

Updating the Definition of Family Engagement through the use of Focus Groups

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Introductions

Who is joining us today?



Outline

Importance of
Families

Terms for families
and school's
working together

Overview of using
Focus Groups

Methods

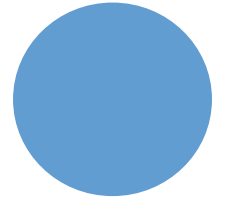
Preliminary
Results

Discussion

Questions

Importance of Families

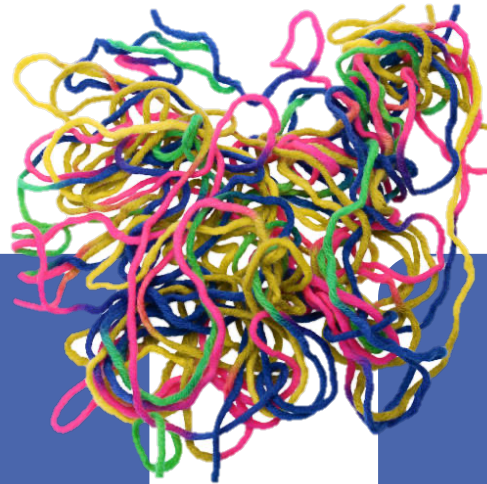
- The parent has the most impact on a child's personal health and well-being than any other single individual or practitioner (Elliott & Mullins, 2004).
- When parents collaborate with their child's school, improvements in academic and behavioral goals have been shown across primary and secondary school-age children (Cox 2005; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein 2001).



Connection between Schools and Families

- Schools provide children with diverse opportunities including learning new skills, interacting in various social situations, problem-solving, self-control, morals, and solving academic and interpersonal problems.
- When working together, schools and families provide children with life skills that will last them into adulthood.
- Culture, socioeconomic status, and child care are a few factors that can potentially limit or eliminate opportunities for parents' engagement (Araque et al., 2017; McNeal, 2015; Nzinga-Johnson Baker & Auperlee, 2009).

Terms for Schools and Families working together



Family
Involvement

Family
Engagement

Discussion



WHAT TERMS DO YOU USE?



WHAT THOUGHTS DO YOU HAVE
ON THIS EVOLVING DISCUSSION?

Terms for Schools and Families working together

- While the two terms (involvement and engagement) are unfortunately still being used interchangeably, the language shift from involvement to engagement is meant to represent that the responsibility to “involve” is not solely on the parents’ shoulders (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Focus Groups

- Kruegar & Casey (2015) describe focus groups as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (p. 2).



Focus Groups

- Nursing and public health research highlights the increasing popularity of using focus groups to collect data with adult participants (ex: Happell, 2007; Webb & Kevern, 2001; Shelus et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2021).
- Focus groups have been conducted in a variety of different settings including:
 - hospitals (i.e., Brunero et al., 2017; Rautamo et al., 2020)
 - community centers (i.e., Elms et al., 2018; Griffith et al., 2020)
 - schools (i.e., Throuvala et al., 2019; Jayanthi et al., 2002),
 - other locations (i.e., Brosens, 2019; Jolivette et al., 2020; Bermea et al., 2019)

Virtual Focus Groups

- Like in-person focus groups, virtual focus groups have been used with a variety of different populations and professional fields.
- Some examples include individuals in:
 - Rural settings (Lally et al., 2018)
 - Pregnant women on bed rest (Adler & Zarchin, 2002)
 - Youth (Chen et al., 2018)
 - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) individuals (Businger, 2021).

Virtual Focus Groups

- Virtual focus groups encourage participants to connect and take part in a group discussion without being in the same location as the other participants.
- Stover (2012) reports that virtual focus groups provide a different sense of anonymity allowing participants to share personal and sensitive information.

