showed how educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students. The third theme demonstrates improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Implications for teachers include providing families with appropriate resources.

Findings for Research Question 4 described how the rural context influences family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement. The fourth theme recognized increased collaboration with the community to impact student success by leveraging community resources. This finding solidifies the importance of the third sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence, the community sphere.

The framework was Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence to demonstrate how the school, family, and community intersect to affect student learning and development. These spheres highlight that family engagement is not isolated to the school but is influenced by and impacts the family and broader community. Overall, the research questions align with the Overlapping Spheres of Influence to explore how these interconnected spheres and themes interact to influence student achievement through family engagement. Table 5.2 summarizes the themes connected to the research questions.

The data analysis process began with the primary researcher using the Otter.ai website to transcribe all recorded interviews, meetings, and focus groups. Next, the primary researcher made notes on transcriptions to find reoccurring words or phrases. Then, the primary researcher uploaded all transcripts to a coding website, Delve Tool, to analyze the data. The reoccurring words and phrases were turned into major and minor codes during the open coding process.

Table 5.3 displays the major and minor codes that surfaced during the coding process.

The primary researcher also used data triangulation to confirm themes across the various data sources. Table 5.4 presents the data sources used in triangulation.

Research Question 1

The study sought to research family engagement's role in boosting student achievement in a rural school.

Table 5.2

Summary of Themes Connected to Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

Research question	Alignment to the theoretical framework	Major themes
1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?	“School” sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence	The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools.
2. How do families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children’s educational outcomes?	“Family” sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence “School” sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence	Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home.
3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?	“School” sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence	Strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources.
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?	“Community” sphere in the overlapping spheres of influence	The transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources.

Table 5.3*Major and Minor Codes by Research Question (RQ)*

Code type	Codes			
	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Major	Effective communication (44) Improved academic performance (17)	Parent–child relationships (25) Building trust, relationships with families, and partnerships (35) Decision-making and shared goals (22)	Parent resources impacting partnerships (38) Academic support at-home (25) Parent training (22)	Collaboration with the community (25)
Minor	Increased attendance (5)	Parent’s role in child’s education (4)	Parent responsiveness (4)	Barriers to engagement (16)

Table 5.4*Triangulation Matrix*

Research question	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
1	Benchmark and progress monitoring data	ARDT and ARIT focus groups	Initial participant interviews and final ARIT interviews
2	Participant questionnaires	Participant interviews	Researcher’s journal
3	ARDT questionnaires and final interviews	ARDT meeting transcripts	Student Support Team meeting attendance data and notes
4	Participant questionnaires	ARIT and participant interviews	Researcher’s journal and ARDT meeting transcripts

Note. ARDT = Action Research Design Team; ARIT = Action Research Implementation Team.

Research Question 1 evaluates the impact family engagement strategies have on the achievement of underperforming students. The three included:

1. Participants and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students.
2. Participants indicated that family engagement strategies improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school.
3. Teachers and participants indicated that effective communication strategies increased parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education.

The study sought to research how family engagement strategies impacted the achievement of underperforming students in a rural school. Data collected during both cycles, including questionnaires, interviews, mid-point focus groups with the ARDT and ARIT, and achievement data, supported findings under theme one. Findings solidified the transformative impact family engagement strategies had on student achievement. Students participating in the at-home learning experience scored higher on progress monitoring data. These students were also better prepared to complete assignments at home and actively participate in academic tasks at school. Finally, the at-home learning experience and resources increased parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education.

Theme 1: The Transformative Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement

The findings for Research Question 1 suggest that family engagement strategies have a transformative impact on student achievement. The findings indicated that family engagement strategies can positively impact student achievement. Schools provide a more supportive learning environment by supporting learning at home, increasing communication, and equipping families

with resources. Findings also revealed that students are more likely to succeed when families are empowered as true partners in their children's education.

Finding 1

Achievement data at the end of the study indicated that family engagement strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring data and benchmarks for underperforming students. Throughout Cycle 1 of the research study, participants participated in an at-home learning experience. The activity directly reinforced what students were doing during the in-school intervention. The at-home learning experience continued throughout Cycle 2, further impacting the achievement of underperforming students. Table 5.5 summarizes the progress monitoring data from UFLI at the end of Cycle 2 to support theme one.

Data from UFLI progress monitoring demonstrated that target students had a higher average increase than non-target students receiving the UFLI intervention at school. Table 5.6 summarizes progress monitoring data from FAST Bridge by comparing the combined achievement percentage of the target students to the non-target students.

In addition to the progress monitoring data from the UFLI program, data from FAST Bridge indicated that target students had a higher average increase than non-target students. Table 5.7 summarizes Winter Reading MAP scores for target students and non-target students.

Consistent with data from UFLI progress monitoring and FAST Bridge data, target students had a more significant average increase in scores on the MAP reading assessment than non-target students. Therefore, this also demonstrated that family engagement practices improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmark assessments.

Table 5.5*Cycle 2 University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) Progress Monitoring Data*

Case	UFLI score (%)
Student target	
Participant 1	95
Participant 2	98
Participant 3	75
Participant 4	100
Participant 5	75
Participant 6	91
Participant 7	96
Average	90
Student non-target	
Student 1	96
Student 2	89
Student 3	93
Student 4	63
Student 5	52
Average	78

Finding 2

This finding indicated that family engagement strategies improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school. Parents' ability to academically support their children at home increased the frequency of students completing assignments given to them to complete at home. The term academic support at home was used 25 times throughout the coding process. In addition, teachers from the ARIT team stated, "Students are participating more in class as a result of being confident in the skills they have worked on at home." Specifically, Mrs. Black shared, "Students participating in the at-

home learning activity have gained confidence in reading aloud. Therefore, they participated more in reading activities during class.”

Table 5.6

Cycle 2 FASTBridge Progress Monitoring Data

Case	FAST progress monitoring test	FAST score		
		Starting	Ending	Difference
Student (target)				
Participant 1	Words per minute	35	37	2
Participant 2	Words per minute	80	109	29
Participant 3	Nonsense words	18	32	14
Participant 4	Words per minutes	58	72	14
Participant 5	Nonsense words	5	13	8
Participant 6	Words per minute	74	110	36
Participant 7	Words per minute	33	61	28
Average				19
Student (non-target)				
Student 1	Nonsense words	5	16	11
Student 2	Nonsense words	10	12	2
Student 3	Words per minute	27	49	22
Student 4	Words per minute	37	46	9
Student 5	Words per minute	33	48	15
Average				11

Note. Period assessed: August, September, October, November.

In addition to members of the ARIT team stating that the family engagement strategies benefit students’ ability to participate in class, participants shared in the final interviews that their children were not as reluctant to complete homework assignments as they were at the beginning of the year. Mrs. Mclean stated, “My son comes home asking to complete his

homework, and this has not previously been the case.” He has often fussed when I asked him to complete his homework before he goes out to play.” Mrs. Fitz commented, “My daughter enjoys completing the at-home learning activity with me and often asks her siblings to work with us.”

Table 5.7

Winter Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Benchmark Assessment Data

Case	MAP score		
	Fall	Winter	Difference
Target student			
Participant 1	148	163	15
Participant 2	185	197	13
Participant 3	150	153	3
Participant 4	181	215	34
Participant 5	149	169	20
Participant 6	177	195	18
Participant 7	174	192	18
Average			17
Non-target student			
Student 1	148	154	6
Student 2	177	183	6
Student 3	178	195	17
Student 4	183	190	7
Student 5	147	151	4
Average			8

After reviewing comments from members of the ARIT and participants, the ARDT discussed how students’ ability to complete assignments at home and participate in academic tasks at school was valuable to the impact family engagement strategies had on academic achievement. Ms. Gowder shared, “I am willing to host more parent trainings if it would

continue to provide parents with resources to assist their students at home.” Mrs. Creedle said, “I believe that if parents are equipped to help students at home, this will positively impact the students’ confidence, participation, and academic achievement.” Mrs. Gowder informed the ARDT that she would contact the participants to see what specific things they need to help their children in addition to the UFLI at-home learning experience. After talking to the participants, the consensus was that they also wanted additional techniques to help with math skills at home. Data analysis around Finding 2 solidified that family engagement strategies positively impacted students’ ability to complete home activities and participate in school tasks.

Finding 3

The final finding related to research question one was that teachers and participants indicated that effective communication strategies increased parents’ knowledge and understanding of their child’s education. Coding ARDT transcripts, interviews, and questionnaire data revealed this finding. The code of effective communication was used in the coding analysis 44 times. Participants shared in questionnaire data that video resources, parent training, at-home learning resources, and sample resources were things the school had done to help families with their children at home. As a result, Mrs. Tucker said, “Effective communication and additional resources helped increase my knowledge and understanding of what my child is doing at school. Before, I was not clear as to how to help.”

In addition, Mrs. Byrd shared, “Having consistent two-way communication about my son has helped me to understand the academic expectations for him and how to help him better.” After reviewing participants’ specific comments, questionnaire responses, and participant reflections about their knowledge and understanding of their child’s education, the ARDT evaluated the communication techniques. Comets Connect was an additional mode of

communication during Cycle 2. Therefore, these responses inspired future content shared on the Comets Connect podcast. The podcast's goal was to provide families with additional information about the context of their school and educational techniques. Data pulled from Spotify showed that the first podcast episode was listened to 65 times within the first week. Therefore, the ARDT felt the listening results from the first week showed progress toward providing families with information in a new, innovative format. Multiple modes of communication were an integral part of increasing parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education.

Findings from Research Question 1 revealed a transformative effect of family engagement strategies, showing improved progress monitoring data and benchmark data scores for students whose families participated in the at-home learning experience. These results demonstrated a difference in performance on progress monitoring and benchmark assessment between students participating in the study and those not. In addition, these findings highlighted the importance of effective communication between school and home, leading to increased parental understanding of their children's education.

Research Question 2

The second research question sought to learn how families conceptualize the impact of family engagement on their children's educational outcomes. After the primary researcher spoke with participants and their children during Cycle 1 and received feedback from the dissertation committee, the ARDT decided it was essential to include parent voices in the study. Research Question 2 findings included:

1. Participants expressed that family engagement enhanced parent and child relationships.

2. Participants and teachers indicated that family engagement enhanced the trust, communication, and partnerships between families and the school.
3. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies increased families' involvement in their decision-making processes for their children.

Data collected during both cycles, including questionnaires, interviews, mid-point focus groups with the ARDT and ARIT, and artifacts from Student Support team meetings, supported findings under these two themes. Concerning the second theme, the study demonstrated how family engagement strategies strengthened family and school partnerships and enhanced trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. Findings indicated that parent and child relationships were positively impacted; trust, communication, and partnerships between families and the school were strengthened, and families were more engaged in the decision-making processes for their children.

Theme 2: Strengthened Family and School Relationships, Enhancing Trust, Communication, and Partnerships Between Families and Schools

Findings indicated that family engagement strategies significantly strengthened relationships between families and schools, enhancing trust, communication, and shared decision-making. Strategies led to stronger parent-child relationships. In addition, family engagement strategies improved trust and communication between families and schools. Parents felt more valued and welcomed. These findings highlight how family engagement strategies can build stronger connections between home and school, creating a more supportive and collaborative environment for student success.

