

AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF PARENTS' AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LEADERS' BELIEFS THAT LEAD TO DECISIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN
FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

by

Sherrie Hembree Brookie

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family–school partnership program (FSPP). Two theories guided this investigation. Simon’s organizational decision-making theory demonstrated how institutions can follow a process for effective decision-making while also recognizing human limitations of the task. Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence contended that when schools, families, and communities work towards a common goal, student development and achievement is attainable at the highest level. The central research question asked, “How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP at one elementary school?” Data were collected from individual interviews of parents and school leaders, a focus group involving school leaders, a focus group involving parents, and document analysis in the form of participant letters. The data from this investigation were analyzed using Stake’s case study worksheets and steps for case study methodology: description, categorical aggregation, establishing patterns, and naturalistic generalization. The results of this study indicated that parents’ and elementary school leaders’ beliefs that lead to decisions to participate in FSPPs are school culture, inclusive partnership practices, commitments and responsibilities, learning environment, and approach to school leadership.

Keywords: family–school partnership programs, family–school engagement, school outreach, decision-making, parent involvement, parent engagement, school leaders

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Dedication

My Heavenly Father: My precious Father. My Comforter, Protector, Confidant. My Savior. My perpetual person. I present this work as a gift to you; may it honor You. It would be humanly impossible to accomplish a task such as this, but you, Lord, you called me to this journey. I simply listened to Your call and You led me through the fire. Thank you for taking a wretch like me, putting me through the fire, shaping and molding me, and then bringing me out on the other side, a diamond. This experience has changed me forever, and although it doesn't make me better than anyone, it has made me my best self. I don't know where this opportunity will lead, but I know You have a plan for me. My verse for this journey has always been Proverbs 16:3, "Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed." Thank you for ensuring I accomplish this humanly impossible task.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments.....	8
List of Tables	18
List of Figures	19
List of Abbreviations	20
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	21
Overview	21
Background	22
Historical Context	24
Social Context.....	25
Theoretical Context.....	27
Situation to Self.....	29
Problem Statement	31
Purpose Statement.....	32
Significance of the Study	33
Theoretical Significance	34
Empirical Significance.....	35
Practical Significance.....	35
Research Questions	36
Central Question	36

	13
Sub-Question 1.....	37
Sub-Question 2.....	38
Sub-Question 3.....	39
Sub-Question 4.....	39
Definitions.....	40
Summary	41
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	43
Overview.....	43
Theoretical Framework.....	43
Organizational Decision-Making Theory	44
Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence.....	47
Related Literature.....	50
Decision-Making in Schools.....	51
Historical Aspects of Parent Involvement in Schools.....	58
Parent Involvement versus Parent Engagement.....	61
Family–School Partnership Programs.....	66
Key Factors for Successful Implementation of FSPPs	67
Supporting and Sustaining Family Engagement Programs	70
Benefits of Parent Partnerships.....	72
Summary	75
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	77
Overview.....	77
Design	77

	14
Research Questions	79
Setting	80
Participants.....	83
Procedures	84
The Researcher's Role.....	86
Data Collection	88
Interviews.....	89
Focus Groups	97
Participant Letters	102
Data Analysis	104
Trustworthiness.....	107
Credibility	107
Dependability and Confirmability	108
Transferability.....	109
Ethical Considerations	110
Summary	110
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	112
Overview.....	112
Participants.....	113
Aron	115
Brent.....	116
Charlee	117
Deana	118

Eloise.....	119
Forrest	120
Greg.....	121
Hazel	123
Isaac	124
Jena	125
Kennedy	126
Lucy	127
Results.....	129
Theme Development.....	130
Major Theme 1: School Culture	131
Major Theme 2: Inclusive Partnership Practices	137
Major Theme 3: Commitments and Responsibilities.....	140
Major Theme 4: Learning Environment	143
Major Theme 5: Approach to School Leadership.....	148
Research Question Responses.....	151
Central Question	151
Sub-Question 1.....	152
Sub-Question 2.....	155
Sub-Question 3.....	158
Sub-Question 4.....	160
Summary	162
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	163

Overview	163
Discussion	163
Interpretation of Findings	164
Implications for Policy or Practice	172
Theoretical and Empirical Implications	176
Limitations and Delimitations	180
Recommendations for Future Research	182
Conclusion	183
REFERENCES	185
APPENDICES	212
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	212
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter	214
Appendix C: Parent Screening Survey	215
Appendix D: Welcome Email to Parent Participants	217
Appendix E: Welcome Email to School Leader Participants	218
Appendix F: Consent Form	219
Appendix G: Individual Parent Interview Protocol	223
Appendix H: Individual School Leader Interview Protocol	225
Appendix I: Focus Group Interview Protocol for Parents	226
Appendix J: Focus Group Interview Protocol for School Leaders	227
Appendix K: Writing Prompt for Parents	228
Appendix L: Writing Prompt for School Leaders	229
Appendix M: Researcher's Reflexive Journal	230

Appendix N: Themes Generated.....	233
Appendix O: Worksheet One.....	238
Appendix P: Worksheet Two.....	239
Appendix Q: Worksheet Three	241
Appendix R: Worksheet Four	243
Appendix S: Worksheet Five	245
Appendix T: Worksheet Six.....	246
Appendix U: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material	248
Appendix V: Audit Trail.....	251

List of Tables

Table 1. Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement Framework	73
Table 2. Parent Participant List.....	114
Table 3. School Leader Participant List.....	114
Table 4. Theme Development.....	130

List of Figures

Figure 1. Visual Representation of Simon's Decision-Making Model	47
Figure 2. Visual Representation of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence	50

List of Abbreviations

Adverse Childhood Experiences Training (ACEs)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Faculty Counsel Representative (FCR)

Family-School Partnership Program (FSPP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Oakdale Elementary School (OES)

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Professional Development (PD)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

School Improvement Council (SIC)

Social/Emotional Learning (SEL)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR)

Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

While family engagement within the educational context is generally defined as a shared responsibility between educators and caregivers to support student learning, the meaning of the construct is broad and has been interpreted differently by various school stakeholders (Gross et al., 2020; Sebastian et al., 2017; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). School stakeholders are defined as anyone invested in the welfare and success of a school or the students who make up a school's population. Examples of school stakeholders include community members, elected officials, school employees, families, and even students who attend a school (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2019). Even with stakeholder involvement, the responsibility of developing and sustaining family-school partnership programs (FSPPs) rests largely on school districts, school leaders, teachers, and other school staff members (Epstein, 2018; Slavin, 2019). Schools already face a plethora of issues when it comes to family engagement, namely differing ideology, epistemology, race, and social class of the school's community (Mestry, 2017). Willemse et al. (2018) listed a lack of training on such structures in teacher and administrator education programs as another prolific concern leaving school leaders feeling unprepared to implement FSPPs. Parents' and school leaders' decision-making and personal beliefs can also impact FSPP success (Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Researchers have claimed that when stakeholders decide to employ evidence-based, strategically designed practices to create FSPPs, students achieve maximum benefits (Avnet et al., 2019; Gross et al., 2020; Myende, 2019). Understanding how families and school leaders decide to offer or participate in FSPPs may result in the preservation of the physical presence and active engagement of families while maintaining or increasing the social, emotional, and

academic benefits for students (Myende, 2019; Otani, 2019; Schildkamp, 2019). Since federal law now requires Title I schools to allow parents to position themselves as full partners in their child's educational ventures, a study examining the elements necessary for helping school leaders and families to meet such requirements is a worthy exploration.

This chapter includes information relating to this study. The background section provides a lens through which a historical, social, and theoretical perspective for the study can be considered. Situation to self, the problem statement, and the purpose statement provide context for the study. Subsequent sections detail the significance of the study and outline research questions that were used to guide the investigation. Terminology necessary for understanding the central phenomenon is also defined. A summary recounts the main points covered by this chapter.

Background

Over time, researchers have cited several empirical studies to support ongoing parental participation in the educational endeavors of children (Avnet et al., 2019; Dennis, 2017; Mendez & Swick, 2018; Reparaz & Sotés-Elizalde, 2019; Stefansen et al., 2018). Parental participation has been listed as the key benefactor for the social, emotional, and academic success of children. Major advantages can be gained by students who consistently experience parent involvement throughout their K–12 education (T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019; Uba & Jain, 2019; Wilson & Gross, 2018). Specifically, researchers have noted evidence of increased academic achievement, motivation to succeed, determination, persistence, elevated school attendance rates, and positive influence on the beliefs and values surrounding education (Lohmann et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2016; Otani, 2019). Family engagement has proven so valuable, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) requires some schools to create participation programs complete with a written

policy that explicitly identifies intentions for the collaborative partnership and expected benefits for students (Gross et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was written into law with the intent of raising achievement levels for disadvantaged school children (U.S. Department of Education, 2016.). The law was later reauthorized in 2002 as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) that focused on school transparency as well as closing student achievement gaps. In 2015, federal legislation was again reinvented as the ESSA which is concentrated on preparing students for success in college and/or future careers. Family engagement has been listed as a key component of the ESSA (2015) since its inception, but frameworks for establishing or sustaining these essential partnership programs are not standardized. Since a set structure for FSPPs is not required for schools with non-Title I distinction, school leaders have conceptualized the components of such programs without consensus or measures for accountability (Dennis, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Some school leaders have implemented FSPPs without defining structures to ensure success, developing a plan for inclusive outreach, or preparing program evaluation systems largely due to a lack of understanding on how to accomplish the task (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; K. B. Grant & Ray, 2018; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). According to Durand and Secakusuma (2019), when FSPPs are not mutually decided upon by school leaders and families served by the school, the outcome could result in a lack of equitable educational opportunity for students. To sustain such vital relationships, Dennis (2017) suggested school leaders apply the tenants of effective FSPPs to the decision-making processes. The decision-making steps outlined for successful FSPPs include agreement on what to evaluate, criteria for judging program performance, acceptable forms of evidence to identify successful performance, and procedures to

assist teams with concluding program performance results (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). When it comes to FSPPs, uneven practices or haphazard decision-making by both families and school leaders regarding FSPPs typically fails to cultivate and stabilize the intended collaboration (Fernandez-Rio et al., 2017). Lack of effective and sustained FSPPs can negatively impact any student, especially those from disadvantaged families (Burke et al., 2019). This study sought to understand decisions relating to FSPPs that lead to beliefs and actions or inactions of school leaders and parents (Arce, 2019; Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Gross et al., 2020).

Historical Context

Parents have often been referenced as a child's first formal teacher, subsequently securing their integral role (Herman & Reinke, 2017; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2018). Historically, parents and teachers have partnered in some capacity since formal schooling was established in the United States (Fan et al., 2018). As far back as the 19th century, parents played a part in the hiring of teachers and the development of curriculum. Parents were even involved in controlling school actions such as identifying life skills that should be taught to fit the local community needs (Prentice & Houston, 1975). As time progressed, different partnership patterns began to emerge. In the early 1960s the federal government and educational theorists began to take a more active role in the regulation of educational activities by promoting agendas and early start programs for students such as Head Start, Home-Start, and Follow Through (Jeynes, 2018). This action inadvertently took the voice of parents out of educational decision-making. Promotion of family involvement through articles, magazines, and school brochures began to position parents as less capable of assisting their children in learning and suggested teaching be left to the professionals (Jezierski & Wall, 2019). The goal was to honor parents' best intentions while promoting a more indirect form of involvement (Cheung, 2019; Medina et al., 2019).

Researchers, however, continued to discover the positive impact parents had on their child's success in school. As a result, advertising and messaging in the early 1990s were written to bring families back into schools (Coleman, 2018; Head, 2020; Hillier & Aurini, 2018; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Pribesh et al., 2020). Between 2013–2015, the literature focused on convincing parents of the need to become invested in their child's education. Messages centered on strategies for increasing the types and frequency of parental involvement (Head, 2020; Jezierski & Wall, 2019). Recently, parental involvement has been on the decline due to uncontrolled hurdles such as caregiver education level, generational differences, varying opinion on educational supports, inequality between families, limited school engagement opportunity, untraditional family make-up (single-gender parents), communication barriers, work schedules, and transportation issues (Curry & Holter, 2019; Fernández & López, 2017; Lohmann et al., 2018).

Empirical evidence determined a new need to effectively engage 21st-century families (Curry et al., 2016; Dennis, 2017). School leaders are encouraged to embrace effective decision-making strategies and to include stakeholder voices when considering partnership programs (Avnet et al., 2019; Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Reparaz & Sotés-Elizalde, 2019). Currently, efforts have been concentrated on putting strategies in place to mitigate the widening disparities among families. Specifically, school leaders are being challenged to engage all parents, with a specific focus on non-traditional families like single parents, grandparents serving as primary caregivers, families who foster, families of varying ethnicities, and parents of students with disabilities (Heinrichs, 2018; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018; Wasserman, 2020).

Social Context

Changes in educational systems are inevitable, but over time one prominent factor

remains constant: the importance of family engagement (Uba & Jain, 2019). Ma et al. (2016) concluded that the role of the family has a more significant impact on academic achievement than any other partnership. Epstein (1987) suggested creating *family-like* schools and *school-like* families. Since a strong correlation exists between family engagement and the social/emotional welfare and academic achievement of students, building institutional capacity about ongoing partnerships is critical (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Uba and Jain (2019) highlighted the need for school leaders to make decisions on family engagement that are sensitive to shifting family structures, ever-evolving societal norms, and varying socioeconomic statuses. School leaders have a responsibility to make partnership opportunities accessible to all types of families, not just the easy-to-reach, available families (Epstein, 1987).

Shaked and Schechter (2019) suggested school leaders reevaluate traditional decision-making practices so that new, more inclusive relationships with families can begin to form. The development of virtual outreach was suggested as one way for school leaders to at least remove accessibility barriers for vulnerable families. Mendez and Swick (2018) added that this strategy might also work to promote better equity among students. Stefansen et al. (2018) also pointed out that generational differences in parenting will require school leaders to put forth an additional effort to create diverse outreach and engagement opportunities. Overall, the establishment of a relationship based on mutual trust and respect between families and school leaders is essential for the partnership to be truly effective and at the same time, rewarding (Epstein, 1987, 2018).

Since effective and ongoing family engagement can present short-term and long-term benefits for students, parents, schools, and communities, understanding effective family-school partnerships that utilize two-way communication and shared decision-making is a profitable practice for school leaders to consider (Park et al., 2017; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019; R. S. M.

Wong et al., 2018). A shift in perspective regarding the decision-making practices of school leaders can also result in more effective family outreach programs (Heinrichs, 2018). This type of shift, including structured protocols for decision-making, partnership program evaluation measures, and inclusion of stakeholder's voice can provide the decision-makers an opportunity to identify a more common and streamlined process for implementing family–school partnership programming that will yield success (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). K. B. Grant and Ray (2018) noted that when schools generate opportunities for families and school leaders to work together, the cultural divide between families can begin to decrease.

Theoretical Context

Researchers have used a variety of theories to support their examination of school leaders' decision-making efforts regarding the implementation of FSPPs (Gülcan & Duran, 2018; Lohmann et al., 2018; Otani, 2019; Shaked & Schechter, 2019). For example, Gülcan and Duran (2018) surveyed models of involvement and concluded that the inclusion of parental voice in the decision-making processes of schools currently rests at unsatisfactory levels. Using the parental role construction theory and framework established by Mowder (1997), one investigation revealed that schools play an essential role in developing parental understanding of their responsibilities concerning their child's schooling (Otani, 2019). Based on a need for improved decision-making strategies and the collective capacity to sustain family–school partnerships, Simon's (1997) decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence were selected as guiding theories for this investigation.

Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory commonly referred to making choices among alternative courses of action or inaction (Baum & Haveman, 2020; Brazer et al., 2014; Kim, 2018; Simon, 1997). This theory was applied since researchers have determined that

leaders who increase the effectiveness in decision-making typically maximize program value (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Shaked and Schechter (2019) offered further support on the importance of decision-making that showed effective decision-making is established using three criteria: (a) expanding choices, (b) identifying consequences and alternatives, and (c) seeking and analyzing relevant information, all of which coincide with existing research on FSPPs (Cheng et al., 2017; Kraft & Furlong, 2019; Ma et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017).

Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence focused on improving partnerships by identifying types of family involvement, entities sharing responsibility for securing childhood development and success, and barriers that potentially prohibit successful family partnerships (Epstein, 1987; Lohmann et al., 2018). The barriers identified by Epstein's (1987) study were intended to provide school leaders with insight and an evidence-based model that might improve and preserve the vital relationship between families, school, and community. Epstein's (1987) theory helped focus the process of identifying barriers that prevent successful family-school partnerships while Simon's (1997) theory was selected to guide understanding of decision-making practices of families and school leaders regarding FSPPs.

When making decisions regarding family outreach programs, school leaders might consider programs that include input from families, students, and the surrounding community. This effort must also be accompanied by the continuous expansion and modernization of outreach approaches (Ma et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017). Schools are uniquely positioned to capitalize on the facilitation of varied family engagement opportunities (Ozmen et al., 2016). So, as educational reform continues to call for an increase in institutional collaboration with families, empirical research surrounding best practices in decision-making and implementation of FSPPs must be made available to families and school leaders (Wilson & Gross, 2018). This study was

instrumental for gathering information that might assist school leaders in making decisions that sustain strong family–school partnerships while also supporting active educational participation by all types of families.

Situation to Self

I worked as a teacher and instructional coach at several elementary schools in one large district for almost two decades. Within that same district, I observed varying levels of family engagement in schools where I was assigned. At each location, I noticed contrasting viewpoints in school leaders' beliefs surrounding family engagement activities and mindset regarding their responsibility to engage families in support of student welfare and achievement. I wondered if existing research in the area of school outreach influenced the decision-making practices or implementation of ongoing FSPPs at the schools seeming to maintain high levels of familial participation. I desired to understand how school leaders made decisions about the practices used to engage families and what decisions parents faced when deciding to take on an active role in partnering with schools for the success of their child.

I was motivated to conduct this empirical research because I wanted to convey information about effective organizational decision-making and essential FSPPs to school leaders and parents. Specifically, I wanted to know what practices benefited students, parents, school employees, school district leaders, and educational policymakers the most. I wished to contribute information to families and school leaders who also desired to strengthen or form this type of partnership. This notion was superseded by my wish to increase awareness of the barriers prohibiting successful, ongoing FSPPs. I also aspired to aid practitioners in the quest to form collaborative relationships between school employees, the community, and caregivers so that education might become more equitable for all children. I remain optimistic that this

investigation revealed best practices in effective decision-making practices for families and school leaders who attempt to establish vibrant FSPPs.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the philosophical assumptions held by the researcher work together to form a broad framework which “guide[s] the design of all qualitative studies” (p. 74) and points to a loosely held philosophical paradigm. A transformative paradigm shaped my viewpoint for the study as this frame of reference is “rooted in the recognition that injustice and inequality are pervasive and the belief that research and evaluation are important tools for addressing the societal ills” (B. Frey, 2018, p. 27). Creswell and Poth (2018) further added that the purpose of a transformative position is “knowledge construction to aid people to improve society” (p. 25). This paradigm is appropriate because my goal for the investigation was to highlight the power of social relationships (parents and school leaders) to improve educational outcomes for every child and stakeholder. Further, this approach endeavored to assimilate action, reflection, theory, practice, and organizational realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Within the transformative paradigm, I hold the following philosophical assumptions. Ontologically, multiple realities exist and they are evidenced through the diverse perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I believe that the realities of the participants are largely shaped by their social, cultural, and economic affiliations both personally and within the communities where they live and serve. This investigation sought to explore the multiple realities of each participant concerning the phenomenon. Epistemologically, knowledge is socially constructed and useful to aid in the improvement of society (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2008). I believe that knowledge is gained through the personal experiences of an individual; therefore, the viewpoints and perceptions of all participants were essential to the study’s findings.

Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to axiology as “the role of value in research” (p. 20). Regarding axiology, I believe that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, deserve a high-quality, world-class education. Therefore, I value programs that facilitate learning for all students, including those who are from marginalized populations. I believe the value of this research is invaluable since this investigation uncovered better outcomes for all students through FSPPs. The methodology is demarcated as the process of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Methodologically, I believe the best way to explore the experience of participants is through close interaction via a qualitative research design. In this investigation, I worked closely with each participant by way of interview, focus group, and writing prompts. Finally, rhetorically, I believe the best way to persuade readers that the data captured are true is by including rich, thick narratives which illuminate the voices of study participants. My goal in this study was to accurately record and report a thick, rich description of each participant’s account of the phenomenon.

Problem Statement

While a free and appropriate public education is guaranteed to every U.S. student, not every student has fair access to education (Milenkova & Peicheva, 2017; Ozmen et al., 2016). Based on this understanding, a great deal of legislation has focused on leveling the playing field for underprivileged and/or marginalized populations through programs like Title I. However, there are still students who do not qualify for Title I services and experience barriers to a quality education (Karanevych & Kutsa, 2018; Welborn, 2019). Leaders of Title I schools are required to meet prescribed mandates for the development of family partnerships to overcome perceived obstacles to education (Adler-Greene, 2019; Dennis, 2017). Yet, educational leaders who are not under Title I mandates have the option to choose if and how they develop these essential

partnerships (D. W. Black, 2017; Brazer et al., 2010). Stakeholders, such as those affected by decisions, persons possessing expertise regarding decisions, and individuals responsible for implementing decisions should also be included as essential members of a school's decision-making team (Brazer et al., 2010; Shava & Tlou, 2018).

The problem is that families and school leaders differ in decision-making when it comes to participation in FSPPs, making the benefits of the intended partnership unattainable (Bibbs, 2018; Gross et al., 2020; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). To provoke change, national reform has advocated for decentralization in schools as well as increased parent involvement in school-based decision-making (Cristina & Gasparotti, 2018). Some families are not able to participate in school-based decision-making since requirements to include them are not clearly defined for individual institutions outside of the Title I qualification (Arce, 2019). Families have the right to question “why” educational decisions are made and should be able to contribute to the “how.” Effective family–school partnerships are of vital importance since the unique partnership has the potential to impact students socially, emotionally, and academically (Welborn, 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP. FSPPs were defined using a set of partnering standards which include (a) welcoming all families into the school community, (b) communicating effectively, (c) supporting student success, (d) speaking up for every child, (e) sharing power, and (f) collaborating with the community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; K. B. Grant & Ray, 2018). The theories guiding this study were Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making

theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Organizational theory can be applied to guide understanding of the complexities in schools and school districts. It can also serve as the basis for collaborative and effective decision-making (Brazner et al., 2014). Since the school's leadership team is responsible for making decisions regarding family-school engagement-based outreach opportunities and the extent to which it is offered, Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory was appropriate for framing the investigation. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence complemented organizational decision-making theory since it defined types of family involvement and supported the overlapping structures of family, educators, and community as the unit responsible for sharing in student learning and development (Epstein, 2018; Hardman et al., 2017; Suskie, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Strong partnerships between educational stakeholders are the cornerstone of American education and have been proven a necessary construct to aid students in achieving at the highest level; however, barriers have prohibited the effectiveness of such actions (Steenhoff et al., 2017). Schools, families, and communities are being urged to come together to undertake the important task of working together to promote and model the social, emotional, and academic competencies necessary for students to thrive independently in society (Fisher et al., 2017; N. Frey et al., 2019). The concept of FSPPs provides a framework for stakeholders to assume such obligation using strategies that promote inclusion of all families, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, caregiver education level, or socioeconomic status. These partnerships also provide for caregivers to share their voice about their desires for their child's education and to develop an understanding of supportive behaviors that can be done in the home (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). Also, FSPPs allow for reflection and can assist in meeting the individualized needs of

unique school communities (Burke et al., 2019; Erdener, 2016). Based on these understandings, exploration of the decision-making practices of parents and school leaders was essential so that stakeholders can continue to influence the learning and development of children during and after a child's school years.

Theoretical Significance

Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory refers to the two fundamental tasks of an organization which were claimed as decision-making and putting action behind decisions. Through this theory, the decision-making process requires employees of an organization to proceed through a plan yet recognizes human limitations of individuals such as skills, habits, values, conception of purpose, experience, and extent of knowledge (Schildkamp, 2019; Truong et al., 2017). Organizational decision-making theory was extended by this study as the intended scope was narrowed to include the multiple viewpoints of parents and school leaders in relation to collaborative attempts at partnership (Simon, 1997). The investigation also extended Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory which states that organizational effectiveness can be improved by adjusting the way parameters are explicated and implemented.

Because the decisions impacting opportunities for FSPPs impact the overall health, wellness, and success of children as well as other stakeholders, I provided a new application of Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Since school leaders have the flexibility to develop programs for families, decisions regarding these choices may inadvertently impact constituents in a negative way. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence supports culturally responsive pedagogy in that management decisions that help or hinder students' access to learning are considered; significant influence is also placed on knowing and interacting with families to empower the institution, families, and community being served (Erdener, 2016).

Empirical Significance

This study is empirically significant to the field of education since the findings may forge new conversations regarding collaborative partnerships among educational stakeholders. Current literature on the decision-making practices of parents and school leaders that help clarify beliefs leading courses of action or inaction about FSPPs is currently incomplete (Acton, 2021; Burke et al., 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018; N. Frey et al., 2019; Head, 2020; Tremblay et al., 2021). Researchers who typically examine FSPPs report on initiatives for parental involvement, barriers preventing parents from participating in the educational endeavors of their children, or FSPPs and sustainability (Fisher et al., 2017). An examination of school leaders' decisions-making on how and to what extent to involve families addressed gaps in the literature regarding rational decision-making practices, human limitations, and the ability to apply action or inaction to a set of decisions (Bibbs, 2018; Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Heinrichs, 2018). By establishing positive discussion around the topic of FSPPs, school leaders, families, and community members can collaboratively define success and develop measures to evaluate programs that address the needs of the local community and inclusion of all families being served by the educational institution (Epstein, 2018).

Practical Significance

Practical implications gleaned from this work offer useful information to school leaders and parents who desire to form lasting relationships for the overall and lasting good of children (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Levitt et al., 2016). This contribution will likely add to the knowledge base regarding FSPPs as the selected beliefs and courses of action taken by stakeholders to engage in collaborative partnerships were illuminated. A detailed investigation of beliefs about family–school partnerships that support students socially, emotionally, and

academically was conducted as well as an inquiry surrounding the decisions used to determine how and when families and schools interact (Mendez & Swick, 2018). Strategies for increasing the likelihood of effective partnerships between schools and families were extrapolated by the application of ideas offered by the organizational decision-making theory and theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987; Simon, 1997). Lastly, barriers impacting successful collaboration between families and schools were identified and communicated to the broader educational audience to offer support for the building of effective and sustained FSPPs (Ma et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017). Since the ESEA (2015) laws call for schools to address achievement gaps and increase parental involvement, this research also has the potential to influence educational reform.

Research Questions

To attain the highest level of knowledge, research questions were developed according to the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2018) that suggested the inclusion of one central question followed by several sub-questions. Additionally, the questions were structured to include open-ended queries asking “what” or “how” (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Since Yin (2018) implied that defining the research questions is perhaps the most significant aspect of a study, each question was developed to address the focus of the research and to align with the theoretical structures framing the study. The following central question and sub-questions guided the investigation that took place at one elementary school located in the southeast region of the United States.

Central Question

How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?

This question was intended to assist with my interpretation of perceptions held by parents and school leaders in relation to their involvement with family–school outreach programs. I attempted to identify specific actions related to organizational decision-making theory as it related to collaborative and effective partnering between the home and school. Data were collected from parent and school leader participants with the goal of being able to gain a thick, rich description of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection from interviews illuminated relationships, prior encounters, future operational plans, systematic planning, collaborative decision-making, and historical occurrences of decision-making and parent involvement over time (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). Parents’ and school leaders’ knowledge of the subject matter, their background knowledge and experiences, and their decision-making actions elicited understanding of the central phenomenon (Clayton et al., 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Each of the investigated themes connected to the factors that define effective organizational and operational decision-making as outlined by Simon (1997). Epstein’s (1987) model helped identify the overlapping goals, resources, and practices that encourage collaboration between the stakeholders.

Sub-Question 1

How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family–school partnership programs?

The theory of organizational decision-making suggests that leaders create systematic procedures before drawing conclusions or making decisions (Simon, 1997). Collaboration in decision-making can also affect outcomes due to the accountability placed on school leaders from outside perspectives or by school leaders on parents (Brazer et al., 2010). Since the terminology of family engagement is loosely defined by the federal government, and guidance

on the installation and maintenance of these programs is not clear for every school, the formal plan for implementation of outreach programs is broadly perceived (Gross et al., 2020). It becomes necessary to gain insight from parents and school leaders about how they create meaning of the construct of decision-making (Gross et al., 2020; Heinrichs, 2018; Otani, 2019). This question assisted with understanding stakeholders' decision-making practices, identifying key participants included in the decision-making process, and highlighted operational protocols put in place by the participants to ensure effectively operating FSPPs. The behaviors contributing to successful organizational decision-making or those that extend on Epstein's (1987) types of parent involvement were illuminated.

Sub-Question 2

How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family–school partnership programs?

Since school leaders can autonomously increase or decrease family–school engagement opportunities for families, an understanding of the perceptions regarding their responsibilities to the partnership is vital (Heinrichs, 2018). School leaders have a significant influence on how FSPPs are implemented, enhanced, or stabilized (T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). One study discovered leadership actions, such as decision-making and non-verbal cues, can even impact program effectiveness positively or negatively (Brazier et al., 2010). Strategies, like the decision to provide training for teachers on effective family communication or the disposition of leaders to assist teachers in reaching out to unresponsive families to encourage participation, may reveal an understanding of effective decision-making practices by members of a school's leadership team (Sebastian et al., 2017; Shaked & Schechter, 2019). This research question was guided by the first tenant of the organizational decision-making theory which works to reveal shared or

valued goals and outcomes (Simon, 1997). Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence laid the foundation for understanding and identifying overlap between the goals, resources, and practices of families and schools (Epstein, 1987, 2018)

Sub-Question 3

What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students' social, emotional, and academic welfare?

Parent engagement has a significant impact on the welfare of children (Lohmann et al., 2018; Otani, 2019; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019; Uba & Jain, 2019; Wilson & Gross, 2018). By clarifying interpretations about family engagement outreach, the intended impact on the well-being of students was illuminated (Lohmann et al., 2018). Moreover, the short- and long-term benefits of effective and sustained family–school partnerships were highlighted (Lohmann et al., 2018). This research question was supported by organizational theory since it posits the second tenant of the theory: reflective theorizing (Simon, 1997). Reflective theorizing can foster positive change and improve the cultural practices and routines of a school's culture (Brazer et al., 2014). According to Epstein (1987), this inquiry also showcased how participants from each sphere of influence aligned in their beliefs and viewpoints concerning factors of student accomplishment.

Sub-Question 4

What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?

The decisions made by school leaders contribute to overall stakeholder welfare (Lohmann et al., 2018; Otani, 2019; Ozmen et al., 2016; Wilson & Gross, 2018). By clarifying perceptions about ineffective or deficient family outreach practices, the restructuring of programs

to better meet the needs of a community can be initiated (Ozmen et al., 2016; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). This research question was situated in the third tenant of organizational theory as it encouraged discussions that may broaden or deepen understanding through critical social processes (Simon, 1997). Analytical conversations aid decision-makers in improving the overall organization since the strategy provides insight as to why and how events occur; often analytical conversations include data sources to support assumptions (Brazer et al., 2014). This question allowed me to identify the analytical context surrounding the decision-making efforts of families and school leaders and what sources were used to improve decision-making processes. According to Epstein (1987), this question also exposes how participants from each sphere of influence contradict their beliefs and viewpoints concerning factors of student accomplishment.

Definitions

1. *Family–School Partnership Programs* – A set of partnering standards to be used in helping schools, families, and communities come together for the good of the students being served: (a) welcoming all families into the school community, (b) communicating effectively, (c) supporting student success, (d) speaking up for every child, (e) sharing power, and (f) collaborating with the community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; K. B. Grant & Ray, 2018).
2. *NCLB* – The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was a piece of federal legislation that lasted from 2002 to 2015. The act required accountability for student success based on factors including attendance, school climate, and access to advanced placement coursework. The legislation was created for schools receiving Title I funding and required schools receiving funding to create plans for family engagement opportunities (Adler-Greene, 2019).