Focus Groups - Parents as participants

- Parent participation has been well-documented in virtual and in-person focus groups.
- Virtual platforms are becoming more common for families to use when interacting with their child's school, thus allowing families to be more familiar with their workings.
- This familiarity has allowed the pivot to using virtual focus groups without too much of a learning curve.



Focus Groups on Family Involvement

- Manz et al. (2004) conducted focus groups to assess the questions used within their measurement of family involvement, the *Family Involvement Questionnaire for Early Childhood (FIQ-EC)*, which is based on the Epstein et al. (1995) definition.
- Lau et al. (2012) followed a similar process of conducting focus groups that asked parents their perceptions of family involvement and to review items for the *Chinese Early Parental Involvement Scale (CEPIS)*.

Focus Groups on Family Engagement

- Kelty & Wakabayashi (2020) conducted focus groups for a study on family engagement and gathered parent, educator, and community perspectives, specifically in areas receiving Title 1 funds.
- Cesario (2021) conducted a dissertation case study using focus groups to gather information on family engagement for Latino families within a single district.

Current Study

This project examined the (a) definitions of family engagement used within the literature and (b) the social validity of those definitions.

Research Questions

What are the existing activities and pathways of engagement that parents of children in elementary school are using?

What barriers exist to families in building relationships with their child's school?

Which definition of family engagement or involvement do parents of children in elementary school find socially valid?

Methods



Methods


- Participants
 - Parents of at least one child in elementary school
 - Live within the United States
 - We recruited 18 individual
- Compensations
 - \$25 virtual Amazon gift card
 - Ability to see when participants add funds to their account

Methods – Part 2

- Recruitment
 - An email was sent to organizations that worked with families (e.g., Family Work Groups, ABA Therapy Companies, Non-for profits, etc.) requesting a letter to be shared with families to recruit focus group participation.
- Scheduling Survey
- Demographics Survey

Definitions for Study

Three commonly used definitions were selected



Verbally present and use
PowerPoint to show definitions
to families

Epstein et al.,'s (1995) Framework of Family Involvement

Parenting

Communication

Volunteering

Learning at
home

Decision
making

Collaboration
with
community

Ma et al. (2016)

Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Learning Outcomes and Parental Involvement

“Behavioral involvement, home supervision, and home-school connection were the keys from family involvement.”



NAFSCE
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FOR FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.

Family engagement is continuous across a child's life and entails enduring commitment but changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.

Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn- at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in after school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

Focus Group Questions

- Introduction
- Ice Breaker Question
- Ease in questions
 - What does the staff do that shows you that you are welcome at your child's school?
 - How does your child's school ask you to be involved?
 - What barriers are there to involvement?
- Specific topic questions

Focus Group Questions

- Specific topic questions
 - Which components accurately represent your current engagement?
 - What are positives you can highlight about the addition to the definition?
 - Do you think additional components are needed? Please expand.
- Wrap up questions
 - Anything else you would like to share on the topic?
 - Summarization
 - Repeat and ask them if correct
 - Ask each participant their most important part of the group

Virtual Focus Groups

- Platform
 - Microsoft TEAMS
- Training or participant materials for using the platform
 - Initial emails asked participants their comfort with TEAMS
 - Emailed a Tip Sheet with link
- Number of participants
 - 3-8 individuals

Virtual Focus Groups

- Length of Focus Group
 - 2 hours (group and technology check)
- Consent
 - Verbal
 - Within Demographic Survey

Virtual Focus Groups – Considerations

- Attrition
 - Two spots for study: during email correspondence or day of the focus group
- Late Participants
 - Study had participants show up 1-15 minutes late
- Participants losing connection
- Requests from children during group
- Use of video or not
- Recording or not

Results



Recordings and Transcription

- Each focus group's discussions will be recorded, transcribed, and de-identified.
 - TEAMS
- Nonverbal communication (e.g., head nodding or facial expressions) was with notes added to the transcriptions, increasing the richness of analysis (Greenwood, et al., 2017).