Finding 4

This finding indicated that family engagement strategies enhanced parent-child relationships. Codes related to relationships between parent and their children were used 25 times during the coding process. Mrs. Mclean and her child stated, “Completing the at-home learning experience has positively impacted the relationship between my son and me. I know how to help him, and it is the best time we can spend together each night.” In addition, Mrs. Less stated, “Although my child struggles with reading, we are working together to increase his confidence. I can see a difference in our relationship. Homework is no longer a fight. I now know how to support him at home.”

The primary researcher shared these comments with the ARIT team. Mrs. Smith stated, “Mrs. Mclean also shared that she is very thankful for the at-home learning activity and the resources we provide to families. She said it has helped her and her son to be able to work together at night without a fuss.” Mrs. Smith also shared that this mom had recently lost her husband, and it had been a strain on her and her son’s relationship. She also shared that the student now comes in daily energized to learn and is always excited to share his progress on the tracker form he turns in each Friday. In addition to the at-home learning experience, results from the questionnaire provided in the Parent Power Newsletter showed that families enjoyed the family activity on the back of each newsletter.

The ARDT processed these comments during one of their bi-weekly meetings and discussed the importance of strengthening the relationships between parents and children. Mrs. Pridemore stated, “Ultimately, when the parent, student, and school are all on the same team and relationships are positively impacted, we will see an increase in student achievement. She believes that all learning starts with relationships.” Responses emphasizing the power of

relationships between the school and home solidifies Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence. After seeing the impact of parent and child relationships on academics, the primary research used AI to create new podcast content on parent and child relationships to share with Southside Elementary School families on the Comets Connect podcast.

Finding 5

Finding 5 indicated that family engagement enhanced trust and communication between families and the school. The phrase "building trust, relationships, and partnerships" was used 35 times during the coding analysis of interviews, ARDT transcripts, Focus Groups, and questionnaires. A discussion within an ARDT meeting revealed that parents desire to be engaged in their child's education. However, they are not always able to be present at school. Therefore, we must build strong relationships with families to build trust. Mrs. Gowder stated, "I have reached out to the participants, and the consistent communication and intentional investment in the relationship with parents has strengthened our trust in the school." In return, this impacted the school's trust in the family.

Mrs. Bowles reemphasized that a partnership is a two-way relationship in which families and schools work together towards a common goal. More consistent communication directly increases student achievement through homework completion (Kraft, 2017). Therefore, Southside Elementary School ensured that the partnership between the school and home would involve both entities working together to impact student achievement.

Questionnaire data revealed from the seven participants that a welcoming environment at Southside Elementary School created a positive school culture that promoted trust. Mrs. Holmes shared in her final interview, "When I met with the Student Support Team, I felt like the team welcomed me right when I walked in the door to each meeting. Therefore, it helped me to gain

trust in what they were telling me, which resulted in me being more willing to give my input on my son's education, too." In the final interview, Mrs. Less said, "I feel comfortable coming in and talking with school staff and trust the decisions you make for my son."

Finding 6

The final finding related to Research Question 2 indicated that, according to participants, family engagement strategies increased families' involvement in the decision-making processes for their children. Attendance at Student Support Team meetings averaged around 23% before the implementation of effective family engagement strategies. However, at Southside Elementary School's recent SST meetings, 95% of families attended meetings either in person or via phone. The increased involvement in the decision-making process for underperforming students resulted from increased communication with families. Also, implementing a new Student Support Team meeting protocol ensured all meeting objectives were completed, and families were a part of the decisions being made for students. Before the new protocol was implemented, meetings generally consisted of teachers talking "at" families rather than families being engaged in the conversation. They counteracted the importance of two-way communication and its positive impact on engaging families. Mrs. Mclean stated in her final interview, "I think being engaged in the decision-making processes for my son helped me to understand the shared goals we had for him. I knew realistically what he was supposed to be able to do academically based on his progress."

Members of the ARIT team shared that having families engaged in the decision-making processes during Student Support Team meetings took some of the pressure off of educators because families were taking more ownership of decisions for students. During an ARDT meeting at the end of Cycle 1, the team discussed providing families with an electronic version

of the meeting protocol and asking questions during the meeting. This could be sent home with the meeting notice. Therefore, families would have prior knowledge of what the conversation would consist of during the meeting. As a result, this would help families feel more comfortable sharing during meetings with prior knowledge of what would be discussed. In the SST meetings, families were more informed about progress monitoring data because the ARIT shared weekly updates with the participants. Therefore, they felt more comfortable giving input about decisions.

Yulianti et al. (2018) describe decision-making as parents participating in school decisions and decisions about their children. In addition, Epstein's (2011) framework places parents in an active role in their child's education and the school's educational process. Therefore, engaging families in Student Support Team meetings is key to positively impacting student outcomes.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to examine how educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students. The primary researcher felt it was essential to gain insight from educators on family engagement. Research Question Three findings included:

1. Teachers expressed that parent training improved academic support by families at home
2. Teachers indicated that family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings.

The study sought to research family engagement's role in boosting student achievement in a rural school. Data collected during both cycles, including questionnaires, interviews, mid-point focus groups with the ARDT and ARIT, weekly completion tracker forms for the at-home

learning activity, and artifacts from Student Support team meetings, supported findings under these three. Concerning theme three, this study sought to gain perspective from educators on how they describe the impact of family engagement strategies on student outcomes. Findings solidified that parent training improved families' academic support at home. In addition, attendance at Student Support Team meetings improved.

Theme 3: Improved Parental Knowledge, Support, and Capacity to Provide Academic Support at Home

The findings support the theme of improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home. Families' increased engagement with the school enhanced parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic assistance at home. Parents with proper training and support are better equipped to support their child's academic journey.

Finding 7

This finding indicated that parent training improved academic support by families at home. During data analysis, improved academic support at home was coded 25 times throughout the coding process. During Cycle 1, the ARDT team met to discuss the at-home learning experience and how to provide families with parent training on implementing the activity. Ms. Haygood provided the UFLI at-home resources to the primary researcher and Ms. Gowder. Ms. Gowder planned the parent training and contacted the families to schedule it with each of them. All seven participants came to the in-person training for the at-home learning activity. Mrs. Pierce shared, "Having explicit training on what to specifically do with my daughter each night helped us to be more motivated to complete the activity consistently." She also shared that having accountability from the completion tracker form and the reinforcement of Comet Cash given to her daughter helped the child stay motivated, too. Final data from the tracker forms

demonstrated that throughout Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, Participant One completed the at-home learning experience 98% of the days, Participant Two 85% of the days, Participant Three 92% of the days, Participant Four 75% of the days, Participant Five 95% of the days, Participant Six 98% of the days, and Participant Seven 88% percent of the days.

The Action Research Implementation team shared that in weekly conversations with participants, they consistently hear how well the at-home learning activity is going and how they appreciate the parent training. In addition, they shared new ideas of additional parent training they want to provide parents to broaden the academic tasks that parents are equipped to help their children with. For example, Ms. Brown suggested that training be held for parents on how to assist children with math assignments at home. Mrs. Baker said, “We should also provide families with video examples of how to help their children at home. This could allow virtual parent training if families cannot attend in-person training.” The ARIT agreed that when families were equipped with exactly what to do, they were more likely to complete the assignments with students.

After reviewing all the data related to finding 7, the ARDT discussed how the parent training, at-home learning activity, additional resources, and communication positively impacted underperforming students. The ARDT then referred back to research by Epstein and the positive impact parent training and at-home learning can have on student achievement. When looking at findings, the ARDT consistently looked back at the Overlapping Spheres of Influence to ensure the finding was related to the theoretical framework. In alignment with Epstein’s (2011) idea of at-home learning and its implications, the data solidified that academic support improved when parent training was provided.

Finding 8

This finding indicated that family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings. Data from the Student Support Team meeting protocols, participant interviews, and meeting attendance data demonstrated increased meeting attendance. In addition, participants engaged in decision-making and shared goals when attending Student Support Team meetings. Before implementing new family engagement strategies, 23% of families attended Student Support Team meetings. In October 2024, 95% of families attended Student Support Team meetings, an increase of 72% participation. This solidifies that effective communication, trust, and collaboration with families positively impact the family's attendance at Student Support Team meetings.

Through analysis of participant interview transcripts, the ARDT established that when parents were present at meetings, either in person or virtually, they were actively engaged in the decision-making process for their child. Although the Student Support Team meeting protocol allowed families to provide input before the meeting, attending the meeting helped engage them in conversations further so that they could better provide input into the decisions for their students. For example, Mrs. Tucker had not previously attended Student Support Team meetings for her son and just returned the meeting notice, checking the line that said, "Call me with results from the meeting." However, after participating in the study and seeing the importance of a partnership, she attended her first meeting in the fall of 2024. As a result, she said:

I did not realize how important it was to be at Student Support Team meetings and the decisions made in these meetings. Being a part of the meeting in person allowed me to know exactly where my son was and to help make decisions for him. After looking at the data from the meeting, I realized that his progress monitoring data was very inconsistent.

Therefore, more could be going on with him rather than learning difficulties. Attention concerns were also brought up. Therefore, I realized I might need to talk with his doctor. Not previously engaged in the meetings, I did not realize the teachers' various concerns regarding my son's education.

Family engagement strategies are essential for increasing family participation in SST meetings, leading to more active family engagement in making decisions about their children's education.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question examined how the rural context influenced family engagement and its impact on student achievement. Based on Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the community is an essential component that supports a student's educational experience. Research Question 4 findings included:

1. Participant indicated that increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student success.
2. Participants expressed a need for more out-of-school learning activities from community resources.

The study sought to research how family engagement strategies boosted student achievement in a rural school. Data was collected during both cycles, including questionnaires, interviews, ARDT transcripts, ARIT meeting transcriptions, and the researcher's journal-supported findings under theme four. Concerning the fourth theme, this study sought to discover how the rural context influences family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement. Findings solidified increased collaboration with the community by leveraging community resources. Increased collaboration with the community is impactful to student

success. In addition, when leveraging community resources, families expressed a need for more out-of-school learning experiences from community resources.

Theme 4: Increased Collaboration With the Community to Leverage Community Resources

The research findings for Research Question 4 highlighted the significant role of community engagement on student outcomes. Results emphasized the need for enhanced collaboration between the school and the community, specifically advocating for more out-of-school learning opportunities provided by the community. Leveraging community partnerships to boost student success through enriched and expanded learning experiences was essential to understand when implementing family engagement strategies in the rural context.

Finding 9

This finding indicated that increased collaboration with the community impacts student success. The phrase collaboration with the community was used 25 times throughout the coding process. The ARDT looked at the Overlapping Spheres of Influence being utilized as the theoretical framework for the study. The community sphere is an essential component, especially in rural areas where community resources are limited. Therefore, early in the study, the ARDT looked at ways to engage the community as a resource and the decision-making processes for Southside Elementary School. Mrs. Creedle said:

We have community members on our school governance team. They help to make decisions for our school and how we budget and spend Charter Funds. However, there are ways we should engage them in other decisions and utilize the community members on the team to provide additional resources for our families.