3. *Parent Involvement* – Parents, legal guardians, or caregivers that serve only the school’s agenda by doing things educators expect them to do; parent choice and voice are not a factor in the one-way relationship (Heinrichs, 2018).
4. *Parent Engagement* – Regular, two-way, meaningful communication and shared decision-making of school leaders and families/legal guardians involving the academic learning and overall well-being of the student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
5. *School Leaders* – School employees who are responsible for daily instructional leadership, managerial operations, or other social decisions for the school being served (Clayton et al., 2020).
6. *Title I* – A federal education program that provides supplementary funding to schools serving students that meet a pre-determined poverty-level criterion (Rivera-Rodas, 2019).

Summary

While parents are primarily responsible for the well-being of their children, historical evidence indicates a strong collaborative partnership between educators, institutions, and the surrounding community to support their efforts (Fan et al., 2018; Jeynes, 2018; Prentice & Houston, 1975). With the recent decrease in parental presence in schools, a more present federal role in education, and societal demands on families, parents and elementary school leaders are once again being tasked to come together on the local level to support the success and well-being of children (Constantino, 2016; Dennis, 2017; Fernandez-Rio et al., 2017). Title I schools are required by law to plan for such FSPPs (Dennis, 2017; Gross et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Conversely, school leaders working in non-Title I institutions are not federally accountable for establishing or maintaining effective FSPPs. Research suggests elementary

school leaders of non-Title I institutions should reflect on current programs and make decisions about the types of partnerships they offer to families since parent involvement in education has been evidenced as a primary indicator of student success (Herman & Reinke, 2017; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2018).

Parents and school leaders beginning or strengthening existing partnership programs should begin with a plan for partnership that is representative of the families served by the school (Shaked & Schechter, 2019). One way to understand the needs of a unique community is to include its stakeholders in decision-making efforts (Jezierski & Wall, 2019). For schools, the families of the students attending must be included and considered primary stakeholders. This action is vital since parent voice and choice in educational programs are essential elements in helping those families become empowered and invested in the institution (Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Clayton et al., 2020; Welborn, 2019). School leaders of non-Title I schools are uniquely positioned to partner with parents to implement FSPPs or support existing FSPPs in an ongoing effort which will contradict the notion that parent input is unnecessary, unvalued, or lacking.

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP. This chapter presented an overview and background of the study. The situation to self was described and the problem and purpose statements were divulged along with the study's significance. Subsequently, the research questions pointed to the plan for research. Definitions were provided to clarify understanding of the study content.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter begins with the theoretical frameworks of organizational decision-making that grounded this empirical inquiry. It continues with a review of the current literature surrounding family–school partnership programs (FSPPs) and issues of parent and school leader decision-making about participation in those collaborative experiences. The history of parental involvement in education follows, including a synthesis of the latest literature regarding decision-making, school leadership, aspects of parent involvement in schools, and effects of family involvement on student outcomes, both academically and socially. Finally, information surrounding the circumstances which lead to the enhancement or development of effective and sustained FSPPs is addressed. The related literature section in this chapter reveals a gap in the literature regarding a practical need for this research study. Parent and elementary school leaders’ decision-making is multifaceted and fluid; therefore, the subject is worthy of scholarly research beyond previous empirical investigations.

Theoretical Framework

According to C. Grant and Osanloo (2014), the theoretical framework is the most important facet of the research process. The theoretical framework underpinning a qualitative study is significant because it has the ability to influence the research process by providing an “explanation of a certain set of observed phenomena in terms of a system of constructs and laws that related those constructs together” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 32). Working as a blueprint for the study, the theoretical frameworks guiding this analysis examine the phenomenon, parents’ and elementary school leaders’ decision-making practices regarding FSPP development, implementation, and sustained success as it relates to engaging families in collaborative

partnerships (C. Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Levitt et al., 2016). The descriptive labels (i.e., constructs) in this study connect forms of family participation with the tenets identified by theorists as essential elements of an effective FSPP: families, students, schools, and communities (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Myende, 2019). The types of parent involvement and actions of school stakeholders are pertinent to this investigation since they divulge links between sustainable outreach practices; therefore, supporting researchers of successful and sustained FSPPs is essential.

Organizational Decision-Making Theory

Decision-making theory formulated by the work of Simon (1997) focused on understanding human behaviors in relation to rational decision-making. The model implied that organizations ought not to be founded on hierarchy but on decision-making and the flow of information that informs and supports the decision-making process (March & Simon, 1993). Specifically, Simon's (1997) work required that leaders make decisions that are correct, efficient, and practical to implement. Based on this discovery, Simon (1997) constructed a model by which operational administrative decision-making should follow. Simon's (1997) decision-making model includes the following process of phases: the intelligence phase, the design phase, and the choice phase. During the intelligence phase, the decision-maker is to search for the conditions that call for a decision. In the design phase, the decision-maker focuses on inventing, developing, and analyzing potential courses of action. In the final phase, choice, the decision-maker must focus on selecting and reviewing a specific course of action from all available options. These phases are defined by Simon (1985) as the process by which choices are made between alternatives to make a decision or to solve a given problem.

Decision-making can influence organization planning, directing, and staffing; it can also be used as a tool for conflict resolution (Simon, 1955, 1976, 1997). This process, when applied in an educational institution, allows members of the school leadership team to resolve challenges before student achievement or family–school relationships are negatively impacted (Brazer et al., 2014; Simon, 1957, 1986). Simon postulated that leadership *is* decision-making (Simon, 1997). Based on this declaration, school leaders must be cognizant of negative implications surrounding poor decision-making since they are dependent on others to implement the decisions they make (Oakes et al., 2017). Simon’s work on organizational decision-making theory was described in terms of an economic framework which alleged that “organizational man” (in this case, school decision-makers) is not completely rational, and that human rationality is bounded (Simon, 1976, 1997).

Simon (1997) referred to the organizational man as one who is not a maximizer, but a “satisficer” wherein one does not strive for optimal solutions but settles for satisfactory solutions which could be detrimental in a school setting. Simon (1997) argued that decision-making in the real world occurs outside of one’s conscious awareness using behavioral and cognitive processes. Specifically, Simon (1955) identified *recognition* and *search* as the essential cognitive processes used by successful decision-makers. Bounded rationality, the term used to label human rationality as limited, is a primary principle of this theory (Simon, 1976, 1997). Simon (1997) noted that nonlogical factors and one’s experience of the world in which they live play a strong role in one’s decision-making since personal experience can, directly and indirectly, impede one’s rationality.

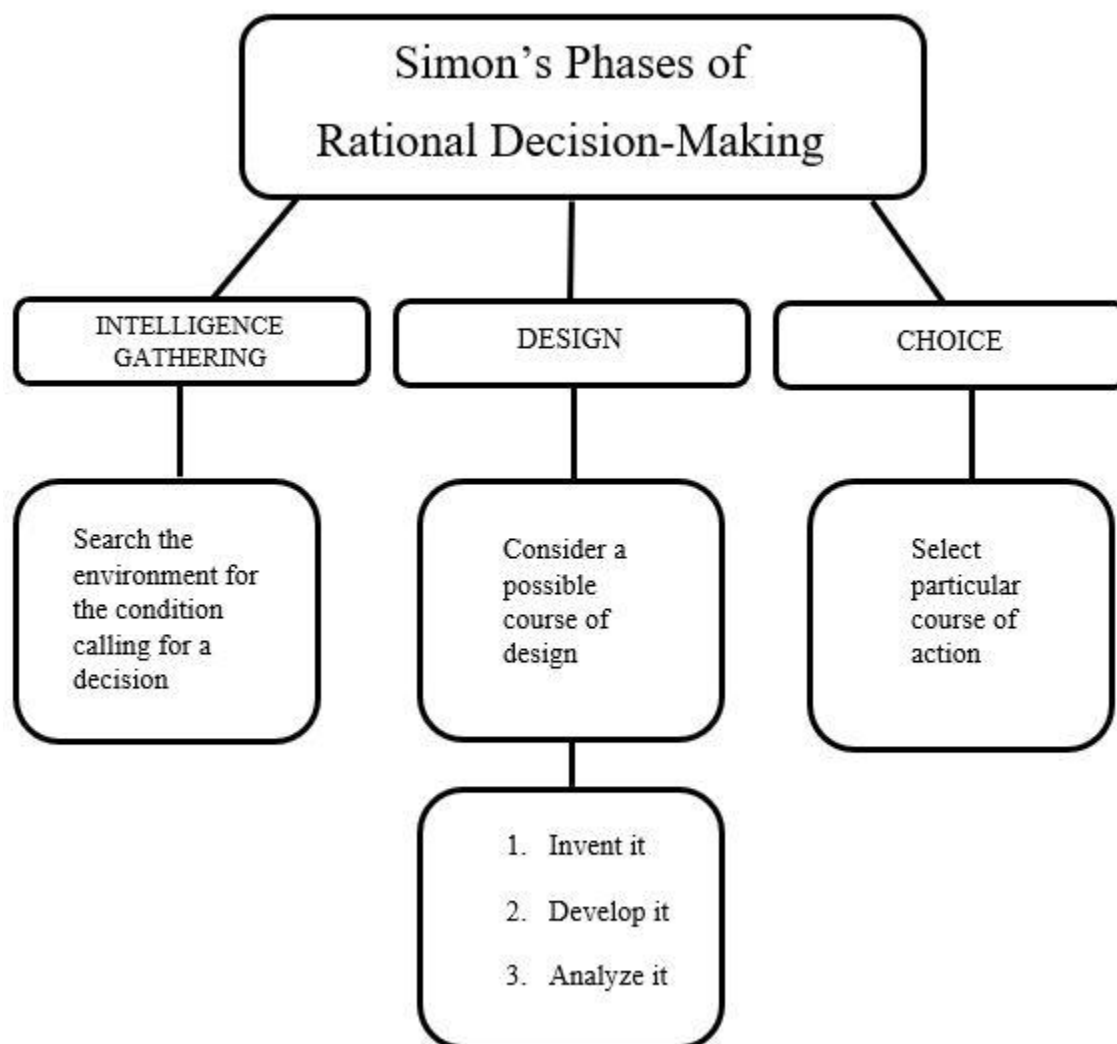
Simon (1997) continuously explored the decision-making model to narrow the theory. In doing so, paradigms of bounded and procedural rationality were incorporated. Organizational

decision-making theory emphasizes the importance of decision-making while predicting organizational improvement as the outcome for institutions that adjust protocols and execute ideas according to a unified plan (Simon, 1997). Decision-making using a systematic approach could significantly improve FSPPs since research has justified the use of such procedures in other organizational settings. Prior research has determined organizational decision-making theory can be used as a tool for incorporating successful FSPPs since it can help to guide understanding of the intricacies within school and district operations (Brazer et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2017; Simon, 1997).

Educational institutions have the ability to limit or expand program offerings by making decisions that restrict participation options for outsiders; however, using this theory's model for school leaders' decision-making choices about FSPPs will likely have a more positive impact on parent involvement levels (Brazer et al., 2014; Simon, 1955, 1997) This theory is applicable to the investigation since decisions by school leaders about parent participation programs may impact student learning, emotional well-being, and levels of school-based program participation by parents (Lohmann et al., 2018; Otani, 2019; Ozmen et al., 2016; Wilson & Gross, 2018). Additionally, since school leaders make decisions about how to include parents in educational endeavors and to what degree participation will be tolerated, the theory is appropriate for this investigation (Simon, 1997). I created Figure 1 based on information gleaned from Simon's (1997) model for decision-making. The model represents a strategical process in which each stage in the decision-making process progresses. The illustration names the three steps of decision-making according to Simon (1997) and then describes the actions the decision-maker should exercise when navigating each situation or scenario.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Simon's Decision-Making Model



Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Coupled with organizational decision-making theory is Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence which was founded upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence merges educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives to outline procedures for creating and sustaining successful partnerships between schools and families (Epstein, 1987; Yamauchi et al., 2017). This universal

vision of the partnership is viewed positively in empirical research as it acknowledges the role of numerous stakeholders in the continuous shaping of a child's schooling (Avnet et al., 2019; Epstein, 1987; Myende, 2019). The theory is defined by Epstein (1987) as having four main components: family, child, school, and community. All components of the model can be pushed together or pulled apart based on forces such as time, family dynamics, or philosophies of the school/family (Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 1987; Myende, 2019; Yamauchi et al., 2017). The framework centers the focus of all partnerships on the child while stressing the importance of relational exchange between teachers, families, and students (Deslandes, 2001). Epstein (1987) proposed that different spheres of influence can interconnect, therefore generating collaboration and enrichment among all constituents (Myende, 2019). This model can also serve as a rich foundation when working to enhance existing partnerships between schools and families (Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein, 1987; Ma et al., 2016).

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence framework identifies the six types of parental involvement for school leaders to consider when trying to engage parents:

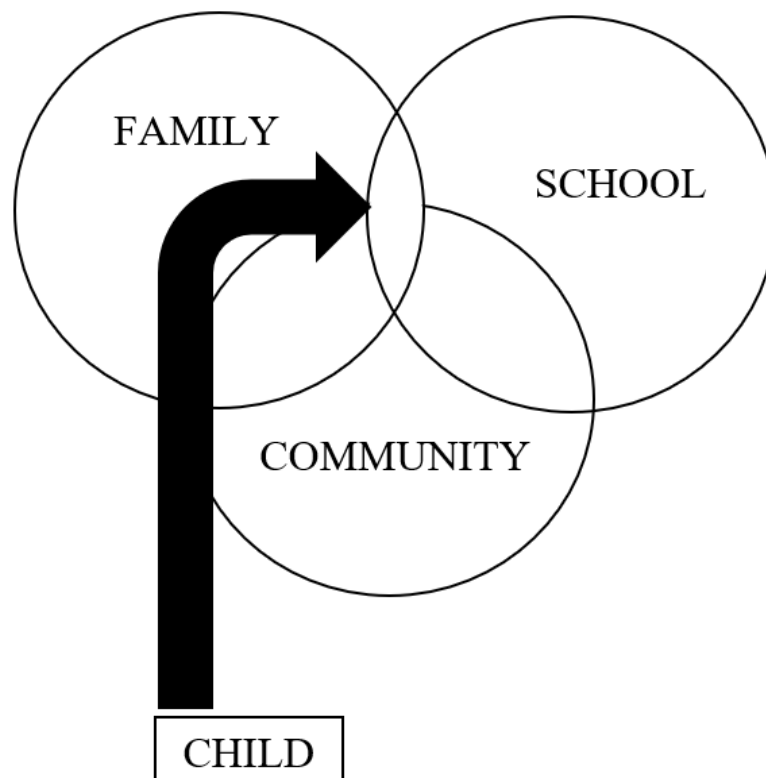
- parenting: assisting parents to create a home environment that supports student learning
- communication: creating a model of two-way communication among parents and teachers
- volunteering: recruiting parent volunteers to support school initiatives
- learning at home: providing educational resources that students can use at their home to support in-school learning
- decision-making: the inclusion of the parent population in school decision-making, and

- collaborating with the community: offering resources and services to students and their families as well as providing services to the community (Epstein, 1987, 2018; Ihmeideh et al., 2020)

While Epstein's (1987) framework for parent partnerships is not the only framework that can be used to develop or enhance an FSPP, the ideas surrounding the foundation of the theory have the same basis as other frameworks: to get families involved. This theory worked to ground my study as it places high value on students, schools, parents, and the school's local community working together to achieve all of the stakeholders' desired outcomes. The concept of school leaders' deciding to give parents the option to help make decisions about school programs and activities might also prompt parents' decisions to engage fully in an FSPP. Finally, viewing parents as communal leaders positions them as valuable stakeholders, therefore, striking a sense of ownership in ensuring the school's overall success (Yamauchi et al., 2017). I created the following figure based on information derived from Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. According to Epstein (1987), the model visually represents the collective group in which a sustained and effective FSPP can be established. All parties, family, school, and the surrounding community work together while keeping a focus on student needs.

Figure 2

Visual Representation of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Related Literature

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP. Although research has been conducted on family partnerships, much of the empirical work has focused on barriers prohibiting the implementation of partnership programs rather than organizational decision-making, such as aspects of the decision-making process that are necessary to produce partnership longevity. Involvement frameworks designed to yield schools' individual success with partnerships, the organizational conditions necessary for ensuring program effectiveness, and elements necessary to transition

school culture toward a more decentralized, inclusive decision-making school environment are also limited (Lohmann et al., 2018; Ozmen et al., 2016; Shava & Tlou, 2018). Since few influences supplant parental involvement as a key factor in the educational success of a child, more information is needed to understand the impact of decision-making on FSPP participation (Cabus, & Ariës, 2017; Erol & Turhan, 2018; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Shuffelton, 2017).

Furthermore, an abundance of evidence exists supporting the notion that students experience increased levels of achievement in school when caregivers actively engage in the educational process (Fenton et al., 2017; Greenleaf, 1977; Heinrichs, 2018; Levitt et al., 2016; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Increases in emotional and behavioral strengths and improved relationships with peers and adults have also been documented (Bronstein et al., 2019; Sprenger, 2020). This review of literature elicits an understanding of parents' and elementary school leaders' decision-making practices, parent involvement in schools, the need for family-school partnerships to exist and be organized systematically and equitably, and the benefits of effectively implemented and sustained FSPPs (Malluhi & Alomran, 2019; Myende, 2019; Otani, 2019).

Decision-Making in Schools

Decision-making is a complex process. According to Simon (1997), decision-making to spawn organizational innovation must be facilitated and elicited by leaders in response to changes in an operative environment, beyond the already existing operating procedures. Groundbreaking program building, such as FSPPs, requires a challenging search and recognition of fleeting opportunities within the constructs of what already exists. Simon (1957) argued that to survive the change in business arenas, executives need to create an organizational environment conducive to innovation. For example, Kheirandish and Mousavi (2018) illuminated processes

for innovation based on their observations of the process at work which included (a) alternative sets being searched for, but not given; (b) discovering what consequences will follow each of the alternatives being considered; (c) searching for the best alternative, not just an acceptable alternative; and (d) solving problems by searching for alternatives while also searching for potential problems themselves. The search for new solutions and the learning of new techniques and approaches to problems were found to lead to in-depth degrees of implied knowledge. Additionally, Brazer et al. (2014) discovered that applying organizational theory in a way that associated leadership practices for educational leaders produced positive benefits. Brazer et al. (2014) transferred this idea to the educational setting and applied processes of creativity divulged by Simon's discoveries to a school setting.

School Leadership Team Decision-Making

Uncontested and unchallenged policies and procedures shaped leadership practices in early American public education (L. Brown, 2008; Clark, 2017; Thompson, 2018). Traditionally, one individual demonstrating one style of leadership has been commonplace in school buildings (Wei, 2020). Typically, the school's head administrator works to make all decisions for the school, which may include hiring personnel, selecting curriculum, implementing programs, allowing extracurricular activities, and developing student behavior codes (Riveros et al., 2016). Over time, district-level personnel have stepped in to assist administrators with more unified approaches to institutional management; however, each school differs in the types of policies and programs needed to serve their individual communities (Shava & Tlou, 2018). While this approach to public education was acceptable for a period, the charter school movement has led to a discussion about educational leadership reform and the idea of decentralization in schools (Blum & Dawley-Carr, 2018).

Decentralization can be classified as the transfer of decision-making to the consumer (Blum & Dawley-Carr, 2018). Democratization, ethnic or regional demands, improved efficiency, and enhanced quality of education have been the justification for the decentralization concept (Clark, 2017; Shava & Tlou, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Baum and Haveman (2020) stated that the benefits of this practice include accountability for citizens and their surrounding school community while also encouraging engagement from stakeholders. Welborn (2019) maintained that the disadvantages of this process include external factors that make the process of decentralization difficult, such as a teacher strike, the high cost of operation, lack of uniformity among departments, and increased administrative expenses. In considering the pros and cons of the approach, most reports claim positive benefits of the process including collaboration, capacity building, and improved instruction (Cristina & Gasparotti, 2018; Shava & Tlou, 2018; Shuffelton, 2017).

Sanders (2018) stated that principals who experience success in school governance have created a model of distributed leadership where solo decision-making is minimal and stakeholder voice is included. In a model like this, the school principal shifts roles to allow other suppliers of influence and direction to contribute (parents, community members, teachers, and students). This practice works to build institutional capacity and allows for collaboration and sharing of resources among stakeholders (Cristina & Gasparotti, 2018; Shava & Tlou, 2018). A study conducted by L. Brown (2008) affirmed this approach since the results of the investigation implied strong institutional capacity resulted in effective teaching and increased student achievement. While the theory of shared leadership has proven beneficial in some educational institutions, some weakness surrounds the idea. Welborn (2019) indicated that a lack of clear concepts and varying definitions make the approach vague. In addition, Welborn noted the

quality of leadership and relationships among school employees must be considered. Arce (2019) and Shaked and Schechter (2019) added that incompetence among individuals can place the entire decentralization concept at risk. For the institutional capacity to thrive, several components must be in place. Clark (2017) recommended creating professional learning networks, applying research-based data to practice, and implementation of instructional coaching for school employees coupled with shared decision-making opportunities.

School Leadership Team Approach to Leading

Kouzes and Posner (2017) worked to compile a text that included a model for individuals serving or aspiring to serve in a leadership capacity. By conducting broad research through interviews, surveys, and written responses, the authors identified five common themes exhibited by strong leaders. The five practices of exemplary leadership identified by Kouzes and Posner were (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Although many aspects of successful team practices are discussed, the focus of *The Leadership Challenge* is on the development of one's personal leadership abilities. Through their research, the authors discovered that leadership skills are learned, not inherited or innate (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 12). Kouzes and Posner encouraged all individuals to examine their character and work to develop exemplary traits to become successful leaders. An emphasis was placed on the idea that all members of a team must work together with a shared vision for confidence and motivation to thrive (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). One attribute, honesty, was highlighted as the most valued personality trait that can be attained by a leadership professional (Dugan & Humbles, 2018; Dunbar et al., 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

In the educational setting, a school's leadership team has been historically recognized as

the decision-makers while teachers are considered followers or program implementers (Daniëls et al., 2019; Dugan & Humbles, 2018). However, the relationships in schools are particularly important because education impacts so many stakeholders: students, parents, community, and society (Acton, 2021). Educational leadership and its influence on school climate are directly correlated to increased program buy-in by teachers and other constituents (Acton, 2021; Daniëls et al., 2019; G. Smith et al., 2017; Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016). Abel et al. (2016) proclaimed that school leaders must work to lead operationally and strategically and indicated that school leaders who are strong, effective, and responsive have even been able to enhance existing relationships.

The typical management position permits individuals in power to have considerable influence over followers, and though there are many styles of leadership, research suggests that some approaches are more appropriate than others in certain environments (Emmanuel & Valley, 2021; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). For example, a study by McMillan (2017) discussed how transformational leaders encouraged their employees to improve on prior knowledge to derive meaning through experiences and reflection. Since the education setting requires strong leadership, a practical application could prove appropriate for teachers as reflection and practice help to cultivate teacher quality (Freeman, 2016; McMillan, 2017). In the same study, McMillan (2017) also recommended servant leadership as an effective management approach to be used by school leaders and stated the servant leaders tend to place trust in followers. When applying this approach to leadership, the school's leadership team does not prioritize self-interest. This philosophy of leadership promotes a sense of community, the sharing of decision-making, and an improved school climate which is necessary for an effective FSPP (Dapula & Castano, 2017). Specifically, transformational and servant leadership styles tend to positively impact school

cultures, which can influence relationships among all involved (Dapula & Castano, 2017; DeLeon, 2018; McMillan, 2017; Freeman, 2016).

Shepherd (2018) defined leadership as the action of leading a group of people or an organization to achieve goals. Kouzes and Posner (2017) shared that the process of leading is centered on one's ability to influence employees to strive for the achievement of organizational goals. Effective leaders possess a plethora of skills and character traits that entice subordinates to want to follow directions (Arce, 2019). Dapula and Castano (2017) added that leadership style plays a substantial role in successful organizational structures. Leadership style is so important that it can even impact the retention and performance of employees (Dapula & Castano, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2020). While many leadership styles exist, only a few styles have been proven to increase parent involvement (Li et al., 2018; G. Smith et al., 2017).

Transformational Leadership Style. Transformational leadership is a process where leaders and followers empower each other through self-awareness, values, motivation, and actions (Avci, 2015; G. Smith et al., 2017). Manuel (2017) identified the specific characteristics of transformational leaders as trustworthy, encouraging, innovative, and motivating. Transformational leaders tend to reward achievement while monitoring mistakes (G. Smith et al., 2017). Avci (2015) surmised that transformational leadership in the educational setting affects followers by creating competition, which often precedes organizational goals. Zhao and Liang (2018) furthered that notion by conducting a study of transformational leadership where it was discovered that transformational leadership accelerated teachers' professional ability to filter stress. Benoliel and Barth (2017) urged school leadership teams to experiment with this style of leadership in order to drive program success. This leadership approach, when demonstrated by

school leadership teams, can also assist with building institutional capacity in the area of parent communication (Benoliel & Barth, 2017).

Servant Leadership Style. The servant leadership theory devised by Greenleaf (1970) provides a framework for which a leader's main goal is to serve. Servant leaders make a conscious effort to focus on growth and well-being for the people and communities to which they belong (Murthy, 2019). According to Cansoy (2019), the servant leadership style differs from traditional leadership methods as it shares power between the employee and employer. Greenleaf (1970) insisted that servant-leaders focus on putting the needs of others first, rather than using status to personally thrive from a company or institution. Servant leadership theory is said to work well in school environments as these types of leaders typically assist employees with professional growth experiences that contribute to overall school success (Greenleaf 1970, 1977). Shepherd (2018) warned that the only drawback to this style of leadership is that leaders might be taken advantage of in certain circumstances.

In summary, transformational leadership theory seeks to inspire and empower employees by inspiring them with vision and creating an organizational climate in which employees want to achieve the organization's mission. As a complement to transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory puts the needs of others above the needs of the leader and focuses on building strong communities, not just strong organizations. Additionally, "servant leadership theory recognizes the leaders' social responsibilities to serve those people who are marginalized by a system" (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 62). Since the school leadership team is responsible for making decisions about outreach opportunities and the extent to which they are offered, Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) suggested school decision-makers incorporate characteristics of transformational or servant leadership approaches to help to fully develop any FSPP.

Furthermore, both leadership styles promote shared decision-making, which produces ownership and efficacy (Benoliel & Barth, 2017).

Historical Aspects of Parent Involvement in Schools

Historically, teachers have been known to perceive their role as one that is an “expert” on student learning (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Ozmen et al., 2016). T. E. Smith and Sheridan (2019) agreed, stating that teachers tend to overestimate their ability to effectively communicate with parents. The effects of this conundrum can leave teachers overwhelmed when faced with the realities of family engagement (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Jezierski and Wall (2019) stated that if not cautious, educational institutions might negatively impact family–school partnership efforts by failing to include parents on issues surrounding the school. Some school leaders reported that consequences from this behavior have already risen (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Myende, 2019; Peck & Reitzug, 2018.) Negative implications over time include the idea that the importance of family involvement has become taken-for-granted, parents have become positioned as less capable of helping children with schoolwork, or that societal changes have allowed technology to replace the necessary human connection. Ozmen et al. (2016) also added that lack of transportation or home language continues to distance family–school partnerships.

Jezierski and Wall (2019) revealed that parenting has become increasingly more intensive over the past few decades. Another discovery of their investigation was that the amount of expected parental support in the schooling of children had also surged: “Several studies have documented the increased demands parents, and especially middle-class mothers, feel to provide increasing time, energy and resources to support their children’s educational attainment” (Jezierski & Wall, 2019, p. 813). While Jezierski and Wall concluded that parental involvement has become gradually too taxing, Heinrichs (2018) argued that educational institutions have

become their own worst enemy by ostracizing parent choice and voice over time. Arguments about parent involvement continue to evolve; however, parent involvement in education has proven consistently invaluable (Cabus, & Ariës, 2017; Erol & Turhan, 2018; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Shuffelton, 2017).

In such situations, it becomes possible for parents to develop feelings of unwelcome, with some even becoming disengaged (T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Gross et al. (2020) recommended schools and families develop a singular vision for partnership which must be built based on two-way communication and joint decision-making. This belief differs from traditional involvement practices such as attendance at school functions, donations or contributions to school projects and fundraisers, or general acts of help like completing a bulletin board or making copies for the teacher (Bibbs, 2018). Heinrichs (2018) suggested that school stakeholders shift from traditional historical practices of being the expert “knower” to assuming the role of parental partner so that students become the beneficiaries of the alliance.

Changes in parenting over time can be anticipated due to variations in societal and cultural norms, parental education status, and the modernization of resources (Uba & Jain, 2019). New ideologies regarding family constructs have also emerged. Currently, research confirms the need for educational institutions to reexamine the communities they serve to ensure they present quality parent partnership programs capable of meeting the needs, desires, and style of 21st century families (DeLeon, 2018; Dennis, 2017; White, 2018). DeLeon (2018) suggested one way that teachers and school leaders can begin to shift this paradigm is by working to gain an understanding of generational similarities and differences. This front work can help open the gates for collaboration to occur in a manner that resonates with caregivers from varied backgrounds.

Malluhi and Alomran (2019) suggested the fix for this issue was for school leaders to examine their style of leadership as a measure to increase parent engagement. Other aspects, such as changing family/student dynamics spawn the need for action. Abrams (2019) surmised that school leaders have a responsibility, not just a need, to reexamine traditional approaches to family outreach and to incorporate more salient forms of involvement while also communicating clear, consistent expectations and aspirations for the partnership. Uba and Jain (2019) agreed that school leaders' responsibility is to examine the community they serve and to provide leadership accordingly. Approaching FSPPs from a strengths standpoint rather than a deficit position can yield stakeholder buy-in since this stance draws on the experiences of the families and needs of the community to inform school decisions (Terry, 2016).

Family engagement has become a new focus in recent educational policy (Gross et al., 2020; Otani, 2019). Most notably, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) established by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015 mandates parent outreach programs for schools receiving Title I funds (Dennis, 2017; Gross et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The purpose behind ESSA legislation is to intentionally plan for an increase in the academic achievement levels of low-income and disadvantaged children (D. W. Black, 2017). While the ESSA provides directives for Title I schools, institutions serving students from a variety of socioeconomic associations, but not necessarily considered Title I, continue to report a decrease in levels of family involvement (Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). Since family involvement has historically been associated with student success, it is necessary for educational institutions to continuously pursue partnerships with families that are effective and sustained. If not formally required for all schools by the federal government or educational legislation,

program evaluation must be used by school leaders to maintain program effectiveness (Ma et al., 2016; Mendez & Swick, 2018; Myende, 2019; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

As educational reform calls for strengthened collaboration between families and schools, Wilson and Gross (2018) pointed out that FSPPs must emphasize high-quality, well-rounded educational goals that maintain equity among all students while aiming to increase social, emotional, and academic success for students. Other factors may also impact FSPPs. Gross et al. (2020) found that some outreach programs lack value, are not evidence-based, and have not been strategically designed, which could result in negative program gains. Measurement and accountability protocols for FSPPs must also be established; norms and expectations across teachers could also prove helpful (Dennis, 2017). Ensuring the best for students by working closely with their caregivers is not only a legal requirement, but some also consider it an ethical responsibility (Blandin, 2017).

Parent Involvement versus Parent Engagement

When determining the best fit for a parent partnership program, school leadership teams must contemplate the desired outcomes. School partnerships that raise levels of student achievement often have critical sustaining elements that incorporate improvement of local communities and an increase in local support that ultimately results in increased student achievement levels (Ferlazzo, 2011). A report by T. E. Smith and Sheridan (2019) found that schools wishing to proliferate familial involvement typically created outreach platforms that communicated needs, identified projects, and set goals. Then the schools informed parents or community members on how to contribute. In other words, parent engagement programs yielded the stage to parents, inviting them to share ideas, goals, and hopes for their children's future (Moll et al., 1992; Mowder, 2005). "The goal of parent engagement is not to serve clients, but to

gain partners” (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 11). While parent involvement is not deleterious, many studies claim parental engagement produces better overall outcomes for families, students, schools, and communities (Epstein, 1987; Mowder, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2019). Family engagement produces immeasurable results for all stakeholders; therefore, schools must take the necessary steps to transition to such beneficial programs, keeping in mind that effective and sustained partnerships must be entered into with careful planning and strategic, collaborative decision-making (Medina et al., 2019).