Focus Group Coding

- After the focus groups were concluded, a thematic analysis was conducted, and line-by-line coding occurred.
- A codebook was created using inductive coding based on ecological and behavioral theory (Thomas, 2006).

Demographics

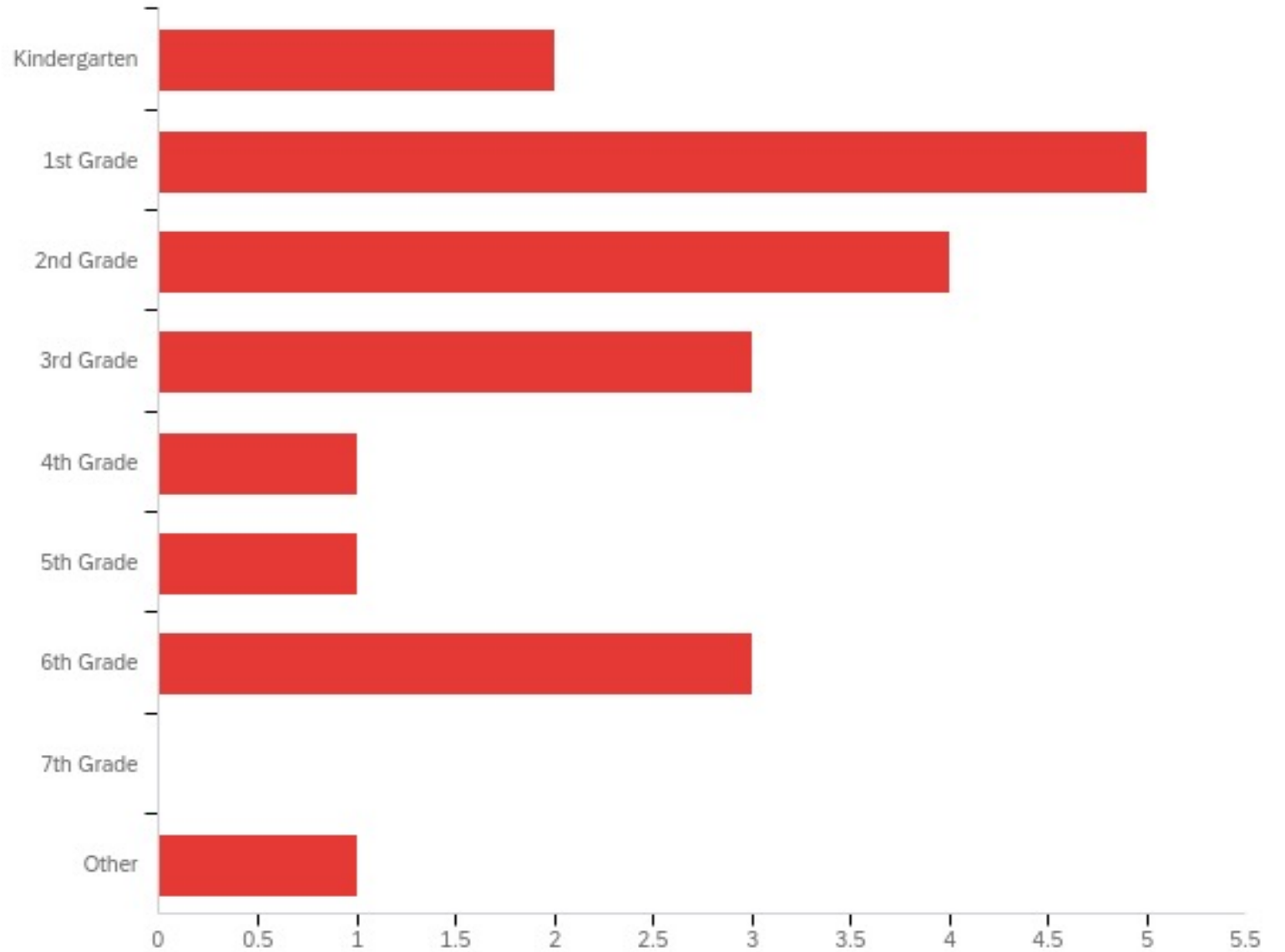
- 15/18 individuals completed the survey
- Other three individuals emailed that they did not want to complete it