Ms. Gowder discussed partnering with the library to provide families with the monthly calendar of events and activities to complete with their child outside school. In addition, she created a monthly newsletter that included activities being hosted at local organizations and a family activity on the back. Participants shared their appreciation in the final interview after implementing the monthly newsletter and partnering with local organizations. Mrs. Byrd said:

I appreciate the resources provided by the public library. The library is a place we had not previously utilized. However, I now know the exact days and times of certain learning activities they have going on. After we had gone a couple of times, I noticed that my son was more motivated to read at home.

In addition to the resources provided by the library, Mrs. Pierce expressed her appreciation of the activities mentioned in the monthly newsletters happening at local organizations and parks. She said, “This allowed us to go out into the community as a family and experience things we had not experienced before.” The ARIT discussed in a focus group meeting that communicating events in the community has also increased their students’ input into things in the classroom. Mrs. Black said, “When students experience things in the real world, they build background knowledge that will help them to participate in real-world conversations in the classroom.”

Finding 10

The final finding indicated that participants needed more out-of-school learning activities from community resources. The ARDT team came up with ways to provide families with resources from the community. It was evident through the review of questionnaire data and final participant interviews that participants found the community resources beneficial for their students. Mrs. Fitz said:

The community resources and activities gave me information about activities around us that I would not have known otherwise. Being in a rural area, there are a limited number of things to do with our family, and the resources provided gave us insight into what's going on.

Data from questionnaires indicated a concern about the rural context impacting parents' ability to be present at school due to their distance from the school. The ARDT worked to come up with solutions for this barrier by providing families with things to do at home and throughout the community. This allowed them to be engaged in their children's learning without being present in the building. Mrs. Holmes said:

Distance to school and childcare often prevent me from being present at meetings and the school. However, the community activities we could do on our own time were beneficial for us. Also, having phone or virtual options for meetings helped me be engaged in the decisions for my son.

The two findings under theme four showed that increased engagement with local resources, such as libraries and community organizations, significantly benefited parents and students. These findings also emphasized the need for more readily accessible out-of-school learning opportunities, particularly addressing challenges posed by the rural setting's limited resources and families' distances from the school. Ultimately, these findings support the positive impact of integrating community resources into a student's educational experience, emphasizing the community sphere of the overlapping spheres of influence.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented ten findings from two action research cycles, data triangulation and open coding. The primary researcher derived these findings through data analysis of initial

and final interviews, ARDT meeting transcriptions, ARIT meeting Transcriptions, ARIT and ARDT focus groups, questionnaire data, achievement data, and the researcher's journal. The Overlapping Spheres of Influence theoretical framework informed the findings and themes. The findings aligned with the four research questions and informed the creation of four broader themes.

Research Question 1 investigated to what extent family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students. Participant and achievement data indicated that family engagement strategies positively impacted the achievement of underperforming students. Results solidify that at-home learning experiences and parent training positively impacted the achievement of underperforming students at Southside Elementary School. This finding aligns with the "Transformative Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement" theme, which demonstrates that when families are actively engaged, students are more likely to complete assignments and participate in learning.

Research Question 2 focused on how families conceptualize the impact of family engagement in supporting their children's educational outcomes. Participants expressed that family engagement strategies enhance parent-child relationships, trust, communication, partnership between families and the school, and family involvement in their decision-making processes for their children. These findings support the theme "Strengthened Family and School Relationships, Enhancing Trust, Communication, and Partnerships Between Families and Schools" by indicating that family engagement strategies effectively empower families to be more active in their child's education and highlight the importance of a shared effort in supporting the child's educational journey.

Research Question 3 focused on how educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on their students' educational outcomes. The ARIT indicated that family engagement strategies such as parent training improved academic support by families at home. In addition, communication strategies increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings. Consistent communication with families held them more accountable for attending meetings. The findings support the theme "Improved Parental Knowledge, Support, and Capacity to Provide Academic Support at Home" by emphasizing increased parental efficacy when families have the knowledge, support, and capacity to provide support at home.

The final question, Research Question 4, focused on how the rural context influenced family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement. The rural context of Southside Elementary School played a significant role in shaping family engagement strategies and their outcomes. Participants noted the impact of family engagement strategies in facilitating trust between the school and home, which reflects the close-knit nature of families at Southside Elementary School. In addition, since SES is a small school, most families know each other. Therefore, it was easier to build trust and relationships with the participants in the study. However, the limited resources typical of rural schools presented challenges for families. Parents often traveled far to attend events and Student Support Team meetings. The unique nature of the rural context influenced the implementation and effectiveness of the action research initiatives. The findings align with the theme "Increased Collaboration with the Community to Leverage Community Resources." This emphasizes that by strengthening ties with the community and leveraging community resources, schools can create more learning opportunities and promote student success.

This chapter discussed the findings and themes in detail. Chapter 6 presents the study's conclusions and discusses the implications and connections to future leadership practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP

The challenges faced by many families in effectively supporting their children's academic endeavors often stem from a perceived lack of knowledge or expertise in educational matters. Families view teachers as academic experts; therefore, they may feel ill-equipped to work alongside their children (Hall, 2020). However, family engagement continues to be widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting academic success. According to Mapp (2017), the effective approach to family engagement is through the lens of a partnership between the family and the school. When families perceive themselves as active partners, they are more inclined to engage with their children academically. Given these insights, fostering strong partnerships with families, particularly those whose students are academically underperforming, is a necessary strategy at Southside Elementary School is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on family engagement's role in boosting student achievement in a rural elementary school.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students?
2. How do families conceptualize family engagement's impact in supporting their children's educational outcomes?

3. How do educators describe the impact of family engagement strategies on the educational outcomes of their students?
4. How does the rural context influence family engagement practices and their impact on student achievement?

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and themes. It also presents the researcher's recommendations to school and system leaders, the current study's limitations and implications, and recommendations for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. The recommendations are based on the literature analysis discussed in Chapter 2 and the findings outlined in Chapter 5. The chapter closes by offering concluding thoughts related to the study and the descriptions provided in this dissertation.

Summary of the Findings and Themes

After data analysis and the researcher's reflection, ten findings emerged from the study. Chapter 5 detailed the process of determining these findings by describing the coding and analysis process. The study data gathered throughout the study from multiple sources informed the themes and findings. The primary researcher used the thoughts and reflections from the participants, Action Research Design Team, and Action Research Implementation Team via direct quotations, achievement data, and artifacts to confirm findings further. The ten findings from the study revealed that family engagement strategies have a multifaceted positive impact on students, families, and schools.

Family engagement directly improves student achievement, specifically for underperforming students, by improving progress monitoring and benchmark attainment. In addition, effective communication strategies increase parent knowledge and understanding of their child's education. Family engagement strategies increase families' involvement in their

children's education decision-making processes. Family engagement strategies enhanced relationships between parents and children and strengthened trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools. Collaboration with the community impacts student success as the study highlights the need for increased out-of-school learning experiences. Finally, family engagement strategies increased attendance at Student Support Team meetings.

The primary researcher grouped the findings into four themes that further articulated the study's results. Joyce Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 2010) guided the research questions. As a result, the findings and themes fell into one of the three Overlapping Spheres of Influence: the school, home, and community. The analysis revealed four themes: (1) the transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement (2) strengthened family and school relationships, fostering trust, communication, and partnerships (3) enhanced parental knowledge, support, and capacity to facilitate academic learning at home; and (4) increased collaboration with the community organizations to leverage community resources.

Discussion of Findings From Research Question 1

The first research question inquired to what extent family engagement strategies impact the achievement of underperforming students. The findings articulated strategies improved the achievement of progress monitoring and benchmarks for underperforming students, improved students' ability to complete assignments at home and increased participation in academic tasks at school, and increased parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's education through effective communication.

Theme 1 of the study emphasized the transformative impact of family engagement on student achievement. Implementing effective family engagement strategies increased underperforming students' scores on progress monitoring data from the UFLI reading

intervention program, FASTBridge progress monitoring, and benchmark testing. Epstein (2011) emphasizes that strong family engagement strategies encourage partnerships between parents and the school and are fundamental to a student's academic success. These improvements reflect the effectiveness of family engagement strategies in addressing academic gaps among underperforming students.

Family engagement strategies enabled parents to support their children academically at home, resulting in increased homework completion rates and the ability to participate in classroom activities. This solidifies Gross et al.'s (2020) finding that parents have taken more responsibility for the learning process by engaging with their children at home. According to teachers, students engaged in learning at home gained confidence from practicing skills at home, leading to more active school participation. For instance, the at-home learning activity led to greater involvement in reading tasks during class. Stronger parent engagement also supported a shift in their student's attitude toward homework and completing academic tasks at home.

Effective communication strategies, such as parent training sessions, video resources, and the Comets Podcast, enhanced parents' understanding of their child's education and academic expectations. Technology has made it easier for parents to stay informed and engaged in their children's education (Power & Matuszewski, 2020). Therefore, families have learned more ways to contribute to their children's academic success (Hall, 2020). Parents expressed their ability to support their child's learning at home and increased parent-teacher relationships due to regular, two-way communication and meaningful communication involving student academic learning, which is crucial (United States Department of Education, 2015). One parent shared that family engagement strategies enabled them to assist their child with homework and better understand their learning concepts.

The findings for Research Question 1 suggest that family engagement strategies positively impacted student achievement by fostering stronger home-school partnerships, building capacity, and addressing academic barriers for underperforming students. These results emphasize the importance of integrating structured family engagement practices into school programs, particularly in rural schools, because of their effect on children's academic success (Gross et al., 2020).

Discussion of Findings From Research Question 2

The second research question explored how families conceptualize the impact of family engagement on their children's educational outcomes. Three key findings emerged, highlighting the significance of family engagement in fostering relationships, trust, and collaborative decision-making between families and schools. The theme for Research Question 2 was strengthened family and school relationships, enhancing trust, communication, and partnerships between families and schools, which was supported by three key findings.

Participants expressed that family engagement strategies improved the relationships between parents and their children, which links back to Epstein's (2010) emphasis on the family sphere of the Overlapping Spheres of influence. Relationships and a supportive home environment are critical for families actively engaging in their child's education (Epstein, 2011). In addition, parental perceptions based on existing research suggest that family engagement involves parenting, decision-making, school interactions, and learning at home (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). The findings from Research Question 2 and the perceptions of the study's participants reflect the current literature.

Parents shared that completing at-home learning activities together strengthened their bond with their children. For example, parents emphasized family engagement's impact on

relationships with their children, specifically in single-parent households who had recently experienced the loss of a parent. Mrs. Mclean described activities as a meaningful way to connect and support her son academically without conflict. Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) note that parents who work with their children on homework show support and interest in their children's learning. Teachers observed that students with improved relationships with their parents were more motivated and enthusiastic about learning. Strengthened parent-child relationships were seen as a foundation for improved academic performance.

Family engagement strategies fostered trust and communication between families and the school. Harvard Graduate School of Education (2020) suggests that leaders cultivate a welcoming and inclusive school culture. Parents appreciated the welcoming environment and consistent communication, which helped build confidence in the school. Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) define school interactions as parents communicating with the school. Participants shared that a warm and welcoming environment made families feel welcomed during Student Support Team meetings. Therefore, they felt valued and encouraged to participate actively in their child's educational decision-making processes, including academic interventions and steps within the RTI process. As defined by Erdener and Knoeppel (2018), decision-making involves parents making informed choices on behalf of their children (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). The school sphere of the Overlapping Spheres of Influence emphasized a welcoming and inclusive culture, effective communication, and involving parents in decision-making (Epstein, 1995). Teachers noted that trust-building was reciprocal, strengthening the partnership between families and the school. Mrs. Bowles pointed out that fostering partnerships where the school and home work together towards shared goals positively impacted student achievement.