Another troublesome issue is that traditional parent volunteering programs can be tempting for educational institutions. For one, this type of involvement effort requires less effort and little collaboration. However, due to the understood positive impact on student achievement and rising pressure on teachers/school leaders to improve student achievement scores quickly, traditional involvement programs might seem sufficient (Avnet et al., 2019). Relationships, trust, and understanding between school stakeholders take time and effort and can only be initiated when rooted in engagement-type practices (Avnet et al., 2019; Wilson & Gross, 2018; Yamauchi et al., 2017). When schools take the position to seek partners in lieu of contributors, families are more likely to support common goals, feel genuinely welcomed, and sense honor despite socioeconomic or cultural differences (D. W. Black, 2017). These constructs led Epstein (1987) to proclaim:

Our model of family–school relations integrates the discrete, extant theories and reflects the fact that any time, in any school, and in any family, parent involvement is a variable that can be increased or decreased by the practices of the teachers, administrators, parents, and students. (p. 134)

Since generations parent differently than those who came before them, schools gain responsibility for knowing how to respond to the needs of the varying generations making up their population (Pyöriä et al., 2017; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Bibbs (2018) suggested that teachers and parents should come together collectively to define the difference between family involvement and family engagement in order to reap the greatest benefits. Provisions to include non-traditional family constructs, such as single-gender parents or working families, were also highlighted by Uba and Jain (2019).

Empowering Families

One approach to shifting traditional parent involvement toward engagement is for school leaders to focus on empowering the families they serve. Gross et al. (2020) revealed a lack of empirical research surrounding how different stakeholders define and operationalize family engagement within different school buildings. By applying the organizational decision-making theory to the FSPP framework, educational institutions can reduce the risk of miscommunication, a major barrier between parties in FSPPs (Brazier et al., 2014; Simon, 1997). For example, defining the important constructs of family–school engagement reduces the possibility for lack of consensus which may also eliminate the unintentional low expectations that schools place on parents. Moreover, schools may conserve resources that may have been inappropriately applied to family engagement efforts, resulting in a lack of longevity (Erol & Turhan, 2018). An effect of appropriately implemented FSPPs is empowerment (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). When school stakeholders learn together about social, emotional, mental, and academic information, all are empowered to model and apply gained knowledge towards children. One voice and goal toward common expectations might then develop, creating

opportunities for meaningful inclusion and equity for all students (Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Clayton et al., 2020; Welborn, 2019).

Otani (2019) stated, “School outreach is a practice in which schools engage with parents for the benefits of students’ education” (p. 142). Involvement can be labeled as actions that occur within the school walls by parents (Ferlazzo, 2011). Family engagement is defined by Sheridan et al. (2019) as “beliefs, attitudes, and activities of families to support their children’s learning, whether at home, at school, or in the community” (p. 128). Before true engagement can begin, shifts in recent educational platforms and approaches must be considered (Shava & Tlou, 2018). School leaders should reflect on program structure or decision-making strategies. For example, Heinrichs (2018) suggested the following questions for school leaders to reflect on before implementing change:

1. Are two-way communication platforms in place?
2. Have provisions or plans been made for working parents who will be unable to attend, but still wish to partake?
3. Have our outreach programs been co-designed with parental input?

If all stakeholders, especially parents, are not included in the decision-making processes, they might feel their time or opinions are not worthwhile (Arce, 2019; Heinrichs, 2018; Lohmann et al., 2018). Basic considerations and shared decision-making decentralize control in schools by distributing powers at the local level (Cristina & Gasparotti, 2018). Ozmen et al. (2016) supported this concept by identifying the school’s parent-teacher association (PTA) as an indispensable catalyst for the realization of effective educational initiatives.

Removing Barriers

Before any FSPP can be successful, school leaders must work to identify and remove barriers. To support schools and families in effective partnerships, perspectives must shift so that parents no longer just run copies, donate to bookfairs, or chaperone field trips. Educational institutions must take time to build the relationships so that together the entities set goals, monitor progress, and share and understand data (Gross et al., 2020; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Blandin (2017) examined barriers that impede partnerships and recognized strategies for removing them. This study's findings revealed that parents' motivation to become engaged tended to be determined based on their sense of efficacy and the personal invitations offered by school personnel. Sheldon (2002) stated, "Connecting an isolated parent with one or two other parents as a strategy to increase involvement at home or school, may be a promising avenue for schools that desire greater connections with families" (p. 313).

When approaching this prolific environmental change in a school, the perceptions of institutional leaders, parents, teachers, and the community will be different and an effort to ensure all are respected is vital (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Wilson and Gross (2018) identified additional barriers which include language, cultural, socioeconomic, personality, or miscommunication. Possible tools that can be leveraged for beginning the barrier removal process include attendance incentives, virtual communication, and social networking options (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017; Grové, 2019; Levitt et al., 2016). While Fong (2019) cautioned against leveraging parents' as social networks to increase involvement in schools due to inequalities that might exist, Sommer et al. (2017) found a positive correlation between promoting parents' social capital and increased attendance in a Head Start program.

Family–School Partnership Programs

School leaders will make decisions about school programs and offerings that will be supported by the school. One type of FSPP is the full-service community school. Full-service community schools can be defined as both a place and set of partnerships between a school and the surrounding community (Caldas et al., 2019; Medina et al., 2019; Varlas, 2008). The purpose of the intentional partnerships is to equip public schools with resources that enable them to contribute productive citizens to the community. The process of adopting a full-service community school improvement model in elementary schools includes applying a set of indicators, such as those developed by the Coalition for Community Schools, to an existing educational program (Sanders & Galindo, 2020). School leaders then determine whether the partnership program has the capacity to function successfully as a community hub (Brazer et al., 2010; Gülcan & Duran, 2018). Typically, full-service community school initiatives are funded by federal, private, or discretionary grant sources. This approach to school improvement is unique because both internal and external influences that contribute to student and stakeholder successes are considered as part of the educational reform process (Sebastian et al., 2017). Most notably, program success depends on school leaders' ability to effectively manage the operation of the full-service community school outreach initiatives (Bass, 1990; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). However, Ratliffe and Ponte (2018) pointed out that this model is not appropriate for every school.

The full-service community school model is not the only choice school leaders have to support the leadership team in their efforts to develop or strengthen family–school partnerships. State-based initiatives supporting community schools continue to emerge. Wolfe et al. (2008) surmised that throughout the 1980s and 1990s reports indicated 36 of 49 community school

programs that were surveyed reported academic gains when some form of an FSPP was in place. Arce (2019) listed Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in the form of Wraparound Services and the 5H Holistic Framework as contending FSPP models since each program gained recognition as an evidence-based improvement strategy implemented by community schools. With empirical evidence determining a new need to effectively engage 21st-century families, school leaders are encouraged to embrace partnership programs that prioritize family and community stakeholders (Curry et al., 2016; Dennis, 2017; ESSA, 2015). The push to involve families and communities in support opportunities has risen as student need continues to indicate a demand for the expansion of traditional boundaries surrounding public education (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Fernandez-Rio et al., 2017; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). Some educational leaders are seeking to activate any available resource that might help to reduce the negative impact on student achievement factors stemming from uncontrollable barriers (Avnet et al., 2019; Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Reparaz & Sotés-Elizalde, 2019).

Key Factors for Successful Implementation of FSPPs

A deliberate process is an investable part of any FSPP implementation project (Bibbs, 2018). Ratliffe and Ponte (2018) investigated the perceptions of local and immigrant parents on family–school partnerships in Hawai’i. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, 12 parents representing different children and schools were interviewed. The authors reviewed transcripts for themes and coded data. After triangulation, four major themes emerged: (a) parents’ understanding of family–school partnerships, (b) principals as gatekeepers, (c) relational aspects of partnerships, and (d) cultural issues in family partnerships (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Through this study, several key factors such as principals’ support of engagement efforts towards teachers in the outreach process were found to be the most valuable determinate of the successful

implementation of their attempt at a parental engagement program. Another significant finding was the planning for helping parents define the difference between school involvement and school engagement and the related expectations for each (Medina et al., 2019; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018; Sheridan et al., 2019; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). The researchers recommended that ongoing outreach and consistent invitation be extended to parents for opportunities to participate (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018).

To effectively move beyond parental involvement to engaging relationships with parents, educational institutions must plan accordingly (Sheridan et al., 2019; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Steps for transitioning to an FSPP can include the reservation of funds for outreach and education, professional development for staff, program coordination, the securing of alternative locations for presentations, and language barrier resolutions (Levitt et al., 2016; Lohmann et al., 2018). When transitioning, a mutual understanding between school leaders and teachers should also be manifested. It is necessary for teachers to buy in to the idea of opening their classroom and possible scrutinization of their practice. Only when intentional efforts are taken to eradicate barriers will successful and sustained partnerships between schools and families begin to take shape. Staff development is a most critical component of any family–school outreach program (Heinrichs, 2018; Medina et al., 2019).

Professional development is a key factor in the FSPP process. Teachers must be taught how to initiate contact with families to begin the process of building lasting relationships. Strike (2019) encouraged school leaders to consider teacher voice in any educational reform process. Training in reflection, language usage, ready-use materials resources, and communication strategies have proven useful (Shaked & Schechter, 2019; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). In other words, principals are tasked with providing teacher training programs that build sociocultural

competence, the capacity to effectively engage parents, and ongoing professional development in the area of home–school connection (Otani, 2019). Wiedmer (2015) recognized teachers as a unique group, a vessel per se, that could help increase effective partnerships. In a study conducted by Otani (2019), a hypothesis was drawn regarding the interactions between schools and parents. Otani postulated that if parents were informed about the school and their child, these actions might prompt parent role construction, therefore, enhancing parents’ sense of responsibility for their child’s education. Alternatively, research by Levitt et al. (2016) reminds us of the undesirable consequences of failing to address a critical barrier in effective school partnerships: teacher capacity on engagement practices. The four main domains of teacher capacity include (a) subject matter knowledge, (b) planning and preparation skills, (c), understanding of classroom environment and (d) understanding of professional responsibilities. To enhance teacher capacity on engagement practices, school leaders must work to shape teacher attitude on educational reform (dispositions) that connect parents while also sharpening the communication abilities (skills) of teachers (Levitt et al., 2016; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017).

School leaders draw from different experiences, beliefs, and leadership approaches when deciding how to best support students, their families, and the communities they serve (Bibbs, 2018; Gross et al., 2020; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). Based on this information, the leadership approach then becomes vital to the formation of supportive and service-oriented school culture (Heinrichs, 2018; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). School leaders have a significant influence on how FSPPs are implemented, enhanced, or stabilized (T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019). For example, one study discovered that leadership actions such as decision-making or even non-verbal cues toward employees can impact program effectiveness either positively or negatively (Brazier et al., 2010). Strategies like inspirational motivation, idealized

influence, and intellection stimulation help to create a committed community following (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017; Bronstein et al., 2019; Heinrichs, 2018). Inspirational motivation is when a leader inspires followers to achieve. Idealized influence can be defined as a leader acting as an organizational role model who leads by example. Intellectual stimulation is when a leader encourages followers to think independently (Bronstein et al., 2019; Yulianti et al., 2020). Sebastian et al. (2017) suggested that the decision to provide training for teachers on effective family communication or the disposition of leaders to assist teachers in reaching out to unresponsive families to encourage participation may also reveal an understanding of beliefs about school leadership traits. Shaked and Schechter (2019) agreed by stating that school leadership traits and professional development for teachers guide effective decision-making practices.

Supporting and Sustaining Family Engagement Programs

In the mission to support students by overcoming barriers between families and schools, a variety of evidence-based practices exist. For example, Lohmann et al. (2018) suggested person-centered planning, intentional and positive communication, home visits, and wraparound services. These practices, meant to encourage relationships of preschoolers with disabilities, might also be used in the support of other types of FSPPs. Levitt et al. (2016) added that attendance incentives could also increase caregiver presence. In fact, in the report *Engaging Parents in Parent Engagement Programs*, caregiver attendance in an unincentivized group ranged between 13–20% per session while caregiver attendance in the incentivized group ranged from 48–53% over the year (Levitt et al., 2016). The reported data represent a 225% increase in attendance, proving a significant and sustained impact when utilizing incentives. Since the extended use of certain incentives for increasing parental participation is not feasible for most

schools, Levitt et al. (2016) suggested school leaders place priority on attendance incentives to increase family participation levels. As previously mentioned, virtual communication and social networking options have also been used as tools to remove barriers between families and schools (Shaked & Schechter, 2019; Terry, 2016). Other possibilities such as social networking, personal invitation, and community-supplied services are options that can also be used to remove barriers for families (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017; Grové, 2019).

Curry et al. (2016) conducted a study that revealed schools could persuade the social networks of caregivers. Using a sample of 30 randomly selected caregivers of fifth graders, the quantitative research study engaged a partially latent structural regression model. School outreach relationships, caregiver social network, motivational beliefs of caregivers, and neighborhood health were examined. Association between caregiver social network and caregiver motivational beliefs was confirmed through a Cronbach alpha reliability test. Based on the results, school leaders can view family–school partnerships through a new lens. Now, schools might facilitate motivational beliefs through parent-to-parent connections or customize outreach efforts to more explicitly meet the needs of the families served. Furthermore, a parent-centered approach to outreach in lieu of the school-centered approach was suggested to enhance the agency and capacity of families to become empowered in the act of influencing their child’s education (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017; Curry et al., 2016; Medina et al., 2019).

Mendez and Swick (2018) offered different suggestions for promoting family engagement. In their study, providing families with technology-based and face-to-face access to resources resulted in an increase in family engagement over a period of 4 years. Shared leadership, used in conjunction with flexibility and trust, is also critical to the success of community-based engagement models (G. L. Black & Cantalini-Williams, 2017). Durand and

Secakusuma (2019) noted, “When schools communicate their willingness to challenge the status quo and begin to prioritize legitimate opportunities to listen to and engage with parents, empowerment, and solidarity among families is strengthened” (p. 35). In summary, non-academic supports of family–school partnerships are also an essential element necessary to create social relationships, clarify expectations, clear misconceptions, enhance commitment, and make school experiences more positive for children (Ma et al., 2016; Moll et al., 1992).

Benefits of Parent Partnerships

Parental participation in schools can have short-term and long-term benefits (Lohmann et al., 2018). Moreover, various types of participation can have an equally positive impact on children’s school performance. Specifically, behavioral involvement, personal involvement, and intellectual involvement help all students to be successful in school (Ma et al., 2016; Moll et al., 1992; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). While the benefits gained by students who are supported by involved families continue to be evidenced, new studies claim significant attention should be given to engaging parents of modern learners as generational differences may require alternative forms of outreach (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Mowder, 2005; Pyöriä et al., 2017; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Since parental involvement demonstrates a continuous bearing throughout history in safeguarding the educational success of children, it is necessary to explore methods of transition and collaborative decision-making such as those represented in FSPPs (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Shuffelton, 2017).

As outlined by Epstein’s (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, it is necessary to champion partnerships among parties that can have a direct impact on a child’s success. It is commonly acknowledged that generations vary in beliefs and actions; therefore, it is also pertinent for educational institutions to transition from involvement practices to

engagement programs targeting family–school connections (Sheridan et al., 2019; Uba & Jain, 2019). Hinged on this understanding, it is assumed that parents representing various generational cohorts tend to employ a variety of childrearing tactics, which may not be represented in prior generations (DeLeon, 2018; Pyöriä et al., 2017; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Uba & Jain, 2019). By investigating various approaches to outreach and frameworks proven to nurture family–school partnerships, caregivers representing multiple generations and a variety of backgrounds can become more engaged in their schools’ FSPPs, likely resulting in the partnership’s longevity (Burke et al., 2019; Erdener, 2016). One framework proven successful is Epstein’s (1987) six types of family involvement which also defines each attribute of successful involvement. In Table 1, I created a visual illustration to better understand the organization of this structure.

Table 1

Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement Framework

Involvement Type	Characteristics of Involvement Type
Parenting	Help the families served by the school to establish home learning environments that support their child as a student.
Communicating	Develop school-to-home and home-to-school (two-way) communication with families about student progress, school programs, and involvement opportunities.
Volunteering	Organize opportunities, recruit, and train parents to help and support students so that they feel useful and successful.
Learning at Home	Provide ideas and information to parents about how to help their child with classroom curriculum, homework, and other educational decisions.
Decision-Making	Include parents as participants in school decisions, advocacy, and governance through PTAs, school councils, committees, action teams, or other parent-based organizations.
Collaborating with Community	Work with the community leaders to coordinate services and resources for students and families through local businesses, agencies, or other outreach groups.

Epstein's (1987) model of family involvement is one of the most widely known and implemented frameworks used by school leaders to assist with the development of FSPPs. Ma et al. (2016) claimed that over time, parental involvement in schools can positively influence student test scores, overall grades, chronic absenteeism, student behavior, social skills, and self-esteem. Also added was that high school graduation rates and admittance to post-secondary school rose. Sheridan et al. (2019) agreed to cite social skills and better behavior as a direct effect of continuous family engagement. While engagement at the school is recognized, Durand and Secakusuma (2019) pointed out engagement must extend beyond the walls of the institution.

In addition to the benefits of parental involvement experienced by students, researchers also suggested institutions profited by reaping a healthier, more cohesive school environment (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Ozmen et al. (2016) argued that parental involvement was a responsibility of the school because "schools are in a position to host or facilitate the organization of seminars for parents that range from child development to stress management" (p. 30). Moreover, schools can help form support groups in meeting the various needs of parents (Ozmen et al., 2016). As teachers grow more confident, capable, and collaborative in strategies leading to high-quality relationships with families, children benefit (Shuffelton, 2017). Furthermore, once trained in effective engagement practices, teachers reported feeling more confident and knowledgeable when consulting with families; this belief was hypothesized as a practice that worked to alleviate some barriers between the teachers and parents (Shuffelton, 2017; Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes parents as an integral influencer of student success (Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Epstein, 1987; Levitt et al., 2016; Wilson & Gross, 2018). The theory defined interpersonal and inter-institutional interactions while

specifying elements necessary to establish and maintain vibrant school–family–community partnerships. Details on accountability systems for all involved stakeholders have also increased partnership success rates and parental executive function needs (Epstein, 1987; Wilson & Gross, 2018). Parents were described by Mendez and Swick (2018) as the “keystone” that holds the educational structure in place.

Summary

To meet the needs of diverse families, school leaders must be willing to increase or establish parental engagement practices that reach clusters of parents in a variety of ways. By understanding the types of decision-making used by school leaders and parents, FSPP outreach can continue to support students in the quest for academic excellence as well as social/emotional stability. Furthermore, whole-school initiatives have demonstrated shortcomings which indicates a need for the development of specific resources and programs to attract and maintain family–school partnerships. Since schools cannot address all challenges alone, it is vitally important to apply frameworks for parent involvement and models for successful decision-making. Parents and other stakeholders should also be included in the transitional process when beginning or working to strengthen an already thriving FSPP.

This literature review provides information regarding the theoretical frameworks associated with this study, revealing that systematic decision-making and frameworks for family involvement are an effective plan for forming successful and sustained partnerships with parents. The historical significance surrounding decision-making in schools was summarized while school leaders’ approach to leading an FSPP was divulged. The supporting theory of organizational decision-making underpinned the need for an organized and structured framework to support educational institutions in the implementation of and transition to FSPPs.

Additionally, evidence regarding factors that control and produce shifts in perspectives was illuminated. The factors included successful removal of controlled and uncontrolled barriers and sociocultural education.

Benefits were also highlighted, including the increase of positive outcomes for all invested parties. To summarize, shared decision-making between schools and families produces long-term benefits necessary for students to be successful in a 21st-century society. Finally, researchers have explored various communication practices among highly engaged schools; however, no studies specifically looked at acceptable strategies for transition from parental involvement programs to family–school partnerships. By exploring the perceptions of parents and school leaders, the system of family engagement can be created, enhanced, or sustained so that support exists for parents raising children in a new generation of educational reform.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter presents a single, instrumental case study designed to recognize the decision-making processes of parents and elementary school leaders that guide courses of action or inaction as it relates to participation in a family–school partnership program (FSPP). Through this investigation, I sought to understand how a sample of parents and school leaders at a public elementary school navigated rational decision-making and which types of involvement they considered essential elements of a successful FSPP (Epstein, 1987; Simon, 1997). The initial section of Chapter Three covers the research design and questions, setting, and participants. Next, I detail procedures, my role in the investigation, data collection, and methods for data analysis. Finally, trustworthiness techniques and ethical considerations help to validate the inquiry being highlighted. The instrumental case study design was applied to this investigation so that a thick, rich description of the phenomenon could be obtained (Stake, 2010).

Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) specified the intent of a qualitative researcher as “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). This research required an extensive and thorough investigation of the varying beliefs and decision-making practices of parents and school leaders regarding FSPPs at one public elementary school in the southeastern United States, which made qualitative research the most appropriate form of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The varying beliefs guiding decision-making actions of parents and school leaders as they relate to collaborative partnerships were explored. Since parent and school leader decision-making cannot be calculated, a qualitative examination was determined to be the most feasible approach

because it addressed the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Yin (2018) identified case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 15). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) added that case study research provides “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). The case study design is suitable “when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). My inquiry focused on parents’ and school leaders’ beliefs and experiences that lead them to make decisions about participation in FSPPs; therefore, this investigation utilized the case study design. A case study was a fitting research method for this investigation since it helped to yield an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of FSPPs through a real-life, bounded system.

Stake (2006) defined a research case as an existing entity such as an institution, program, or organization. However, the case is not the focus of inquiry for a qualitative researcher. By looking closely at a case, researchers applying the case study design examine a phenomenon within a specific entity (Stake, 2010). In this study, Oakdale Elementary School (pseudonym) served as the primary case while the parents and school leaders were identified as separate nested cases within the primary case. To clarify, this investigation utilized a single case study while including multiple embedded units of analysis. Baxter and Jack (2008) referred to subunits in a larger case as powerful agents since “data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within-case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis)” (p. 550). Stake (2006) referred to the same subunits as “nested

cases.” My intention for including multiple embedded subunits of analysis was to acquire a more detailed level of understanding. By taking a close look at the embedded units of analysis (parents and school leaders) I hoped to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon of parent and school leader beliefs and experiences that drive decision-making for participating in FSPPs.

My motivation for hosting separate reviews of the nested cases was to understand the quintain. Stake (2006) defined “quintain” as viewing or grouping cases together as a single entity. I selected this method because Stake (2006) asserted studying similarities and differences across nested cases would allow the researcher to better understand the quintain. I expected each participant to describe their experiences and perspectives uniquely and the cross-case analysis of their accounts to work as individual parts that helped reveal the quintain (Stake, 2006).

Researchers who apply the case study design must also consider whether the investigation is intrinsic or instrumental in nature. Cases that present an unusual situation can be classified as intrinsic (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). Instrumental case studies provide researchers with a general understanding of a phenomenon through a specific case (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018). Since the purpose of this investigation was focused on understanding the quintain, not the nested cases, this study can be labeled as a single instrumental case study with embedded units of analysis (Stake, 2006).

Research Questions

The central research question was as follows:

How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?

The sub-questions were as follows:

1. How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family–school partnership programs?
2. How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family–school partnership programs?
3. What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic welfare?
4. What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?

Setting

The school district hosting the participant site was selected due to its unique size and location. The Bluefield County School District (pseudonym) features schools of all levels (elementary, middle, and high) in urban, suburban, and rural settings. According to 2021 school district data, approximately 72,000 students are served by public schools in this district. The county hosting the school district has an estimated population of 523,542; 76.4% of the population identifies as White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The participant site, Oakdale Elementary School (OES; pseudonym) is a public elementary school set in an urban area of Bluefield County School District. The district is located in the southeastern region of the United States.

To ensure confidentiality and to protect the privacy of individuals and the selected site, pseudonyms were used. OES represented just one of the school district’s 52 elementary schools. The participant school was established in 1964 and served students in kindergarten through fifth grade. According to 2021 school district data, the school consisted of a school leadership team,

59 certified teachers and professional staff, and 39 support staff. The school's leadership team included a principal, two assistant principals, an instructional coach, an instructional technology specialist, two guidance counselors, a literacy coach, and one faculty council representative from each grade level or special instructional area. At OES, special instruction areas included art, music, gifted and talented instruction, special education, physical education, STEM lab, and an Innovation lab. The school's leadership team was tasked with overseeing day-to-day operations in the physical school building (P. C. Brown & Flood, 2020; Clayton et al., 2020). According to 2021 school district data, OES served approximately 892 students; the ethnic makeup of the school included 70.5% Caucasian, 2.3 % Asian, 15.6% African American, 5.7% Hispanic, 0.3% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1.1% American Indian, and 4.5% identifying as two or more races. The percentage of pupils in poverty was 53% while the percentage of students with disabilities was 15%. The percentage of gifted and talented students was 44%. English Language Learners included 8% of the population.

I selected this site carefully based on insights gained from OES's state-generated school report card and because the school was not designated as Title I by the state's department of education. First, the school was an accredited institution with a record of academic rigor and high levels of parent and student satisfaction. According to the school district's community report as well as the 2021 school website, the school district had been awarded accreditation from Cognia, formerly AdvancED. To earn accreditation, participating schools must "engage the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation, reflection, and improvement. It invites external scrutiny and welcomes the constructive feedback of peers. It demands rigor, is based in data, and approaches documentation of results with discipline" (AdvancED, 2015). Since these characteristics directly correlate with student achievement, the school's acquirement

of accreditation was a fundamental requirement for the investigation.

The second criterion for participant selection was based on the school's mission, vision, and belief statements. According to the 2021 school website, the mission of OES "is to engage children in a nurturing learning environment and to provide a quality education." OES envisions a school "where collaborative support and communication between home, school, and community is essential for an effective educational program." And finally, OES believes "education is the shared responsibility of students, home, school, businesses, and the community." These priorities were demonstrated by the school in a variety of ways including monthly School Improvement Council (SIC) meetings, ongoing parent workshops, various communication platforms, and a community outreach program. These activities confirm the ongoing efforts of OES school leaders to involve parents in the educational aspirations of their children.

The third criterion for inclusion was evidence of a successful FSPP as defined by the National PTA. The National PTA recognizes six elements for building a successful FSPP including (a) welcoming all families into the school community, (b) communicating effectively, (c) supporting student success, (d) speaking up for every child, (e) sharing power, and (f) collaborating with the community (National PTA, 2012). Since OES administered the National PTA Power of Family Partnerships Family Survey in October of 2019, results from the inquiry were considered in each PTA-specified domain. Next, I viewed OES's most recent state report card to review reported results of parent opinion. In 2018–2019 the school's state report card indicated 93.3% of OES parents included in the survey were satisfied with school–home relations, 95.1% of parents reported satisfaction with OES's social and physical school environment, and 98.3% of parents divulged they were satisfied with the school's learning

environment. Finally, I surveyed the school's independent PTA website, which indicated the institution "consistently achieves 100% membership, and each year thousands of volunteer hours are logged in service to the school." Notably, I also discovered a portion of the school's website is dedicated to new or incoming families, an active log of PTA and SIC board meeting minutes is available, and a section outlining the school's plan for community outreach could be accessed. In summary, I selected OES as the site for this investigation since the school is well-established, has a history of academic excellence, and could meet all three requirements necessary to conduct the study. Based on the accolades associated with OES, I expected to encounter participants who would help me better understand the phenomenon under investigation. This investigation will not be easily replicable due to the lofty criteria for participation. However, it is hoped that by selecting a non-Title I school with a strong FSPP, others can better understand the strategies and decisions used by parents and elementary school leaders of non-Title I schools to develop, improve, and strengthen partnership programs.

Participants

The participants in this study included six members of the school's leadership team and six parents whose children were currently enrolled in OES. For the purposes of this investigation, elementary school leaders were defined as individuals responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the school building (P. C. Brown & Flood, 2020; Clayton et al., 2020; School District, 2021). Since the school's leadership team members were already identified based on their employment position and title, I applied the convenience sampling method to acquire participants. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, is employed when subjects are selected based on their convenient accessibility or proximity to the researcher (Patton, 2015). I invited the OES school principal, one of the two

assistant principals, a guidance counselor, the instructional coach, one faculty council member representing an intermediate grade level, and the instructional technology specialist to participate in the research study. Then, I utilized the purposeful sampling approach to target six parents to be included in the study. Parents were selected based on current student enrollment and results from the parent screening survey. The sample size for this investigation was limited to 15 participants. Recruiting attempts attracted exactly 12 participants: six parents using probability sampling and six school leaders using convenience sampling.

Procedures

I first acquired permission from the Bluefield County School District. Next, I applied to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to engaging in data collection. After acquiring IRB research approval (Appendix A), a pilot study of my individual interview questions, focus group interview questions, and participant letters was conducted. The purpose of the pilot study was to confirm interpretation and understanding of the wording and ensured useful data could be collected from the protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I interviewed three school leaders and three parents from an elementary school that was not involved with the study to discover the perceived essence and connotation of each item. Specifically, I looked for areas of confusion, frustration, the precision of wording, improper language, and lack of clarity in the questions. As suggested by Yin (2018), adjustments to the questions were made when deemed necessary. Piloting the individual/focus group interview questions and participant writing prompts, an exploratory measure, helped me to detect flaws in the questions and highlight potential problems with the instrument in the early stage of data collection. This preliminary process also helped me to practice interview skills as well as ensured I gathered focused evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After completing the pilot study and revising wording, I immediately began to recruit participants. Before invitations were extended to potential participants on the school's leadership team, the current employment of these individuals was verified by the school's head principal. After potential participants from the school's leadership team were identified, I leveraged the school district and OES email directory, as well as the school's website to obtain job titles and contact information. Next, I emailed a Recruitment Letter (Appendix B) to the school's leadership team. After school leader candidates expressed interest in study participation, I contacted them by the email address listed on the school's website to let them know of their selection with a welcome letter (Appendix E) and asked them to sign the Consent Form (Appendix F).

Contact was made with potential parent participants by utilizing the OES directory of families whose children were currently attending the school. Attendance was confirmed by the school's secretary. I emailed a Recruitment Letter (Appendix B) that contained a link to the Parent Screening Survey (Appendix C). A minimum of 15 contact attempts were made to secure potential parent candidates from the identified school site; this number of attempts supported my effort to obtain maximum variation among the parent participants based on their responses to the Parent Screening Survey (Appendix C). Parents who completed the Parent Screening Survey and expressed an interest in study participation were verified by the school's secretary as having an elementary-aged child currently enrolled at OES. Once this information was confirmed, a formal invitation to join the study was extended. I then emailed a welcome letter (Appendix D) that contained a link to the consent form (Appendix F).

After each selected participant returned a signed consent form, I assigned pseudonyms and began the process of collecting data for the study using individual interviews, two focus

group interviews, and document analysis in the form of participant letters. The individual and focus group interviews were audio and video recorded using a laptop computer, an iPad, and an iPhone.

The Researcher's Role

In case studies, the researcher's role is to serve as the human instrument for data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the primary researcher for this investigation, my responsibility was to act as the human instrument for data collection and analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained the researcher's role as one that maintains awareness of potential bias when collecting data since qualitative research is interpretive by nature. Because this research was designed to employ a case study design, I heeded additional caution so that findings were discovered without bias. Yin (2018) warned that case study researchers are prone to bias since they understand the issues before conducting research; therefore, I did not engage in advocacy for any position regarding the investigation. I acknowledged my potential for bias to many of the issues and barriers that were presented in this study since I had firsthand knowledge and experience of operations within the bounded system. To record biases, I kept a researcher's reflexive journal (Appendix M).

Growing up in a rural community as a product of poverty and being a first-generation high school graduate gave me a working knowledge of the need for families to engage in school outreach programs to support student well-being. Although schools generally attempt to maintain partnership programs, levels of family involvement and stability of FSPPs can fluctuate across sites. Schools with effective and sustained FSPPs reap the benefits of accelerated test scores, reduced turnover, improved social/emotional student well-being, and a better overall school climate (Park et al., 2017; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019; R. S. M. Wong et al., 2018). The

decision-making practices of a school's leadership team can nurture family partnerships, which is essential since parents have been cited as the key benefactor for the social, emotional, and academic success of children in empirical research (Lohmann et al., 2018; Otani, 2019; T. E. Smith & Sheridan, 2019; Uba & Jain, 2019; Wilson & Gross, 2018). With more legislative emphasis on family-school partnerships, I consider school parents' and school leaders' decision-making practices a first step in the successful implementation of effective and sustained FSPPs.