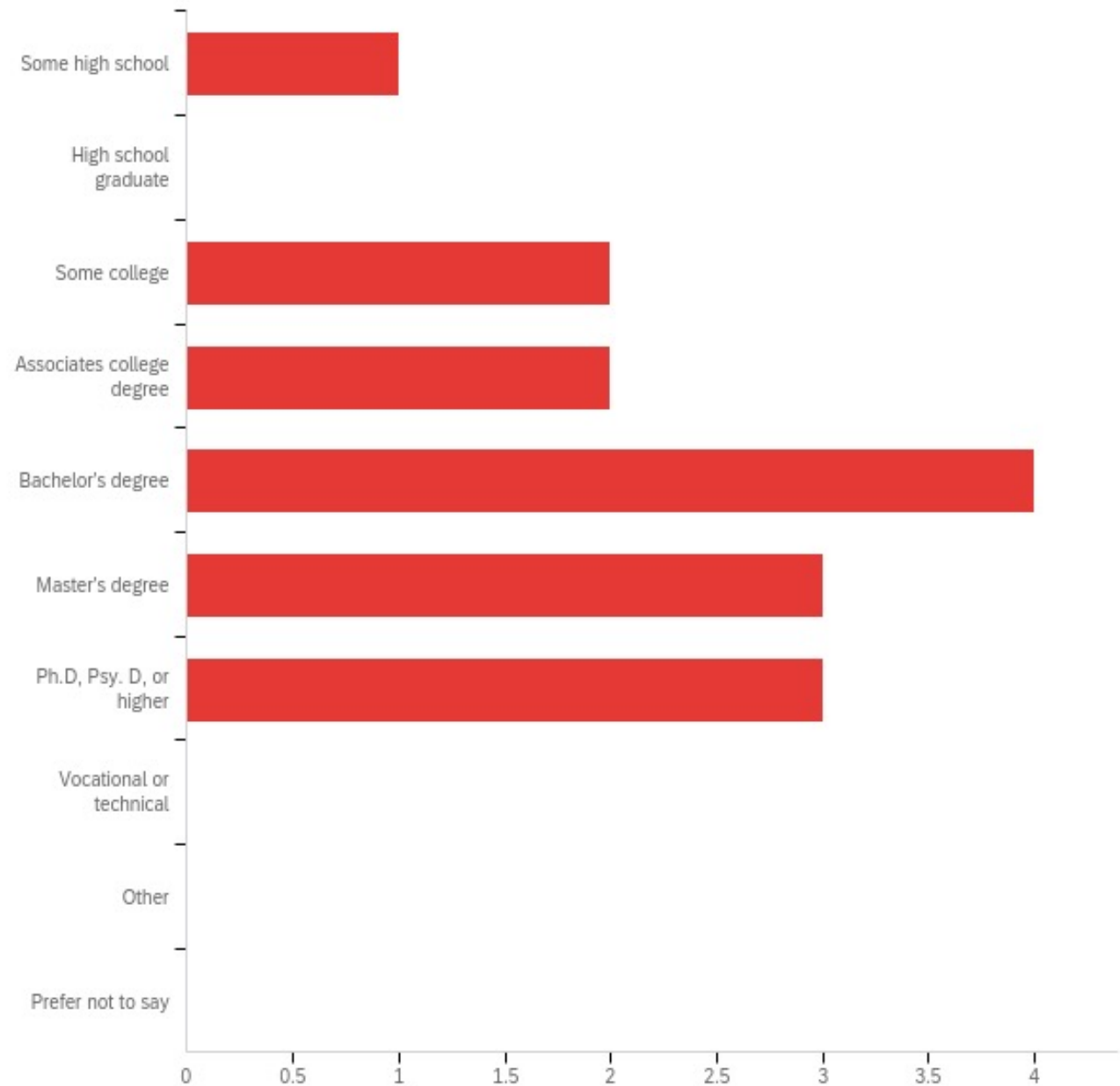
Demographics - Child(ren)'s Grade

Characteristics	n	%
Age		
18-29	0	0
30-39	7	38.8%
40-49	8	44.4%
50-59	0	0
60-69	0	0
70+	0	0
Gender		
Male	0	0
Female	14	77.8%
Gender Variant/ Non-Confirming	1	5.56%
Transgender Female	0	0
Transgender Male	0	0
Race		
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0	0
Asian	0	0
Black or African American	2	11.1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0
White	12	66.7%
Some other race or Unknown	1	5.56%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino Origin	2	11.11%
Not Hispanic or Latino Origin	12	66.7%
Other	1	5.56%
Role within the family		
Mother	14	77.8%
Parent	1	5.56%

Demographics - Child(ren)'s Grade



Demographics - Education



guide
reinforcer
teacher
supportive role
professor
enforcer

advocate
Their voice
member of the PTO
provide for their needs

What is a
parent's role in
their child's
education?

According to the participants, the most important areas of the Epstein et al.'s (1995) framework...

Parenting

Communication



Quotes

- After viewing the Epstein et al. (1995) definition
 - “...it assumes family engagement is on the backs of the parents. So that family engagement is the family engaging the school, as opposed to the school, engaging the family. Like, where's this sort of bi-directional model of family engagement that I imagined?”

Quotes

- “I think, again, coming from a different background, I think when it talks about like, engaging families in meaningful ways, or families or being committed to supporting their kids learning, it's really different. I would say, like, culturally what that actually looks like. So, you know, for me growing up in a Hispanic household, I'm first generation, you know, immigrants, first time ever going to college here. I mean, we had no idea what anything actually looks like.”

Quotes

- “Coming from Special Needs perspective, family engagement is great, but his support system is more what I would like to be addressed. You know, he, it's not just us as family, he has speech therapists, he has language pathologists, you know, he has doctors that are involved. All these different people, they're not family, but they affect his day to day from school to home to everything, so them not being included.”