Participants expressed that family engagement strategies empowered them to participate actively in their children's decision-making process. This was particularly evident when implementing a new Student Support Team meeting protocol. Before the meeting protocol, families did not actively participate in meetings. However, the revised approach promoted two-way communication, allowing families to share input and align on shared goals for their children. Participants reported they better understood attainable goals and how to achieve these goals for their children after being a part of decision-making. Teachers and ARIT members reported that family engagement in these meetings reduced the pressure on educators while increasing parental ownership of educational decisions.

Parents' knowledge of how to specifically assist their children at home impacted students' ability to complete work at home and increase participation in academic tasks at school. As a result, the students felt more confident answering questions at school when the skills were being reinforced at home, too. Findings from Research Question 2 revealed that family engagement strategies significantly impacted relationships, trust, and collaboration. These outcomes highlight the importance of building strong home-school partnerships that empower families and enhance their involvement in shaping their children's educational experiences.

Discussion of Findings From Research Question 3

The third research question examined how educators perceive the impact of family engagement strategies on student educational outcomes. According to Weiss et al. (2018), family engagement includes confirming their child's learning, advocating on their behalf, guiding their child through complex school requirements, and supporting effective schools. Two significant findings emerged from the data: improved academic support at home and increased participation

in Student Support Team meetings. The theme surrounding Research Question 3 was improved parental knowledge, support, and capacity to provide academic support at home.

Educators observed that parent training positively impacted families' ability to support academic tasks at home. A parent training session equipped families with explicit strategies for completing the UFLI at-home learning activities. All seven participants attended the in-person training, which improved consistency and motivation for completing these tasks. Participants shared that the training helped them understand how to consistently work effectively with their children. The accountability system, including weekly completion tracker forms and Comet Cash, further supported student motivation. The weekly completion of the at-home learning activity ranged from 75%-98% among participants, reflecting the effectiveness of parent training.

Weekly conversations with participants revealed consistent positive feedback about the at-home learning experience. Educators and participants suggested expanding parent training to cover additional academic areas like math and offering virtual training options through video tutorials to accommodate families unable to attend in person. Educators aligned these findings with Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence, emphasizing the importance of parent training and at-home learning in improving student achievement.

Family Engagement strategies significantly boosted attendance at Student Support Team meetings, with participation increasing from 23% in Spring 2024 to 95% in October 2024, a 72% increase. Educators noted that increased attendance allowed families to be more involved in decision-making and meaningful discussions about shared goals for their children. The new meeting protocols ensured that families were informed and prepared to participate, fostering

collaboration and two-way communication. Virtual attendance options further facilitated participation, making meetings more accessible to families.

Findings from Research Question 3 emphasized the transformative impact of family engagement strategies on academic support at home and family participation in decision-making. Schools should inform and provide specific examples of how families can support students with homework and how to monitor homework at home (Goshin & Mertsalova, 2018). Within the study, parent training initiatives equipped families with practical tools to support learning, while increased meeting attendance strengthened home-school collaboration. Educators consistently linked these strategies to improved educational outcomes, highlighting the importance of empowering families as active partners in their children's education.

Discussion of Findings From Research Question 4

Research Question 4 examined the role of the rural context in influencing family engagement and its impact on student achievement. Guided by Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which highlights the community as an essential component of student success, two findings emerged: increased collaboration with the community and a need for increased out-of-school learning opportunities. The theme that emerged from the findings for Research Question 4 was increased collaboration with the community to leverage community resources.

Participants emphasized that collaboration with the community positively influenced student success. In addition, recognizing the limitations of resources in rural areas, the ARDT worked to strengthen the community's role in family engagement. The primary researcher and the principal utilized the school governance team to leverage decisions to support families at Southside Elementary School. Participants emphasized that collaboration with the community

played a crucial role in student success. Recognizing the resource limitations in rural areas, the ARDT worked intentionally to strengthen the community's role in family engagement. Additionally, the school partnered with community organizations to align with the community sphere within the Overlapping Spheres of Influence framework. The family engagement coordinator collaborated with the county's Chamber of Commerce to identify and connect families with local organizations and resources. Teachers observed tangible benefits in the classroom, noting that students involved in community activities gained valuable real-world experiences. These experiences enriched their background knowledge and deepened their engagement during lessons.

Participants expressed the need for more community-based, out-of-school learning activities, particularly in rural areas with limited opportunities. The ARDT identified barriers to family engagement, such as distance from school and limited childcare options. Distance from school, a unique characteristic often associated with rurality, can limit families' ability to be physically present at school (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). To address these challenges, the team developed solutions that allowed families to participate in learning activities on their schedules, such as taking home resources and providing opportunities to engage in community events. Virtual and phone meeting options were also implemented to increase accessibility for families unable to be physically present at school.

The findings for Research Question 4 emphasized the importance of leveraging community partnerships to address the unique challenges rural families face. Southside Elementary School met the need to access available resources to provide educational support to students (Witte & Sheridan, 2011). Family engagement strategies implemented throughout the study allowed students to learn in their community context (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Increased collaboration with community organizations provided families valuable learning opportunities, while flexible engagement strategies helped mitigate barriers to participation. These efforts highlighted the critical role of the community sphere in supporting student achievement and fostering stronger connections between schools, families, and the community.

Limitations of the Current Study

While the researcher designed and implemented the study with detailed planning and consideration, every research study has inherent limitations that may affect the interpretation or generalizability of its findings (Glanz, 2014). While findings provide valuable insights into the impact of family engagement strategies in a rural school context, this study had a couple of limitations.

The first limitation is related to data collection methods. The study primarily used qualitative research methods, including interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and artifacts, to explore the impact of family engagement strategies. While these methods provided deep insights into participants' experiences, the lack of quantitative measures (e.g., standardized test scores, attendance data, and other academic indicators) limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the direct impact of family engagement strategies on student achievement.

An additional limitation is that the family engagement strategies were implemented over two cycles, limiting the ability to assess their long-term effects on student achievement. While data suggest positive short-term outcomes, it is unclear whether these improvements would be sustained over time or how they might evolve with continued implementation. A study with a longer duration could provide a more robust understanding of the long-term trends and sustainability of the implemented strategies. In addition, the two-cycle research study might limit the data collected, making it difficult to draw broad conclusions. A more extended study allows

for more comprehensive data collection. This underscores the importance of considering the study's time frame as a limitation when interpreting the research findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners and Researchers

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for practitioners seeking to enhance family engagement strategies in rural school settings. By addressing challenges and leveraging innovative approaches, practitioners can make meaningful improvements to student achievement.

This study highlighted the importance of consistent communication and resources shared with families. Practitioners, such as school-based administrators, could further integrate AI-driven tools to streamline and personalize family engagement. For example, ChatGPT and NotebookLM were utilized in this study to generate Comet's Connect podcast content. Additional examples include AI-powered communication platforms, Virtual Training Modules, and family engagement analytics. AI-powered communication can provide schools with automated messaging systems that give parents timely updates on their child's progress, meeting reminders, or tips for at-home learning activities. In addition, it can be utilized to help increase communication when students are absent. AI can help develop adaptive virtual training modules for schools and families. This training would provide families with on-demand training programs tailored to parents' specific needs, such as supporting literacy or math skills at home.

Given the rural context, fostering partnerships with local organizations is essential. Practitioners can expand partnerships with community groups to provide accessible out-of-school learning opportunities for families. In addition, partnering with local businesses to sponsor family-oriented educational events or provide resources for at-home learning would be beneficial. Finally, utilizing community resources to address barriers such as transportation or

childcare that limit family participation in school events could be critical to engaging families. These resources include local organizations, community volunteers, social workers, etc.

To address the dependence on researcher facilitation, schools should train staff members to implement and sustain family engagement initiatives and develop leadership teams to oversee family engagement efforts, ensuring continuity and consistency. This team could recognize their school context's unique cultural and socioeconomic dynamics. The family engagement strategies should be tailored to reflect the community's values and priorities. Finally, the team could document best practices and create guides for replicating successful strategies in their context and others.

Like implications for practitioners, this study's findings also offer implications for researchers. Given that the family engagement strategies were implemented over two cycles, which is a limitation, future researchers could conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of family engagement on student achievement. This would help determine if positive short-term outcomes are sustained and how they evolve with continued implementation.

In addition, the study was conducted in a single rural school. Therefore, researchers should explore family engagement in diverse rural settings with varying socioeconomic, cultural, ethnicities, and available resources. Future researchers must conduct more research and investigate AI and its effectiveness in rural settings in facilitating family engagement. Research on how AI can personalize learning experiences, improve communication, and connect families with community resources is needed. This will help determine the generalizability of findings and identify context-specific strategies that best engage families.

In summary, researchers should focus on longitudinal, diverse contexts and the role of technology. They should also focus on the strategies and outcomes of family engagement and

investigate how best to support underperforming students. By examining these variables, research will provide more robust, detailed, and valuable information for improving family engagement in diverse communities.

Implications for Policy

Family engagement is not merely a local school issue but a critical requirement established by federal, state, and local policies. Specifically, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) mandates parent engagement in Title 1 schools to provide all children equal opportunity for high-quality education. Schools must ensure that parents have substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education, which is especially vital in rural areas where families often face unique barriers to engagement.

Partnerships with families are the best way to create an environment conducive to family engagement (Epstein, 2011). Given the challenges specific to rural areas, such as geographic isolation and limited community resources, context must be considered when developing family engagement plans. These plans could address logistical barriers, include specific strategies for leveraging community resources to enhance learning opportunities, and focus on fostering partnerships with community organizations. In addition, policies should encourage schools to adopt technology and AI-driven tools to enhance family engagement because of the barriers families face. AI-driven platforms can offer flexible engagement opportunities, such as virtual meetings, on-demand resources, and personalized communication, allowing families to participate in ways that fit their schedules and needs. Policies could encourage funding for AI-based platforms that provide additional resources for schools to implement innovative family engagement strategies.

Finally, to ensure effective family engagement, professional development for educators should be a mandatory component of in-service training within schools and pre-service programs in teacher preparation. Federal and State policies should mandate professional learning opportunities for educators focusing on effective family engagement practices because of their impact on student achievement. This training should include strategies for building trust and relationships with families, techniques for integrating family engagement into daily practices, and effective two-way communication strategies.

Policymakers must recognize family engagement's unique challenges and opportunities in rural schools. By requiring context-specific family engagement plans, integrating technology and AI, and prioritizing professional development focused on family engagement, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for families. Policies around family engagement would ensure that family engagement strategies are compliant with the Every Student Succeeds Act and impactful in addressing the needs of rural students and their families.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

Chapter 6 summarized key findings, themes, limitations, and implications for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. The findings underscore the transformative potential of comprehensive family engagement strategies. The research study suggests that schools should prioritize implementing structured family engagement strategies. Schools should foster strong partnerships between families, schools, and the community, as the collaborative approach is essential for leveraging resources and supporting student learning. In addition, schools should focus on consistent and effective communication, utilizing various forms to ensure families are well-informed.

Schools should provide families with the necessary resources and support to engage in their children's education. Leveraging community resources is a key component of effective family engagement. Schools, especially those in rural areas with limited resources, should collaborate with community organizations to expand opportunities for learning outside the school setting. Finally, schools need to offer varied methods of engagement to address different family needs and preferences, especially for those facing barriers to engagement.

Family engagement should be a shared responsibility between families, schools, and the community. By working together, the overlapping spheres of influence can create a supportive environment where all students can thrive. This study shows that such an approach and leveraging transformational family engagement strategies have the power to bridge gaps and boost student achievement in a rural school.

REFERENCES

- Allen, L., & Calhoun, E. F. (1998). Schoolwide action research: Findings from six years of study. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(9), 706–710. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20439316>
- Annie Casey Foundation. (2022, December 14). Parental involvement in your child’s education. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/parental-involvement-is-key-to-student-success-research-shows>
- Baade, L.M. (2015). Impact of a rural public school district on community culture [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.
- Baker, T. L., Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R. J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. *School Community Journal*, 26(2), 161–184. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2016-62234-009>
- Barbour, R. S. (2014). Analyzing focus groups. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 313–326). Sage Publications.
- Barr, J., & Saltmarsh, S. (2014). It all comes down to the leadership. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 42(4), 491–505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213502189>
- Benjamin, S. (2014). Shifting from data to evidence for decision making. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(7), 45–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171409500711>
- Bloomberg, L. D. (2023). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Bloomberg, L.D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap*

from beginning to end (4th ed.). SAGE.

Boonk, L., Gijselaers, H. J. M., Ritzen, H., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2018). A review of the relationship between parental involvement indicators and academic achievement.

Educational Research Review, 24(2018), 10–30.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.001>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Brock, A., & Hundley, H. (2016). *The growth mindset coach*. Ulysses Press.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610440967>

Cai, J., Moyer, J. C., & Wang, N. (1997, March 24–28). *Parental roles in students' learning of mathematics: An exploratory study* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, United States.

Calarco, J. M., Anderson, E. M., Meanwell, E. V., & Knopf, A. (2020). “*Let’s not pretend it’s fun*”: How COVID-19-related school and childcare closures are damaging mothers’ well-being. ResearchGate. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/jyvk4>

Coady, M. (2019). Rural multilingual family engagement. *The Rural Educator*, 40(3), 1–13.

<https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v40i3.545>

Coghlan, D. (2019). *Doing action research in your own organization*. Sage publications.

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2014) *Doing action research in your own organization* (4th ed.). SAGE.

- Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare.
- Constantino, S. (2015). *Engage every family: Five simple principles*. Corwin Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Danisman, S. (2017). The effect of parent involvement on student achievement. In: Karadag,E. (eds). *The factors effecting student achievement* (pp. 271–290). Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56083-0_17
- DeMarrais, K. (2004). *Qualitative interview studies: Learning through experience*. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 51–65). Routledge.
- Denessen, E., Bakx, A., & Gierveld, J. (2009). Teacher-parent partnerships: Preservice teacher competences and attitudes during teacher training in the Netherlands. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(2), 192–200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.07.008>
- Denscombe, M. (2017). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (6th ed.). Open University Press.

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Desimone, L. (1999). Linking parent involvement with student achievement: Do race and income matter? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(1), 11–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220679909597625>
- Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2005). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level schooling. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98(3), 164–175.
<https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.98.3.164-175>
- Đurišić, M., & Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental involvement as an important factor for successful education. *CEPS Journal*, 7(3), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:14918>
- Efron, S. E., & Ravid, R. (2020). *Action research in education: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Epstein, J. L. (1987). *Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. Theories of teacher education*, 9(2), 119–134.
- Epstein, J. L. (1992). School and family partnerships. In M. H. Alkin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational research* (6th ed., pp. 1139–1151). Macmillan.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701–712. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009600909>
- Epstein, J. L. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.

- Epstein, J. L. (2005). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. (2010). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(3), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200326>
- Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. L. (2016). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Epstein, J. L. (2019). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (4th ed.). Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., Van Voorhis, F. L., Martin, C. S., Thomas, B. G., Greenfeld, M. D., Hutchins, D. J., & Williams, K. J. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J. L., & Connors, M. M. (1995). *Family involvement in school and children's academic achievement: A review of research* (Report No. 23). National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.
- Epstein, J., & Sanders, M. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J., & Sheldon, S. (2006). Moving forward: Ideas for research on school, family, and community partnership. In C. F. Conrad & R. C. Serlin (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook for*

- research in education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry* (pp. 117–138). SAGE Publications.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2006). *Toward an understanding of the roles of school, family, and community partnerships in student learning and development*. In D. J. Chavkin (Ed.), *Family-school-community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (pp. 33-50). Corwin Press.
- Erdem, C., & Kaya, M. (2020). A meta-analysis of the effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 7(3), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.56059/jl4d.v7i3.417>
- Erdener, M. A., & Knoeppel, R. C. (2018). Parents' perceptions of their involvement in schooling. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*, 4(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.21890/ijres.369197>
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009048817385>
- Fenton, P., Ocasio-Stoutenburg, L., & Harry, B. (2017). The power of parent engagement: Sociocultural considerations in the quest for equity. *Theory Into Practice*, 56(3), 214–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1355686>
- Flynn, G. (2007). Increasing parental involvement in our schools: The need to overcome obstacles, promote critical behaviors, and provide teacher training. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 4(2), 23–30. <https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v4i2.1627>
- Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Family-School Partnership Program*. Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org>

Georgia Department of Education. (2023). *Title I Program*. Georgia Department of Education.

Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org>

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2022). *The top ten issues to watch in 2022*.

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. <https://gpee.org/toptenissues2022>

Glanz, J. (2014). *Action research: An educational leader's guide to school improvement* (3rd ed.).

Rowman & Littlefield.

Gordon, S. P., & Louis, K. S. (2009). *Leadership for learning: How do principals promote effective teaching and learning?* *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(2), 217–240.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230910955809>

Goshin, M., & Mertsalova, T. (2018). Types of parental involvement in education, socio-economic status of the family and students' academic results. *Voprosy obrazovaniya / Educational Studies Moscow*, 3, 68–90. <https://doi.org/10.17323/1814-9545-2018-3-68-90>

Green, B., & Letts, W. (2007). Space, equity, and rural education: A 'trialectical' account. In K. N. Gulson & C. Symes (Eds.), *Spatial theories of education: Policy and geography matters* (pp. 57–76). Routledge.

Gross, D., Bettencourt, A. F., Taylor, K., Francis, L., Bower, K., & Singleton, D. L. (2020). What is parent engagement in early learning? Depends who you ask. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(3), 747–760. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-019-01680-6>

Hall, C. M. (2020). The impact of family engagement on student achievement. *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, 22(2), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1327>

- Hamlin, D., & Flessa, J. (2018). Parental involvement initiatives: An analysis. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 32(5), 697–727. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904816673739>
- Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*, 50(3), 277–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802309424>
- Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2020). *A family engagement framework for all*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/20/06/family-engagement-framework-all>
- Hattie, J., & Anderman, E. M. (Eds.). (2013). *International guide to student achievement*. Routledge.
- Hayes, S. D., Flowers, J., & Williams, S. M. (2021). “Constant communication”: Rural principals' leadership practices during a global pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, Article 618067. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.618067>
- Heinrichs, J. (2018). School leadership based in a philosophy and pedagogy of parent engagement. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(2), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1459022>
- Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hill, N. E., & Taylor, L. C. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: Pragmatics and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(4), 161–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00298.x>

- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher positionality—A consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research—a new researcher guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 99(2), 278–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819709900203>
- Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An update. *Educational Review*, 70(1), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1388612>
- Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2010.488049>
- IBM. (2024, December 19). *What is artificial intelligence (AI)?* <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence>
- Ishimaru, A. M. (2019). From family engagement to equitable collaboration. *Educational Policy*, 33(2), 350–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691841>.
- Jacobson, L. (2002, September 18). Putting the 'parent piece' in schools. *Education Week*, 22(5), 1–2.
- Jacques, C., & Villegas, A. (2018). *Strategies for equitable family engagement*. State Support Network.
- Jarrett, R. L., & Coba-Rodriguez, S. (2017). How African American mothers from urban, low-income backgrounds support their children's kindergarten transition: Qualitative findings. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46(4), 435–444. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0868-4>.

Jerald, C. D. (2002). *All talk, no action: Putting an end to out of field teaching*. The Education Trust.

Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 19(3), 237–258.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-007-9048-8>

Jeynes, W. H. (2018). A practical model for school leaders to encourage parental involvement and engagement. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(2), 147–163.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1459022>

Johnson, M. K., & Herlihy, C. (2020). Rural families and the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Rural Educator*, 41(3), 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v41i3.1060>

Jones, C., & Palikara, O. (2023). Have teachers' perceptions of parental engagement changed following COVID-19? Evidence from a mixed-methods longitudinal case study. *Education Sciences*, 13(7), 750. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070750>

Kelty, N. E., & Wakabayashi, T. (2020). Family engagement in schools: Parent, educator, and community perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 10(4), 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020973024>

Kena, X. X., Author, X. X., & Author, X. X. (2020). Name of the article. *Name of the Journal*, VV(N), PP–PP. <https://doi.org/xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

Kim, H. J. (2019). The relationship between parental involvement and students' postsecondary education aspirations. *Educational Policy*, 33(2), 350–385.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.12.001>

- Knisely, K. (2011). Literature review: How much does parental involvement really affect the student's success? *ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED520084*.
http://kniselymtt.pbworks.com/f/EDCI6300_kknisely_LiteratureReview.pdf
- Kraft, M. A. (2017). Engaging parents through better communication systems. *Educational Leadership*, 75(1), 58–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017730730>
- Ladd, G. W., & Dinella, L. M. (2009). Continuity and change in early school engagement: Predictive of children's achievement trajectories from first to eighth Grade? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(1), 190–206. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013153>
- Lavalley, M. (2018). *Out of the loop: Rural schools are largely left out of research and policy discussions, exacerbating poverty, inequity, and isolation*. National School Boards Association, Center for Public Education. <https://www.nsba.org/News/2018/Out-of-the-Loop>.
- Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of “the four paths model.” *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(4), 570–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19878772>
- Leo, A., Wilcox, K. C., & Lawson, H. A. (2019). Culturally responsive and asset-based strategies for family engagement in odds-beating secondary schools. *The School Community Journal*, 29(2), 255–280. <https://doi.org/10.32692/SCJ.2019.29.2.255>
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. In G. W. Lewin (Ed.), *Resolving social conflicts* (pp. 201–216). Harper & Row. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x>
- Mapp, K. L. (1997). Making the link: The between school and family connections. *Educational Leadership*, 55(7), 35–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017730730>

- Mapp, K. L. Carver, I., Lander, J. (2017). *Powerful Partnerships: A teacher's guide to engaging families for student success*. Scholastic.
- Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2021). *Embracing a new normal: Toward a more liberatory approach to family engagement*. Carnegie Corporation.
- McWayne, C. M., Hampton, V. L., Fantuzzo, J. W., Cohen, H. L., & Sekino, Y. (2008). Defining family engagement among Latino Head Start parents. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(4), 454–467. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2008.02.002>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2024). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (5th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mertler, C. A. (2019). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Milner, H. R. (2018). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity in classroom and community* (2nd ed.). Harvard Education Press.
- Milner, H. R., Cunningham, H. B., Murray, I. E., & Alvarez, A. (2017). Supporting students living below the poverty line. *National Youth Advocacy and Resilience Journal*, 2(2), 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.20429/nyarj.2017.020204>

- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (2001). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840109596216>
- Myende, P. E. (2019). Creating functional and sustainable school–community partnerships: Lessons from three South African cases. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(6), 1001–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219869151>
- Myende, P. E., & Nhlumayo, B. B. (2022). Enhancing parent–teacher collaboration in rural schools: Parents’ voices and implications for schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(3), 490–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1731764>
- National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement. (n.d.). Parent engagement: A shared responsibility to support children’s learning and development. Retrieved from <http://www.nafsce.org>
- Association for Middle Level Education. (2003). *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents* (3rd ed.). Association for Middle Level Education.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, M. J., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Nunez, J. C., Reguerio, B., Suarez, N., Pineiro, I., Rodicio, M. L., & Valle, A. (2019). Student perception of teacher and parent involvement in homework and student engagement: The mediating role of motivation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 1384. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01384>

- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Posey-Maddox, L., & Haley-Lock, A. (2016). One size does not fit all: Understanding parent engagement in the contexts of work, family, and public schooling. *Urban Education*, 1(28), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859166603>
- Povey, J., Campbell, A. K., Willis, L., Haynes, M., Western, M., Bennett, S., Antrobus, E., & Pedde, C. (2016). Engaging parents in schools and building parent–school partnerships: The role of school and parent organization leadership. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 79, 128–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.07.005>
- Power, T., & Matuszewski, J. (2020). Technology and family engagement: Tools for learning and collaboration. *Educational Leadership*, 78(4), 44–49.
- Prime, H., Wade, M., & Browne, D. T. (2020). Risk and resilience in family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Psychologist*, 75(5), 631–643. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000660>
- Probst, J., Barker, J. C., Enders, A., & Gardiner, P. (2018). Current state of child health in rural america: How context shapes children’s health. *Journal of Rural Health*, 34(Suppl 1), s3–s12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12222>
- Purtell, K. M., & McLoyd, V. C. (2013). Parents’ participation in a work-based anti-poverty program can enhance their children’s future orientation: Understanding pathways of influence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(6), 777–791. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9802-7>

- Pushor, D., & Amendt, T. (2018). Leading an examination of beliefs and assumptions about parents. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(2), 202–221.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1439466>
- Rattenborg, K., MacPhee, D., Walker, A. K., & Miller-Heyl, J. (2019). Pathways to parental engagement: Contributions of parents, teachers, and schools in cultural context. *Early Education and Development*, 30(3), 315–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2018.1526577>
- Rodgers, D. (2020, September). *Using technology to connect with parents*. Edutopia.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-technology-connect-parents>
- Rodrigues, D. R. G. (2020). *Does parental involvement improve learning? Evidence from Angolan primary-schools* [Doctoral dissertation, Nova School of Business and Economics]. Semantic Scholar. <http://hdl.handle.net/10362/108431>
- Roksa, J., Deutschlander, D., & Whitley, S. E. (2021). Parental validation, college experiences, and institutional commitment of first-generation and low-income students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 58(3), 295–309.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2019.1699105>
- Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2017). *An introduction to qualitative research: Learning in the field* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Roy, M., & Giraldo-García, R. (2018). The role of parental involvement and social/emotional skills in academic achievement: Global perspectives. *The School Community Journal*, 28(2), 29–46.
- Sanders, M. G., & Sheldon, S. B. (2009). *Principals matter: A guide to school, family, and community partnerships*. Corwin.

- Sanders-Smith, S. C., Smith-Bonahue, T. M., & Soutullo, O. R. (2020). 'The parents are locked out': Policies, practices, and perspectives undermining family engagement. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 29(3), 250–273.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2020.1770190>
- Schultz, T. R., Author, X. X., & Author, X. X. (2011). A review of parent education programs for parents of children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 41(7), 957–969. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1144-3>
- Semke, C., & Sheridan, S. (2012). Family-school connections in rural education settings: A systematic review of the empirical literature. *School Community Journal*, 22(1), 21-47.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1144-3>
- Shute, V. J., Hansen, E. G., Underwood, J. S., & Razzouk, R. (2011). A review of the relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' academic achievement. *Education Research International*, 2011, Article 915326.
<https://doi.org/10.1155/2011/915326>
- Smith, T. E., Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., & Sebastian, J. (2021). Exploring the link between principal leadership and family engagement across elementary and middle school. *Journal of School Psychology*, 84, 49–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.12.006>
- Smith, T. E., & Sheridan, S. M. (2019). The effects of teacher training on teachers' family-engagement practices, attitudes, and knowledge: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 29(2), 128–157.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2018.1460725>
- Stringer, E. T., & Aragon, L. M. (2020). *Action research: A handbook for practitioners* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Sugrue, E., Ball, A., Harrell, D. R., & Daftary, A. H. (2023). Family engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic: Opportunities and challenges for school social work. *Child & Family Social Work*, 28(4), 908–918. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13011>

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020). *Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>

United States Department of Education. (1994). *Improving Schools Act*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-753/pdf/COMPS-753.pdf>.

United States Department of Education. (2015). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. <https://www.ed.gov/essa>

United States Department of Education. (2016). *The importance of family and community involvement in education*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-involvement>

United States Department of Health and Human Services & United States Department of Education. (2016). *Policy statement on family engagement from the early years to the early grades*. United States Department of Education. <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/07/policy-statement-on-family-engagement.pdf>

University of Florida Literacy Institute. (2022). *Home Support Guide*. https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/UFLI_Foundations_Home_Support_Guide_Updated.pdf

Van Lancker, W., & Parolin, Z. (2020). COVID-19, school closures, and child poverty: A social crisis in the making. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(5), e243–e244. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30084-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30084-0)

- VanValkenburgh, J., Putnam, J., & Porter, M. (year). Middle school parent involvement: Perceptions of teachers and parents. *Middle School Journal*, 52(4), 33-42.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2021.1948299>
- Van Voorhis, F. L. (2003). Interactive homework in middle school: Effects on family involvement and science achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96(6), 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670309596616>
- Villarreal, R., Martinez, A., & Gonzalez, M. (2019). Parent involvement in the success of students: Evidence from community schools. *Journal of Educational Research*, 112(4), 487–499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2019.1580721>
- Walters, D. (2014). Grounded practice: Putting the ‘self’ back into self-evaluation. *Educational Action Research*, 22(1), 72–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2014.960531>
- Webster, J. G. (2020). *Effective family engagement for middle grades transition* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Weiss, H., Lopez, M. E., & Caspe, M. (2018). *Carnegie challenge paper: Joining together to create a bold vision for next generation family engagement*. Global Family Research Project.
- Wilinski, B., Morley, A., & Wu, J. H. (2023). Reconceptualizing family engagement as an improvisational practice: Lessons from pre-K teachers’ practices during COVID-19. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-023-01481-z>
- Williams, S. M., Swain, W. A., & Graham, J. A. (2021). Race, climate, and turnover: An examination of the teacher labor market in rural Georgia. *AERA Open*, 7, Article 2332858421995514. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858421995514>

- Witte, A. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2011). Family engagement in rural schools. *Handbook on family and community engagement* (pp. 153–156). National Center for Research on Rural Education.
- Yamauchi, L. A., Ponte, E., Ratliffe, K.T., & Traynor, K. (2017). Theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in research on family–school partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 2(27), 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9392-0>
- Yulianti, K., Denessen, E., & Droop, W. (2018). The effects of parental involvement on children's education: A study in elementary schools in Indonesia. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 10, 14–32. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijpe.10.1.14123>

Appendix A

University of Georgia Consent Form: Action Research Design Team

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

The Effect of Family Engagement Strategies on the achievement of underperforming students in a rural elementary school

You are being asked to participate in a research study.

Before you agree, the investigator must tell you about (i) the purposes, procedures, and duration of the research; (ii) any experimental procedures; (iii) any reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, and benefits of the research; (iv) any potentially beneficial alternative procedures or treatments; and (v) how confidentiality will be maintained.

Where applicable, the investigator must also tell you about (i) any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs; (ii) the possibility of unforeseeable risks; (iii) circumstances when the investigator may halt your participation; (iv) any added costs to you; (v) what happens if you decide to stop participating; (vi) when you will be told about new findings which may affect your willingness to participate; and (vii) how many people will be in the study.

If you agree to participate, you must be given a signed copy of this document and a written summary of the research.

The main investigators conducting this study are Dr. Jamon Flowers and Breanne Smith at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, contact Breanne Smith at bsmith@madison.k12.ga.us or **706-795-2181**.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop.

Signing this document means that the research study, including the above information, has been described to you orally and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Witness

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent

Signature

Date

Appendix B

University of Georgia Consent Form: Action Research Implementation Team and

Participants

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

The Effect of Family Engagement Strategies on the Achievement of Underperforming Students in a Rural Elementary School

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to participate. Please ask the researcher(s) below if anything is unclear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Jamon Flowers*
 University of Georgia
 540-235-1180

Co-Investigator: *Catherine Breanne Smith*
 University of Georgia, GCPS
 770-362-5166

We are doing this research study to learn more about the effect of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students in a rural area. The following is the purpose of the study:

This action research study examined the effects of family engagement strategies on the achievement of underperforming students in a rural elementary school in the southeastern United States. It sought to examine the perspectives of both parents and educators. Input from educational leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, and caregivers was evaluated. You are being invited to participate in this research study because of your voluntary involvement with engaging families in the student support team process and your relationship with the students identified as underperforming students.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your view of family engagement strategies and how they affect student achievement.

- We will ask you to *conduct your regular job duties and voluntary work within the family engagement committee. Additionally, based on MAP data, you will participate in interviews, focus groups, and surveys on the impact of family engagement strategies and student achievement.* There will be three 4.5-week cycles.
- We will have an initial study orientation meeting in July 2024, follow up within the three 4.5-week cycles, and close with reflections by *December 2024.*

Focus Groups or Other Group Activities

Even though the investigator will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.

Audio/Video Recording/Photographs

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview and focus group (audio and video) recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview and focus group recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview and focus group recorded.

Relationship to Researchers

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will not impact your involvement in the family engagement committee, normal job functions, or job evaluations. The decision to participate or not to participate in the research will not affect your employment or employee evaluations.

Some questions may make you uncomfortable. If you do not wish to answer them, you can skip them.

Your responses may help us understand how to improve family engagement opportunities to increase family engagement in a rural elementary school.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will mask your identity using a coding system (e.g., Teacher 1, Student 1, or Parent 1A) and/or pseudonyms (false names). We will only keep information that could identify you on the researcher's password-protected private computer, and identifying information will be removed/destroyed a year after publicizing it.

The information you provide as a participant will not be used or distributed for future research.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. The principal Investigator, Dr. Jamon Flowers, can be reached at jamon.flowers@uga.edu or 540-235-1180. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix C

Interview Protocols

Participant Interviews

The interviewer may probe for specifics after each/any question as necessary.

Research Question 1:

1. Do you feel welcome in your child's school?

If yes, what does school staff do to show you are welcome?

If not, what could the school do differently to make you feel welcome?

2. Are you satisfied with how often and how school staff communicates with you about your child? About school activities and academics?

If yes, what are they doing that is helpful?

If no, what would you like them to do differently?

Research Question 2:

1. How does the school ask you to be engaged in your child's learning?
2. What challenges have you observed regarding families' engagement in the decision-making processes for their child's education?
3. What kind of school activities do you like to attend?
4. What kind of things has the school done that helped you to help your child at home?
5. How do you prepare your child to do well in school?
6. What would you like to do to help your child in their schooling but do not know how?

Research Question 3:

1. What barriers do you face when it comes to being engaged in your child's education?
2. What community resources would you like to see being used more to engage families?

3. Is there anything else you would like us to know about what is important to you as a family about your child's education?

Implementation Team Interviews

The interviewer may probe for specifics after each/any question as necessary.

Research Question 1

1. Do you feel the school communicates effectively with families?
2. Are families responsive to your communication techniques?
3. If parents are engaged, do you see a difference in academic achievement?

Research Question 2

1. How does the school ask families to be engaged in a student's education?
2. How does this work for families?
3. What do you feel we should do to engage families more?
4. What is the parent or family's role in a child's education?

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocols

Action Research Design and Implementation Team Focus Group Interviews (mid-study)

The interviewer may probe for specifics after each/any question as necessary.

1. How do you feel family engagement impacts student achievement?
2. What things should we do to engage families more?
3. What are some at-home learning experiences we can provide to families to get them more engaged?
4. What resources does the school need to provide to families to improve engagement?
5. What innovative communication methods could the school provide to families to enhance family engagement and inform families?
6. How can the school administrators/parent engagement coordinator support you in engaging the families of underperforming students?

Appendix E

Family Engagement Questionnaire

Family Engagement Questionnaire

This survey is intended to aid educators in identifying established Family Engagement strategies and processes and areas of growth and development in this school building. The survey is sectioned with questions that align with family engagement research questions and the school improvement plan. Answer all questions with complete transparency. This study aims to improve family engagement strategies and evaluate their effect on student achievement. Thank you for completing this survey with a mindset of growth.

** Indicates required question*

1. Email *

2. What is your name? *

3. What is your title? Parent or School Employee *

4. Our school receives Title 1 funds to engage parents and families in their child's education. How would you like to see the Family Engagement funds at our school used? Check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Educational materials for parents use
- ☐ Professional development for teachers and administrators about family engagement.
- ☐ Distributing information about how best to engage a families in the education of their children.
- ☐ Helping schools partner with community-based or other organizations that support family engagement.
- ☐ Educational software for home use.
- ☐ Parent workshops
- ☐ Technology Workshops

5. What I want School Staff to Know About Building Partnerships/Working with Families. *

~How can teachers and school staff build partnerships with parents and families to improve student achievement in elementary school?
Check all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Value and use suggestions of parents when making decisions
- ☐ Reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners
- ☐ Implement and coordinate parent engagement program/activities/events

6. Please help the school develop professional learning activities about engaging families for teachers, principals, other leaders, and other staff by writing your ideas here. *

7. How do you want the school to communicate with you? Check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Email
- ☐ pre-recorded/automated phone calls
- ☐ Mass Email
- ☐ notes/written messages sent home
- ☐ Remind App
- ☐ Posting on Website
- ☐ Social Media

8. Communication with the school is provided, translated, or interpreted in a language I can understand? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. Which format do you like for us to provide meetings? Check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ In-Person
☐ Online/Virtual

10. The school offers parent meetings at a convenient time of day/night? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ yes
☐ no

11. When is the best time to attend a parent meeting? Check all that apply *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Before School
☐ During school, before lunch
☐ During school, after lunch
☐ Immediately after school
☐ Evenings
☐ Saturday
☐ Virtual Meetings Only
☐ other

12. Why would you most likely not attend a family engagement event? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Not aware the event is taking place
- ☐ Events take place at inconvenient times/dates
- ☐ The location of the event is not convenient
- ☐ I do not feel that events are effective to me and my students
- ☐ Lack of transportation
- ☐ Lack of childcare
- ☐ Events are not in a language I can understand

13. What would improve your participation in family engagement events/activities at your child's school? *

14. What should the school/teachers do to support you in helping your child achieve academically? *

15. The following is a list of family engagement activities that have been ★ previously provided. Please check the ones that were helpful.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Annual Title 1 Parent Input Meeting
- ☐ Student Support Team Meetings
- ☐ Parent Breakfasts with information about the school year and how to get engaged in your child's education
- ☐ Family Literacy Night
- ☐ Math Night
- ☐ Parent/Teacher Conferences

Appendix F

University of Florida Literacy Institute At-Home Learning Activity



Weekly Reading and Spelling Home Practice Guide

This school year, your child's teacher will be using the UFLI Foundations program for reading and spelling instruction. Your child will be learning **new concepts** (sounds and letter patterns) to build their skills in **reading and spelling words**. The UFLI Foundations program includes Home Practice sheets to help families support their child's learning at home. This is a guide for how to use these UFLI Foundations Home Practice sheets.

New Concept and Sample Words sh shop shin dish lash crush	The Home Practice sheet will have the new concept listed at the top with a list of sample words for each concept. Instead of having your child memorize these words, use them to help your child practice applying what they have learned about letters and sounds. To read words , your child should say the sound for each letter or letter combination (d-i-sh) and then blend the sounds to read the word (dish). To spell words , your child should break the word into sounds and write the letter or letter combination for each sound.
Word Work Chains 1. shin → ship → shop → shot 2. rash → dash → dish → wish Sample Word Work Chain Script shin → ship → shop → shot 1. Make the word shin . [spelling] 2. Change the n to p . What word is this? [reading] 3. Change ship to shop . [spelling] 4. Change the p to t . What word is this? [reading]	When children practice building and changing words using word work chains , they are strengthening their reading and spelling skills. You can guide your child's practice by asking them to spell or read a new word. The Sample Word Work Chain Script shows how to alternate reading and spelling practice. <i>Resources for Word Work:</i> Beginner Word Work Mat bit.ly/WordWorkMat1  Intermediate Word Work Mat bit.ly/WordWorkMat2  Paper Letter Tiles 
New Irregular Words said, we*  	Your child will also learn to read and spell irregular words . These words have a tricky part, and that part needs to be learned "by heart." The rest of the word can be sounded out. An asterisk* next to a word indicates that the word is temporarily irregular. This just means your child hasn't yet learned all the letter-sound connections in the word.
Sentences 1. We go to the shop. 2. She said to pick up the trash.	It is important for children to have opportunities to practice applying new letter-sound connections in connected text (sentences and books). Have your child practice both reading and spelling the sentences provided.

ufli.org

© 2022 University of Florida Literacy Institute

Note. From University of Florida Literacy Institute, 2022

(<https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/home/>). Copyright 2022 by University of Florida Literacy Institute.

Appendix G

Student Support Team Meeting Protocol

General Discussion of Student's Present Performance and Progress: (include any attendance concerns, environmental factors, benchmark/screener results, teacher observations, specific areas of challenge, and overall response to the Tier III Intervention Plan to date)

Review of Current Tier III Intervention and Progress Monitoring Information: (include information about the intervention plan and fidelity of implementation, progress monitoring data, what progress has looked like so far, and what might be impacting response to the intervention)

Continued Tier III Intervention Planning: (discuss response to intervention so far (good, uncertain, poor), what adjustments may need to be made to the intervention plan, when/where/how often will support happen, which staff will be responsible for the intervention/data gathering/evaluating)

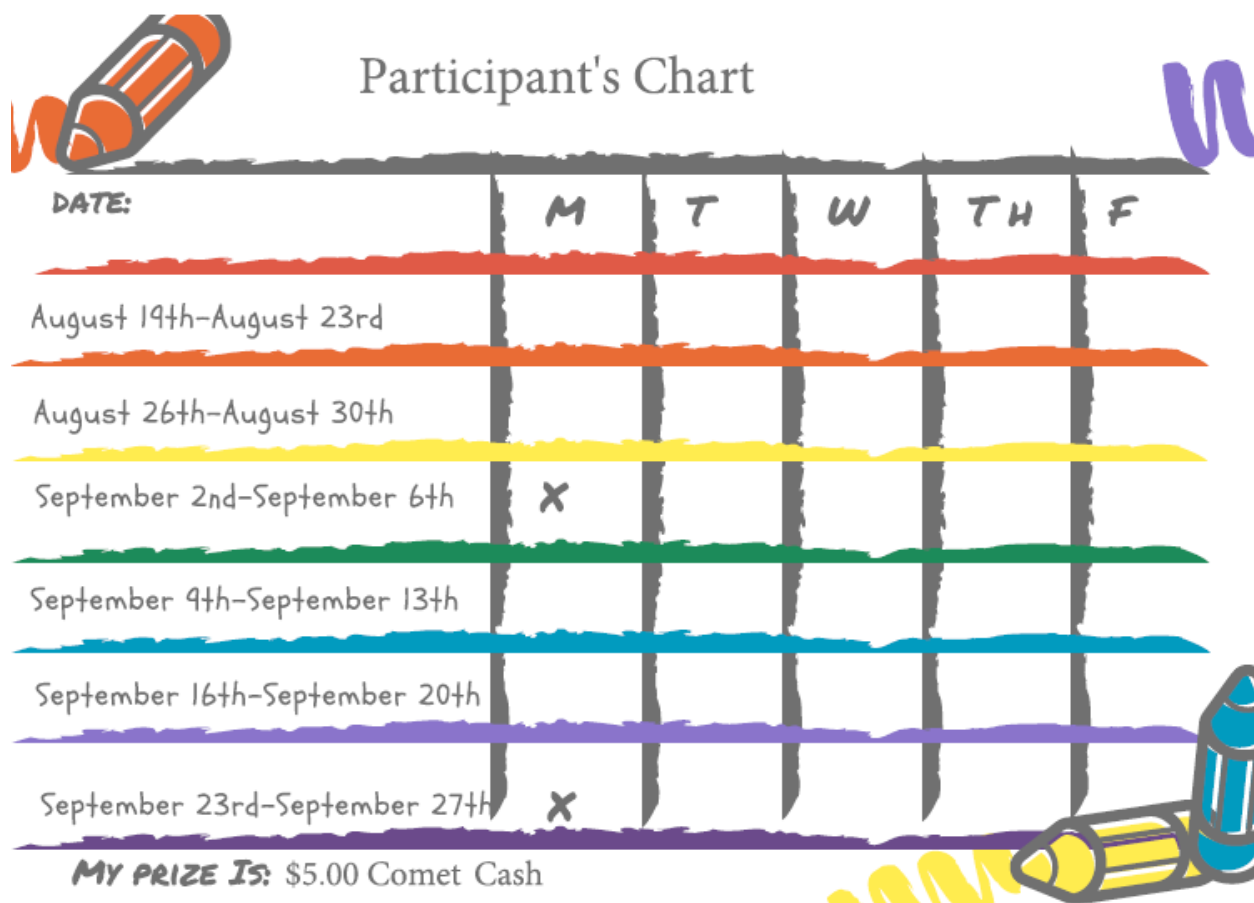
Family Input on current progress, student strengths, and student weaknesses.

Additional Meeting Notes:

Date for Follow-Up Meeting-

Appendix H

Weekly Tracker Form



Participant's Chart

DATE:	M	T	W	TH	F
August 19th-August 23rd					
August 26th-August 30th					
September 2nd-September 6th	X				
September 9th-September 13th					
September 16th-September 20th					
September 23rd-September 27th	X				

MY PRIZE IS: \$5.00 Comet Cash

Appendix I

Family Guide to MTSS

Family Engagement in RTI

Tier 1: All students receive differentiated instruction in the general education classroom as well as academic and behavioral universal screening. I can help by...

- Communicating frequently with teacher and other school personnel
- Becoming involved by attending school functions or serving on a school committee
- Monitoring and helping my child with homework

Tier 2: Students struggling academically or behaviorally may receive an additional level of support in the general area of concern and on-going progress monitoring to measure their response. I can help by...

- Recommending strategies and/or interventions
- Praising my child for improvement
- Continuing to monitor and help with homework

Family Engagement in RTI

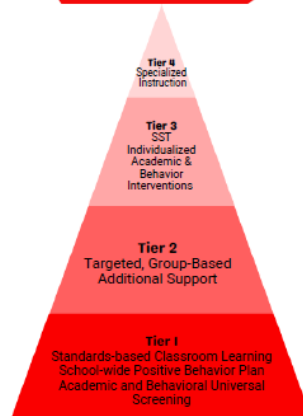
Tier 3: Students who do not make adequate progress in Tier 2 might receive more intensive implementation of targeted research-based interventions (for a minimum of 12 weeks) catered to student's individual needs and more frequent progress monitoring. I can help by ...

- Meeting with Student Support Team (SST) and provide suggestions for interventions
- Continuing to communicate with school regarding student progress

Tier 4: Students who have been unsuccessful in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 may be referred by the RTI committee for an evaluation, which helps to determine if they are eligible for the highest level of specialized instruction (special-education). I can help by ...

- Actively participating in all Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings
- Becoming aware of rights and responsibilities of parents of students who are eligible for special education.

A Family Guide to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)



What is Response to Intervention (RTI)

The Response to Intervention (RTI) method seeks to offer additional support for students struggling academically or behaviorally by:

- identifying students in need of academic or behavioral support
- providing research-based interventions in the area of concern
- measuring their progress frequently and
- providing increasing levels (tiers) of support as necessary

Four Tiers of RTI:

Tier 1 - All Students

Tier 1 - All students receive research-based curriculum in the regular education classroom as well as universal screening measures to identify students in need.

Tier 2 - Group-Based Support

Tier 2 - Students who are not successful in the regular education classroom may receive more focused, group-based support and their progress is monitored.

Tier 3 - Individualized Support

Tier 3 - (Student Support Team process) Students who continue to be unsuccessful, despite Tier 1 and 2 supports, may receive individualized support (research-based intervention for a minimum of 12 weeks) in an area of weakness. As well, they will receive more frequent progress monitoring.

Tier 4 - Specialized Instruction

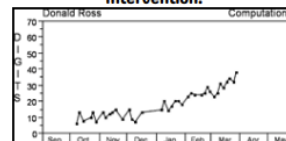
Tier 4 - If students make inadequate progress in Tier 3, a referral for evaluation may be requested. Following the evaluation, the SST team will determine if your child has a disability and

What is Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring?

- All students receive universal screening measures in order to identify students in need.
- Students who are receiving additional interventions will be frequently assessed (progress monitored) on their skills to determine if they are making adequate progress.

Adequate Progress

Example of student making adequate progress on a math computation intervention.



Inadequate Progress

Example of a student making inadequate progress on a reading fluency intervention.



Appendix J

Parent Power Newsletter



PARENT POWER
NOVEMBER
NEWSLETTER

SCAN THE QR CODE TO COMPLETE OUR PARENT SURVEY & A CHANCE TO WIN AN ACE HARDWARE GIFTCARD!



ALSO, YOUR CHILD WILL RECEIVE 2¢ * CASH!

Behavior Support Lesson:

We often take for granted some of the social skills that we have learned in our lives and forget that someone had to teach us these skills. Parenting.org identifies ten social skills that your child needs to know which include following directions, introducing yourself, controlling emotions, asking for help, accepting "no", disagreeing appropriately, showing appreciation, making an apology, and accepting consequences or feedback. If you would like some ideas on how to teach these skills, please visit: <https://www.parenting.org/Pages/Ten-Social-Skills-For-All.aspx>

Conversation Starters *for children*

- WHICH SUBJECT MADE YOU THINK THE MOST TODAY AND WHY?**
- WAS THERE A MOMENT WHEN YOU FELT REALLY PROUD OF YOURSELF TODAY?**

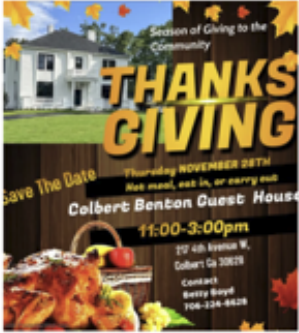
Upcoming Community Events:

11/9 FALL LEAF HAYRIDE
VICTORIA BRYANT PARK
2PM-4PM

11/9 HARVEST FESTIVAL
COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
10AM-3PM

11/23 FALL MOVIE
-BRYANT PARK
7PM-8PM

11/30 CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING & CHRISTMAS MOVIE
BRYANT PARK
7PM-9PM



PARENTING TIP:

WHAT IS THE POWER OF PRACTICING DAILY GRATITUDE?

"GRATITUDE ENRICHES HUMAN LIFE. IT ELEVATES, ENERGIZES, INSPIRES AND TRANSFORMS, AND THOSE WHO PRACTICE IT WILL EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN SEVERAL AREAS OF LIFE INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS, ACADEMICS, ENERGY LEVEL AND EVEN DEALING WITH TRAGEDY AND CRISIS."

DR ROBERT EMMONS.

FAMILY ACTIVITY:
GRATITUDE WALK
***ON BACK**
RETURN TO MS. FOR A SPECIAL PRIZE

WE WOULD LOVE TO SHARE OUR FAMILIES ENJOYING THE COMMUNITY EVENTS OR GRATITUDE WALK ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE! PLEASE SEND PICTURES TO JBATES@MADISON.K12.GA.US

Appendix K

Family Resources

Figure K.1

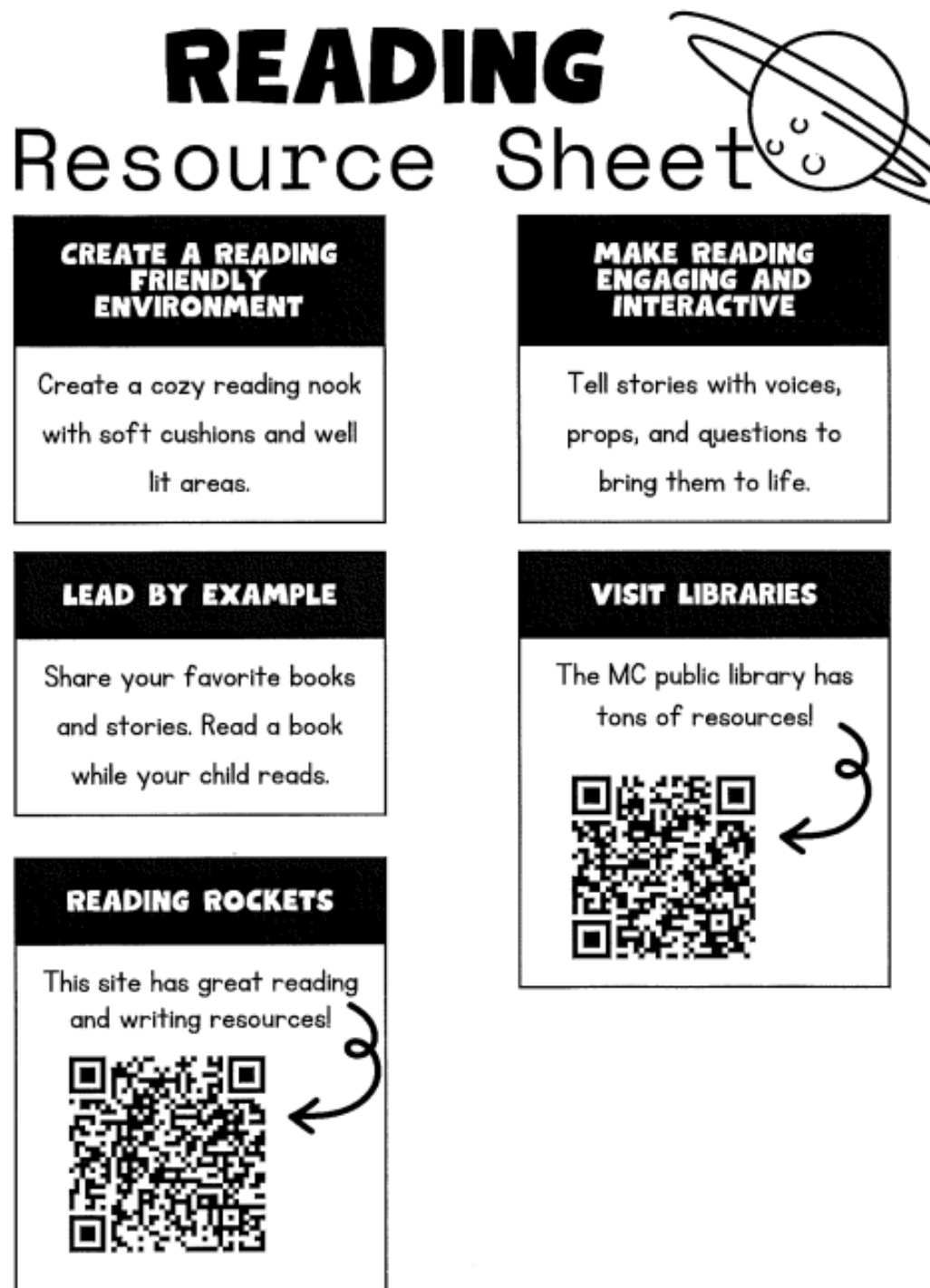
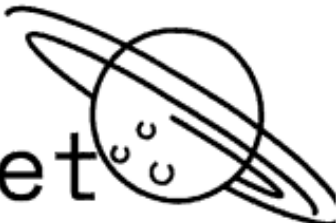
Family Reading Resource

Figure K.2

Family Math Resource

MATH Resource Sheet



CREATE A MATH FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Incorporate math friendly music and songs into routines.

MAKE MATH ENGAGING AND INTERACTIVE

Puzzles, Board Games (Connect Four/Battleship), and read aloud math picture books.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

When at the grocery store, measuring for a home project, or building something, voice your math thinking out loud.

MATH APPS

Check out these useful digital math tools!



MATH AT HOME

Check out these math activities for each grade level!