As a current member of an elementary school leadership team in the district where this investigation was carried out, I had the opportunity to work with individuals who met participant qualifications for this study. For example, at the time of the study I was employed as an instructional coach at an elementary school and served on a leadership team that included a literacy specialist, an administrator, two assistant administrators, grade level chairs, a technology specialist, and two guidance counselors. However, I did not have any authority over potential participants or to make final decisions on how often or to what extent the institution extended opportunities to engage parents. However, my experiences have allowed me to consistently attend and observe the decision-making processes that involved FSPP topics. I believe that school leaders hold a significant amount of power in extending opportunities for parent involvement. Furthermore, I hold the assumption that systematic implementation processes coupled with strategic decision-making efforts can enhance relationship efforts between school leaders, parents, teachers, and students. As an instructional coach for a highly involved and engaged community of parents, and a previous employee of a school with deficient FSPPs, my perspective may be biased. I endeavored to remove these assumptions using my researcher's reflexive journal. This activity helped accurately determine a pure understanding of the participants' perceptions.

Since this investigation was designed using the case study approach, I acknowledged my responsibility to ensure the participants' voices were heard and exhibited in data analysis by using a thick, rich, detailed description of personal accounts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I set aside my opinions when interacting with participants and displayed an impartial position about the central phenomenon to avoid influencing participant responses. This was accomplished by applying bracketing. Bracketing can help mitigate negative effects that could be imposed by researcher bias and preconceptions (Yin, 2014). For example, I did not react positively or negatively to comments made by study participants so that open, honest responses were obtained. The array of parent and school leaders' perspectives were presented in a correct and precise fashion. Conclusions from data collection were drawn from multiple sources and were selectively yielded (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). My reporting included an accurate interpretation of the case and lessons learned through data analysis (Stake, 2010). Creswell and Poth (2018) and Saldaña (2016) decided that as the human instrument in a qualitative study, the case study researcher ought to synthesize data by way of coding and theme generation. Lessons learned should be generalized into larger meaning to add to the existing body of empirical research while attempting to improve practice. My intention for employing this design was to assist others in understanding the phenomenon from multiple angles with no researcher bias.

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data collection are required in a qualitative study so that researchers can gain an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010). Yin (2018) surmised that the collection of multiple sources of data is a tactic used to enhance the validity and credibility of a case study investigation while Stake (2010) added that

any collected data should be guided by research questions and triangulated across at least three forms of data collection. Data sources such as records, artifacts, interviews, focus groups, and observations have been deemed acceptable data collection methods to complete the qualitative research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). For this single instrumental case study, the primary mission was to investigate the nested cases so that the quintain was elucidated or so a clear understanding of the phenomenon of decisions surrounding participation in FSPPs could be revealed.

Data for this study were collected from 12 participants. My primary methods for data collection included individual interviews, two focus groups, and document analysis in the form of participant letters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, I conducted individual interviews with six parents whose children attended OES at the time of the investigation. The same process was repeated; however, participants included six members of the school's leadership team. School leaders are defined as school employees who are responsible for daily instructional leadership, managerial operations, or other social decisions for the school being served (P. C. Brown & Flood, 2020; Clayton et al., 2020). After interviews, focus groups, and participant letters were received, the data collection process was complete.

Interviews

According to Yin (2018) and Stake (2010), interviews are the primary technique for discovering multiple realities in case study research. Based on this insight, interviewing is a suitable form of data collection for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) defined interviewing as a “systematic activity” (p. 87) that can be structured or unstructured. Creswell and Poth (2018) provided guidance on interview etiquette by suggesting interview questions be general, open-ended, and focused on the study's central phenomenon. It was imperative that interview

questions be posed so that participants could comprehend the requests being asked of them (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended a structured interview protocol. An interview protocol for this research study was followed. Recordings and transcripts were made to accurately account for the responses of participants. Interviews were performed as the participants' accessibility became available and occurred according to the preference of each interviewee. Individual interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour and were guided by open-ended, semi-structured interview questions; I composed prompts to assist with the natural flow of conversation. I also scribed handwritten field notes during each interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) concluded that fieldnotes should include vast detail so that the intended audience feels like they are in the setting; feelings, hunches, reactions, speculation, initial interpretations should also be included. All interactions were recorded with a computer-embedded video/audio recorder, an iPad, and an iPhone audio recording device. I transcribed each conversation verbatim immediately after the conclusion of the interview. After interviews were transcribed, individual participants received a copy of the transcription and were afforded the opportunity to comment or clarify any statements as a form of member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In terms of quantity, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested 5–10 questions be generated for individual participant interviews. I used a semi-structured interview template containing 11 questions that related to school leaders' decision-making practices for including parents in engagement activities. I also used a semi-structured interview template containing approximately 13 questions that related to parents' decision-making practices for involving themselves in engagement activities offered by the school. The semi-structured interview

protocols allowed for flexibility in wording and temporary word rearrangement to encourage natural communication between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interview questions were grounded in literature and served as a guide to focus the conversation rather than structure dialogue (Yin, 2018). Provisions were made for participants who were not personally accessible for individual interviews; the Zoom video conferencing platform was used to allow face-to-face access to individual interviewees when proximity could not be attained.

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions for Parent Participants (See Appendix G):

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. In what ways should school leaders help to further your understanding of parenting skills, child development, and home conditions that can support or improve your child's academic performance? Prompt: What programs like this are offered to you at Oakdale Elementary School?
3. How have the school leaders supported or improved your child's social/emotional well-being? Prompt: Describe a social/emotional support your child received at Oakdale Elementary School.
4. How do you prefer to receive communication about school programs and your child's progress? Prompt: In what ways have the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary School communicated with parents?
5. Describe how you have been allowed to be involved as a volunteer, supporter, or audience member at Oakdale Elementary School? Prompts: How do you decide on what activities to participate in at OES? What barriers prevent you from being involved in the way you desire?
6. In what ways are you involved with your child's academic learning in the home? Prompt:

How do the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary help you to support your child's learning at home?

7. What types of resources do you keep in the home to support your child's curriculum-related learning and activities? Prompt: What resources have been provided by the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary to assist you with supporting your child's curriculum-related activities?
8. How have you been included as a participant in school decision-making, school governance, school advocacy, or other parent organizations? Prompt: How do the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary allow parents to be involved? How often can parents be involved at Oakdale Elementary?
9. In what ways should a community support their local schools? Prompt: What collaborations have you seen or heard about between Oakdale Elementary School and the surrounding community? Elaborate.
10. How would you explain the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement? Which type of partnership is available to Oakdale Elementary parents?
11. Describe an ideal family-school partnership. Prompt: Which Oakdale Elementary FSPPs do you believe best support the students at Oakdale Elementary? What parent involvement programs would you like to see at Oakdale Elementary in the future?
12. What ways should stakeholder voices be included in the development of family-school partnerships? Prompt: How are parents included as decision-makers at Oakdale Elementary School?
13. What else can you add about parent involvement based on your personal beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals?

The purpose of the questions for parents was to view parent involvement in schools through the lens of Simon's (1997) decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The intent of Question 1 was to build rapport and gain a clear understanding of participants' background and relationship with the school site (Given, 2008). The aim of Question 2 was to gain participant opinion on FSPPs and identify any structure(s) implemented by the OES school leadership team that might assist families with gaining parenting skills or setting home conditions to support children as students (Mowder, 2005; Wilson & Gross, 2018; R. S. M. Wong et al., 2018). Question 3 illuminated the personal experiences of participants in relation to supports that can impact the social/emotional development of their child (Cabus & Ariës, 2017; Coleman, 2018). Question 4 highlighted the forms of communication valued by OES parents and illustrated methods of communication deemed acceptable by OES school leaders (Curry & Holter, 2019; Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). Question 5 was used to obtain a sensory response about FSPPs (Arce, 2019; Curry et al., 2016). This question was also used to identify the ways in which OES organizes volunteers and audiences to support the school, students, and the extent to which such opportunities were offered.

Brazer et al. (2014) discovered that benchmarks of success "can be articulated through a process of deliberative knowing" (p. 263). Deliberative sessions incorporate intentionally placed neutral and respectful information to participants so that the comprehensive values, experiences, and perspectives of individuals can be discussed. My goal for including this tactic was to allow participants to examine or refine their own perspectives. This notion led me to generate Questions 6 and 7 (Clayton et al., 2020; K. B. Grant & Ray, 2018). Eliciting this information

revealed gaps in parent understanding and uncovered barriers prohibiting families from successfully supporting their child academically in the home.

Question 8 revealed ways in which parents are included in the school's decision-making and highlighted the factors that parents value when their voices were heard (Jeynes, 2018; Heinrichs, 2018). Also, sustaining factors of OES's FSPPs and perceived attitudes of school leaders regarding the engagement of families in the school's culture arose. Question 9 provided insight into other partnerships that might be a sustaining factor for the FSPP, particularly the partnerships made available by OES school leaders (Ismail et al., 2019). Question 10 was included to reveal the depth of existing FSPPs at OES. Question 11 was added to strike the element of emotion in parents since their desires for an ideal partnership would expose elements missing from currently available FSPPs (Malluhi & Alomran, 2019). This inquiry also helped to gain an understanding of how parents perceived their school stakeholder position and their rights. To gain knowledge of the parents' experiences directly related to FSPPs and involvement opportunities available at Oakdale Elementary, Question 12 was added (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Finally, Question 13 allowed participants to have the final word and to conclude the interview on their terms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008). Yin (2014) defined open-ended questioning as a pathway for generating "rich dialogue with the evidence" (p. 73). By accurately gathering the detailed perspectives of parents, my goal for affording them a "voice" was achieved.

Concerning school leaders, organizational decision-making theory alleges that complexities of schools and districts can be a basis for understanding effective decision-making structures (Brazer et al., 2014; Simon, 1997). Specifically, the theory advocates procedural steps to formulate effective decision-making systems and processes of action which will likely result

in universal benefits for parents, school leaders, teachers, and students. The purpose of the individual interview questions for school leaders was to view decision-making practices through the lens of Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory. Studies have shown administrative support to positively impact morale across a school community (Bibbs, 2018; Heinrichs, 2018). Therefore, the aim was to target factors influencing school leaders' decisions to participate in FSPPs and to create a more equitable and supportive school for all stakeholders. Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions for School Leader Participants (See Appendix H):

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. Explain your role as a member of the schools' leadership team.
3. How would you describe your role in the decision-making process specifically relating to FSPPs?
4. What do you perceive as strengths in school leaders' decision-making practices as it relates to FSPP opportunities?
5. What do you perceive as barriers in school leaders' decision-making practices in relation to FSPP opportunities?
6. In what ways could the decision-making practices, in relation to FSPPs, be made more effective?
7. What professional development is available for school leaders to help them understand and implement effective FSPPs for the community they serve?
8. What types of engagement activities do families request from the OES leadership team that are not offered?
9. Describe an ideal family-school engagement partnership.

10. What future is there for including other stakeholder voices in the development of family–school engagement opportunities?
11. What else can you add about school leaders’ decision-making as it relates to engaging families with the school?

The intent of Question 1 was to build rapport and gain a clear understanding of participants’ background and relationship with the school site (Given, 2008). The aim of Question 2 was to gain an understanding of the participants’ level of decision-making power within the school’s hierarchy of authority (P. C. Brown & Flood, 2020; Clark, 2017). Simon (1997) claimed that the decision-maker is the most important member of an administration and can maximize values in a given choice, creating the need for Question 3. Question 4 helped to identify rationality types most often applied by OES school leaders (Schildkamp, 2019; Shaked & Schechter, 2019). Simon (1997) identified three general types of rationality: (a) organizational: decisions related to the organization’s mission (b) subjective: decisions based on subject knowledge, and (c) objective: a decision that maximizes given values in a situation.

Question 5 alluded to barriers in the decision-making practices of the school leader. According to Simon’s (1997) theory, decision-making is either *optimized* (seeking out best courses of action) by the participant or the participant applies *satisficing* (adopting choices that are just good enough) during the decision-making process (Fan et al., 2018; Simon, 1945, 1955, 1997). Question 6 was included to recognize the notion that human thinking is limited in terms of knowledge, time, and options (Wilson & Gross, 2018). Simon (1997) devised the term “bounded rationality” to describe this concept. This inquiry helped to uncover the limitations of the decision-makers at OES.

In terms of professional development, Question 7 highlighted the participants' subject knowledge of FSPPs, referred to by Simon (1997) as subjective rationality. Questions 8 and 9 helped to identify elements of the rational decision-making model that were applied when OES school leaders were asked to engage in decision-making practices (Koziol & Witte, 2019; Simon, 1997). Simon's (1997) decision-making model includes a six-step decision-making process: (a) identify the problem, (b) establish decision criteria, (c) weigh decision criteria, (d) generate alternatives, (e) evaluate alternatives, and (f) select the best alternative. Question 10 highlighted the type of rational behaviors exhibited by the OES school leaders and whether that behavior encompasses procedural rationality (Levitt et al., 2016). Simon (1997) defined procedural rationality as the outcome of a decision that is the result of appropriate deliberation. Conversely, irrational behavior was defined as impulsive decision-making that does not include intervention of thought (Simon, 1976). Finally, Question 11 allowed participants to have the final word and conclude the interview on their terms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008).

Focus Groups

To better comprehend the existing phenomenon and to accomplish triangulation, I employed focus group interviews. Patton (2015) defined a focus group as an interview process situated on a topic including a small number of homogeneously grouped individuals, and he recommended six question types to use when constructing focus group questions: (a) questions on experience and behavior, (b) questions regarding opinions and values, (c) questions that spark emotion, (d) questions that display subject knowledge, (e) sensory questions, and (f) questions to reveal background or demographics. Focus group interviews can add value and strength to an empirical investigation because in addition to individual interviews, focus groups establish a platform for collective engagement. Focus groups also serve as a collaborative and empowering

tool for researchers who employ a case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). The goal of both focus groups in this investigation was to permit similarities, differences, or some level of convergence across the nested cases to emerge while also allowing participants to consider alternative views of the same phenomenon while maintaining their own perspective (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Yin, 2018). Focus groups have proven theoretically appropriate for research while also creating greater opportunities to gather data and create a social presence (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017).

Six participants bearing various school leadership titles completed the first focus group. Six parents completed the second focus group. I posed a variety of questions to guide each group discussion and allowed individuals to respond and reply. These questions served as the tool to help draw out information between the nested cases naturally while also addressing the study's research questions. The estimated time allotted for the entirety of the focus group experience was set for 1 hour. The meeting was documented using video and audio-enabled capabilities on an iPhone, iPad, and laptop computer. Queries were drawn from the research questions and grounded in the literature.

Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions for School Leaders (See Appendix J)

1. Please introduce yourself and state your position as a school leader.
2. How would you describe the role of school leaders in supporting family engagement programs?
3. How do the decisions of school leaders impact family engagement opportunities?
4. What decision-making practices are utilized by school leaders that have a positive impact on family engagement levels?

5. What decision-making practices are utilized by school leaders that have a negative impact on family engagement levels?
6. In what ways should school leaders attempt to increase family engagement opportunities?
7. If you could change anything about the way leadership teams make decisions in relation to FSPPs, what would it be and why?
8. Think back to a time you made a decision about engaging families at school. How would you explain your experience?
9. What training have you had in decision-making or FSPPs?
10. What else would you like to add regarding your school's leadership team, your personal experiences, family engagement, or decision-making practices?

Question 1 was written to highlight the background and demographics of the participant and to support the broader audience in understanding leadership hierarchy at the school (Patton, 2015). It should be noted that participants worked at the same school and were familiar with one another; a previous rapport had already been established. Question 2 allowed the investigator to gain understanding of value placed on the school leaders' position as it relates to decision-making for family engagement; additionally, the employee's perceived value as a decision-maker at their school was illuminated (Li et al., 2018; Patton, 2015; Simon, 1997). Question 3 was designed as a sensory question to help irradiate what had been seen or heard by participants that might directly relate to decision-making and FSPPs (Epstein, 1987; Malluhi & Alomran, 2019; Simon, 1997). Questions 4 and 5 were written to draw out participants' emotions about decision-making and family engagement (Epstein, 1987; Schwanke, 2020; Simon, 1997). Question 6 functioned as an instrument to generate insight into participants' personal experiences surrounding the phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Shaked & Schechter, 2019). The seventh question

worked to highlight participant opinions about decision-making or FSPPs and to lend understanding about elements that might establish more sustainable partnerships (Epstein, 1987; Patton, 2015; Sebastian et al., 2017). Individual behaviors carried out by participants in relation to the central phenomenon were revealed by Question 8 (Shava & Tlou, 2018; Simon, 1997). Question 9 was included as a knowledge-based question so that I could surmise the depth of knowledge and amount of professional development acquired by participants; it also helped clarify the influences, beliefs, and experiences that have helped to shape understanding of decision-making and FSPPs (Patton, 2015; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). Question 10 allowed participants to have the final word and end the discussion on their terms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The six parents who participated in individual interviews were also asked to participate in a focus group session. This group completed the second focus group. I posed a variety of questions to guide each group discussion and allowed individuals to respond and reply freely. These questions served as the tool to help draw out information between the nested cases naturally while also addressing the study's research questions; the parents' point of view was illuminated. The focus group exercise lasted approximately 1 hour. The meeting was documented using video and audio-enabled capabilities on an iPhone, iPad, and laptop computer. Items on the protocol were drawn from the research questions and grounded in the literature.

Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions for Parents (See Appendix I)

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. How are parents responsible for supporting their child's educational journey?
3. What method(s) of communication do you prefer in regard to your child's development and academic progress?

4. In what ways do you involve yourself at your child's school?
5. How do you decide on which activities to participate in at your child's school?
6. What factors positively impact parent involvement at your child's school?
7. What factors negatively impact parent involvement at your child's school?
8. How can school leaders increase parent involvement levels at your child's school?
9. How would you describe an "involved" or "engaged" parent at Oakdale Elementary School?
10. How have you been included as a participant in school decisions or as a parent leader at Oakdale Elementary School?
11. What trainings or support programs are offered to you as a parent of an OES student?
12. In what ways does the local community support Oakdale Elementary students?
13. What else would you like to add regarding your personal experiences with OES's attempts at FSPPs?

Question 1 was written to highlight the background and demographics of the parent participants at OES (Given, 2008; Patton, 2015). It should be noted that participants had currently enrolled students at the school and were familiar with one another; a previous rapport had already been established. Question 2 allowed me to gain an understanding of the value that parents place on themselves in terms of involvement in their child's educational journey (Epstein, 1987; Patton, 2015; Stefansen et al., 2018). Question 3 was designed to draw out participants' preferences on involvement, communication style, communication frequency, and highlighted the communication methods exercised by OES school leaders (Epstein, 1987; Simon, 1997; Uba & Jain, 2019). Questions 4 and 5 were written to expose participants' sentiments about decision-making and the value they place on family engagement (Epstein, 1987; Simon,

1997; R. S. M. Wong et al., 2018). Question 6 was used as an instrument to generate insight into participants' personal experiences of parent involvement (Coleman, 2018; Epstein, 1987). The seventh question worked to highlight barriers that exist in FSPPs; it also established strategies to better secure sustainable FSPPs (Epstein, 1987; Patton, 2015). Individual behaviors demonstrated by OES school leadership team members were exposed by parent participants through Question 8 (Boonk et al., 2018; Simon, 1997).

Questions 9 and 10 were included so I could understand perceptions by OES parents in reference to parent involvement (Avnet et al., 2019; Epstein, 1987). Parental decision-making on FSPP participation was derived by information retrieved in Question 11 (Arce, 2019; Epstein, 1987; Patton, 2015; Simon, 1997). The depth of FSPPs at OES was derived from parent perceptions elucidated in Question 12 (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Epstein, 1987). Lastly, Question 13 allowed participants to have the final word and end the discussion on their terms (Patton, 2015). The two focus group discussions served as the second of three ways I collected data for this investigation. The group discussion acted as an agent to generate additional information.

Participant Letters

Document analysis allows the researcher to interpret documents so that voice and meaning can be construed (O'Leary, 2014). I selected this form of data collection since written work serves as an additional method for cross-checking oral data collected through individual and focus group interviews (Bowen, 2009) For this study, document analysis was applied to triangulate findings and so parents' and school leaders' decision-making practices could become evident since each was asked to share first-person accounts, experiences, actions, or beliefs about the central phenomenon by responding to a writing prompt (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this investigation, I provided school leader and parent participants with instructions on how to write the letter in an email (Appendices K and L). The participants have 7 days to respond to the prompt. I sent follow-up email reminders to participants who did not submit the letter within the specified timeline. For school leaders, the instructions invited participants to respond to a colleague seeking advice about improving their school's existing FSPPs. The prompt for school leaders was designed according to Simon's (1997) rational decision-making model. Prompts provided participants the opportunity to share personal, first-hand accounts surrounding the phenomenon and yielded an understanding of individual beliefs and responsibilities in relation to FSPPs and decision-making. Decision-making practices were communicated to the general audience. Open-ended instructions for the prompt were used to allow participants freedom of expression.

School Leader Writing Prompt Instructions (Appendix L):

A colleague of yours, who is also a school leader in a nearby school, has reached out to you about advice on strengthening existing family–school partnership programs (FSPPs) at their elementary school. Drawing from your own experiences, compose a response to your colleague discussing how you define family–school partnerships, what role school leaders play in sustaining FSPPs, what impact you have seen FSPPs have on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of students, and any improvements you would make to your current FSPP model. This letter has no required length and will not be distributed. Please complete this letter in 7 days and return it by email.

The parents' prompt was based on insight provided by Epstein's (1987) family involvement framework. Participants were directed to write a letter to another parent about the ways they can expect to be involved at OES.

Parent Writing Prompt Instructions (Appendix K):

A friend emailed you about a family they know who is moving to your neighborhood.

The friend asked you to connect with the family to answer some questions about the elementary school where their child will be attending. Drawing from your own experiences, please write a letter of advice to the other parent who will be enrolling their child at [Oakdale] Elementary School for the first time. Discuss what a family–school partnership means to you, the role you think an [OES] parent should play as far as school helper/volunteer, the activities or programs at [OES] you think impact student well-being, and the programs you think could use improvement. This letter has no required length and will not be distributed. Please complete this letter in 7 days and return it by email.

The letter-writing exercise answered the central research question by focusing participants’ attention on personal experiences through the use of reflective practices (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I gained further insight into Sub-Questions 1 through 4 in both the school leader and parent letters considering the prompt asked participants to share their personal definition of these partnership programs. Instructions also recommended letters include elaboration about their perceived role inside the partnership. Insight was gathered based on the directive to judge positive and negative aspects of available programs according to whether or not, from their perception, the children benefit.

Data Analysis

Precisely defined, qualitative data analysis is “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 145). An advantage of this instrumental case study design that includes nested subunits of

analysis is that it supports cross-case synthesis of the phenomenon which allowed me to view similarities and differences within, across, and between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This investigation was conducted with participants from one school in a large, public school district; therefore, according to Creswell and Poth (2018) common and uncommon themes should emerge. Since I have connections to the school and district where this study was conducted, potential for researcher bias was addressed using a researcher's reflexive journal (Appendix M). For this study, I sought out strong patterns through triangulation before reaching assertions.

Data collected from individual and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim directly following the meetings. Then, transcripts were made available to the study participants so that member checking could be completed. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated member checks are necessary to "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 261). I then conducted analysis on the transcribed documents by focusing first on the school leaders' nested cases and then on the parents' nested cases. Reading through transcriptions separately, I highlighted, color coded, and recorded marginal notes so that information could be organized. Once the initial readings occurred and notes from the first read were generated, I used Stake's (2006) analysis methodology and worksheets. First, I completed Worksheet Two, the Analyst's Notes Worksheet (Appendix P), where I gave a summary of each case, documented findings, entered case relevance to themes, discussed exclusiveness of each case, and cataloged quotations that might be used in the final report. I selected this analysis methodology since I believed it would illuminate the whole-case synopsis as well as allow me to intricately examine separate pieces to reveal a more complete understanding. My goal with this strategy was to reveal themes that are typical or atypical of the quintain.

The next step was to perform a document analysis on each of the participants' letters. Each document was carefully examined, and information derived was assimilated into the Analyst's Notes Worksheet. Since the documents provided only a limited amount of information, deeper insights into emerging themes were revealed by repeating this pattern with the individual interview and focus group transcriptions. This merging of the nested cases created a rich, thick description by yielding a precise essence of participants' perspectives regarding the phenomenon.

After data were collected using a triangulated process and scrutinized with careful focus on the individual case, I segued into cross-case analysis. Using Stake's (2006) Theme Based Assertions Matrix from Case Study Findings Rated Importance (Appendix R), I was able to understand how much a theme was displayed in each case scenario as well as label cases as typical or atypical. This protocol was necessary so that I could recognize unsound assertions arising from weak evidence, and so that I could apply Stake's (2006) Theme Based Assertions Matrix from Case Study Findings Rated Importance to generate cross-case assertions that worked to develop categories and codes necessary to merge the themes and sub-themes (Appendix S). I then created a table displaying how each group of codes was merged to form themes; sub-themes were divided (see Table 4). Next, documents were compared to the findings of the individual interviews as well as the focus groups. Yin (2014) recommended this process utilize four strategies: (a) focus on all collected evidence, (b) address any plausible interpretations, (c) address the substantial aspects of the case, and (d) use prior, expert knowledge of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) surmised that gaining an understanding of the participants' reality of the phenomenon assures precise analysis of the data. Abiding by these

four principles, as well as heeding advice from other scholars in the field, I reconstructed each participants' reality of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

Since trustworthiness can be considered the cornerstone of a valid and reliable empirical investigation, steps were taken to secure trustworthiness within this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as the measure of trustworthiness for qualitative research. Credibility addresses the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the study's findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability maintains that the study is conducted systematically so that it might be replicated. Confirmability requires that findings emerge from data rather than researcher assumption (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is the expectation that the study's findings could be applied to other contexts. Procedures to ensure this study met standards for trustworthiness are indicated below.

Credibility

An important condition of case study research is the collection of multiple data sets. Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to this practice as triangulation. Verification and triangulation of data are necessary components of the data collection process since these methods allow a holistic picture of a phenomenon to emerge (Billups, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on this understanding, three sources of evidence were obtained to achieve triangulation: individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. To maintain credibility in a study, Stake (2010) suggested researchers recognize the need to present accurate findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined credibility as the value and plausibility of the study's findings due to prolonged, persistent observation,

triangulation of data, and member-checking. To establish credibility, I spent a significant amount of time collecting data that contains a thick, rich, detailed description. Yin (2018) stated that strong evidence occurs when three independent sources are utilized to collect data; based on my plan to conduct interviews, host focus groups, and perform document analysis, triangulation of data was achieved. Additionally, as suggested by Stake (2010), I also employed member-checking. Member-checking confirmed the attainment of valid, credible data to determine my version of participants' accounts accurately (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability provide consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting. Creswell and Poth (2018) determined that case studies designed with embedded nested cases naturally provide some level of dependability due to the cross-case synthesis component. I used Stake's (2006) case study analysis strategies, which is another way to establish the study's findings as consistent and repeatable. Confirmability was established by a peer review which enlisted three individuals outside of the study to examine the data and findings of the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Those individuals confirmed the accuracy of findings and that those findings were well supported by the data collected. Since I was employed by the school district I investigated, and because I served as a school leader, I bracketed myself out of the study to the highest extent possible. Bracketing was used as a measure to eliminate my personal perspectives and opinions from those evolving in the research. I am aware that potential bias may arise; therefore, I kept a researcher's reflexive journal (see Appendix M) to record biases and review information so that my actions did not refute the school district's mission. The researcher's reflexive journal was used by the investigator as an auditing device and helped to

improve the reliability of the findings by recording biases that need to be removed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that qualitative research is discussed in terms of transferability in lieu of generalizability. I do not expect the results of this study to be generalizable or transferable to a broader population since qualitative measures were employed and because the sample of participants was relatively small. Based on this knowledge, I collected a thick, rich description of the beliefs and experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I did this by providing as much information about the fieldwork site for the readers to make their own transferability inferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as the application of results from a research study to another similar situation. Yin (2018) contended that the purpose of research is to guarantee that subsequent researchers might arrive at the same conclusions if exact study procedures are followed. Patton (2015) described transferability as a systematic process that is systematically followed. I ensured transferability for this study by reporting aspects of the research process using an audit trail (Appendix V). This activity allows the study to be replicated in the future since the reporting of the information was transparently noted from the beginning of the investigation until the conclusion. These recommendations prompted me to collect detailed data so that transferability could be obtained by future researchers. According to Yin (2018), case study research procedures have been inadequately documented in the past so I scrupulously documented investigative practices used during this investigation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study occurred to protect participants, sites, and other stakeholders. Prior to conducting this study, I secured IRB approval through Liberty University and maintained contact with the IRB for the duration of the investigation. Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the school district, building administrator, and participants at the site. Participants were provided with consent forms and the choice to opt-out of the study at any time. Creswell and Poth (2018) reminded researchers to incorporate justice as a measure for treating participants fairly and equal; furthermore, researchers are prohibited from placing participants at risk. For these reasons, pseudonyms were used to address participants, sites, and other identifying features so that confidentiality could be maintained.

Documents, notes, recordings, and any other records collected from the investigation were secured in a locked file cabinet. Transcripts, videos, response logs from focus groups, and audio archives were safeguarded by a password-protected USB drive during the investigation. After the study concluded, I scanned all written documents into a PDF file and original documents were shredded by a professional company. I then saved and stored all PDF files and audio/visual recordings to a password-protected hard drive that was placed in a locked safe in my home; this storage will last 3 years after the study's conclusion. After 3 years all data will be deleted. Before the publication of this research, I obtained final approval from my dissertation committee members and the school district hosting the investigation.

Summary

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP. Chapter Three unveiled the research questions which guided

the investigation. The research design, including the qualitative methodology, approach, and inquiry focus was clearly identified and justified. The setting and participants were revealed and the researcher's role in the investigation was disclosed. I also explained the procedures that were used to collect and analyze data. Finally, as I concluded this chapter, I addressed trustworthiness and the ethical considerations for the investigation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family–school partnership program (FSPP). This chapter provides a thick, rich description of each study participant and results from the multiple case study analysis. Each nested case was analyzed individually, then cross-case analysis was performed to obtain the quintain (Stake, 2006). Individual and cross-case analysis employed Stake’s (2006) multiple case study methodology and corresponding worksheets to derive assertions. Individual and focus group interviews along with independent writing prompts were analyzed to answer the following central research question and sub-questions:

Central Question: How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?

Sub-Question 1: How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family–school partnership programs?

Sub-Question 2: How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family–school partnership programs?

Sub-Question 3: What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic welfare?

Sub-Question 4: What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?

Following a synopsis of the study’s participants and results, the chapter concludes with a narrative of discovered themes and sub-themes addressing the previously referenced research question and sub-questions.

Participants

The participants for this study included six parents with a currently enrolled student and six school leaders at Oakdale Elementary School (OES) located in a large school district in the southeastern United States. The school leader participants included two males and four females, one identifying as African American and five individuals identifying as Caucasian who served in the following positions: principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, guidance counselor, intermediate grade level faculty council representative, and instructional technology specialist. Years of experience for the school leader participants ranged from 4 to 26 years. Years of experience in their current role at the selected site ranged from 3 to 16 years. The parent participants included two Caucasian males and four Caucasian females with the following grades represented: one parent of a kindergarten student, three parents of second graders, one parent of a fourth-grade student, and one parent with a fifth-grade student. The cumulative total of years for parent participants to have an enrolled student at the site ranged from 1 to 11. Parent perspectives from their personal experiences surrounding their currently enrolled child were considered.

All participants in this study were identified using culturally appropriate pseudonyms as outlined in Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Pseudonyms were assigned alphabetically in the order participant consent forms were received. Descriptions

included demographic information, school leaders' and parents' experiences with family–school partnerships, and a narrative of the school leaders' and parents' beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals regarding FSPPs. The table below outlines various points of interest regarding the parent and school leader participants.

Table 2

Parent Participant List

Parent Participant	Currently Enrolled Students	Enrolled Student Grade Level	Cumulative Years as OES Parent	Actively Involved in FSPP
Brent	2	2nd and 5th	6	Yes
Deana	1	5th	11	Yes
Isaac	1	2nd	1	Yes
Jena	1	Kindergarten	7	Yes
Kennedy	1	4th	10	No
Lucy	1	2nd	1	No

Table 3

School Leader Participant List

School Leader	Leadership Title	Years in Education	Years in School Leadership	Years in Leadership at OES
Aron	Intermediate Level Faculty Council Representative	27	14	3
Charlee	Instructional Technology Specialist	9	4	4
Eloise	Assistant Principal	26	17	8
Forrest	Instructional Coach	13	4	3
Greg	Head Principal	15	9	3
Hazel	Guidance Counselor	26	16	16

Aron

Aron served in the field of education for 27 years. Her career began as a long-term substitute in a kindergarten classroom where she fulfilled a 6-week assignment at an elementary school in a large school district in the southeastern United States. Directly afterward, Aron accepted a full-time teaching position in the same school district as a fourth-grade teacher and remained in that position for 11 years. Following this, Aron moved to the southwestern United States where she also taught fourth grade for 11 years. Aron then returned to the initial district and accepted a position as a fourth-grade teacher in the school where she had been the long-term substitute. She has spent the duration of her career teaching fourth grade. Aron had been selected as the grade level faculty council representative (FCR) at every school where she was employed for at least 3 years.

At the time of the study, Aron was listed as the FCR for the fourth-grade team at the study site and had continued in that leadership position for 3 of the last 4 years. Aron described the faculty council school leadership position as a group of school employees that come together to assist in making decisions for the school as a whole. She added that one representative from each department gathered on a monthly basis with the goal to give all employees a voice. Aron stated that her job as the FCR was to be more of a liaison, but that when situations or scenarios were presented where decisions needed to be made, the FCR team was responsible for coming up with a list of possible solutions to present to their grade level team members. After receiving information about the situations or scenarios, Aron's job is to gather the grade level department consensus and report back to the FCR group so that a final decision considering all input can be made. After voice from all stakeholders in the building is received and reported back to the FCR group, the committee makes a final decision together and that decision is then communicated to

the staff and stakeholders (parent-teacher association [PTA], School Improvement Council [SIC]) by the school's principal.

Relational and relatable were defining characteristics of Aron. In addition to having a warm, welcoming disposition and magnetic personality, as the researcher I would describe Aron as the “supportive and caring” teammate. Aron's sentiments toward her teammates, other school leaders, and her administration were highly positive, specific, and detailed. For example, when referring to her colleagues who were employed at the study site, she stated:

I always tell my teams at the very beginning of the year, listen, we're gonna fall together. It's not just one member, if one of us, you know, fails at something, then our team failed. If we do something great, then all of us did something great together. I don't feel like one classroom is better than another other classroom. Like, it's not a competition. In the long run our goal is making sure that all of our kids get the same education. They get the same material. It might be presented differently, but it's all together and we're always together.

Brent

Brent was an involved father of three children. Two of his three children attended Oakdale Elementary; his third child would begin kindergarten at the school in the next school year. Brent's participation in various partnership opportunities at the school was evidenced by his accounts of personal involvement. Brent's desire to be an active participant and to be invested in the lives of his children was also apparent. For example, when discussing the characteristics of an ideal family–school partnership, Brent stated,

What's hard for me as a parent is knowing at the end of the day, for five days a week is that there are other adults with my child more than me. I have a hard time with that. I think, you know, four, five, you know, 120 hours a week, you know, however, you do the

math on that. I'm with them three . . . three and a half hours in a day and another adult's with them for eight or seven. Doesn't feel right to me, you know, somewhere in my heart that feels wrong. Now I'm not saying I don't want them in school or any of that stuff, but when I get down to a very simplistic view of my relationship with my child, I don't like that.

At the time of the interview, Brent had a child in fifth grade and a child in second grade at Oakdale Elementary. Brent mostly attended field trips, volunteered to prepare materials for the teachers from his home, volunteered for class events, or had lunch dates with his children. He did not attend PTA or SIC meetings due to the size of his family and need for childcare during those events. Brent's family was not absent from formal gatherings such as PTA or SIC; however, Brent's wife typically represented the family at those events while he took care of the children simultaneously in the home. Brent worked and lived close to the school. Due to the proximity of his employer to the school and the nature of his personal career, Brent had the ability to interact with students and employees from the school regularly. Brent referenced these interactions as additional relationship investments he had made within the school community.

Charlee

Charlee served as the instructional technology facilitator at Oakdale Elementary School. She was hired under the former head principal and after a change in leadership occurred, was able to continue in her position. Charlee described her role as one that wore several hats; however, she stated that her primary job was to assist teachers and students to transition to a 1:1 technology-based learning environment. Additionally, she reported that a top priority was to support teachers using the Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) model in order to integrate technology-enhanced lessons into their existing curriculum. Charlee enjoyed

focusing on school goals, specifically those related to technology and even noted how she viewed technology as a tool to support teachers in every area. For example, when describing how she defined her role and the role technology plays in the school, she indicated that they both were significant and valued at Oakdale Elementary. Charlee said,

I even work with the counselors from an SEL [social/emotional learning] standpoint. I mean, I can buy templates that support cultural responsiveness. PearDeck is a big resource that has templates and slides that supports students. Like, are you checking in with students first thing in the morning or even at the end of the day? I try to include all of that stuff in my monthly newsletter too. I helped set up a hotline for parents to assist them with technology-based instruction during the school closure . . . because of the pandemic. I made a website with Google Suite tutorials and an additional resource, a parent guide for those families that don't enjoy the videos. I've collaborated with other leaders in the school to set up some sessions for parents like a lunch and learn session on study habits. I mean its relationships. . . . It's really big here at our school and one of our main goals.

Deana

Deana had been the parent of an Oakdale student for 11 consecutive years. Her oldest child, a 10th grader at the time of the study, as well as her fifth grader, had completed kindergarten through fifth grade at OES. As much as her work schedule allowed, Deana volunteered at the school. Deana had previously served as an SIC committee member, a lunch relief volunteer, a field trip chaperone, the class party coordinator, and had volunteered to help her child's teachers in her home by completing cut-outs or other tasks for class projects. Deana was a unique participant because she had been at the school during three head principal changes.

She actually had the opportunity to interview new principals for the school due to her role as an SIC committee member and was a part of the group that selected and hired the school's former principal.

Deana stated that she was the parent of two very different children. She reported that school tended to come naturally for one of her children; however, the other learned and grasped educational material differently. When discussing how Deana might support her child's education in the home, Deana credited the teachers and staff at OES for helping her to understand how to do that well. When asked about ways the school supported her and her child in the home, Deana specified,

This is where I feel Oakdale excels. I ask the teachers a lot of questions. I attend conferences and ask them to show me how I can help my child learn this. One fourth grade teacher was life-changing for my child. This teacher took the initiative to call me to tell me about a skill set that needed to be developed. She built confidence in my child and helped me know how to work with my child. That same child of mine had a different teacher in another grade that supported reading. My child didn't like to read but the teacher would take things that appealed to students and would encourage reading with that . . . like my child liked to cook so cookbooks could be read and reported on the reading log. Even recipes. My child could read those and it counted on the reading log and I could supply plenty of those. This made the kids feel good and it made my child attempt something that normally would not be engaging.

Eloise

Eloise was one of the school's two assistant principals. Eloise was in her eighth year at the school and during her time had worked with two different head principals. Eloise described

herself as an executor and strategic thinker. Eloise was an assistant principal for the entire school; however, she did have some defined responsibilities. Eloise was tasked with discipline and multi-tiered systems of support for students in kindergarten through second grade; she was also the school's testing coordinator. During her 26-year career, Eloise had the opportunity to work in a variety of schools including Title I schools in the area. When discussing how the school leaders at Oakdale made decisions about family-school partnerships, Eloise shared,

When I first started working at Oakdale, I kid you not, our parents were so involved that sometimes I didn't know who was a parent and who was an employee. Our current principal makes everything a joint effort. He's the type of person who likes equal opportunity decision-making. He likes to talk about things. There is a collaborative approach, you know. He respects and listens to what I and everyone else says. We go to every meeting: PTA, SIC, Faculty Council. We have fun too, there is music in the car line and on the speakers on Friday's just because it's Friday. We dress up . . . we want the kids to have fun. We even talk about the pictures shared on social media . . . we want to keep students the face of our social media presence. I think leadership defines everything. You can have all types of relationships in your building but it always comes from the top down . . . and here, we all make the decisions especially when it comes to our families . . . but we do it based on the kids.

Forrest

Forrest's 13-year career as an education professional began as a classroom teacher in fifth and second grades; he also taught kindergarten for one year. Most recently, Forrest worked as a literacy specialist, then transitioned to the role of instructional coach at OES. At the time of his interview Forrest was beginning his third year as an instructional coach and was enrolled in an

educational specialist program at a local university. Forrest's focus in that program was school leadership; this interest was inspired by how his current administration led Oakdale Elementary School. While Forrest's time as an instructional coach had been relatively short, he had experience as a school leader in other capacities including FCR, teacher leadership forum, and as a literacy mentor for the school district.

Forrest's statements and responses indicated a strong level of professionalism and pedagogical knowledge. In addition to his depth of knowledge, he discussed his desires to invest in making the learning environment the best it could be for the students at his school. He proclaimed these statements regarding the learning environment at OES:

We are intentional with every decision that we make. We listen to all stakeholders. We get feedback from all, including students . . . like in conferences we ask how THEY feel about what THEY learned or if they feel they met the demands of the learning target. And I don't know if I have ever worked with a faculty where they are so willing to grow and try new things. Not every decision is going to work for every kid or even at every school, but, we must be open and willing to try new things and the teachers at this school . . . they are, you know? We are growing together, through a partnership. We collaborate. We take risks together and it's okay if it fails . . . because that is how you learn. We just have to do what is best for the individual student and keep working at it.

Greg

Greg was entering his third year as principal of Oakdale Elementary School. The appointment as principal was his first; however, Greg had served in a variety of other leadership roles such as program director at a middle school, in a teacher leadership forum, as an intervention coordinator, a grade level chair, and was even named a top ten teacher of the year in

his district which set him up for mentoring other teachers. Greg was unlike the other school leaders in that he had intentionally volunteered to work or lead a variety of different grades and committees even when he was not in a school leadership position. He claimed this move allowed him to gain leadership experience and a deeper perspective of how “school things worked.” It was evident that Greg wanted to have a broader reach; he wanted to extend his footprint not only to help students, but to help teachers and families as well. When discussing Greg’s beliefs and experiences on helping teachers and families through an FSPP, he specified:

I explain things. I want you to hear things from me. It’s about transparency. I think transparency is what creates that level of trust. I don’t think that lines have to be drawn in the sand. I think you should feel just as comfortable calling me as I feel calling you.

There’s never a bad phone call. Even if the topic is a hard one. Good always comes from every conversation good or bad. If the topic was unpleasant, hey, now we can just look at it as we are now on a team to facilitate this situation. To facilitate it together.

Although Greg was only in his third year as a principal, his approach to leadership seemed revolutionary in my experiences. His office donned toys and commonly known cartoon figurines; hundreds of children’s storybook characters dressed the corner of his office. Above his desk were masks; larger than life cartoon heads of hit box-office beings. Greg even had a television hanging on his wall with a popular entertainment system connected to it. When asked about his office décor, he joked that he simply liked the items . . . as if he were a big kid. Greg then added that the items were intentionally placed and that he used them to help him connect with students.

Hazel

Hazel was one of two school counselors at Oakdale Elementary. She was the primary, full-time counselor but worked closely with a part-time counselor as well as a state-funded mental health therapist who was also housed at the school. Hazel began her career at Oakdale as a teacher, and then she transitioned to the part-time counselor position. Over time, Helen assumed the full-time school counselor position. At the time of the study, Hazel had been a part of the Oakdale community for 16 years. When asked about the school counselor's role in comparison to the state-funded mental health counselor, Hazel described the school counselor role as a "Tier 1" support for Oakdale stakeholders. She then clarified that school counselors operated at more of a "Tier 1 level" and did not provide ongoing therapies for students and families. When asked to define her role in the decision-making processes that involve FSPPs at Oakdale as it relates to SEL concepts, she responded:

My job is to know the needs of the school and to pull the community in as much as possible to support those needs. Our principal believes community is good. We think there are experts around and they know . . . they might know things even better than us. So, I might survey our parents or teachers and also the kids to see what they need and then work with the community to provide that support. For example, we had a group of kids that needed assessment skills and study techniques. The parents were requesting this, but so were the teachers. So, I reached out to a local learning center and they came out to the school to offer a session to our families on just that . . . and they did it for free. It was beneficial to us and them. I also help teach SEL concepts to classes on a daily basis and I support grade levels/teachers with those things. I even help address negative behaviors that might start showing up on a consistent basis. So, I guess my role is to decide how to

best support the needs of our kids, teachers, and parents and then put action to whatever we come up with . . . but really we just all work together on this.

Isaac

Isaac was the husband of a teacher and father of two children. His oldest child was attending OES as a second grader and it was his family's first year at the school. His other child attended a local private daycare, but would attend kindergarten at Oakdale in the upcoming school year. The pandemic and his wife's job change had led his second-grade child to attend one school for kindergarten, a different school for first grade, and Oakdale for second, which was the school children in his neighborhood were zoned to attend. Isaac described these movements as less than ideal; however, he claimed his role as a supportive parent had remained that same throughout each transition. Isaac communicated that when he reflected on how a community should support a school, the role of parent was the most integral part of that community. He then claimed that the family-school partnership was vital and that he took it seriously. He made the following statement:

Parent involvement in schools is one of the most important parts of the educational success of the school overall . . . and for a person's individual child. I think the more parents are involved in their kids' school, the better that school will be for everybody. Principals and the leaders of the school can't do it all . . . and the teachers can't do it all. They have to rely on parents in a lot of ways and we've got to feel that responsibility and step up and help. For me that means making sure my kid has routines at home like homework time, reading time, and a proper bed time. I think it's important I even dress them appropriately for the day. I have to try to work on my end to eliminate anything that will distract or take away from my child's learning time. I also need to help at the school

when my schedule allows or do things at home to help the school. I think my role is to even support the school and teachers financially when I can. If I have connections, like have a friend who owns a restaurant . . . I need to also get them involved. A domino effect making community bigger and bigger.

Isaac made an interesting claim, mentioning how he and his wife decided to pass on the opportunity to send his son to the elementary school where his wife works, which is an option for the teachers in the county if space is available. Isaac indicated that their decision was based on their children creating better connections with other neighborhood children, things he had heard other parents saying about Oakdale Elementary School, and that they wanted to settle in and invest in a school community. Isaac asserted that both his children would complete their elementary education at Oakdale Elementary as long as no major life change occurred.

Jena

Jena is a fourth-grade teacher with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in literacy, a certification as a literacy coach, a certification as a reading specialist, and a reading teacher certification for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. She had also been trained to serve as a state mentor for new teachers. In addition to her certifications, Jena was named her state's 2019–2020 PTA teacher of the year. During the interview process, her youngest child was enrolled as a kindergarten student at the school. Previously, Jena's oldest child attended Oakdale Elementary from kindergarten until fifth grade.

Jena was a unique participant because she had been an Oakdale parent for an extensive amount of time, yet she was also employed as a teacher at Oakdale Elementary. Jena sought to participate in the investigation as a parent of a currently enrolled student. Jena had extensive knowledge of the school's mission, vision, and beliefs and could communicate her experiences

as a parent who actively supported and participated in FSPPs at Oakdale Elementary. Jena had served under two different school administrators and believed decision-making processes at Oakdale Elementary School had continued to positively evolve during her 8 years as a parent and employee. Jena displayed a joyful disposition as she spoke about working at OES and exhibited a sense of pride for having a child enrolled at the location. When discussing active FSPP participation in her individual interview, Jena stated the following:

I have been all of those things mentioned. A supporter, an audience member, and a volunteer. Obviously, I am limited in the school day, but I do other things to show my investment. I show up to all PTA meetings, I support the teacher by sending in materials or supplies, I send in treats for the kids and have hosted parties. Sometimes I am a guest reader in the class. I share concerns if I see them and I ask a lot of questions. I make suggestions sometimes too. I feel good about being able to do that. My thoughts or questions or even suggestions as a parent are always welcomed. PTA events are big for me. I like to show up to those as a parent, not just a teacher who works at the school so that my own kids can just enjoy those things. My favorite is the fall festival put on by the school. I volunteer at a booth, I get local business to donate items, and I do clean-up crew also.

Kennedy

Kennedy was the mother of four children. She had one child in middle school, one fourth grader at OES, and twins at a local daycare that would attend OES as kindergarteners in the upcoming school year. Kennedy claimed that her family attended OES as part of the district's school choice initiative. Kennedy was familiar with the activities of a school. Kennedy began her career as a teacher, although she currently served as a media specialist for a Title I elementary

school located in the same district as OES. Kennedy claimed that she was limited in time due to the schedules of her four children but that she tried to be as invested and involved as much she could. Kennedy believed that investments in FSPPs were a major indicator of school success. Her experience working in a Title I school was quite different than her experience as an OES parent. As she detailed the differences between parent involvement and parent engagement, Kennedy alleged:

Well, I don't know how they do it. At the school I'm in we have to incentivize our participation in FSPP and offer dinner or free books, we basically have to bribe. OES is not a Title I school and it is not necessarily affluent either. It is actually a good, mixed population of low, middle, and high class folks. They get all kinds of parents and community members to help. I don't know if it's because they are always asking or they are just better-known in the community. I mean, I guess it's how they run the school. I grew up here (I didn't attend OES), but I know it's been that way for as long as I can remember because I have friends that went there when we were little. I wish I could do even more. I think they want parent engagement but they will accept parent involvement. Parent involvement is like . . . here is a set list of things you can do for us can you do them. Engagement is more like I show up and say what can I do or I see this needs to be done. That's what I can do for them right now. I can be involved but not necessarily engaged.

Lucy

Lucy was the mother of a second grader and was relatively new to the public school experience. Lucy herself attended public school for only 2 years of her life and completed her education in a private Christian school. When this investigation took place, her child and family

were new to public education. Her child had attended Christian daycare and Christian elementary school until the 2021–2022 school year. Since this was her first experience with a child in public school, she mentioned having reservations about the encounter but claimed she welcomed a more diverse environment so that her child could gain an understanding of the real world and have real-world experiences. Specifically, she mentioned using technology.

Lucy and her husband were employed full-time and had two children. One child was still in daycare, but Lucy believed her youngest would also be attending OES when the time came. During the discussion about the transition from privatized education to public education and how she might decide to involve herself in the FSPP opportunities available to her at OES, Lucy appeared excited to experience new things and build new relationships with others as an OES parent. Lucy exclaimed,

I am not really sure what they have in store for us, but I have heard wonderful things. I started following them on social media so I could better understand the public school environment. I'm pretty excited . . . you know, it looks like they do some cool stuff. I think I'd be willing to help with just about anything they need. I don't know anyone yet though. You know, I probably couldn't during the day but I am sure other opportunities will arise. I do know they have online workshops for parents. At the end of last year I saw them advertise a virtual parent workshop for parents of fifth graders. It was something that helped the students and families prepare for middle school if I remember correctly. I thought that was cool they even did that but also that it was offered virtually. Sometimes my husband travels for work or I might be at a soccer game with the kids so it's good to know I could participate in both and that my husband could join. As of right now I am

not sure exactly what I will get into, but I could probably be talked into anything? I will for sure do PTA and volunteer for classroom things like room parent.

Results

This section presents the findings divulged from significant accounts, statements, and commonalities that transpired as data analysis of the participant interviews, focus groups, and independent letter writing exercise was conducted. Participants engaging in this research study included six parents of currently enrolled students at OES and six OES school leaders. Stake's (2006) multiple case study analysis process and worksheets were used to analyze the individual nested cases. Subsequently, a cross-case analysis was performed which illuminated major themes and corresponding sub-themes revealing the quintain; Stake's (2006) worksheets were also utilized to perform cross-case analysis (Appendix S). The research questions were the basis for all identified themes and sub-themes.

During the investigative process, I participated in journaling using a researcher's reflexive journal (Appendix M). Throughout data collection and analysis, the journaling process enabled participants' voices related to FSPPs to be illuminated and ensured researcher biases remained separate from beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals communicated by study participants. By examining multiple sources of data and remaining close to the investigation, I was allowed to examine the nested cases while also applying cross-case synthesis. Based on these actions, I was able to fully capture the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP at one elementary school. The resulting information includes a comprehensive inquiry guided by the research questions revealing themes and sub-themes sustained by participants' quotations captured during data collection.

Theme Development

Table 4 depicts how the themes emerged (Appendix N). The table contains a list of five major themes along with the associated key words or phrases and corresponding sub-themes. A discussion of the themes with narratives and data derived from all three data collection methods follows, as well as in vivo participant quotations. All quotations from participants in this results section are presented verbatim, which includes verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to accurately depict the participants' voices.

Table 4

Theme Development

Key Words/Phrases	Sub-themes
Major Theme 1: School Culture	
email blast, phone blast, school messenger, school newsletter, classroom newsletters, school website, teacher websites, school app, carline signs, parent help line, technology hotline, social media networks, student stickers	Communication
surveys, feedback, formal and informal conversations, program evaluation, data analysis, school goals, strategic planning, data dig, PLCs, goal setting, SIC, PTA, school committees	Continuous Improvement
targeting audiences appropriately, controlling the narrative, defining roles, sharing the "why," current and consistent messaging, flexibility/collective input in decision-making, outlining goals, communicating results, program evaluation, outreach, committees	Transparency
Major Theme 2: Inclusive Partnership Practices	
S.M.A.R.T goals, clarity in decision-making, motivation, singular vision, long-term success, goal tracking, goal evaluation, reflection, input, voice, training, professional development, curriculum pacing, common assessments	Common Goals
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) training, Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS), professional development, diverse classroom libraries, community outreach, underrepresented subgrouping, diverse school population	Cultural Responsiveness

Key Words/Phrases	Sub-themes
Major Theme 3: Commitments and Responsibilities	
accessibility, responsibility, communication, relationships, commitment, partnership, on-going involvement, outreach opportunities	Active Participation
voice, distributed leadership, decentralization, collaboration, leadership style, opinion, expression, listening, feedback	Shared Decision-Making
Major Theme 4: Learning Environment	
student safety, self-regulation, engagement, relationships, individual skill development, self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal skills	Commitment to Social/Emotional Wellness
student choice, student voice, individual student needs, leveled instruction, differentiated instruction, math centers	Student Centeredness
specific, learning targets, PLCs, depth of knowledge, standards, concrete goals, intentional planning, informal assessments, formal assessments, standard-specific vocabulary	Targeted Instructional Goals
Major Theme 5: Approach to School Leadership	
additional perspectives, buy-in, participation, involvement, engagement, common understandings, empowerment, advocacy	Exclusion of Stakeholder Voice
car line appearances, school picnic, parent workshops, committees, meet and greets, volunteering, question and answer sessions, lunch bunch, visibility, availability	Invisible, Unapproachable, or Unavailable Leaders

Based on Table 4, five major themes and 12 sub-themes emerged. Each major theme and the corresponding sub-themes are discussed below. The participants' individual responses supporting the themes are embedded within the discussion of each major theme and sub-theme.

Major Theme 1: School Culture

The chief theme emerged from individual interviews, focus groups, and written responses to prompts (Appendix R). "School Culture" elucidated the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and goals that influenced parents' and school leaders' decisions to participate in FSPPs. The

participants' perspectives were explained through the three sub-themes: communication, continuous improvement, and transparency.

Communication

The first sub-theme within the major theme of school culture was communication (Appendix N). Frequency and consistency as well as varied methods of communication were factors that influenced participants' decisions to involve themselves in FSPPs at Oakdale Elementary School. Participants emphasized communication that promoted school events and achievements, time-sensitive matters, policies, teacher needs, student photos and videos, as well as human interest content produced the maximum motivation impacting engagement decisions. Additionally, a variety of communication methods were highlighted as assets in communication, including a school app available to parents on smart devices, the principal's live monthly social media hour, and a helpline for parents and students set up to assist with learning in the home during quarantine. During the focus group interview Lucy exclaimed, "I feel like if you don't know what's going on at Oakdale, you must be living under a rock." Charlee's supplementary comments elaborated the idea:

We are really big on relationships. One of our goals is transparency. So, we want to have open, honest conversations about the things that will impact the families we serve and control that narrative. We are gonna share things in a way where they see it's safe and because of that they feel safe. Social media is big for us. Weekly recordings and conversations with the bald guy is a hit. In the live social media session parents can ask questions . . . right there . . . LIVE. I've heard things like, "Are the fifth graders still taking that field trip?" Some resources are overwhelming too. We know that, that's why we try to do different things to reach different audiences. Some like the human

connection so we are trying to be cognizant of that and do more of that . . . like we've always done . . . but take it up a notch. You know . . . like sidebar conversations in car line with the families, having informal conversations with families at the school picnic or at student drop-off.

Communication methods at Oakdale Elementary were varied. Participants' viewpoints on communication included statements about ongoing efforts to improve methods of communication in order to reach all families in the way they best receive information. Kennedy claimed, "I've seen them do a lot over the years to get in touch with us. Lately, they probably have 20 different ways they tell us the things they want us to know." Three participants claimed email was their favorite type of OES school communication; one participant mentioned school and teacher level communications as the preferred method of contact, such as newsletters. All participants acknowledged giving or receiving communication about OES events on a consistent basis. Brent's statement summarized his beliefs about school communication: "They tell us a lot, but I'd rather them err on the side of overcommunication you know? I'd hate to miss something."

Continuous Improvement

The second major sub-theme that emerged inside the major theme of school culture was continuous improvement (Appendix N). Schools are living institutions encompassing various interconnected parts. Elgart (2017) explained the idea of continuous improvement as "an embedded behavior within the culture of a school that constantly focuses on the conditions, processes, and practices that will improve teaching and learning" (p. 56). The following participants shared their perspectives about school quality and improvement and how, based on personal experiences, it impacted their decisions to participate in an FSPP at Oakdale

Elementary. During her interview, Eloise shared examples of how the school progressed in student achievement scores over time:

The former administrator put a lot of effort into helping the teachers learn how to read and interpret data and was able to see huge gains in student achievement because of that. We called it data teams and basically it was a data dig to see what the numbers or scores told us. Now we've been taking it further and we drill down to specific standards, skills, and depth of knowledge level (DOK). After we do that, we address specific areas or skills during our weekly grade level meetings which we call professional learning communities (PLCs). At this point in the PLC meetings, we have tried to level the playing field for all the kids. We talk about specific data on a constant basis. Everything is considered.

Content vocabulary, what the strengths of the students were and the weaknesses. We compare classes to the grade level whole. We even talk about how we put the assessments together, like, how much did we vary the DOK levels on the assessments? The kids have done amazing. The most current data shows that even our resource kids, the ones not projected to meet standard . . . they made it.

Jena, a parent and OES employee, addressed the evolving level of rigor she sees on her child's formal and informal kindergarten assessments. She identified problem solving, complex thinking, and open-ended questioning as examples of the shifting kindergarten rigor. Jena alleged,

I've seen my kindergartener doing higher level work. Now my child is not just identifying letters, they are connecting meaning to letters. It's more real-world . . . they might learn about "e" then they have to circle it in pictures. The pictures are of store signs or even signs in the school where they might see the letter "e."

While continuous improvement in academics is a priority focus for most schools due to high stakes testing, Hazel pointed out her experience with continuous school improvement involved more than just academics. For Hazel, continuous improvement included all factors that affected performance. Specifically, Hazel commented on how her goal for continuous improvement included getting more stakeholder input . . . but including students in that group. She stated, “We let the kids have input into the school theme last year . . . we came up with a list and they got to vote, and I thought, oh my goodness, why have we not included them in this before?”

Transparency

The final sub-theme “Transparency” manifested under the major sub-theme of “School Culture.” School culture has been identified as an essential ingredient accounting for a harmonious working and learning environment (Amtu et al., 2020). Morris et al. (2020) defined school culture as the collective values and beliefs of school staff, encompassing how these are enacted in practice. Forrest, Oakdale’s Instructional Coach, had previously worked in a variety of leadership roles and with several different types of school administrators. During his individual interview, he identified “transparency” as being a major strength when it came to school leaders’ decision-making practices. During his interview he stated,

If we don’t tell our story, someone else will tell it for us . . . so we as the leaders are proactive in that role here. That’s why social media is so big at Oakdale. We always have a presence and we are there telling our story. We are constantly putting out to the community what we are doing and we make sure students are the face of it.

In his writing prompt Forrest reiterated,

You have to constantly share your school's mission and how folks can help support that mission. Educate them in the ways to be involved with the school, and invite them to join committees such as SIC, PTA, and other mentoring programs. Many parents don't know all the opportunities there are to get involved to support the school and therefore supporting their student. Provide opportunities where the families can support the school financially, as well as volunteering time. Once the relationships are established it takes consistent communication and evaluation to be sure it's working and successful.

Deana had been a parent of children at the school for over 11 years. During this time period she had witnessed three changes in administration at the school due to the former principals accepting district level promotions. She commented on her experience with the current school leaders' transparency efforts,

It's always been good, but it keeps getting better. I feel like Principal Greg would take a meeting with me tomorrow if I had a concern. I don't know if I'd get my way, but I know I'd be heard. And if my request couldn't be granted, he'd tell me why.

All six school leader participants and four of the six parent participants mentioned that it was evident transparency was a top priority at Oakdale Elementary. In fact, four participants noted transparency as an intentional school goal; a goal that was set in previous years under previous administrations that had been nurtured further as the years progressed. When discussing decision-making practices and how they could be made more effective, Greg, the principal, replied, "It's just important for me to be transparent. I have to tell folks why . . . or at least the theory as to why something might help us. I want them to hear it from me. I want to build that trust level."

Aron, the 4th grade FCR, confirmed in her interview session that transparency was also a common practice between the Oakdale teachers and parents,

I tell my parents every year that we have an open-door policy at this school. Tell us what the struggles are . . . tell us what the celebrations are. Let's not just focus on the negative. Hey, your kid got their yellow belt in karate. You need to tell me so we can celebrate. That's awesome! Or hey, you lost your pet over the weekend? Let us know so we can tread lightly and offer support or a pat on the back. We all care. Heck we probably petted that dog in the car line you know, we might be sad too. You don't like how I graded that assignment, call and ask me about it. Let's have a conversation.

Deana, in her written prompt wrote,

Be honest with your teacher about the strengths and weaknesses of your child. Ask questions about expectations, and then support them for the teacher and your child. I have found that even when my kids didn't do well on an assignment or acted out, that the teacher wanted to get to the root cause, just like I did. Don't be afraid to ask questions or challenge the teachers. It will help them learn how your child sees things and it will help you truly advocate for your child. (By the way, every teacher I have worked with at Oakdale is happy I want to know what my child is struggling with and how to help.)

Major Theme 2: Inclusive Partnership Practices

"Inclusive Partnership Practices" was recognized as the second major theme. This major theme clarified the definition parents and school leaders applied to FSPPs. The inclusive partnership practices identified were common goals and cultural responsiveness.

Common Goals

The first sub-theme identified under the umbrella of inclusive partnership practices was common goals (Appendix N). When schools and families share common goals for students, they become equal partners in the educational success of a child. It is at this pivotal point when both in-school and out-of-school occurrences can be recognized as having influence on a child's performance. In his written response, Brent noted that the sharing of information between parent and teachers helped to form a shared understanding of objectives desired by both parties. He wrote, "The best thing I can tell you about the school is that any assistance we have ever needed there we have been able to get because we talked about it with them and we all agreed it was necessary." He further indicated in the focus group interview that "having a relationship with folks at the school made for a healthier classroom environment you know, because we can all get on the same page." Isaac added that knowing the school's expectations and the teachers' expectations helped him to "meet those expectations with his child in the home." In the interview he added,

Two-way communication. Sharing what we both want for the child . . . that is having a common goal. If I had to define it I'd say giving clear expectations on what the school needs/expects from the parents and what the parents need/expect from the school.

Lucy added a comment about common goal setting. She interjected,

Common goals, I believe, can even be set between teachers and students too. But for me as a parent I think the most important thing about shared visions or common goals is that it happens to consider me and my thoughts and my goals for my child. The teacher isn't the expert on everything about my child, but I welcome their input and respect their opinion, and want to work with them to get the same things . . . the same results. I mean,

it's like we are all on the same team, right? We want the child in question to be successful in academics, relationships, and just life in general so the best thing we can do is work together to plan how we are going to achieve that.

Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness was the next sub-theme highlighted within the major theme of inclusive partnership practices. Lack of cultural responsiveness in a school environment can cause harmful or negative effects on the family–school relationship (Erdener, 2016). Schools with employees that demonstrate cultural responsiveness towards their population take a step toward bridging the gap in unfamiliar relationships by working to identify aspects of the partnership that may cause the relationship to break down (K. B. Grant & Ray, 2018). Five participants believed or had experienced the element of cultural responsiveness at Oakdale Elementary School which urged them to participate more frequently in FSPPs. Eloise explained,

When we get student data, we look deep. We dig deep. We look at every question missed, every child, group or subgroup. We look at it all and try to target specific goals for all the kids because we believe every child has the ability to learn and parents want to know where their child is.

Aron gave a different perspective as she contributed the following statements during her individual interview. She explained,

We did this activity where a leadership group came into the school to do a PD [professional development]. And we were like, you know, placed in groups and given scenarios. We role-played. We talked about different things . . . like my scenario was about a family that had to make a decision on whether to pay the power bill or buy food for the week. We actually had to participate in making those tough decisions. I think it

changed perspectives. I think it changed the expectations that we have on families. We want all families to feel welcomed here. That, you know, we will work together with whatever is happening in your home. We will help you in you know, like, any way, shape or form we can. I think this draws parents in.

Deana added to this notion when she mentioned how her child's teacher at Oakdale Elementary went above and beyond to connect with her son on a personal level to better understand his needs. She stated, "They had a special connection. They had both lost their sisters and would share things about their sisters with each other to remember them. It was so sweet. They just go beyond. The teachers there go above and beyond." Greg supported Deana's point of view when he discussed facilitating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) training for the school's employees. He specified,

This was a positive opportunity for us. I took a huge chunk of our PD budget and hired subs for the day to cover classes for three hours and sent teachers over to the community building next door so they could focus on this training. I wanted them to have a nice area, to clear their heads, and just not worry about having to do the training outside of the school day. It's important; it has benefit. I even cancelled related arts for two days. I was transparent about it. I said you give me 50 minutes and I'll save you three hours. But we need to do this to know our kids better and to be able to connect with families.

Major Theme 3: Commitments and Responsibilities

The third major theme "Commitments and Responsibilities" developed as data for the investigation were analyzed (Appendix O). Essential partnerships require a level of commitment from all involved parties. This major theme necessitates that parents and school leaders become dedicated to the task of carrying out their respective roles and responsibilities in order for all

students' needs to be met. The sub-themes supporting this concept were identified as active participation and shared decision-making.

Active Participation

Active participation was the first sub-theme recognized under the major theme: commitments and responsibilities. Active participation in an FSPP requires a certain extent of dedication on the part of parents and school leaders. Active participation in FSPPs were defined by one participant as “a set of actions taken by a party to engage about student progress on a regular basis.” This notion was agreed upon by Jena, a parent and employee of the school. Kennedy, another Oakdale Elementary parent, was employed as a media specialist at a different school within the same school district. She defined active participation as “a relationship that is focused on student progress.” Greg, the school’s principal claimed that “active participation is when parties share their voice, are heard, and then collectively become part of a decision-making process.” In Forrest’s written response he penned, “Active participation in a FSPP is willingness to participate in any opportunity that provides a shared experience for educators and families to partner together to build academic, social-emotional, whole child connections and support for students.”

Hazel shared her beliefs regarding active participation. She responded to her written prompt with the following statements:

To achieve active participation, I think it’s important to KNOW your school community. It’s equally important to survey and communicate with families to see what their needs are and how to best support them and their children. We should host parent workshops with topics on things they are interested in and share resources they might believe to be beneficial . . . things they can use to help their child be successful. You need to ask them

what they want in order for them to want to participate. I've also learned I have to reach out in different ways to involve some families. Like families that work. Many parents don't know all the opportunities there are to get involved to support the school and therefore supporting their student. Provide opportunities where the families can support the school financially, as well as volunteering time, and in a variety of ways. Once the relationships are established it takes consistent communication and evaluation to be sure it's working and successful. One way to do this is through surveys and being visible and available for parents and the community to contact you. It is the school leaders' role to use consistent and effective communication with their families in order to support these relationships. I have seen our parents and families support our school programs which has had a direct positive effect on our students socially, emotionally, and academically.

Shared Decision-Making

The second and final sub-theme that came to light under the major sub-theme of commitment and responsibilities was shared decision-making. Shared decision-making has the ability to decentralize authority and distribute leadership, which can provide a form of checks and balances. Bagwell (2019) claimed that shared decision-making is when stakeholders meet, discuss, and work together to arrive at a final decision. Deana claimed that she experienced a shared form of decision-making when she was part of the school's SIC committee: "I was part of the SIC committee and the principal of the school got a promotion. When the search for a new principal began, I got to be part of the interview panel that selected the next principal of the school."

Isaac indicated he had the choice in selecting the type of classroom his student would join. "I was able to pick a primary multiage classroom for my son, or a regular second grade

class.” Greg contributed the most detailed statement on shared decision-making, and in his individual interview he made the following statements:

When I arrived I started creating a vision and I did that by including people in the decisions that were gonna make it all happen. It’s not about authority . . . it’s about how, when, and who will get you there and under what conditions. In becoming the principal I reframed the leadership team and its functions. I started having all administrative leaders and instructional leaders meet together. That way we all knew the goal and where we were supposed to be going. We should all have equal parts. I should be able to get a flat tire on the side of the road one morning and not miss a beat in this building. That’s how collaborative and inclusive things should be. My leadership style is very collaborative. I believe that if you have a part in building something then you understand its intricacies and that’s why I want everyone involved. Singular Vision. Everybody has a seat at the table and everybody gets a say and we decide together what we will do.

Major Theme 4: Learning Environment

The fourth major theme revealed from the investigation was “Learning Environment.” Learning environment is a broadly interpreted term encompassing cooperative learning experiences, integrated use of technology, continuous feedback, and ideas such as meaning-focused content inside of a classroom (An & Mindrila, 2020). Within the major theme of learning environment three sub-themes were spawned. Emphasis on social/emotional wellness, student centeredness, and targeted instructional goals were identified as the prominent sub-themes.

Emphasis on Social/Emotional Wellness

The concept of social and emotional wellness (SEL) has slowly become a focus in schools across the United States. When polling parents and school leaders about the concept of SEL at Oakdale Elementary School, the idea of growing children in skills necessary to manage emotions, attitude, and relationships was no different. The initiative and focus on the theory were highlighted as a top priority for the school and also the school district where the school was located. Charlee claimed,

Our district has shifted a lot of its recourses to focus on SEL concepts. ACEs and TIPs [Training for Intervention Procedures] training is something our entire district is working on. SEL is even big in the technology arena. For example, I have been helping the teachers get templates and other technology-based resources set up so that they can do daily check-ins with their kids. We have some teachers who do a morning and afternoon check-in. Some do it elaborately and others, like kindergarten teachers might have their students click an emoji to indicate how they are feeling. My job is to find things for teachers to help them connect with the kids. You know, student-centered. At the end of the day we just want to find things to help the kids.

During her interview Deana recalled a recent event where her child was hurt on the playground. The parent of a fifth grader claimed,

This is where I feel Oakdale excels. One day I arrived at the school to pick up my child from after school care and while signing him out I heard a call on the radio that he was hurt on the playground. My husband and I walked out to the equipment and were immediately met by the school principal. He helped me get my son, gave me his personal cell phone number, and asked me to call him to let him know how he was doing. When

we hadn't called or texted the principal after about two-hours he called us to check in. I mean, that is a personal connection.

Isaac and Brent both mentioned the welcoming and smiling faces in the building that made their kids excited to go to school. Isaac said, "Yeah, every morning when I drop my child off for school they are all out there. I mean all of them. They are waving and smiling . . . encouraging the kids; sometimes even wearing costumes. It makes my kid feel good." Brent claimed that this warm environment extends to the front office staff at the school. In his individual interview Brent stated, "The ladies in the office, they talk to me like they've known me for years. Very kind and welcoming and it makes us as parents feel good about sending our kids there. My kids are at ease going there." Brent went on to add in his written prompt response,

That principal I see at school every day is still engaging. Always available. He didn't stick his head in the sand. Sometimes at carline drop-off he'll be out there with a remote control car and the kids you know, they walk into the classroom with a smile. They have built a foundation for them to be effective. At the beginning of the school year when kids were walking in after a pandemic year . . . they were okay because they knew who the people were. Half is anti-mask, half is mask. . . . Principal Greg meet them in the middle by wearing a space suit. The staff didn't go invisible. They are always there building the positive relationships with the students and families.

Jena noted one of her classroom goals is to help the kids "self-regulate and reset" and Hazel added that she conducts monthly SEL lessons with classes to help students with "relationships, making responsible decisions, and other skills necessary to help them manage emotions."

Student Centeredness

A student-centered learning environment is one where the focus on instruction shifts from the teacher to the student. Kulakow (2020) surmised that the goal of student-centered learning is to develop autonomous and independent learners who can accept the responsibility for learning. Kennedy, a media specialist, reasoned that student-centered learning and SEL initiatives have made a positive impact in how her child learns and that the approaches “go hand in hand because they are both about shifting the responsibility for learning or personal responsibility to the student.” Lucy interjected, “I’ve seen student-centered approaches in how they do projects at the school. The child gets to choose which project they want to complete like maybe a report, or a slideshow. Some choice.” Isaac added to the conversation about student-centered learning approaches motivating him to be more involved in homework and projects:

Yeah, it’s different than when I grew up. I just sat quietly and did my work. Today the teachers can be more of a facilitator. Like my child just did a reflection. It helps them because they get to do something they might be interested in. The teacher presents the content and the kids put it together and my child enjoys this. I am doing a lot more homework I guess you’d say because I’m helping my child learn how to make decisions about the projects that need to be completed and they have to think for themselves.

Eloise, one of the school’s assistant principals, addressed how making the decision to move toward a more student-centered learning environment has positively impacted students and families. She iterated,

We became real specific about how we target learning goals and that decision has had a huge impact on student achievement . . . and I think how the students just enjoy learning this way in general. I’ve seen kids who just hated reading begin to read because they had

a choice in what they read. We try to target kids on their reading level but for some we just have to start by getting a book in their hand. That might mean they read a skateboarding magazine or even a recipe card. Then, teachers began to look at students as individuals and have tried to meet their individual needs. We also had to get comfortable with sharing data with each other. It's like . . . hey, my kids didn't do well on this concept what did you do differently? It took a while to develop that trust but now we are seeing gains because it's not about who did the prettiest craft and placed it out in the hallway. It's about how did we do this or how can we do this so that the student meets their individual potential.

Targeted Instructional Goals

Targeted instructional goals was the third sub-theme that evolved from the major theme learning environment. Instructional goals, when targeted at an individual level, have the ability to meet students where they are and push them forward. When discussing factors that negatively impacted parent involvement, Aron mentioned, "I think the one-size-fits-all approach to anything involving families and kids has to stop. I've noticed in my 27 years that parents need us to help them meet their child where he or she is and then move them forward." Forrest, the school's instructional coach, mentioned,

We are very intentional with every decision that we make. We listen to all stakeholders. We get feedback from all including students. We talk to students in conferences about skills in learning. We ask, "Do you feel prepared, do you see yourself as reader and writer?" or "How do you feel about what you learned?" The teachers follow up with learning targets and asking them if they feel successful in that ability. We made this decision to help students do the metacognitive thinking on their own. Then we go deeper.

We might offer a (PD) on building in student choice. We don't leave the teachers out there to do it all on their own. We need structure, but we also need a balance. In the PD we talk . . . what does choice look like? Is it a menu of outputs? Are students involved in creating the choices of their work? Teachers must be willing to grow their practice and gradually release control to the students. And here they are; we're getting there. The decision to do this has engaged the students and the families more.

When discussing how parents contributed to their child's educational journey, Lucy talked about a conversation she had with her child's teacher involving high stakes test data. Lucy indicated that she had trouble understanding the information so she reached out to her child's teacher for clarification. She revealed,

You know, as a parent, I am responsible here. When I don't understand something I need to make the effort to try to understand. It's my responsibility and in my child's best interest but I felt kind of silly. So, I call the teacher anyway and she meets with me virtually that day. She is so precious. She told me what the terms meant, the strengths, the weaknesses, and what it all meant and how I could support my child at home. She didn't make me feel silly about it either. Next time I have a question, I'll go back to her. She knew some things I could do to help. She pointed me to resources. She told me specific things I could do to help with a specific skill my child struggled on and then she told me how she would address that with my child in the classroom.

Major Theme 5: Approach to School Leadership

"Approach to School Leadership" was revealed as the fifth and final major theme. School leadership can be classified into an array of styles. In addition to the various approaches used to manage a school building, each boasts positive and negative characteristics. "Exclusion of

stakeholder voice” was the first sub-theme derived from the data. Invisible, unavailable, or unapproachable school leaders was acknowledged as the second and final sub-theme that developed as part of the major theme “approach to school leadership.”

Exclusion of Stakeholder Voice

Exclusion of stakeholder voice became an evident sub-theme underpinning the major theme of approach to school leadership. During focus group interviews a lively discussion among parents revealed that past and present interactions with school leaders have been a key factor in their decision to participate in FSPPs. All parents claimed they felt like they had could have a voice in the OES decision-making should they seek out those opportunities. Lucy reported,

I have not actively sought out a position on SIC or PTA, but if I wanted to give input on something I feel very comfortable with sharing with anyone at the school whether it be a positive or negative opinion. Even if I’m not part of those organized committees I think my voice matters and I know they’d give me an audience.

Jena wrote about stakeholder voice in her writing prompt response. She indicated, “Our principal wants everyone to feel like they have a voice and a place. I think this makes parents want to be involved because they know we care about what they want too.” Kennedy shared that she “always felt like she was welcome to contribute to the decision-making going on at the school.” One parent recounted a personal experience, “At another school where my child briefly attended, we all knew who made the decisions and we knew that the decision was made before anyone was asked. Yeah, I didn’t even try there.”

When meeting in focus groups with school leaders, Eloise made a pointed comment about an experience she endured when working at another school. She stated,

A former principal had a decision made and we would work her plan. Here there is a shift in dynamics and people noticed it in me. Back then, I knew when to speak and what to speak. Roles here are different and there is a collaborative approach which is why I am more outspoken. It has changed relationships. He respects what I say and listens to what I say. He listens to what other people say. Culture has always been good in this building but now it's great. And recently better we did a strengths test and are plugging people in based on their strengths and letting teachers pick and choose how they want to serve in things like committees.

Invisible, Unavailable, or Unapproachable School Leaders

The final sub-theme revealed under the major theme approach to school leadership was invisible, unavailable, or unapproachable school leaders. One participant shared,

I didn't even realize that visibility was a priority for me until I realized that I saw this guy, the principal, everywhere. He's in the car line, he's directing traffic, he was running down the street on the first day of school getting parents out of the car and into the building to keep them safe because there was a tornado warning. Guy was soaking wet. He's serving food in the cafeteria when they are short staffed. He's wearing costumes all the time. The assistant principals are out in the car line and petting the dogs. I think one of them was handing out dog treats. Teachers show up to my child's baseball game. I mean, this is great. I know them without even knowing them. They are not invisible, I'll say that.

Isaac pointed out that his only child was just entering the second grade and how it was the first year at the school for his family. He mentioned making a mental note about the employees at Oakdale. He detailed his thoughts:

You know, come to think of it I have always been able to reach the people I need up at the school. Especially when registering at the school. The few times I have had to leave a message I have always had a returned call. I remember when this didn't happen last year at the other school. It was so frustrating especially during a pandemic school year where everything was up in the air anyway. I really appreciate them taking the time to get back even on the little things. I think I message my child's teacher one or two times per week just about homework and she's always available to answer my questions. I do the social media live thing with the principal and he responds immediately right there to my questions. Yeah, this kind of stuff is what makes a difference for me.

Research Question Responses

Responses from participants addressing the research questions were captured by the researcher during interviews and as part of the letter writing exercise. Based on this study's theoretical underpinning inspired by organizational decision-making theory (Simon, 1997) and the theory of overlapping spheres of influence structure (Epstein, 1987), the research questions were developed to provide a narrow scope through which significant statements were recognized and sorted into themes and sub-themes using cross-case analysis. The contributors' responses regarding their beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and goals related to FSPPs were compiled in order to answer the central research question as well as the supporting sub-questions. Declarations from participants' individual interviews, focus group interviews, and letter writing prompts were lifted and processed using Stake's (2006) multiple case study analysis methodology and noted verbatim in support of the research inquiry (Appendix P).

Central Question

The central research question for this research investigation sought to apprehend the

following: “How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?” To identify the factors influencing decisions to partake in a family–school partnerships, participants’ replies to the interview protocols and writing prompts were reviewed. While analyzing data, I kept the organizational decision-making theory and the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, both used as the theoretical framework for this study, in mind as a focus for reference (Appendix N). The results of this investigation revealed that the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influenced parents’ and elementary school leaders’ decisions whether to participate in family–school partnership were as follows: school culture, inclusive partnership practices, commitments and responsibilities, learning environment, and approach to school leadership (Appendix O). Sub-Question 1 was answered by examining the major theme school culture and its sub-themes of communication, continuous improvement, and transparency. Greater detail of the themes and sub-themes is presented below in response to each of the sub-questions.

Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question in this research investigation intended to understand, “How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family–school partnership programs?” Organizational decision-making theory formulated by the work of Simon (1997) focused on understanding human behaviors in relation to rational decision-making. Epstein’s (1987) theory of overlapping spheres provided a framework for meshing parent and school leaders’ collaborative practices. For this study, decision-making theory includes the process for decision-making, specified by stages, specifically the intelligence phase, the design phase, and the choice phase (Simon, 1997). Amid all data collection measures used in this

investigation, participants made significant statements regarding their definition about FSPP participation. The processes for making rational decisions defining FSPP participation included common goals and cultural responsiveness.

When deciding on the definition of FSPP participation, parents and elementary school leaders should consider discussing and setting common goals. Conclusions drawn from each data collection method revealed that having common goals for students was one way that parents and school leaders defined FSPPs. For example, parents and school leaders from OES reported that goal setting among parents and school leaders provided a level of unity. Isaac, a parent of a second-grade student stated,

. . . clear expectations on what the school needs from the parents and what the parents expect from the school, too. I do feel like this school does that and I have seen it through parent conferences. I just had a parent conference and the teacher had this list of scores and levels and was talking about what it all means. She said our goal was to move to a certain reading level by the end and told me how I could help do that. Together we want to get to level M, I believe it was, by the end of the year. I have seen my child recording scores on a sheet and reflecting on what went right or wrong. Even the kids have to set goals. School leaders need to consider input from families and families need to give input too, that's a way they can all be a part of the end goal.

Forrest, an OES school leader, added to the belief that common goals played a factor in defining FSPP participation. Much like the parent responses regarding the definition of participation in an FSPP, Forrest drilled down to the details about teachers communicating clear, consistent expectations for students across the grade level so that all parents could understand the expected outcomes and support the efforts. Frank proclaimed,

We even ask our teachers to provide students with common major assessments. We try to get a picture of where they are and keep on gathering student data, monitoring, tracking, looking at strategies, doing data dives, centered around data and child. If the data is not current, or reflective, we grab something else to give us a clearer picture on where to navigate ourselves instructionally. Then, we communicate the goals to parents in many different ways like conferences, the strategic plan, in the materials we buy with the money brought in from fundraisers . . . all that.

Another way participants defined participation in FSPPs was through making those types of offerings culturally responsive toward the targeted audience. Culturally responsive outreach opportunities, like common goal setting, were highly indicative of the inclusive partnership principles parents and school leaders used to outline the defining characteristics of FSPPs. Jena, a kindergarten parent, indicated,

For me, I'd say that a truly thriving FSPP would be one where teachers are trained in how to deal with all different types of families. That's how I'd define it. One that is representative and welcoming of all the families at the school. We can't control who walks through the door to be a member of our school community, but we can train in how we meet the needs of those families. Are the teachers prepared to deal with that? Can they make connections with families different than the ones they personally relate to? Is the classroom library and curriculum going to reflect the types of families represented in their classrooms? Do you know how to connect with those families?

Hazel, the school's guidance counselor, also commented on how the push to be more culturally responsive has led to families within the school advocating for other families within the school. Sometimes, that looked like making donations for underprivileged families and

sometimes that meant forming relationships with students in the school who were not necessarily their own children. Hazel commented,

I have parents that volunteer to mentor and have lunch with a student once a week to build a positive relationship as well as donate many items such as supplies, clothing, shoes, and coats to meet the needs of our at-risk students and families. I also have parents attend parenting workshops on discipline and how to support a child academically then they might tutor. I encourage families that have been here and families that have established relationships to reach out to new families to invite them in and give them a start. So, it's turned into sort of parents being advocates for their own child and other children in the school. We are responding to needs. Not just our kids, but other people's kids.

Sub-Question 1 of this study was designed to draw out participants' definition of FSPP participation. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and writing prompts identified that parents and school leaders defined FSPPs through inclusive partnership principles. Personal experiences, beliefs, assumptions pointed to common goals and cultural responsiveness as the defining factors for reasons they decided to participate in an FSPP.

Sub-Question 2

The second sub-question in this research investigation intended to understand, "How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family-school partnership programs?" Through Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres framework connecting family, schools, and community engagement and partnerships in schools, parents and school leaders' beliefs about their role in an FSPP was illuminated. Data from this

investigation regarding beliefs about role in an FSPP were based on commitments and responsibilities. Specifically, active participation and shared decision-making helped participants perceive themselves as having a role in OES's FSPPs.

For participants to perceive themselves as having a role in the decision-making processes involving FSPPs, they need to actively participate. Attending outreach opportunities, fulfilling designated responsibilities, working to build relationships, and remaining accessible were noted as key elements of an active FSPP participant. Kennedy claimed that active participation in an FSPP included several elements:

My role is a big role. I see myself as having an equal part as the teachers in making sure my child meets with success. I need to be checking in, asking questions, building relationships with the teachers and other parents. Ideally, I would attend all events in case input is needed, but I do the best I can on that. I like when they respond to me quickly and I am sure they need that from me. We both have big responsibilities here and we need to show up for each other. The decision to get out there and do something defines my role in FSPP.

Aron, a school leader, shared her perceptions relating to roles in FSPPs. The concept of an FSPP and what role school employees should play stood out in all participants' responses. When discussing his role, Aron shared the need to have the stakeholders come together. She stated,

I think we all need to come together as a community inside and outside of school. We all need to be working on relationships with each other. When other people in the community see that they will want to be a part of it. People will choose our school

through choice then, businesses will get involved, and I feel like communication will get stronger by default. So we all need to be there doing our part.

Participants proposed that their role in the decision-making processes involving FSPPs also included sharing in decision-making processes. In her written statement Eloise commented on shared decision-making. She claimed,

To be effective we have to include parents, community members, business partners, and possibly local county or town councils in school decision-making. This can be done through PTA board meetings, School Improvement Council, attending county/town council meetings, and/or surveys.

When discussing role perception with parents regarding FSPPs, shared decision-making was also noted by five out of six participants. Two of the participants discussed using communications about school needs as the factor that influenced participation in shared decision-making. This concept aligns with rational decision-making theory where in the first step an individual identifies a problem, then brings in personal or other stakeholder interests to draw a conclusion. At this point, study participants felt comfortable using their voice to help make decisions about FSPPs if it would positively impact others. When discussing shared decision-making and roles, Lucy stated,

I think being a good decision-maker includes being open to listen to other people's perspectives because they might be able to offer a better alternative or viewpoint to whatever is being debated. This also provides a chance for stakeholders to collaborate, and provides checks and balances. However, you have to have a principal and leadership group that will be willing to accept that type of partnership. I know some that are not.

When discussing shared decision-making and roles in that process as it relates to an FSPP, Charlee commented on school leaders' role in ensuring all stakeholders have a voice:

It's about relationships, listening. Being open. We have to discuss as a leadership team, then take it to faculty counsel, for input and feedback. Whether it be negative or positive and then come together and make a collective decision. We wait until we hear from everyone. PTA, SIC, students, parents. We can't move on something until everyone has their say.

The second sub-question illuminated participants' point of view on role in FSPPs. Participants' substantial statements were viewed through the theoretical lens of organizational decision-making theory supported by the overlapping spheres framework (Epstein, 1987; Simon, 1997). Statements that could be categorized as perceptions of role were grouped under the major theme: commitments and responsibilities. Active participation and shared decision-making were the sub-themes that supported participants' point of view on role in FSPP decision-making.

Sub-Question 3

The third sub-question in this research investigation intended to understand, "What aspects of decision-making processes regarding family-school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students' social, emotional, and academic welfare?" The learning environment was identified as the most notorious factor impacting the social, emotional, and academic welfare of students. A learning environment infused with a commitment to the social and emotional wellness of students as well as instruction that was student centered and targeted had the most impact on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of students. Student centeredness was a factor considered by parents and elementary school leaders when deciding impact on students' social, emotional, and

academic welfare. Brent spoke about student centeredness that he and his family experienced during the focus group:

Principal Greg would have a session on FB [Facebook] live during the pandemic, but kids saw their principal doing something and taking time to make sure they see life goes on. 20 minutes. Focusing on the kids doesn't take long . . . he just did it. Another example is after school on Tuesday they have a social club. They provide guidance to the kids on a lot of issues; it's a nurturing supportive group.

Forrest also commented on the social/emotional wellness focus at the school and coupled the concept with targeted instructional goals. He claimed,

. . . [SEL] impact on students because they gain skills in interpersonal skills.

Stakeholders see kids functioning high and they buy-in, creating a larger community support and value for education. Then you get involved parents which snowballs to higher engagement from students. Once we get that engagement then we use data to target strengths and weaknesses and try to get the students performing at their highest level. It all equals improvements and you will probably see an increase of intentionality around events being planned.

The third sub-question sought to identify perceptions on FSPP impact. Specifically, commentary on social, emotional, and academic welfare was probed. Participants' significant accounts were viewed through the theoretical lens of organizational decision-making theory coupled with tenants of the framework produced by Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres. Accounts that could be characterized as having impact on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of students were collected under the major theme: Learning environment. The sub-

themes that supported participants' point of view on impact were as follows: commitment to social/emotional wellness, student centeredness, and targeted instructional goals.

Sub-Question 4

The fourth and final sub-question in this research investigation intended to understand, "What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?" Spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) and organizational decision-making (Simon, 1997) framed the questions that led to the discovery of ineffective or deficient FSPP decision-making strategies among parents and elementary school leaders. Parents and elementary school leaders believe the approach to leadership can make decisions surrounding FSPPs ineffective or deficient. Particularly, exclusion of stakeholder voice and invisible, unapproachable, or unavailable leaders make FSPP decision-making ineffective and deficient. In her written prompt, Deana revealed,

We have a pretty ideal FSPP. We have great communication. I feel like I'll be heard. You can walk in there and know the whole team there loves what they do. If they didn't act like that (which I believe is genuine) I think it would all be dysfunctional. Organization would be a mess and no decisions would be made because nothing could function properly. Also, people have to have that comfortability factor. If a leadership team decides everything and that parents can't have a voice well . . . they'll shut down and there won't be a functioning FSPP.

Eight participants mentioned visibility, availability, and approachability as reasons they decide to participate in FSPPs. A lack of these elements was confirmed to be a factor that would lead to ineffective or deficient FSPPs. Brent elaborated,

The challenge of any teacher or principal or group leader should know parents have strong beliefs and facing that challenge is difficult and sometimes you have to split the difference. They can't be unapproachable because they are providing a service. I'd suggest they just at least listen to people even if they don't give them the answer they wantI mean doing that part is 90% there. If nothing else if they walk out of a meeting win or lose knowing you are there for your child and they want to serve your kids . . . 99 percent will be happy with that even if you don't get what you want. They have to be available and parents need to be heard and we all need to have more margin of patience.

Two other participants heavily focused on invisible leaders. Based on past experiences, the invisibility of school leaders made them want to withdraw participation efforts due to lack of connection. Lucy shared her experiences with an invisible school leader:

I just would not get involved at the other school because I didn't feel welcomed. You never saw the principals. I didn't even know the assistant principal's name for a few months at the last school. I'm not saying they didn't care, I am just saying their undetectable presences didn't grow my desire to be a part of anything.

The fourth sub-question for this study identified decisions-making practices having perceived ineffective or deficient impact on participation in FSPPs. Direct statements given by participants were considered through the organizational decision-making theory sustained by the overlapping spheres framework (1987). Interpretations that could be pigeonholed as decision-making practices perceived as ineffective or deficient were identified under the major theme: approach to school leadership. Exclusion of stakeholder voice and invisible, unapproachable, or unavailable leaders were the sub-themes that supported participants' point of view.

Summary

This instrumental case study aimed to bring light to the influences that impact parents' and elementary school leaders' beliefs and actions that motivate them toward active participation in FSPPs. Using Stake's (2006) multiple case study analysis process and worksheets, participants' responses to interviews, focus groups, and independent letter writing exercises were analyzed to answer the central research question: How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP? Six parents and six school leaders took part in the investigation at one large, public elementary school in the southeastern United States. Table 2 displayed the five major themes and 12 sub-themes that emerged as part of the multiple case study data analysis process. Direct, verbatim statements from the participants were utilized to support the discussion of themes and answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that led to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family–school partnership program (FSPP) in a large school district in the southeastern United States. Stake’s (2006) multiple case study data analysis process and worksheets were used to evaluate participant responses to individual interviews, focus group interviews, and prompt responses. Data were viewed through the lens of the study’s underpinning theories, organizational decision-making (Simon, 1997), and overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) which worked simultaneously to help reveal understanding surrounding the phenomenon. This chapter also includes dialogue and interpretation of the study’s thematic findings. The study’s discoveries related to implications for policy, practice, associated literature, and theory are also revealed along with the limitations and delimitations of the investigation. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research and final conclusions.

Discussion

In this section I discuss the study’s findings in light of the developed themes which were situated in empirical literature and viewed through the lens of the supporting theoretical frameworks. The interpretation of the findings is discussed first, followed by implications for policy and practice. Theoretical and empirical implications are then conveyed, and the limitations and delimitations of the study are communicated. This section concludes with recommendations for future research. Participants’ quotations are used to support and confirm my interpretations of the study’s findings.

Interpretation of Findings

The themes discovered during the data analysis procedure were used to interpret the study's findings. The information gleaned from the findings correlated with current empirical literature regarding FSPPs. Using Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the central research question and sub-questions were answered. Stake's (2006) multicase analysis procedure was used to investigate participants' responses to interviews and focus group questions and a writing prompt. Individual cases were analyzed and the findings between the two nested cases were merged to reveal the quintain.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The individual cases in this study were scrutinized and later the findings were merged using cross-case analysis. The five major themes revealed during data analysis were *school culture, inclusive partnership practices, commitments and responsibilities, learning environment, and approach to school leadership*. The subsidiary sub-themes were *communication, continuous improvement, transparency, common goals, cultural responsiveness, active participation, shared decision-making, commitment to social-emotional wellness, student centeredness, targeted instructional goals, exclusion of stakeholder voice, and invisible, unapproachable, or unavailable leaders*. Interpretation of thematic findings is further expounded upon below.

Personal Beliefs and Experiences Influence FSPP Participation Decisions. Due to lack of program regulation, leadership style, and school culture, experiences in collaborative partnerships can vary. In this investigation, parents' and school leaders' personal beliefs and experiences played a significant role in their decision to actively participate in an FSPP. When specific strategies were used to regulate FSPPs, collaborative partnerships at OES became

strengthened, sustained, and representative of most families making up the school's population. Recent empirical literature by Sim et al. (2021) offered ideas for increasing parent and community engagement by taking three steps to shift school culture: (a) develop a school culture that enables family/community engagement, (b) establish goals and strategies for parent involvement, and (c) drive school's efforts at building partnerships with families.

It was also perceived that when partnership opportunities are regularly communicated in a variety of ways, active participation by both families and school leaders is increased. Brent, an OES parent, stated, "Yes, if we know about something we try to always help out or participate." In his individual interview, Brent spoke about communication for himself and elaborated on the issue:

I'm an IT guy, I prefer email. Email is permanent, written, and organizable. Phone is great and the human connection is a nice touch, but I like to store things so I can refer back. If there are problems, I want a phone call. OES communication is sometimes redundant . . . they email, do phone blasts, mention on Facebook. Social media is also great communication outlet for whoever does that. Whatever kind you want to receive, I don't think it's too much because people miss things. I'd err on the side of overcommunicate. Like I said I'm an IT guy, so I do email all day but that might not be everyone's situation. What if someone's voicemail is full . . . they are going to miss out. That's why they need to overcommunicate. At OES kids sometimes even come home with stickers on shirts as reminders about events.

Perasso and Barone (2021) corroborated this strategy as they hypothesized an increase in the number of communication strategies used by a school might also increase the school surroundings' safety. The study by Perasso and Barone proved that a greater number of

communication strategies within the school increased the perception of safer school surroundings. Since variety and volume of communication increases school safety and FSPP participation, school leaders must look to grow and differentiate their communication efforts. These actions assisted with creating meaningful engagement opportunities and a higher presence of parents at OES which, based on participants' responses, positively affected student safety, well-being, and success. The findings obtained through my investigation corroborate the empirical discoveries outlined by Perasso and Barone.

In addition to communication, transparency between the two parties was highly valued, especially when decisions were made that directly impacted students. According to the findings of this study, when stakeholders feel they can have a voice, they are eager to participate in FSPPs. This means that school leaders must know their community and have a platform for hearing their voice, not just complying with central office directives as they may not be fully applicable to a school's population. This is particularly important in large districts. Researchers L.-S. Wong et al. (2020) discovered that even though school leaders had the power to make most instructional decisions for their institution, most overwhelmingly made decisions consistent with central office preferences. Simon (1997) theorized that using a decision-making protocol can assist decision-makers to eliminate risk and uncertainty. This can be applied by parents and school leaders who wish to evade a one-size-fits-all approach to FSPPs. Greg, the OES school principal, commented on decision-making regarding FSPPs at OES, when he specified,

If there is a hard and fast district mandate, I may not be able to change that, but I can tell my people the "why" behind it. I think that is so important because it builds understanding as well as trust. I communicate it to all the people. Even the parents. Through PTA, SIC, our FCR, and in faculty meetings. Some things I can't change, but

anytime we have autonomy we cater to our community by putting our teachers', students', and families' needs first.

Finally, parents and school leaders noted that when steps to evaluate FSPPs are regularly implemented, more families can be reached in an applicable way, therefore resulting in stakeholder's consistent, on-going decisions to support a school through FSPPs. Widiharti et al. (2019) supported this notion by conducting an analysis on the implementation of school partnership programs through program evaluation methods. Their study found that partnership programs can have a tangible impact and that evaluation processes lead to improved educational quality due to the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Aron, the OES intermediate grade level FCR, commented on OES's work to evaluate school programming in her individual interview when she stated, "If something doesn't work, we try to find out why. We go back to the drawing board. We are always trying to improve our school and we look at every angle." In conclusion, this study revealed communication, continuous program improvement, and transparency as elements of school culture that influence stakeholders' decisions to participate in FSPPs. Based on this evidence, stakeholders need to have personal experiences that shape their beliefs toward FSPP participation decisions.

Components of a School's FSPP Must Be Collaboratively Defined by Parents and School Leaders. Parents and school leaders at OES defined participation in FSPPs as a two-way partnership that works together to create common, purposeful goals for students and the direction of the school. It was perceived that the collaborative effort requires input from several parties including parents, school leaders, students, and sometimes community members. This idea is consistent with Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres framework indicating that the contexts of home, school, and community can influence children through interaction. Until these factors are

included, the study's members believe FSPP participation cannot be solidified. To combat such barriers, Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence model can be considered since it illustrates a global and holistic image of partnership.

Scanlan and Park (2020) defined collaborative efforts as authentic partnerships that act as respectful alliances amongst stakeholders who value relationship building, communication, and the sharing of power. Their study revealed that authentic partnerships become a powerful tool to enhance social justice in school; the partnerships with shared goals also empower marginalized students and families. Deanna, an OES parent, iterated her thoughts on common goal setting: "With two distinctly different kids, I have leaned on the teachers and admins at OES to guide me in order to help my kids, even be an advocate for them in ways I didn't know I needed to be." This statement coupled with the empirical evidence highlights the significance of common goal setting.

Furthermore, cultural responsiveness is a defining factor of FSPPs since individuals who present themselves as culturally competent are able to avoid relationship breakdown which naturally influences decisions to participate in an FSPP. Freidus (2020) claimed that one school's reaction to the presidential election demonstrated teachers' dedication to developing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness, but that it also highlighted teachers' struggles with tying such goals to students' academic learning. Professional development, approach to leadership, and teacher preparation hold the key to creating a culturally responsive school environment (Freidus, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Jena, a parent, commented on the inclusion of multicultural books and teaching materials as an action she has witnessed OES implement as they moved toward cultural responsiveness. Jena shared, "I have even seen books in classrooms change. They are more representative of the school's population. They are intentionally being

added.” Greg, the OES school principal, identified TIPS and ACEs training as a district and OES school priority. He mentioned he had been “using PD funds to hire subs so that teachers could concentrate on the training . . . because it was that important.” In conclusion, common goal setting and cultural responsiveness are the inclusive practices that define FSPP participation for parents and school leaders at OES and both can be achieved through a variety of methods.

Strong FSPPs Include Roles for Parents and School Leaders. Parents and school leaders representing OES agreed their role in FSPPs was vital. Together, they believed each was equally responsible to help make decisions for the school and students; they believe one way to do that was through active participation in FSPPs on a regular basis. Examples of active participation included individuals taking initiative to support the development and learning of children. In addition, they believed they are accountable for sharing in the decision-making process so that proper placement, programing, and advocacy can take place. Evidence of rational decision-making emerged as the participants discussed working together to make school-based decisions by noting elements of problem recognition, information searches, and sets of alternatives; all are elements highlighted in Simon’s (1997) organizational decision-making theory.

Active participation and shared decision-making are the commitments and responsibilities that outline roles of parent and school leaders in FSPPs. Kennedy shared her opinion about shared decision-making: “I think shared decision-making automatically leads to active participation; active participation is just a natural result of that kind of work.” Hazel, the OES school counselor, spoke on her experience with shared decision-making:

When I worked with teachers to decide on how I could best help them, we decided that I was most needed in the academic realm. We looked at the gaps and I hosted small groups

on study skills, executive functioning, and focus. Test taking skills and strategies were also a big focus and I led those using a focus group model for students.

Examples of shared decision-making were evident across OES parents, teachers, and school leaders. Another measure that can be applied to increase the validity and reliability of decisions is using data to drive choices. Dogan and Demirbolat (2021) investigated data-driven decision-making and found the process legitimate. When participating in shared decision-making, parents and school leaders should use data to drive determinations. Simon's (1997) decision-making stages would place this action in the design phase of decision-making, which calls for parties to formulate models, set criteria for choice, search for alternatives, and predict/measure outcomes.

Strong FSPPs Include a Focus on Student Learning Environment. Learning environments have an impact on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of children (Yang et al., 2020). It was perceived that when parents and school leaders received training in ACEs and TIPS, they were likely to emphasize a learning environment focused on social and emotional well-being (Nickerson et al., 2019). The participants in this study thought that when students were socially and emotionally well, they were more engaged in learning which resulted in higher academic achievement. Also, they believed that when learning environments remain focused on children, rather than the teacher expertise, students could think independently and would engage in learning more frequently. Isaac claimed, "My child is happy to go to school every day. I think that is because they make him think they are all there just for him." Aron elaborated on being student centered in the classroom. She claimed her team "tried their best to meet the individual needs of the students in their classroom . . . including personal needs." Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres can be used to guide the overlap between school personnel and family

relationships because the framework guides the dynamics by pushing forces together using background and practices of families, schools, and communities; developmental characteristics of students; and history, time, and policy contexts.

When targeted learning goals are identified and understood by school leaders, parents, and students, higher levels of academic achievement can be attained (Fuentes & Jimerson, 2019). Deana's comment on targeted instruction was enlightening:

The teachers told me about some skills that were weak and how I could help hone those skills. We both knew to work on this and so did my child. You could see a difference in the grades once we were all working toward the same goal.

The participants' believed that this type of intentionality was one factor that helped OES sustain a healthy school climate and academic excellence. Teachers can take additional steps to build knowledge about content-specific teaching practices so that they can offer the most valuable advice to stakeholders (Fuentes & Jimerson, 2019). To summarize, OES participants emphasized social/emotional wellness, student centeredness, and targeted instructional goals as the elements of a strong learning environment that have a positive impact on students' social, emotional, and academic welfare.

Ineffective or Deficient Practices Limit Benefits of FSPPs. According to the data, participants believed an overly authoritative approach to school leadership impacted FSPPs negatively in a variety of ways. In addition, participants noted that when school leaders or teachers are invisible, FSPPs cannot be as effective since relationships are impeded. Lucy made a comment about seeing the OES school leaders regularly; she maintained, "I do see them everywhere. I don't think there has been one day I haven't seen the school leaders at drop off or pick up. To me that is different than what I have experienced in the past." Unavailable school

leaders are not able to connect with stakeholders; therefore, communication suffers, and clear, consistent school goals are not communicated (Gümüs & Bellibas, 2020). Subsequently, school leaders who are not willing to include stakeholder voice also run the risk of limiting the school's scope and ability to achieve since a variety of alternatives cannot be considered in any decision-making effort (Simon, 1997). Being invisible, unavailable, seeming unapproachable, or dismissing stakeholder voices are leadership approaches that the OES participants perceived as the cause of ineffective or deficient FSPPs.

Implications for Policy or Practice

As a result of this study, implications for policy and practice were determined. An examination of the study's findings revealed that the participants' understood the significance of making FSPP decisions using a rational decision-making process. The participants believed that the relationships formed with families, students, and community members were vital in sustaining their FSPPs and that as a result the high levels of parent participation positively influenced students' social/emotional well-being as well as academic achievement levels.

Implications for Policy

An analysis of the findings indicated that successful FSPPs did not have to be mandated through policy. Relationships between schools and their stakeholders are established by maintaining an inviting school culture that is inclusive of others' voices on school-related subject matters. Further analysis of findings revealed that it may be in the districts' best interest to facilitate training on how to establish FSPPs using a framework for decision-making and inclusive practices as well as explore non-traditional outreach options. From the data presented, one can advocate that policies that increase decentralization in schools may also be crucial to facilitate effective and sustained FSPPs. It may be inferred from the data that when families and

community members are allowed to give input about programs, curriculum, partnership opportunities, or other school-based involvements, it may encourage others to build relationships with school employees and further support the school.

In addition to decentralized school leadership, data further suggested that it might be beneficial to invest in more professional development and resources positioned on social/emotional well-being. It was discovered in the data that opportunities to utilize SEL resources promoted strengthened learning environments. SEL practices also yielded stronger trust between parents and school employees as well as between students and teachers. The data uncovered parents' beliefs about SEL as a major factor impacting their level of trust and willingness to participate in FSPPs. In Jena's writing prompt she stated,

My two children have looked forward to each new school year and all of the fun activities that are school wide and led by individual teachers and grade levels. Each of the teachers my own children have had have been supportive and encouraging and have been a great fit for what my child needed. If I ever have a concern about something I feel like I can reach out to the teacher and my concerns are heard and valued.

In the first focus group, Isaac also mentioned his views on SEL and how OES seemed to make SEL practices a major priority. He stated,

I see their focus on the kids and their social/emotional health. They are always doing something fun to support community interaction like, I think they just did "Rock Your School Day" and I wasn't sure what that was, but they did all sorts of fun, interactive stuff and incorporated the learning. My child got to do math in the dark using glowsticks. After that, my kid who was struggling with a math concept, was willing to try it again

with me at home. I do credit the school on that, and yes, that makes me want to do more for the school because they are helping me out too.

Implications for Practice

This instrumental case study also resulted in practical implications. The findings revealed that the participants understood the importance of building an effective, sustained FSPP and that the factors which make up an FSPP must be regularly maintained and evaluated. The participants agreed that a lack of program structure, stakeholder voice, and authoritative school leadership negatively impacts FSPP participation. In her individual interview Eloise, one of the school's two assistant principals, commented on authoritative leadership,

The former principal had a decision made already and she would have a plan and roles to lead out the plan. With our new administrator there is a shift in dynamics and people have noticed it in me. Before, I was fulfilling a role. I knew when to speak and what to speak. Now our principal wants to know from the very get go what we are thinking. I feel very comfortable sharing. Team dynamics have changed; now, everything is collaborative which is why I am more outspoken. It has changed relationships. He respects what I say and listens to what I say. He wants to hear from everyone, teachers and parents included.

Adding to the idea of structured programing, Charlee said, "It's about finding what helps students at the end of the day. Meeting teachers where they are . . . and you know, seeing what parents need to help their children be successful. We have a plan in place to determine all that."

Lucy, a parent new to public education, harped on her excitement to join the school's PTA based on recommendations from friends and statements made by neighborhood acquaintances; she noted,

No one really asked me to be involved at the last school, but I have already signed up to serve on the book fair committee based on the PTA outreach form. They shared what they did in the past and asked if I had any input. I didn't due to my lack of experience, but the fact that they even asked my opinion meant a lot to me. I felt included and, I appreciated that they were trying to make something I've heard they already do really, really well an even better experience for the kiddos.

School leaders who are visible, available, and approachable played a primary role in their decision on whether to participate in the school's outreach opportunities, specifically, FSPPs. The participants believed that OES had leaders that maintained such qualities; however, many of the participants had been enrolled in other elementary schools across the same district where this display among school leaders was not equivalent. Kennedy said, "I work at a school, and I can say that our leadership team does not go to the extent the OES leadership team does when it comes to visibility and availability. That is why we chose to come here." The participants believed there had always been schools in the district with involved leaders, but that OES stood out as having visible, available, and approachable leaders. Every participant mentioned visibility, availability, and approachability as a strength among the OES school leaders and referenced those characteristics as why they or their children took part in school activities regularly. Participants associated visibility, availability, and approachability as major factors supporting strong relationships between families, students, and school leaders.

Schools, families, and communities must work together to support students. From the data presented, one can determine that when there are strong relationships, effective and sustained FSPPs can be established and maintained, resulting in improved social/emotional student well-being and higher academic achievement. The students need to feel comfortable in

their school environment, should see and communicate with their school's leaders, and should know their caregivers have a relationship with the adults inside the school building. Students must know they are not just learners who are supported by their classroom teachers, but they are individuals supported by a team of advocates who care about both their academic success and their friendships, interests, and health. The data revealed that families and school leaders want all children to be successful; however, lack of voice, transparency, and cultural responsiveness are confining aspects when working to sustain collaborative partnerships. School districts should consider having resources that foster family–school relationships.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The findings that resulted from this investigation had theoretical and empirical implications. The theories supporting the investigation were Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Based on implications arising from the inquiry, recommendations relating to FSPPs were made to stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

The theories guiding this instrumental case study were Simon's (1997) decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. This case study focused on parents' and school leaders' decisions to participate in FSPPs at one elementary school in a large school district located in the southeastern region of the United States. The findings suggested that certain factors could positively impact decisions to participate in FSPPs. All 12 participants agreed that decision-making processes utilized together by the stakeholders were vital in the effectiveness and sustaining ability in non-Title I FSPPs. Forrest said during his interview, "I think decisions have to be made intentionally, yes, using a process, and with the

parents because we need parents to support us on the instructional side of things.” Eloise in her written prompt remarked, “We use systematic process to make decisions. We have teams, committees, groups, organizations, and we begin with norms and goals. We consider the angles, sometimes we have to do research, but we base decisions on our kids and families.”

The participants further agreed that FSPP participation by parents and school leaders positively influenced the social, emotional, and academic success of students. The participants believed that their SEL focus at the school and district level provided for safe and engaging learning environments where students felt individually acknowledged and understood. Brent commented, “I mean, even the office staff, when I pick up my kids, ask about my family and talk to my children about their day.” Deana noted, “My child and my child’s teacher made a connection over the loss of a sibling. He has sad days, but his teacher understood that and knew how to comfort him with the help needed it.” Aron, the intermediate FCR, even shared her perspective on SEL; she claimed, “I want to know the good and the bad. If your child has something to celebrate I wanna know or if a family pet were to pass . . . I need to know so I can offer additional support.”

Approaching this case study from a decision-making standpoint revealed how collaborative partnerships, such as FSPPs, could be more effective when intentionally managed; using the decision-making approach allowed for the study of the complexity of FSPP partnerships. A study of the literature uncovered that there are no set structures for FSPPs in schools with non-Title I distinction. Current literature reveals that stakeholders who design or maintain FSPPs using a structured decision-making model have students that benefit socially, emotionally, or academically (Fuentes & Jimerson, 2019; Nickerson et al., 2019; Scanlan & Park, 2020). The data revealed that the three components of Simon’s (1997) decision making

model supported by the structured guidance of Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres theory existed within the decision-making practices regarding FSPPs at the study site.

Participants in this case study believed in strong FSPPs that could positively benefit the students, families, teachers, and school leaders. Isaac declared, "The schools can't do it all, and I need them to help me target how to best help my child. So, yes, I'll be participating so that they see me and know me and know who I am." Even though the participants believed that FSPPs did not need to be mandated in non-Title I schools, they believed that the school district should be proactive in training all stakeholders in relationship building, SEL concepts, and FSPP best practices. Kenned wrote, "I do think I need to know more about SEL and what the schools are doing to help kids socially and emotionally."

The results of this instrumental case study supported Simon's (1997) decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The study participants claimed that they established effective FSPPs by applying a structured decision-making protocol that includes all stakeholder voices. Students were said to have functioned at lower stress levels, had reduced behavioral referrals, better relationships with peers, and were meeting academic achievement goals beyond their projected growth target. The participants shared that their experience with other non-OES families and school leaders operating in an authoritative capacity experienced frustration and did not likely decide to participate in FSPPs offered by their institution.

Empirical Implications

Existing research indicates that students with high levels of stakeholder support perform better academically, socially, and emotionally (Epstein, 1987; Mowder, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2019). These benefits highlight the significance of designing FSPP stakeholder voice,

transparency, and continuous program evaluation (Perasso & Barone, 2021; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Sim et al., 2021). An analysis of data on this study's findings indicated that rational decision-making provided stakeholders with a real-world viewpoint in regard to FSPPs and that the procedures and protocols produced higher FSPP participation and overall stakeholder benefit. The participants agreed that the students who experienced this level of support were happier, received higher test scores, and built better peer relationships. School leaders must be willing to put in the work to establish strong relationships while also maintaining effective FSPPs at their schools.

The rise of school leaders' approach to management may be of interest to this research's audience. The participants in this study felt the urge to comment on only school leaders' management style when referring to ineffective or deficient aspects of decision-making regarding FSPPs. All participants agreed that stakeholders must understand the commitments and responsibilities of caregivers and school leaders or realize their FSPPs could fail. Lucy candidly remarked, "I like school leaders who are transformational because it seems to me, they have everyone's best interest in mind." School leaders who are intentionally visible and approachable help to create a family-like environment and a sense of belonging for their school stakeholders, especially the students (Yang et al., 2020).

Empirical research is lacking in relation to the overt exploration of decision-making and FSPPs. The current literature focus is on types of school partnership programs, not necessarily the structures used by stakeholders in non-Title I schools. The current investigation deviates from previous research in that it looks at decision-making regarding FSPPs at non-Title I schools. By deviating from past investigations, the current study champions the need for future research on decision-making processes and FSPPs in schools without Title I distinction or a

structured FSPP. Stakeholders are urged to create a plan to develop and sustain FSPPs so that students reap the maximum social, emotional, and academic benefits.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations existed in this investigation over which I, the researcher, had no authority. Limitations for this investigation included my inability to select the study's members and having to recruit school leader participants based solely on job title. These constraints resulted in a lack of diversity amongst participants. I also made intentional decisions to define and limit the boundaries of this inquiry which resulted in study delimitations. Delimitations for this investigation included the application of the case study research design, the research questions, participation criteria, and the location where the investigation took place. Specifically, the findings divulged from this research are representative of a precise sample of participants located in a precise location. The following section further elaborates this research study's limitations and delimitations.

The breadth of this investigation was limited based on the study's setting as well as distinct criteria for participant acquisition, specifically purposeful sampling for parent participants and convenience sampling for school leader participants. The participant criteria and study setting also limits this investigation from being applied in other U.S. regions and school districts since the findings are based on participants' varying personal beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and goals related to participation in FSPPs. Specifically, the findings from this study were reliant on parent and school leader participants who were selected and willing to participate in the investigation and specific job titles assigned to school leaders. If this study were to be conducted in another school district or with different parents and elementary school leaders, limited generalizability in study findings could occur. While I would have preferred to

select individuals to be included as participants who were more racially diverse, all participants were forthcoming in responses related to participation in FSPPs which allowed me to collect necessary data to support the study's findings.

A case study design was applied to this investigation because it allowed me to gather participants' views surrounding decision-making practices that lead to beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in FSPPs within a bounded system. Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory was used as the theoretical underpinning to recognize decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in an FSPP. Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence identified family, school, and community actions that influence student growth and learning. Intentionally designed research questions permitted significant statements to be translated into major themes and sub-themes, therefore extending Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory and Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence.

Parent participants were selected using the purposeful sampling technique. Requirements for parent participants included having at least one currently enrolled child at the study site whose enrollment could be verified. School leader participants were selected based on their assigned job title; the convenience sampling method was utilized. School leaders included the principal, one assistant principal, an instructional coach, a technology specialist, a guidance counselor, and an intermediate faculty counsel representative. Limiting the number of participants was essential as the study sought to understand beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and goals that influence parents and school leaders' decisions to participate in an FSPP.

This investigation was conducted in a large school district located in the southeastern United States. The study site was carefully chosen based on the school's non-Title I distinction,

accreditation status, record of academic rigor, and high levels of parent and student satisfaction. In addition, the school district did not prescribe set structures for developing or maintaining FSPPs. Based on this understanding, participants' personal accounts yielded in-depth knowledge about factors that guide their decision(s) to participation in FSPPs. This study included active, partially active, and non-active FSPP participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section provides recommendations for future research based on the study's findings, limitations, and delimitations. The study results indicated that structured decision-making practices in relation to FSPPs had a positive impact on FSPP participation by both parents and school leaders. The current study's participants worked in a school where the culture already support strong family partnerships; however, continuous program evaluation and cultural responsiveness increases FSPP participation, both of which were intentionally implemented by the school's current administration. A multiple case study design could be utilized to explore FSPPs across multiple sites; specifically, future research could be conducted at varying school levels, such as middle and high school. One angle that might positively contribute to the pedagogical field is perspectives of parents and school leaders at the middle or high school levels since empirical research claims FSPP participation and focus tends to decrease at those levels. However, there may be other gaps between FSPPs in non-Title I elementary schools that need to be explored.

Future studies might also investigate difficulties that school leaders experience when working to build relationships with parents who are from non-traditional settings. Individuals who speak a different language in the home, single-parents, or homes where both parents work are examples of non-traditional settings. Epstein (1987) argued that stakeholders should work to

build *family-like schools* and *school-like families*, or the partnership benefits may be at insufficient levels. This form of research could be completed over multiple sites with maximum variation represented among the participant population.

Since standardized testing and nationally normed curriculum have placed increased demands on student performance levels, a study might look at which districts provide supports or structures for FSPPs in non-Title I schools and whether the FSPPs in those schools thrive. A look at student achievement levels should also be considered. A mixed-methods or applied research approach examining both qualitative and quantitative data could yield rich results in determining the best FSPP decision-making approach and if identified, which has the most significant impact on student success.

Conclusion

This single instrumental case study sought to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that led to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in FSPPs. Using Simon's (1997) organizational decision-making theory with support from Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the investigation explored decision-making practices that influenced FSPP participation. Data were collected from 12 participants through individual interviews, focus groups, and writing prompt responses. The data were analyzed using Stake's (2006) multicase methodology and corresponding worksheets. The data analysis processes yielded major themes and sub-themes surrounding the phenomenon. Five major themes materialized from the analysis of data: school culture, inclusive partnership practices, commitments and responsibilities, learning environment, and approach to leadership. Each major theme resulted in the following corresponding sub-themes: communication, continuous improvement, transparency, common goals, cultural responsiveness, active

participation, shared decision-making, commitment to social/emotional wellness, student centeredness, targeted instructional goals, exclusion of stakeholder voice, and invisible, unapproachable, or unavailable leaders. The study's main finding discovered that when strategic decision-making practices are used to support partnership attempts, such as an FSPP, parents and school leaders are more likely to actively participate.

The study's members believed that their participation in FSPPs played a vital role in the school and students' success. Two key takeaways were revealed from the findings. First, FSPP participation was perceived as having a positive influence on the social, emotional, and academic success of students. Lastly, stakeholders must understand the significance of using a rational decision-making model to intentionally develop FSPP opportunities if they want to reap the most benefit from the partnership. Highly effective and sustained FSPPs increase student achievement levels and well-being as well as ongoing stakeholder support. Haphazardly designing FSPPs without identifying important facts and information, performing analysis, then making decisions using step-by-step procedures places stakeholders in danger of producing ineffective FSPPs that yield little benefit.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 2, 2021

Sherrie Brookie
Gail Collins

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-995 AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF PARENTS' AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERS' BELIEFS THAT LEAD TO DECISIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Dear Sherrie Brookie, Gail Collins,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any

modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to understand the decision-making practices of parents and elementary school leaders that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family-school partnership program (FSPP). I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be either parents or school leaders at [REDACTED] Elementary School.

Parents must be 18 years of age or older and have a child currently enrolled as a student. School leaders must be 18 years of age or older, employed at the school, a member of the school's leadership team, and responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the school building. Participants, if willing, will be asked to engage in an audio-and video-recorded, in-person interview (60 minutes), an audio- and video-recorded, in-person focus group (60 minutes), and an individual letter writing exercise conducted via email exchange (7 days). After the interview, the focus group, and letter writing exercise, data will be transcribed verbatim and participants will be asked to review the transcripts and the researcher's findings to ensure accuracy. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate,

1. **Parent Participants** will be asked to complete a survey. Click here to access the parent survey: PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY
2. **School Leader Participants** will be asked to respond to this email expressing interest.

A consent document will be emailed to you if you are selected to participate in the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the individual interview.

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. All participants will be given a \$25 Amazon gift card by the researcher. This gift card will be handed directly to each participant after all the participant exercises have been completed. To be eligible for compensation, the participant will have to complete all procedural steps of the study including an individual interview, participation in one focus group conversation, one letter-writing exercise, and transcript review. Failure to complete all procedures will forfeit monetary benefits. The \$25 Amazon gift card will not be pro-rated if a subject does not complete the study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
 Sherrie Brookie, Ed.S.
 Doctoral Candidate
 sbrookie@liberty.edu

Appendix C: Parent Screening Survey

Parent Screening Survey

1. Do you have a currently enrolled student at Oakdale Elementary School?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. How many years have you been a parent of an Oakdale Elementary School student?
 (this can be a total of currently enrolled students and previously enrolled students)
3. Have you ever participated as a parent in non-required OES activities (parent conferences, PTA meetings, volunteering, etc.)?
☐ yes
☐ no
4. Which types of parent engagement activities have you participated in at Oakdale Elementary School?
5. Would you be interested in participating in a research study regarding family and school partnership programs?
☐ yes
☐ no

The following questions are asked to help me select a diversified group of parent participants. You can elect to not answer any of the following questions, and it will not keep you from being selected as a participant.

6. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female
7. What is your age?
8. What is your ethnicity?
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ Two or More Races
☐ White
☐ Other

9. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Some High School
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Career Certificate
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate Degree
- ☐ Other

Appendix D: Welcome Email to Parent Participants

AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF PARENTS' AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERS' BELIEFS THAT LEAD TO DECISIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Sherrie Hembree Brookie
Liberty University School of Education

Date

Mrs. Jane Doe
OES Parent Participant
123 Oakdale School Road
Bluefield, Southeastern State 12345

Dear Mrs. Doe,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study to understand the decision-making practices of elementary school parents that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family-school partnership program (FSPP). I look forward to meeting you and sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview, a focus group interview, a writing prompt exercise, a review of your one-on-one interview transcript, and a review of your part of the focus group session as a way to check for accuracy of my interpretation.

A letter of consent has been linked here for your convenience. View this letter in its entirety. Afterwards please print, sign, and return the letter to me at sbrookie@liberty.edu. If you do not have access to a printer or if wish to receive a paper copy, you may send an email request to me at sbrookie@liberty.edu. Upon request of a paper copy of the consent form, I will mail the document and a self-addressed return envelope. I will contact you to schedule your one-on-one interview as soon as I receive your letter of consent.

As a reminder, the one-on-one interview and focus group sessions will be conducted in person and recorded to assist me when analyzing the entirety of the collected research data.

I value your participation in this research study and appreciate your enthusiasm to share your experiences with decision-making and family-school partnership programs. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me.

With sincere gratitude,

Sherrie H. Brookie
sbrookie@email.com
Instructional Coach, Bluefield County School District
123-456-7890

Appendix E: Welcome Email to School Leader Participants

AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF PARENTS' AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERS' BELIEFS THAT LEAD TO DECISIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Sherrie Hembree Brookie
Liberty University School of Education

Date

Mrs. Jane Doe
School Leadership Team Member
123 Oakdale School Road
Bluefield, Southeastern State 12345

Dear Mrs. Doe,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study to understand the decision-making practices of elementary school leaders' that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family-school partnership program (FSPP). I look forward to meeting you and sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview, a focus group interview, a writing prompt exercise, a review of your one-on-one interview transcript, and a review of your part of the focus group session as a way to check for accuracy of my interpretation.

A letter of consent has been linked here for your convenience. View this letter in its entirety. Afterwards please print, sign, and return the letter to me at sbrookie@liberty.edu. If you do not have access to a printer or if wish to receive a paper copy, you may send an email request to me at sbrookie@liberty.edu. Upon request of a paper copy of the consent form, I will mail the document and a self-addressed return envelope. I will contact you to schedule your one-on-one interview as soon as I receive your letter of consent.

As a reminder, the one-on-one interview and focus group sessions will be conducted in person and recorded to assist me when analyzing the entirety of the collected research data.

I value your participation in this research study and appreciate your enthusiasm to share your experiences with decision-making and family-school partnership programs. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me.

With sincere gratitude,

Sherrie H. Brookie
sbrookie@email.com
Instructional Coach, Bluefield County School District
123-456-7890

Appendix F: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the Project: An Instrumental Case Study of Parents' and Elementary School Leaders' Beliefs That Lead to Decisions to Participate in Family-School Partnership Programs

Principal Investigator: Sherrie H. Brookie, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and either a parent or school leader at [REDACTED]. Parents must be 18 years of age or older and have a child currently enrolled as a student. School leaders must be 18 years of age or older, employed at the school, a member of the school's leadership team, and responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the school building. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the decision-making practices of parents' and elementary school leaders' that lead to their beliefs and courses of action relating to participation in a family-school partnership.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in the following activities:

1. Participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. This interview will be audio- and video-recorded and will take approximately one hour to complete.
2. Review the interview transcript for accuracy. After the interview, you will be asked to read the researcher's interpretation of the interview to ensure its accuracy. You will have an opportunity to discuss the findings with the researcher if desired.
3. Participate in an in-person focus group session with the researcher and other participants from your elementary school. Questions will be based on decision-making and family-school partnerships. The focus group will be audio- and video-recorded and should take one hour to complete.
4. Review the focus group transcript. You will be asked to read the researcher's interpretation of your contribution to the focus group to ensure its accuracy. You will have an opportunity to discuss the findings with the researcher if desired.
5. Participate in an independent, fictional letter writing exercise. You will be given seven days to share a reply based on your actual beliefs and return it to me by email.
6. Review the researcher's interpretation of your letter to ensure accuracy. You will have an opportunity to discuss the findings with the researcher if desired.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study

Benefits to society, specifically educational professionals, include gaining an understanding of decision-making structures that support or pose barriers to successful and sustained family-school partnership programs. Furthermore, school stakeholders that wish to form collaborative relationships might gain insight and improve access to education and equitability for students. Lastly, parents may gain awareness of the benefits involved with school partnering that could support their child academically, social, and emotionally.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Physical documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the conclusion of the study. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected USB drive. Only the dissertation committee members and the researcher will have access to the data.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The participant's name, the school's name, and school district's name will not be used in the research. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear conversations.
- Physical documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet until the conclusion of the study. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected USB drive. The data will not be used in future presentations. At the conclusion of the study, all physical documents will be scanned into a PDF and kept on the password-protected USB drive. Physical documents will then be shredded by a licensed shredding company. The USB drive will be stored in a safe in my home. Three years after completion of the study, all electronic records will be deleted.
- The interview and the focus group will be audio- and video-recorded and then transcribed. All audio- and video-recordings will be stored on a password-locked USB drive for three years and then erased. All materials will be maintained and available for review, if requested, by the research participants, but they may only view their individual portion of the research. I will then save and store all PDFs and audio- and video-recordings to a password-protected USB drive that will be secured in a locked safe in my home. The password-protected external USB drive will be stored in my home for three years and after the conclusion date, all data will be deleted. Only the researcher and the dissertation committee will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. All participants will be given a \$25 Amazon gift card by the researcher. This gift card will be handed directly to each participant after all the participant exercises have been completed. To be eligible for compensation, the participant will have to complete all of the procedural steps of the study including an individual interview, participation in one focus group conversation, one letter-writing exercise, and transcript reviews. Failure to complete all procedures will forfeit monetary benefits. The \$25 Amazon gift card will not be pro-rated if a subject does not complete the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Bethel Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sherrie Brookie. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED] or sbrookie@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gail Collins, at gcollins2@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ I consent to participate in the study and the researcher has my permission to audio- and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix G: Individual Parent Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Parent Participants

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. In what ways should school leaders help to further your understanding of parenting skills, child development, and home conditions that can support or improve your child's academic performance? Prompt: What programs like this are offered to you at Oakdale Elementary school?
3. How have the school leaders supported or improved your child's social/emotional well-being? Prompt: Describe a social/emotional support your child received at Oakdale Elementary School.
4. How do you prefer to receive communication about school programs and your child's progress? Prompt: In what ways have the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary School communicated with parents?
5. Describe how you have been allowed to be involved as a volunteer, supporter, or audience member at Oakdale Elementary School? Prompts: How do you decide on what activities to participate in at OES? What barriers prevent you from being involved in the way you desire?
6. In what ways are you involved with your child's academic learning in the home? Prompt: How do the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary help you to support your child's learning at home?
7. What types of resources do you keep in the home to support your child's curriculum-related learning and activities? Prompt: What resources have been provided by the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary to assist you with supporting your child's curriculum-

related activities?

8. How have you been included as a participant in school decision-making, school governance, school advocacy, or other parent organizations? Prompt: How do the school leaders at Oakdale Elementary allow parents to be involved? How often can parents be involved at Oakdale Elementary?
9. In what ways should a community support their local schools? Prompt: What collaborations have you seen or heard about between Oakdale Elementary School and the surrounding community? Elaborate.
10. How would you explain the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement? Which type of partnership is available to Oakdale Elementary parents?
11. Describe an ideal family-school partnership. Prompt: Which Oakdale Elementary FSPPs do you believe best support the students at Oakdale Elementary? What parent involvement programs would you like to see at Oakdale Elementary in the future?
12. What ways should stakeholder voices be included in the development of family-school partnerships? Prompt: How are parents included as decision-makers at Oakdale Elementary School?
13. What else can you add about parent involvement based on your personal beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals?

Appendix H: Individual School Leader Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for School Leader Participants

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. Explain your role as a member of the schools' leadership team.
3. How would you describe your role in the decision-making process specifically relating to FSPPs?
4. What do you perceive as strengths in school leaders' decision-making practices as it relates to FSPP opportunities?
5. What do you perceive as barriers in school leaders' decision-making practices in relation to FSPP opportunities?
6. In what ways could the decision-making practices, in relation to FSPPs, be made more effective?
7. What professional development is available for school leaders to help them understand and implement effective FSPPs for the community they serve?
8. What types of engagement activities do families request from the OES leadership team that are not offered?
9. Describe an ideal family-school engagement partnership.
10. What future is there for including other stakeholder voices in the development of family-school engagement opportunities?
11. What else can you add about school leaders' decision-making as it relates to engaging families with the school?

Appendix I: Focus Group Interview Protocol for Parents

Focus Group Questions for Parents

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your connection to Oakdale Elementary.
2. How are parents responsible for supporting their child's educational journey?
3. What method(s) of communication do you prefer in regard to your child's development and academic progress?
4. In what ways do you involve yourself at your child's school?
5. How do you decide on which activities to participate in at your child's school?
6. What factors positively impact parent involvement at your child's school?
7. What factors negatively impact parent involvement at your child's school?
8. How can school leaders increase parent involvement levels at your child's school?
9. How would you describe an "involved" or "engaged" parent at Oakdale Elementary School?
10. How have you been included as a participant in school decisions or as a parent leader at Oakdale Elementary School?
11. What trainings or support programs are offered to you as a parent of an OES student?
12. In what ways does the local community support Oakdale Elementary students?
13. What else would you like to add regarding your personal experiences with OES's attempts at FSPPs?

Appendix J: Focus Group Interview Protocol for School Leaders

Focus Group Questions for School Leaders

1. Please introduce yourself and state your position as a school leader.
2. How would you describe the role of school leaders in supporting family engagement programs?
3. How do the decisions of school leaders impact family engagement opportunities?
4. What decision-making practices are utilized by school leaders that have a positive impact on family engagement levels?
5. What decision-making practices are utilized by school leaders that have a negative impact on family engagement levels?
6. In what ways should school leaders attempt to increase family engagement opportunities?
7. If you could change anything about the way leadership teams make decisions in relation to FSPPs, what would it be and why?
8. Think back to a time you made a decision about engaging families at school. How would you explain your experience?
9. What training have you had in decision-making or FSPPs?
10. What else would you like to add regarding your school's leadership team, your personal experiences, family engagement, or decision-making practices?

Appendix K: Writing Prompt for Parents

Parent Writing Prompt Instructions

A friend emailed you about a family they know who is moving to your neighborhood. The friend asked you to connect with the family to answer some questions about the elementary school where their child will be attending. Drawing from your own experiences, please write a letter of advice to the other parent who will be enrolling their child at [Oakdale] Elementary School for the first time. Discuss what a family–school partnership means to you, the role you think an [OES] parent should play as far as school helper/volunteer, the activities or programs at [OES] you think impact student well-being, and the programs you think could use improvement. This letter has no required length and will not be distributed. Please complete this letter in 7 days and return it by email.

Appendix L: Writing Prompt for School Leaders

School Leader Writing Prompt Instructions

A colleague of yours, who is also a school leader in a nearby school, has reached out to you about advice on strengthening existing family-school partnership programs (FSPPs) at their elementary school. Drawing from your own experiences, compose a response to your colleague discussing how you define family-school partnerships, what role school leaders play in sustaining FSPPs, what impact you have seen FSPPs have on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of students, and any improvements you would make to your current FSPP model. This letter has no required length and will not be distributed. Please complete this letter in 7 days and return it by email.

Appendix M: Researcher's Reflexive Journal

Sample Entries

Date:	Notes:
03/27/21	<p>In 2013 I left my fifth-grade teaching position to become a gifted and talented (GT) teacher. This new journey would cause me to travel to different schools where I would gain a variety of experience with school culture. Each school was different; I attribute that variance to the school's leadership team, leadership style displayed by the school's head principal, and decision-making strategies used by the school's leaders. When I initially began my GT career, some of the schools I served had little to no parental involvement. The last two schools I worked at as a GT teacher left me dumbfounded by the amount of active parental engagement that was going on in each. In my last year as a GT teacher, I worked 2 days at "Newport Elementary" and 3 days at "Bozeman Elementary." Both schools had a significant level of parent involvement and were historically known for parent participation, yet student achievement was higher at BES. The schools were similar in demographics, but I could not pinpoint why parents were so actively involved at both. I was dumbfounded when I would walk into PTA meetings at either school and see the cafeteria full of parents; so many were in attendance for the PTA meeting, they were lined against the cafeteria walls! In 2017 I took a full-time job at BES as the instructional coach. This was the same school I worked at three days per week as a GT teacher: the school with high achieving students, highly involvement parents, and what seemed like an affluent community. This was my first experience as a school leader, so I learned a lot about the inner workings of a school's management system. This eye-opening experience has led me to believe that when parents are welcomed into the school and encouraged to be a part of the school's community, they are willing to participate at high levels. I wondered, is BES successful because it is surrounded by an affluent community or does the school's management approach have anything to do with its success? I had observed the principal participate in PTA meetings, parent workshops, and community events. Parents knew the principals by name, the principals knew the student's name, and the school leaders were all always visible. I became interested in family-school partnerships at this point because I saw how much parents and the community helped the school to be successful. I even took over a reading tutors' program where I trained parents to come in and tutor students with low reading levels. These parents came weekly (sometimes more than once per week) for the entire school year to help a child who was not even their own child! So, I began reading about the topic of family-school partnerships. My previous experiences as a classroom and early GT teacher leave me unsettled about why the schools with low parent involvement truly had a lack of parental involvement. Is it because the area/location of the school or was it due to the school's leadership approach? Did parents feel welcomed? How did those schools communicate with parents or help them to feel like a member of the school's community? I appreciate my experiences with parent involvement at BES and I wondered if I</p>

	would be as effective of an instructional coach without the experiences of those at Newport and Bozeman Elementary Schools.
08/01/21	I hold the assumption that systematic implementation processes coupled with strategic decision-making efforts can enhance relationship efforts between school leaders, parents, teachers, and students. As an instructional coach for a highly involved and engaged community of parents, and a previous employee of a school with deficient FSPPs, my perspective may be biased.
08/03/21	Today I reached out to several school leaders and at a nearby school to see if they would be willing to participate in my pilot study. I ensured that I reached out to participants of different races in order to gain maximum variability so that if I needed to make modifications and adjustments to the data collection protocols I could and so that all viewpoints could be given attention.
09/09/21	Today I completed the pilot study for this research study. All participants gave minimal recommendations for individual and focus group protocols. One pilot study participant directed I make several revisions to the grammar I used in order to make my questions clearer. I made the necessary edits and agreed the questions presented more clearly with the revisions.
09/10/21	Now that the pilot study is complete, I reached out to the principal (gatekeeper) at the study site to gain access to the school's parent directory and for permission to contact potential school leader participants. I had the school's principal verify the job title of the individuals who I desired to contact for school leader participation. Employment was verified by the principal. Permission to begin recruitment at the study site was granted.
09/22/21	Collecting data from parent participants included individual interviews, focus groups, writing prompts. It was harder to recruit parent participants than it was school leader participants. I was worried that my recruitment efforts did not attract a diverse group of parent participants, which was a goal for this investigation. I am reminded that this study will have limitations. I think me not having control over who participates in this study will be a study limitation. Transcription occurred directly after interviews. Marginal notes were recorded and color coded. Fears were eased after interviews as participants spoke freely about their personal accounts in regard to the phenomenon. Data analysis will begin after school leader participant data are collected.
09/30/21	Collecting data from school leader participants included individual interviews, focus groups, and writing prompts. This process was much easier than collecting data from parent participants. Transcription of interviews was completed directly after interviews. I was worried about not meeting maximum variation due to job title assignments, but interviews and prompts gleaned strong personal accounts which eased my worries. Marginal notes were recorded and color coded. Data analysis will begin shortly.
10/01/21	While reviewing the data that answered sub-questions one and two, I realized that my personal definitions for defining participation in an FSPP and the role I play in an FSPP were different from those identified by the participants. It was essential for me to focus on the participants' perspectives and to bracket out my personal definitions/biases from those drawn from participants perspectives.

10/03/21	Member-checking of participants' responses and interpretations was completed. The participants were allowed to review their statements because I wanted to correctly represent their accounts shared during protocols. This step was necessary to ensure my biases and opinions were not represented when reporting the findings.
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Appendix N: Themes Generated

Central Research Question How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?		
Keywords/Phrases	Common Themes	Direct Quotes and/or Examples from Text
Partnerships are necessary for success	Culture	“In my 27 years of experience these programs are a very important factor for a school to be successful”
Openness of Leader	Leadership Style	“Our principal is very open and welcoming to all people, all suggestions, and all voices”
Get Involved	Culture Commitments/ Responsibilities Inclusive Partnering	“meet the teacher and align with the classroom” “get to know the other children in your child’s classroom” “encourage your child to participate in spirit days, dress as book characters, college team day, or wear pajamas on pj day”
Actively Seek Involvement Opportunities	Commitments/ Responsibilities	“When you are at the school for events or open house, or even in the office to check out your child, talk to everyone. They will share what is going on and they will take time to learn more about you and your child”
Structure	Leadership Style	“Organizational structure. Creating a hierarchy for parents to know where and who to go to and then being willing to partner for the opportunity to truly problem solve together and not just vent”

Sub-Question 1 How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family-school partnership programs?		
Keywords/Phrases Themes	Common Themes	Direct Quotes and/or Examples from Text
Work Together	Inclusive Partnering	“These important ingredients present themselves as a team that works together with the community and the school”
Communicate	Inclusive Partnering Commitments/ Responsibilities	“Be honest with your teacher about the strengths and weaknesses of your child. Ask questions about expectations, and then support them for the teacher and your child”
Participate	Commitments/ Responsibilities	“If you can, help in the classroom as opportunities arise, or if you are financially able, send in items on their wish list or items they request to make class more fun, or just easier for the teacher”
Mission	School Culture	“It’s where we are all aware of our beliefs and mission and how we are going to make that happen. Common goals that were created together. We bring our strengths together to flesh out plans so that all buy in”
Collaborative	Inclusive Partnering Leadership Style	“Valuing what everyone brings to the table. The partnership would be two-way and we would be able to listen and respond to each other. Be honest with successes and weaknesses for the child. Working toward a common goal and thinking outside the box together.”
Sub-Question 2 How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family-school partnership programs?		
Ongoing Maintenance	School Culture	“As a school leader it is important to work on keeping these family-school

	Leadership Style	<p>partnerships well-oiled and maintained”</p> <p>“It is also important for me to lead by example”</p>
Creating responsible future citizens of a community	Learning Environment	<p>“If we lead by example in front of students and families, this will hopefully create lifelong responsible citizens that continue to give back to their community”</p>
Everyone has a voice	Leadership Style Inclusive Partnering School Culture	<p>“At my current school our family–school partnership program gives everyone a voice. My leadership team is very welcoming with suggestions from families or PTA organizations”</p>
Communication	Leadership Style School Culture Responsibilities	<p>“Oakdale does a great job on digital communication”</p> <p>“The principal uses Facebook often not only for announcements but also for fun activities that both entertain the children while continuing their education”</p>
Physical presence matters	Commitments/ Responsibilities Inclusive Partnership	<p>“Going into the school also gives you a chance to get to know the office staff, talk to teachers and see the school in action”</p> <p>“In turn, as they got to know me, I was asked to participate on boards or to weigh in (for instance, in interviewing a new principal) on things I would have never raised my hand for”</p>
Physical presence matters	Commitments/ Responsibilities	<p>“If you show up, volunteer or make the effort to communicate, you will have a</p>

		great experience at the school and have confidence your child is in great hands”
Engage Parents Early	School Culture	“Oakdale does a great job at the beginning of the school year informing parents”
Communication	Leadership Style School Culture Learning Environment	“Social media is a huge piece at Oakdale. Every day the school is posting something. We are always there with a presence and telling our story and students are the face of it” “If we don’t tell our story, someone else will tell it for us, so we have to be proactive in that role”
Sub-Question 3 What aspects of decision-making regarding family-school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic welfare?		
Impact on level of support	Learning Environment	“If the family knows that the school cares then the parents will do everything they can to help with their child”
Parents assist schools with SEL	Commitments/ Responsibilities	“When you have parents that help out whether it is directly within the school building or from home, this shows their children that they care”
SEL and Academic Gains	School Culture Inclusive Partnering	“When we are all working together, the positive impacts are ongoing and the kids are the ones who benefit”
Availability	School Culture	“The faculty and staff at the school make themselves very available . . . we found that it made both our child and ourselves much more comfortable”
SEL	Learning Environment	“Point out that the principal and other staff members are dressed up in the car line”
Adverse childhood experiences	Learning Environment Leadership Style	“This has been so good for us to understand the social/emotional piece

		because it helps us understand how to bridge relationships”
Trauma Informed Practices	Learning Environment	“I can’t fix the homelife necessarily, but I can identify all resources around to care for a need. For example a child was doing poorly in school and we found the child could not read. It was not an academic problem, it was a visual impairment. That we can do. We can call our social worker and get that child assistance. We had to identify the root cause”
Sub-Question 4 What aspects of decision-making regarding family-school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?		
Not advocating for your child.	Commitments/ Responsibilities Inclusive Partnering	“Don’t be afraid to ask questions or challenge the teachers. It will help them learn how your child sees things and it will help you truly advocate for your child”
Lack of Focus	School Culture Leadership Style Learning Environment	“Trying to do too much too fast. You have to have time to create a strong culture.” “Not being purposeful and jumping on the bandwagon for every new idea or thing that comes around” “Not being hyper focused on your goals and intentional.”

Appendix O: Worksheet One

Worksheet Two- Identified Themes

<u>Theme 1:</u> School Culture
<u>Theme 2:</u> Inclusive Partnership Practices
<u>Theme 3:</u> Commitments and Responsibilities
<u>Theme 4:</u> Learning Environment
<u>Theme 5:</u> Approach to School Leadership

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Appendix P: Worksheet Two

Worksheet Three- Analysts Notes Worksheet

Overall Case Impression

All participants have worked in the same school in a leadership role for 3 years. The participant with the longest stretch time at the study site was the full-time guidance counselor. The counselor began her career at the school as the teacher, then was the part-time school counselor, and eventually became the full-time school counselor. The guidance counselor had served at the school for 16 years and under three different head principals. Next, the assistant principal had been a part of the school's leadership team for 8 years serving under two different head principals. The instructional technology specialist and the intermediate grade level faculty council representative both had 4 years of experience at the school. Two participants, the principal and the instructional coach joined the school's leadership team at the same time. Even though the group had only worked together in the school for a limited time, many of them had professional relationships due to working in the same district for several years. All participants had a good rapport with one another and all were positive about their role, the conditions under which they worked, and their passion for the families that the school served. The participants expressed similar thoughts about decision-making and how decisions can impact participation in FSPPs. Each contributed information about adding to the historical culture of the school by working to improve already existing programs. All participants identified Greg's leadership approach as one of the reasons the school is so successful in maintaining and developing partnerships with families and students. Greg was in his third year as the school's principal; this was his first principalship. Greg spoke about voluntarily assuming a variety of leadership roles before having become a principal. All participants believed that they should be transparent and inclusive in decision-making and that all families should feel as if they belonged as part of the school and should have a voice; all also believed FSPPs are essential to school success.

Documented Findings

1. FSPPs are essential to school and student success. **(Central Question)**
2. FSPPs work better when families and schools work together to help students achieve their potential. **(Central Question)**
3. Decision-making in FSPPs should be transparent. **(Central Question)**
4. Family-school partnerships work best when parents and school leaders are working towards the same goals. **(Sub-Question 1)**
5. A two-way partnership has to be formed with families in order to maintain highly effective FSPPs. **(Sub-Question 1)**
6. Learning materials/resources must be multicultural and representative of the school's population. **(Sub-Question 3)**
7. School leaders need to work to reach all types of families in have to do it in a variety of ways. **(Sub-Question 2)**

8. Teachers must be sensitive to the different types of families that students represent. **(Sub-Question 2)**
9. Schools must continuously evaluate their programs and relevance to the communities they serve. **(Central Question)**
10. Stakeholders must work together to make decisions for the school. **(Sub-Question 3)**
11. It is essential for school leaders to be approachable and visible. **(Sub-Question 4)**
12. School leaders must welcome stakeholder voice. **(Sub-Question 4)**
13. Stakeholders willing to invest in schools are making an investment toward the future of the community. **(Sub-Question 3)**

Relevance to Themes

After working together in a leadership capacity for a number of years, all participants have mentioned the importance of the structured, inclusive, decision-making strategies implemented by the school's new principal. Each participant mentioned a culture of excellence and inclusion at the school, but noted how the current leader worked to evaluate programs and improve them so that more intentionality might yield greater impact on stakeholders. They believed that parents were equal partners in the educational experience and mentioned the impact transparency and inclusive decision-making has had on the school's culture and success.

Case Uniqueness

Theme 1 X Theme 2 X Theme 3 X Theme 4 X Theme 5 X

Commentary

All school leaders acknowledged the need to incorporate a multi-step process for decision-making in order for FSPPs to be successful. Specifically, this process was acknowledged as a transparent endeavor which would include input from all stakeholders. They spoke of the need to gather feedback in order to ensure program effectiveness. All were focused on making decisions that had students' best interests in mind. They believed strong FSPPs could be sustained by the school's approach to leadership and the willingness to hear and accept criticisms when ideas or decisions did not yield success. All maintained a high regard for their level of responsibility in relation to FSPPs and the decisions that were made to maintain strong relationships with the families they serve.

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Appendix Q: Worksheet Three

Worksheet 5A- Theme Based Assertions Matrix from Case Study Findings Rated Importance

Parent Participants	THEMES				
Findings	1	2	3	4	5
Parents have a responsibility to support their child's school through FSPPs.	X				
Parents who feel they can have a voice in the school's decision-making want to participate in FSPPs.			X		
Communication should occur in a variety of formats in order to reach families who make up the school's population.	X				
The school must strive to consistently improve instructional programs.	X				
All families should feel they are welcomed to take part in the school community and be encouraged to do so.		X			
When school's leaders clearly communicate goals or direction, parents decided to participate in FSPPs.				X	
Families should actively support the school with their time, talents, and treasures.			X		
Schools that work to target individual student needs and who offer students' choices in their learning gain active parent participants in FSPPs.				X	
Families who feel welcomed, regardless of ethnicity or background, will participate in FSPPs.		X			
School leaders should not be invisible to students and families.					X
School leaders must make themselves available to families.					X
Parents and school leaders that develop a two-way partnership in collaboration with the families representing the schools form lasting partnerships.		X			
Schools must support individual student interests and when they do, parents are more willing to relax their expectations and meet teachers in partnership.				X	
Schools that support families in transition develop a sense of cultural responsiveness which attracts a broader audience to FSPPs.		X			
Schools that support non-traditional families develop a sense of cultural responsiveness which attracts a broader audience to FSPPs.		X			
School leaders who have a system for checks and balances or way to evaluate programs have parents who want to participate in FSPPs.					X
School leaders who seem approachable to students, families, and teachers make parents want to participate in FSPPs.					X

When working together, teachers and parents can identify students' academic needs.			X		
School Leader Participants	THEMES				
Findings	1	2	3	4	5
School leaders must communicate in a variety of ways to try and reach underrepresented families.	X				
When school leaders include parents in the schools' decision-making processes, the school can benefit from higher levels of parent support.			X		
School leaders not including stakeholder risk the possibility of sustaining a thriving FSPPs.					X
Strong FSPPs directly correlate to improved academic student achievement.				X	
Approachable leaders enjoy strong relationships with families.					X
When school leaders help parents to understand the schools expectations, academic achievement levels increase.				X	
School leaders who share decision-making rationale with stakeholders have higher FSPP participation.			X		
School leaders who are not willing to hear stakeholder voice will not reap the benefits of a thriving FSPP.	X				
School leaders who share the school's mission, vision, and beliefs have strong FSPPs.		X			
When opportunities to engage in FSPPs are inclusive, underrepresented families will be more willing to participate in an FSPP.	X				
When a school's culture includes aspects of social and emotional student development as well as academic achievement parents participate in FSPPs.				X	
When school leaders and parents share the same vision, they actively decide to propel the school forward toward success.		X			
School leaders who see themselves as equivalent to parents in the partnership for student success increase FSPP participation.					X
When school leaders set the example for participation in FSPPs, relationships between home and family improve.			X		
School leaders working to hire staff representative of the school's population help marginalized families see their place in FSPPs.		X			

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Appendix R: Worksheet Four

Worksheet 5B- Assertions from Merged Findings Rated Important Matrix

Merged Findings	Which Case?	Theme Correlation
Parents have a responsibility to support their child's school through FSPPs.	Both	3
Parents who feel they can have a voice in the school's decision-making want to participate in FSPPs.	Both	5
Communication should occur in a variety of formats in order to reach families who make up the school's population.	Both	1
The school must strive to consistently improve instructional programs.	School Leaders	1
All families should feel they are welcomed to take part in the school community and be encouraged to do so.	Both	2
When school's leaders clearly communicate goals or direction, parents decided to participate in FSPPs.	Parents	2
Families should actively support the school with their time, talents, and treasures.	Both	3
Schools that work to target individual student needs and who offer students choices in their learning gain active parent participants in FSPPs.	School Leaders	4
Families who feel welcomed, regardless of ethnicity or background, will participate in FSPPs.	Both	4
School leaders should not be invisible to students and families.	Parents	5

School leaders must make themselves available to families.	Both	5
Parents and school leaders that develop a two-way partnership in collaboration with the families representing the schools form lasting partnerships.	Both	1
Schools must support individual student interests and when they do, parents are more willing to relax their expectations and meet teachers in partnership.	School Leaders	4
Schools that support families in transition develop a sense of cultural responsiveness which attracts a broader audience to FSPPs.	Both	2
School leaders who have a system for checks and balances or way to evaluate programs have parents who want to participate in FSPPs.	Both	1
School leaders who seem approachable to students, families, and teachers make parents want to participate in FSPPs.	Parents	5
When working together, teachers and parents can identify students' academic needs.	Both	3

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Appendix S: Worksheet Five

Worksheet Six: Final Reporting for Multicase Assertions

Assertions	Theme Relation	Case Evidence
Communication, continuous improvement, and transparency are highly regarded beliefs that impact the decisions to participate in an FSPP.	1	“In my 27 years of experience these programs are a very important factor for a school to be successful.”
Common goals and cultural responsiveness yield heightened interest in FSPPs.	2	“Be honest with your teacher about the strengths and weaknesses of your child. Ask questions about expectations, and then support them for the teacher and your child.”
Active participation and shared decision-making are the responsibility of educational stakeholders.	3	“If you can, help in the classroom as opportunities arise, or if you are financially able, send in items on their wish list or items they request to make class more fun, or just easier for the teacher.”
Learning institutions must be focus on students in order to form relationships with families.	4	“When we are all working together, the positive impacts are ongoing and the kids are the ones who benefit.”
Invisible, unapproachable, and unavailable leaders are not likely to include stakeholder voice in their decision-making practices; therefore, they will not likely reap the partnerships’ benefits.	5	“At my current school our family-school partnership program gives everyone a voice. My leadership team is very welcoming with suggestions from families or PTA organizations.”

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Appendix T: Worksheet Six

Worksheet Two- Final Conclusions from the Study

Theme 1:

How do the beliefs, experiences, assumptions, or goals of parents and elementary school leaders influence decisions regarding participation in an FSPP?

Parents' and school leaders' personal beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and goals play a significant role in their decision to actively participate in family–school partnerships. Due to lack of program regulation, leadership style, and school culture, experiences in such partnerships vary. When specific strategies are used to regulate FSPPs, collaborative partnerships are strengthened, sustained, and representative of all families making up a school's population. It is perceived that when partnership opportunities are regularly communicated in a variety of ways, active participation by both families and school leaders is increased. These actions assist with creating meaningful engagement opportunities for all, resulting in student success. In addition to communication, transparency between the two parties is highly valued, especially when decisions are made that directly impact students. When stakeholders feel they can have a voice, they are eager to participate in FSPPs. Finally, when steps to evaluate FSPPs are regularly implemented, more families can be reached in an applicable way, therefore resulting in a consistent, on-going decision to support a school through FSPPs. Communication, continuous program improvement, and transparency are elements of school culture that influence stakeholders' decisions to participate in FSPPs.

Theme 2:

How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in family–school partnership programs?

Parents and school leaders in an elementary school define participation in an FSPP as a two-way partnership that works together to create common, purposeful goals for students and the direction of the school. It is perceived that the collaborative effort requires input from several parties, including parents, school leaders, students, and sometimes community members. Until then, FSPP participation cannot be explicated. Furthermore, cultural responsiveness is a defining factor of an FSPP since individuals who present themselves as culturally competent are able to avoid relationship breakdown which naturally influences decisions to participate in an FSPP. Common goals and cultural competence are two key elements in parents' and school leaders' ability to define FSPP participation. Common goal setting and cultural responsiveness are the inclusive practices that define FSPP participation for parents and school leaders.

Theme 3:

How do parents and school leaders in an elementary school perceive their role in the decision-making processes regarding family–school partnership programs?

Parents and school leaders agree their role in FSPPs is vital. Together, they believe each are equally responsible to help make decisions for the school and students; they believe one way to do that is through active participation in FSPPs on a regular basis. Active participation

includes individuals taking initiative to support the development and learning of children. In addition, they believe they are accountable for sharing in the decision-making process so that proper placement, programing, and advocacy can take place. Active participation and shared decision-making are the commitments and responsibilities that outline roles of parent and school leaders in FSPPs.

Theme 4:

What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as having an impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic welfare?

Learning environments have an impact on the social, emotional, and academic welfare of children. It is perceived that when parents and school leaders receive training in ACEs and T.I.P.S. they are likely to emphasize a learning environment focused on social and emotional well-being. When students are socially and emotionally well, they are more engaged in learning which results in higher academic achievement. Also, when learning environments remain focused on children, rather than the teacher expertise, students are able to think independently and will engage in learning more frequently. Lastly, when targeted learning goals are identified and understood by school leaders, parents, and students, higher levels of academic achievement can be attained. This results in a healthy school climate and academic excellence. Emphasis on social/emotional wellness, student centeredness, and targeted instructional goals are the elements of a strong learning environment that have a positive impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic welfare.

Theme 5:

What aspects of decision-making regarding family–school partnership programs in an elementary school are perceived by parents and school leaders as ineffective or deficient?

Approach to school leadership impacts FSPPs negatively in a variety of ways. When school leaders or teachers are invisible, FSPPs cannot be as effective since relationships are impeded. Unavailable school leaders are not able to connect with stakeholders; therefore, communication suffers and clear, consistent school goals are not communicated. Subsequently, school leaders not willing to include stakeholder voice also run the risk of limiting the school’s scope and ability to achieve since a variety of alternatives cannot be considered in any decision-making effort. Being invisible, unavailable, seeming unapproachable, or dismissing stakeholder voice are leadership approaches which cause FSPPs to be ineffective or deficient.

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billing_state: --

billing_country: United States

GP_title: Multiple Case Study Analysis

author: Robert Stake

isbn: 978-1-59385-248-1

pubyear: 2006

pagenum: 43,45,51,59,73

protocol_trial_id: Liberty University Dissertation

phase: Data Analysis

location: Liberty University

languages: English

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Appendix V: Audit Trail

11/30/20	Requested permission from office of quality and assurance in the selected school district to conduct research and requested help identifying applicable study site
03/15/21	Completed school district's research application
04/15/21	Received letter of approval to conduct research in district and three options to select for study site
04/16/21	Contacted principals at selected study site
05/25/21	Sent email to Guildford Publishing requesting permission to modify and use specific worksheets provided in Stake's (2006) text
06/04/21	Defended proposal
06/06/21	Completed and submitted IRB application
08/02/21	Received IRB approval
08/05/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with first parent participant
08/05/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with second parent participant
08/09/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with third parent participant
08/19/21	Completed pilot study focus group interview with the three parent participants
08/21/21	Received participant letter from first pilot study parent participant
08/25/21	Received participant letter from second pilot study parent participant
08/30/21	Received participant letter from third pilot study parent participant
09/01/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with first school leader participant
09/01/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with second school leader participant
09/02/21	Completed pilot study individual interview with third school leader participant
09/06/21	Completed pilot study focus group interview with the three school leader participants
09/07/21	Received participant letter from first pilot study school leader participant
09/08/21	Received participant letter from second pilot study school leader participant
09/09/21	Received participant letter from third pilot study school leader participant
09/29/21	Received permission from Guildford Publishing to use Stake's worksheets.
09/10/21	Emailed principal at study requesting permission to contact prospective participants and access parent information directory
09/10/21	Received permission to contact potential participants for investigation
09/13/21	Data collection with parents
09/24/21	Data collection with school leaders
09/30/21	Data transcriptions and data analysis

10/03/21	Member checking completed
10/04/21	Peer 1 review of data
10/04/21	Peer 2 review of data
10/05/21	Peer 3 review of data
10/07/21	Justification for final themes and sub-themes
	Dissertation approved to move forward to final defense
	Final APA edit completed
	Final defense successfully completed