- “I think for me, just, you know, family engagement doesn't necessarily just mean like the core family, it could mean like, your family, including the school, including, like, whatever is in your circle of your family, because we're very engaging, but that's only a portion of how things could happen.”

Barriers to Family Engagement

- Time
 - When opportunities occur
 - Work schedule
- Resources
 - Money, items, etc.
- Other children
- Childcare
- Teacher's contracted hours



“It's a juggling act, continuously.”

Discussion



Discussion

- Collaboration and connection between the home and the school has been found to strengthen children's sense of community in both environments (McNeal, 2015).
- Connection means with **all** different types of families.
- This study looked at how parents interpret their experiences and how this attributes to how they collaborate with their child's school

Limitations: Recruitment

- Three focus groups were conducted prior to the data being displayed today
- No signs within the focus group
 - Extra facilitator present as well
- Data had to be thrown out due to the individual's geo ping located outside of the USA

Moral of the story: If you want a population from a certain geographic area – check the geo ping!



Working with Families

- We attempt to remove bias
- Virtual groups only allow you to see a small view of their life
- We ask questions and have to trust the answers provided to us



Implications for Practitioners

- Provide opportunities for families to be partners in their child's education journey.
- Have open conversations about family engagement opportunities.
- Provide different types of family engagement opportunities.



Implications for Researchers

1

Be mindful of the language choices used within articles.

2

Continue to research different family engagement practices and measures.

3

Continue to incorporate family voices in family engagement research.

Next Steps

- Are we now moving towards the term family- school collaboration?
- De-tangling the language in research
- Further research studies





Questions

Contact Us

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References upon request.
Please email us!

Travel Funded by:

