Full-Service Community School Intervention: Case Study of Somali Parent-School Engagement Within a Rural Midwestern School District

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Abstract

The purpose of this three-stage qualitative phenomenology case study was to characterize Somali refugee parents' understanding of their role in school-parent relationships and investigate the impact of a research-based parent involvement intervention model adapted for use with this study. Research questions included: 1) What are Somali refugee parents' understanding, perceptions, and expectations of school parent involvement; and 2) Did the adapted training intervention, designed to enhance school-parent relationships and parent engagement behaviors among Somali refugee parents, succeed? Following an initial interview stage, Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model (2019) was adapted and used to design a training intervention that was delivered as a component of the district's Community School model. The pre-training interview identified that none of twelve parents in the study had attended school in their home country or the United States. The Somali refugee parents reported that their lack of English skills caused difficulty for them to understand school policies, their child's school progress, and teacher expectations. Coded and themed results from post-training interviews revealed the parent involvement training interventions had resulted in both increased parent engagement knowledge and behaviors. The study verified parent engagement barriers for Faribault Public Schools' Somali parents, and the engagement trainings provided the study sample group with focused, evidenced-based knowledge, skills, and recommended actions. Recommendations for practice include aligning school-parent involvement activities with a comprehensive, structured approach such as the Epstein model and the thorough identification of parent engagement barriers for the targeted subpopulation.

Keywords

Parent involvement, parent engagement, parent empowerment, social justice, community school.

Author Bio

Anne Marie Leland, Ed.D. is a lifelong educator with extensive teaching and administrative experience in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and the E-12 field. She has been the Community Education Director with the Faribault Public Schools in Faribault, MN since 2012. Within her previous position at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, she was co-facilitator of the Minnesota's Adult Career Pathways system, now known as Pathways to Prosperity—an innovative approach that helps educationally underprepared adults succeed in well-paying careers by integrating basic skills education and career-specific training in fields where new skills are in high demand. Prior to that employment, she was an adult education specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education providing accountability and workforce education consultative services to all adult education consortia in the state. She has also worked at the local level in St. Paul, Minnesota for the Minnesota Literacy Council. Dr. Leland holds a MN Community Education Administrator license, a grade 6–12 social studies MN teaching license, an MA in Teaching from the University of St. Thomas, a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate from Hamline University, and a BA in History from UCLA. She lived and taught in Pakistan and was awarded a scholarship in 1992 to serve as a Congressional intern.

Introduction

As research on the benefits of parent involvement emerged during the past three decades, both public educational policy and local school initiatives have steadily increased the levels of parent involvement as well as the identification of many systemic and individual barriers to parent and family engagement. For example, systemic issues may include a lack of emphasis or priority on the engagement of parents by the school administration or faculty as well as teacher-parent contact or written communications that are consistently about negative behavior or student problems. On the individual barrier side, many hindrances to effective parent and family engagement emerged such as parent language or basic literacy issues, cultural misunderstandings or lack of cultural awareness, and lack of parent support for their children's learning at home (Baker et al., 2016).

At the federal policy level, mandated parental involvement was included in legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) which was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act ([NCLB], 2002) and reauthorized again in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA], 2015). Within ESSA, Title I mandates considerable parent involvement targeting low-income parents, and it has changed the terminology of *parent involvement* under the previous authorizations to *parent and family engagement*. Title IV of ESSA includes a program called 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is clearly focused on parent and family involvement as well as local community engagement.

At the state level, Minnesota enforces federal parent and family engagement legislation and has numerous state statutes that either require or encourage parent and family engagement. These mandates are embedded in a range of education and workforce programs that include parent-teacher conferencing, early childhood programming, high-risk youth

programming, English learner programs, and state child labor laws (Belway, Duran, & Speilberg, 2007). The Minnesota Department of Education maintains a Family and Community Resources website (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/fsce/) that highlights state and federal parent and family engagement policies and provides web access to numerous related resources for educators, parents, and families.

Using a combination of federal, state and local funds, Faribault Public Schools implemented a full-service community school model, known as Community School, which complements traditional K–12 education by connecting students and families with each other and with a wide array of community resources that address physical, social, and academic needs. The parent and family engagement intervention activities implemented in this study were delivered as a component of the Community School programming design and focus.

The term *parent and family engagement* used in this study encompasses a broader definition of parent involvement that reflects the research of Joyce Epstein on the establishment of school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein, 2019, p. 2). This broader definition features the notion that comprehensive parent and family engagement includes multi-dimensional concepts of involvement, engagement, participation, and collaboration. Furthermore, it involves individuals in the home, at school, and in the community working cooperatively for the betterment of the students, the schools, and the community. For example, the Community School model, with its emphasis on collaborative family services such as physical and mental health care and parent-school and parent-community partnerships addresses this fuller definition of parent engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Current research has recognized considerable benefits of parent and family engagement with their children's schools (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2003; Wilder, 2014). However, research shows that there are many systemic and individual barriers to effective parent and family engagement (Ahmed, 2015; Baker et al., 2016; Epstein, 2019; Jeynes, 2011). Although most of the studies addressing barriers to parent involvement analyzed data by subpopulations, such as racial minority groups or low socio-economic groups, only studies by Ahmed (2015) and Fahrid (2004) focused on Somali immigrant or refugee parents. Both of these studies confirmed the more general parent involvement barriers found in current literature, such as a perceived lack of knowledge about or understanding of parent involvement needs, and these studies highlighted more unique barriers that were also uncovered in this study including language and cultural barriers and barriers of basic literacy that limit parent-child assistance and parent-teacher communications about school policies, expectations, and student progress.

Located in a rural Minnesota setting, Faribault Public Schools (FPS) has a large population of Somali refugee parents with limited English proficiency. Based on data from FPS, children from these families are falling behind in school. The FPS system has acknowledged the need to enhance engagement with these families to more effectively support their children's success in school.

Faribault, Minnesota, is a rural community of 23,650 people (U.S. Census, 2015), located 40 miles south of the Twin Cities. Dependent mostly on farming, manufacturing, and the food industry, Faribault is home to both public and private educational institutions, as well as the largest Minnesota prison in the Department of Corrections system (with more than

2,000 adult males in residence). Over the past 20 years, the face of Faribault has changed dramatically from a predominantly Caucasian community to one of growing ethnic diversity.

The influx of Somali to Minnesota is largely attributed to the Somali civil war which began in the mid 1990s. Since 2012, when a new internationally-backed government was installed, Somalia has been inching towards stability, but the new authorities still face a challenge from Al-Qaeda-aligned Al-Shabab insurgents. The access to employment, good schools, and a growing Somali community are all reasons why large numbers of Somali refugees have settled specifically in Faribault.

In the 2017–2018 school year, FPS had 899 Somali students enrolled representing 23.8% of the total district student population (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The achievement gap between Somali students and other FPS students is of concern to both FPS educators, individual families, and the community at large. For example, according to the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment III (MCA) reading scores for the FPS 2016–2017 school year show a 36% gap between black students (Somalis make up approximately 95% of FPS' black population) and white students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Similarly, MCA math scores, show a 40% gap between black versus white students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

According to the Student Information Database (Sid), between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 program years, 90% of Somali Faribault adult education students reported their primary language as Somali (Faribault Public Schools, 2019). The predominantly Somali speaking population demonstrated that 74%, an average taken between 2016 and 2018, had less than a grade twelve education and no diploma (Faribault Public Schools, 2019). Compounding the education challenges of this population, 38% self-reported that they were

receiving public assistance in the form of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (Faribault Public Schools, 2019), a benchmark of poverty.

The parent subjects in this study were Somali refugees. As identified through the initial interview process, these parents had significant parent and family engagement barriers. These included language, cultural differences, and in some cases, perceived systemic barriers that are related to a lack of knowledge of the American public school system and school district policies. The 12 Somali parents participating in this research study self-reported that they had zero years of previous formal education. A few of the study participants were enrolled in Faribault Adult Education but were continuing to struggle with basic reading, writing, listening, and speaking English. These problematic barriers limit parent and family engagement and have the strong potential to limit their children's success in school and throughout life.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to better understand the perceptions and expectation of parents of Somali children within the Faribault Public Schools regarding school parent involvement, and 2) to investigate the impact on Somali refugee parents of a research based intervention that aimed to enhance parent-school and parent-child engagement. The study provided Somali parents with knowledge and skills through an intervention that consisted of nine training sessions. The data collected provided useful information that could benefit not only participants, but parents and diverse school systems in general. A major premise of this study was the belief that that school systems have a responsibility to promote, enhance, and support parents to attain genuine and effective parent engagement.

Specific questions and areas of interest within this research were:

1. What are Somali refugee parents' understanding, perceptions, and expectations of school parent involvement, and;

2. Did the training intervention, designed to enhance school-parent relationships and parent engagement behaviors among Somali refugee parents, succeed?

Significance of the Study

As highlighted by the paucity of reports in the education literature, little understanding exists regarding parent engagement behaviors among minority groups, especially Somali refugee parents. More specifically, results from this study had direct application to practice and policy regarding Somali parent and family engagement within Faribault Public Schools (FPS). Due to a significant influx of Somali refugee families into the Faribault area, FPS has known that a critical need for enhancing parent-school relationships exists. Results from this study intended to inform FPS's understanding about how parent-school relationships can be more positive for Somali parents and how best to support their engagement in their children's education. Results of the study will also be used to develop or adjust FPS Community School curricula and instruction for future parent and family engagement trainings. More broadly, results from this study have contributed to the body of knowledge regarding specific strategies to effectively engage Somali parents with their children's schools (Leland, 2020, p. 102). Results from this study may be helpful for other schools, school districts, and advocacy groups as they seek to increase Somali parent engagement in their locations.

Finally, this study intended to benefit Somali parent study participants by enhancing their perception of empowerment and self-advocacy, as well as enhancing their skills related to supporting their child's education. Parent engagement activities, based on the Epstein model (2019) and on parent input and questions, that were taught as part of the study's hands-

on training intervention encouraged parents to be advocates for their children. Further, parents were taught how to engage with school administrators and teachers around specific parent engagement concepts. These empowering and self-advocacy activities support the basis toward broader concepts of social justice and equity for participating Somali parents.

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Theoretical Framework

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This study integrated the theoretical background of Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community-Partnership Model ([Partnership Model], 2019) and the FPS Community School model into the study design. Specifically, Epstein's Six Types of Involvement component of the Partnership Model is applicable to this research. Figure 1 describes the relationship of these two theoretical frameworks that overlap to support Somali parent engagement. Epstein's model is based on the six key elements that lead to successful school, family, and community partnerships (2019).

Figure 1

Epstein's Six Types of Involvement (2019) and Community School Characteristics
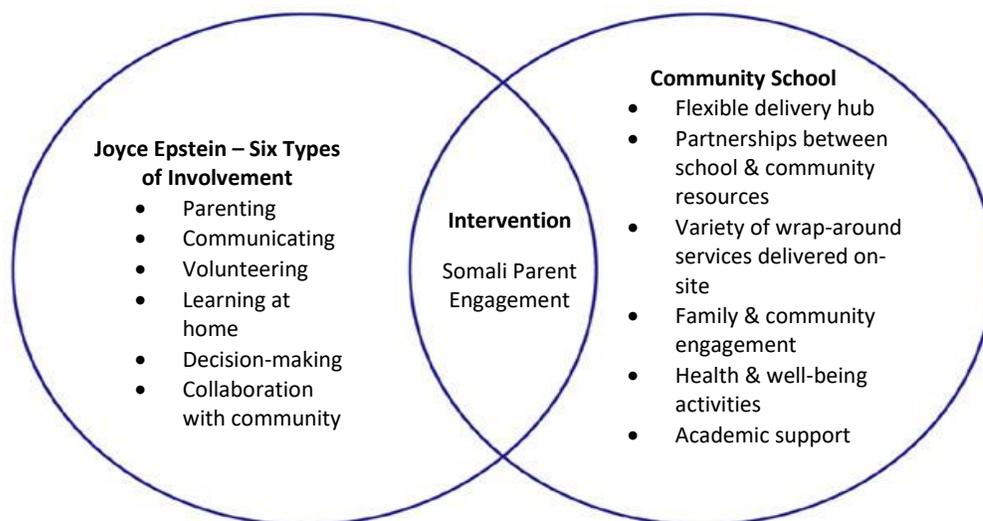
Note. Two theoretical frameworks to inform Somali parent engagement intervention.

The Community School model is designed to be a flexible delivery hub inside a school building, leveraging resources and services to support the power of family and school partnerships. The Epstein model along with the FPS Community School delivery model was the framework for this case study of 12 Somali parents. Using these two theoretical frameworks, as in Figure 1, provided context for the pre- and post-training interview questions and the parent training. For over twenty years, Joyce Epstein has created strategies to link families, schools, and communities together with the goal focused on healthy youth development. Epstein's theoretical framework has been paramount for the professional development of and action planning for teachers and educational leaders of pre-Kindergarten through grade twelve students to design ways to bring the triad of family, school, and community together to form an authentic and balanced partnership (Chen & Chandler, 2001). The utility and effectiveness of Epstein's Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2019) has been well-described in educational literature for a variety of majority and minority populations, however, this study's application of the Epstein model specifically for Somali refugee parents is unique.

The nine parent engagement training sessions, designed and implemented in this study, were conducted through the FPS Community School delivery model. Chen et al. (2016) defined a Full-Service Community School (FSCS) model as:

> FSCS means a public elementary or secondary school that works with a local education agency and community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, and other public or private entities to provide a coordinated and integrated set of comprehensive academic, social, and health services that respond to the needs of its students, students' family members, and community members. In addition, a FSCS

promotes family engagement by bringing together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities for students, students' family members, and community members. (p. 2270)

An underlying reason for selection of this dissertation topic was the researcher's personal interest and strong belief in social justice. In Creswell and Poth's (2018) description of qualitative interpretive framework theory, they assert, "… the theories may be social justice theories or advocacy/participatory theories seeking to bring about change or address social justice issues in our societies" (p. 23). When researching parent and family engagement, the literature frequently describes the benefits for children or for the school, but typically does not describe benefits accruing to parents or family members. According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), parents are often viewed by school faculty as inadequate partners in their children's education and seen as lacking the skills or interest to support their children. Given these findings, the research and intervention strategies used in this study hoped to enhance the parents' sense of empowerment and building skills around their own self-advocacy.

Method

This three-stage qualitative phenomenological design case study investigated the presence of parent engagement behaviors and the application of parent engagement training strategies for Somali refugee parents. This qualitative design was chosen to encourage the participants to fully express their views and allow the researcher to gain richer insights into complex issues being addressed in the interview questions. As a phenomenological design, the researcher was able to clarify and be enlightened as to how the Somali refugee parents understand and comprehend the phenomena of parent and family engagement.

The Somali Refugee parents in this study were found to share similar demographic characteristics both within the participant group and relative to the overall Faribault Somali refugee population. All participants had less than ten years residing in the US and none had attended school in Somalia or the US. A significant shared characteristic of these parents was their overall lack of English proficiency. All study participants identified as Muslim and had multiple children, representing 59 students enrolled in FPS.

Using a face-to-face pre-training interview process, the researcher examined the attitudes and perceptions of a non-randomized group of twelve FPS Somali parents about their own understanding of and level of engagement in their children's education. Following these interviews, the researcher provided nine parent engagement training sessions for the selected group over a ten-week period. Each training session ranged from 90 minutes to two hours in length and included parent and family engagement knowledge and skills that were directly aligned to Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1993). During the training sessions, participants were encouraged to share their prior experience with the parent engagement concept being presented, their perceived barriers to implementation of the concept, and their ideas for how they might implement the training concept in the future.

Three weeks after the training sessions, a final set of face-to-face interviews were conducted. The aim of the final interviews was twofold. First, to determine the extent to which parents applied strategies they were taught during their training sessions, and second, to gauge changes in their perceptions regarding engagement strategies. The time period available for parents to implement a specific parent engagement training concept varied from a maximum of 13 weeks to a minimum of three weeks depending on when during the ten-week training period a concept was presented.

Fifteen interview questions for parents, used in stage one and three, were conceptually framed around Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1993). The nine-part parent engagement trainings, stage two, were also designed around Epstein's framework and delivered by the researcher as a component of the FPS Community School model.

Research Design

Within the qualitative phenomenological paradigm, this study used a case study methodology featuring: stage one–parent pre-training interviews; stage two–an intervention consisting of nine training sessions on parent engagement skills; and stage three–post-training interviews to capture training practices. Subjects for this study were not randomly selected, but rather a convenience sample selected through recommendations from Community School staff. Because the research focused on Somali parents, there were important linguistic and cultural aspects to consider. The use of a qualitative research approach allowed for more thorough and open participation of the Somali families who are not fluent in the English language and the content domains of reading, writing, and listening. The study consisted of face-to-face group interviews, hands-on parent engagement training, and in-depth discussions with parents. All discussions and presentations were facilitated by the researcher with the assistance of a Somali interpreter.

Results from the participant interviews were coded and organized to identify common themes or insights. For example, coding was performed on pre-training interview questions of parents that included their current practices for discussing postsecondary educational expectations with their children and with their children's teachers. Coding was also performed on the stage three post-training interview data regarding parent perception about specific engagement strategies.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) for the twelve Somali parents participating in the study. The interview questions were developed using Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement as a conceptual model (Epstein, 1993). Some qualitative researchers argue that, because qualitative research is necessarily inductive, any substantial prior structuring of the methods, like those used in most quantitative research, may lead to a lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights, and can lead to data interpretations that are too narrowly developed (Maxwell, 2013). However, as noted in the research of Thai et al. (2012), the use of semi-structured instruments allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into complex issues being addressed in the interview questions.

The stage one parent pre-training interview instrument included a set of demographic questions and a set of questions about perceived barriers to parent and family engagement. The next set of questions on the instrument were designed around the six concepts of Epstein's model: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) parent-school decision-making, and 6) community collaborations. Excluding the demographic questions, a total of 15 separate questions were asked of each participant. Most questions on the instrument included a few prompt sub-questions that helped to clarify the theme of the initial question. All 12 participants in this study indicated they did not read Somali proficiently; therefore questions on the instrument were read in English by the researcher and in Somali by the interpreter to the twelve parents as a group.

The post-interview parent instrument was identical to the pre-training instrument, except demographic questions were excluded, and was administered six weeks after the final parent and family engagement training. While the intent of the pre-training interview was to

determine parent perceptions around important concepts of parent and family engagement, the intent of the post-training interview was to determine if any of the knowledge and skills from the parent engagement trainings had been put into action or if initial perceptions about the parent engagement concepts had changed. The interview questions were divided into three stages:

1. Stage one included pre-training interview questions and participant demographic information.

2. Stage two was an intervention consisting of nine training sessions on parent engagement skills.

3. Stage three included post-training interview questions that paralleled stage one to determine parent application of parent engagement skills.

Data Collection Procedures and Timelines

The researcher secured permission from the FPS administration and the local school in the fall of 2018 to conduct this research. Approval was also secured from the University of Minnesota Moorhead Institutional Review Board. Following these approvals, the researcher began working with the interpreter/cultural liaison as well as the Somali Community Resettlement Services organization to fully design the study and begin participant recruitment.

Stage one of data collection involved pre-training interviews with the twelve Somali parent participants. Two hour pre-training interviews were done in two sessions during 2019, one in February and one in June. Participants met as a group with the researcher and interpreter/ cultural liaison and responded verbally to the demographic and parent engagement questions. To ensure that all participants understood the interview questions delivered by the

researcher, the Somali interpreter provided verbal interpretations of questions in Somali. As responses were given, the interpreter translated participant responses from Somali into English. The use of the interpreter/cultural liaison was essential as only two of the twelve participants had enough English skills to understand and orally respond to all of the interview questions in English. The researcher took detailed notes during the pre-training interviews and also digitally recorded each session.

Stage two of data collection involved the delivery of parent and family engagement trainings by the researcher with assistance from the interpreter/cultural liaison. A total of nine trainings were conducted during March, April, and May of 2019. The duration of each training ranged from 90 minutes to two hours in length and included parent and family engagement knowledge and skills that were directly aligned to Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1993) (see Appendix B). The researcher made observations during each training session and recorded observations in a notebook. Observations included comments from participants about the trainings as well as the researcher's own observations of participants' behaviors and attitudes.

Stage three of data collection involved the post-training interview. These interviews were conducted during two participant meeting sessions in June 2019. The information collected during these post-training interviews paralleled the content of the pre-training interviews, excluding demographic questions. Questions from pre- to post-intervention were consistent in order to detect any changes in perceptions about parent and family engagement actions and/or to determine if parents had implemented any of the training concepts. Participants met as a group with the researcher and interpreter/cultural liaison and responded

verbally to the interview questions. The researcher took detailed notes during the post-training interviews and also digitally recorded each session.

Data Analysis

The demographic data from Somali parent participants were aggregated by the researcher and provided a rich context for knowledge about the Somali refugee parents participating in this research. Detailed notes were taken by the researcher during pre-training interviews and interview sessions were digitally recorded for reference and coding purposes. The interview questions were aligned with Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement and the analysis of the participant responses followed that framework.

The intent of the pre-training interview stage was to determine the extent to which participants were familiar with concepts of parent involvement that would be part of the intervention training they were to receive. Further, data from pre-training interviews helped to determine whether or not the participants were already implementing strategies for parent engagement that were part of the intervention training they would receive. Summary statements were generated by the researcher and coded around each of Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement. This analysis of pre-training interviews relied on both the researcher's notes taken during the pre-training interviews and the digital recordings of each session.

The nine parent and family engagement training sessions conducted for the participants included parent and family engagement knowledge and skills using a deductive coding approach in direct alignment with the Six Types of Parent Involvement. The researcher took notes during the trainings that were coded around intentional themes including: 1) degree of participant engagement during the training, 2) mood or attitude of

participants, 3) participant difficulties understanding the training content, and 4) other participant reactions to the training content or training process.

Data collected by the researcher from the post-training interviews were also coded into Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement framework. The intent of the post-training interview stage was to determine the degree to which participants had implemented the strategies taught, and if they had, their comments about their use of those strategies. Participant comments about difficulties in implementing the parent involvement strategies were also noted (See Appendix A).

Results

Research Question One

The first research question in this study was: What are Somali refugee parents' understandings, perceptions, and expectations of school parent involvement? Prior to the training intervention, pre-interview findings indicated that parents had experienced positive interactions with schools in Faribault. Parents indicated their appreciation of how resources from the community were being delivered through a partnership with and through FPS, (i.e., the community school model) mentioning support services offered such as cultural liaisons, interpreters, childcare, and topic-based parent sessions. Additionally, parents expressed concerns around their lack of English skills, their understanding of school policies, how to monitor student progress, and teacher expectations.

During the nine training intervention sessions, parents highlighted stark differences in education and life between refugee camps in Africa and America. Even though all parents admitted concerns about the specifics of their expanded involvement role and how to overcome their language and education challenges, they enthusiastically supported a shared

desire for their children to succeed in school. Collectively, parents expressed interest in volunteering at their child's school but did not know how to approach these opportunities and were waiting for invitations from school staff.

Further findings indicated that parents had broad expectations (e.g., student success in school and in life) in parallel with those of Faribault Public Schools. However, they indicated that they lacked specific, actionable knowledge about parent engagement skills, and coupled with their personal barriers of low English skills, this lack of parent engagement strategies and behaviors was a significant obstacle to fulfilling the involvement expectations.

Research Question Two

The second research question in this study was: Did the training intervention, designed to enhance school-parent relationships and parent engagement behaviors among Somali refugee parents, succeed? Throughout the nine weeks, parents continued to affirm their responsibility to help their children learn at home but thought that their lack of English and formal education skills stood in the way of understanding how to support their children in school. Feelings of isolation from the rest of the community were discussed and compounded with the revelation that their children were experiencing a life that they could not participate in fully or know how to effactually cause change for the betterment and success of their children.

Post-training findings revealed changed attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Parents were ecstatic to receive hands-on help and support during the training sessions from the team of district technology and administrative staff where they established email addresses and were provided access to the Campus Parent Portal application. Not only were parents empowered to begin monitoring their children's homework assignments, grades, and

attendance, they conveyed their excitement that school district staff wanted to hear from and partner with them. Parents indicated that they had learned about expectations about and skills to provide homework support for their children, communication strategies with school staff, monitoring student progress, and setting high expectations for and giving praise to their children. Overwhelmingly, parents appeared more empowered to effectively advocate on behalf of their and other families' children. They reported increased knowledge of school policies and experienced positive staff receptiveness to parent volunteering. The availability of support services in the community, for example the library, was mentioned in the post-training responses. Parents reported more comfort with approaching building and district administrators with concerns, suggestions, and opportunities to partner. After carefully scrutinizing after school opportunities for their children, parents indicated more willingness for their children's participation in extra-curricular and out of school time activities and programs. Responses noted during the training sessions as well as those from post-training interviews of Somali refugee parents revealed that the training intervention appeared to result in both increased parent engagement knowledge and parent engagement behaviors.

Discussion

Although the study population of Somali refugees held the same expectations and goals for their children with regard to school and life as the white FPS population, this minority group of parents had significant barriers to attaining the parent engagement skills and behaviors to fulfill these goals. Through post-training semi-structured interviews, parents affirmed that they had gained more confidence in supporting their children in school and communicating with school staff, and that they were excited about their future interactions with their children's learning.

Early in the study process, the researcher uncovered parent perceptions and behaviors regarding school-parent relationships that were unanticipated. For example, whereas the researcher assumed all FPS parents had access and used the FPS online parent portal for monitoring student progress and other information; that was clearly not the case for these Somali refugee parents. As a result of this finding, as part of the intervention training sessions, parents were assisted to set up email accounts and given hands-on training to make full use of the parent portal information. This finding led parents to recognize and validate that this information is available. Even though the parents lacked English proficiency, instead of relying on their children for helping to interpret their grades and attendance on the portal site, the district's cultural liaisons and paraprofessionals that speak and are culturally Somali have made this connection for these and a number of Somali parents. Another example of a parent engagement barrier that was unanticipated was Somali parent lack of connection with their children's school administrators. This was addressed during the training intervention sessions so that parents met and interacted with FPS administrators. These interactions resulted in policy clarifications, involvement, volunteering invitations for parents, and a new perception by parents that administrators did much more than the nuts and bolts of school management, they deeply cared about the success of their children and were open to personal conversations about their children's learning.

In a practical sense, this research confirmed the need for parent engagement training for this population of parents and revealed that the barriers faced by minority populations of parents, as reported in literature and evidenced in this study, were both significant and addressable (Cooper & Christie, 2005). The researcher believes that having a structural model of parent engagement content (i.e., the Epstein Six Levels of Parent Involvement) was a key

to the success of the parent engagement training interventions. The model used was evidence-based, comprehensive, and allowed the researcher to provide knowledge, skills, and behavioral actions to directly address the needs of this parent population.

The use of the semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to deeply explore the two research questions presented in this study. The interview process and the use of the Epstein model opened up a broader array of parent input that naturally flowed from expectations to parent engagement current actions, barriers, and specific needs for new skills and behaviors. The six content domains of the Epstein model prompted conversations and discussions that in essence 'covered the waterfront' of parent engagement opportunities. During stage one, pre-training questions, all 12 parents stated that in Somali culture, schooling is the total responsibility of the teacher and the school. Parents expressed that their priorities with their children center in regard to the provision of food, shelter, and clothing. The concepts of Epstein's parent-school involvement is untraditional in Somali culture. Furthermore, the Somali parents grew to understand that Faribault Public Schools' parent engagement expectations were far more varied than attending teacher conferences or signing off on assignments, and that these wide-ranging parent engagement dimensions required actions in the home, actions with teachers, administrators and staff, the school or district in general, and within the community at large.

The findings in this study clearly support the premise that parent engagement and school-parent relationships can be enhanced through parent engagement training interventions. Further, the delivery of parent engagement training through the FPS Community School aligned well with the mission of the full-service community school model which cultivates and enhances parent and family engagement, empowers parents, and

increases student success in school (; Anderson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Dryfoos, 2005). The study sample of Somali refugee parents had previous familiarity with many of the support services provided at the FPS Community School and therefore had an increased level of comfort and openness in these familiar surroundings.

Although limited research exists on parent and family engagement practices of the Somali refugee population in America or abroad, the existing research showed that due primarily to cultural beliefs and norms, Somali parents view their main role is to ensure their children attend school and expect educators to prepare their children for a productive, economically sound life (Farid & McMahan, 2004). The pre-training interviews of Somali parent refugees in this research verified these basic expectations but also revealed the desire of the study group to take a more active role in their children's learning.

Ahmed (2015) reported that the issues of language, culture, and school-parent and teacher-parent relationship barriers tend to seriously stifle parent and family engagement and result in the disempowerment and absence of self-advocacy in Somali parents. This identification of barriers to parent engagement was confirmed in this study through parent responses in both the pre-training and post-training interviews. The responses of parents in this study during the parent engagement trainings, and especially those trainings that encouraged parent-school relationships (e.g., volunteering, decision-making committees, etc.), revealed that parents who implemented the recommended parent engagement actions appeared to perceive a level of increased empowerment and self-advocacy as previously described in literature (Moll et al., 1992; Epstein, 2001, 2013).

Some research suggests that for minority parents and students, including refugee populations, effective parent engagement and student success must feature school efforts to

cultivate a climate of cultural diversity so that trust is established between parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The findings in this study support this trust-building premise as the study parents reported that getting to know and interact with school administrators and staff through the parent engagement trainings led to new and positive relationships and perceptions.

Several studies revealed that parent involvement declines as students' progress through the preK–12 grades. Research on this phenomenon shows that the lack of parent involvement begins at the middle school level and increases in secondary school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hill & Taylor, 2004). These studies and others offered evidence-based suggestions for secondary schools to increase parent and family engagement actions through more intentional collaborations with parents (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997; Scott-Jones, 1994). Similar to these findings in the current literature, the Somali parents of middle school and high school students in this study revealed a greater reluctance to be involved with their children's school as their children insisted, sometimes falsely, that he or she (the student) was doing fine in school and the parent had no need for involvement. As recommended by the Funkhouser and Gonzales research, this study of Somali parent engagement included intensive and intentional collaborations at all grade levels as components of the training interventions.

This research confirmed the findings from several studies that directly linked positive outcomes of parent and family engagement with the implementation of a full-service community school model (Chen et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2010; Voyles, 2012). As the parent engagement trainings in this study were delivered through the FPS Community School

model, this research contributes to the growing base of information about the benefits and success of the FSCS concept.

Conclusions

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this study of Somali refugee parent engagement. It is clear that Somali parents have significant barriers to parent engagement with their children's learning and with their children's schools. These barriers include lack of basic literacy and English, cultural awareness issues, lack of understanding about American school culture and expectations, and a lack of parent-school relationships. These barriers result in Somali parents being disadvantaged and disempowered in terms of helping their children succeed in school and in life. The study verified those barriers for FPS Somali parents and through parent engagement trainings provided the study sample group with focused, evidenced-based knowledge, skills, and recommended actions.

The study found that although the Somali refugee parents held high aspirations for their children's success in school and in life, they had many barriers to effective parent engagement. The most significant barriers were revealed to be low basic skills and English literacy and the lack of understanding of the skills and behaviors needed to be effectively engaged with their children's learning and their children's schools. The parent engagement knowledge and actionable training delivered to the Somali refugee parents resulted in positive actions in each of the six levels of involvement as described by Epstein's (2019) model including: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, parent-school decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

The study concluded that the use of a comprehensive parent engagement model is an effective tool to provide parents with the motivation and skills to increase their parent

engagement and parent-school relationships. The implementation of the Epstein model of parent involvement is highly flexible and is well-supported by training materials and texts by Joyce Epstein (2019) and other parent educators and researchers.

Observations of and responses from parents supported the notion that increased parent engagement leads to self-advocacy, empowerment, and more broadly, social justice and equity. This research presented Somali refugee parents with opportunities to be more active in their children's learning, interact with school administrators and staff, and access parenting and educational resources. All parents in the study reported during the post-training interviews that they achieved to some extent an increased sense of empowerment and self-advocacy, and they were looking forward to a more positive parent-school relationships and interactions in the long-term. This finding of promising future parent empowerment and self-advocacy implies an important step forward in social justice and equity for the FPS Somali refugee parent population.

Over the course of the study the Somali parents appeared to develop feelings and behaviors of self-advocacy and empowerment which in a broader sense demonstrated important social justice and equity outcomes for this marginalized population. Although the basic assumptions of our democratic society endorse and champion justice and equity across our nation, many communities still harbor social injustices and sub-group disenfranchisement. The actions that schools can take to create more equity and fairness would benefit all community members and institutions. Developing and strengthening parent and family engagement in our schools is not just a dream for enhanced social justice, it is a realizable challenge, a small step toward equity, and one that this research embraced.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type One: Parenting

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis

• Parents reported significant responsibility for teaching children behaviors and values of respect, kindness, openness, and humility
 	
• Parents described vast differences in parenting roles between their chaotic lives in Somalia and their new life in the US. Whereas parenting in Somali was basically one of providing necessities of food, shelter, and safety, they generally understood their role as a parent in the US to be greatly expanded to include involvement in their children's education, social and emotional development, and basic health and welfare
 	
• Parents raised concerns about the difficulty of parenting including dealing with:
   o strong-willed teenagers,
   o finding quality parenting time as working parents,
   o accessing quality daycare, and,
   o maintaining a focus on the Somali culture and Muslim religion
	• Parents reported a using a variety of new behaviors including:
	   o monitoring their children's homework,
	   o providing a set time and location for homework and study,
	   o accessing the FPS parent online portal,
	   o communicating more frequently with their children's teacher,
	   o providing incentives and rewards for school progress and grades, and,
	   o giving their children daily praise and affirmations
	
	• A few parents indicated they were able to be intentional role models for their children as they (the parent) progressed and succeeded in their own adult education classes

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type Two: Communication

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis
• Several parents acknowledged feeling somewhat welcomed by school staff. They added they ought to feel welcomed since their children spend 8 hours a day at school	• All parents identified feeling very welcomed by school staff • Some parents reported using some training strategies to communicate expectations with school staff

• All parents reported receiving communication from the school only when their child was late to school or class	• Parents came to realize lack of communication with high school staff was:
	   o leading to confusion about school rules and policies
	   o giving their children opportunity to distort rules and policies
	
	• For example, parents thought high school staff were making their children stay after school every day when it was their child's choice.

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type Three: Volunteering

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis
• All parents said "yes" that they felt able to volunteer at their child's school but only one parent had been approached by school staff to volunteer	• Two parents reported being hired at the middle school, 1 as a lunchroom paraprofessional and both to help with community school programming as site assistants • Several parents reported that they had been asked to participate in regular parent group meetings

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type Four: Learning at Home

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis
• Helping children learn at home was reported by all parents as a primary responsibility although some parents commented that their child should share that responsibility • Seven parents reported uncertainty about their child's truthfulness about grades or assignments and wanted to know how parents could have direct access to this information • Three parents reported taking children to the public library, but found their lack of English skills a barrier to helping their children select grade-level learning materials • Several parents raised the issue concerning a lack of time for homework and studying because their children attended Quranic study sessions at the Mosque on weeknights	• All parents reported knowing how to use and that they were using FPS's online portal for parents. • All parents reported that being able to access and use the portal was extremely helpful • All parents reported monitoring their children's grades, assignments, and progress at school and could better focus their children's study time at home on missing assignments and grade improvement activities • All parents reported increased understanding of school expectations for attendance and available support service resources • Five parents reported more frequent use of the library • All parents indicated they had increased the number and type of learning resources available in their home

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type Five: Decision Making

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis
• Parents reported lack of confidence in their English skills prevents them from joining school committees or organizations	• Parents reported feeling much more comfortable approaching administrators regarding the making of decisions about their children's school life
• Examples of frustrations were expressed by parents wanting to change policies and practices, but all felt they lacked the ability	• Parents articulated their demand that the school use equitable practices with their children and all students within the context of academics and restorative justice consequences
	• All parents requested that parent groups be established district wide that meet regularly to examine policies and procedures and share in the decision making of existing and future school practices

Epstein's Parent Involvement Type Six: Collaboration with the Community

Pre-Training Response Synthesis	Post-Training Response Synthesis
• All parents indicated that the community at large was important and that the Somali population had a responsibility to help the community prosper and grow	• All parents reported broader knowledge of community supportive services including organizations and services previously unknown to them
• Parents reported that the Faribault community had an obligation to financially support the school district and make community resources available to students and schools	• Parents expressed specific interest in the upcoming district levy referendum and asked that school officials explain the content and process so they could better communicate the levy importance to others
• Four parents reported that their children participated in extra-curricular activities including service-learning, volunteering, soccer, and basketball during the past year. However, parents often did not know about these opportunities and relied on their children to discover them.	• Parents discussed their concerns about their children's participation in extra-curricular activities (e.g., available time, cost, etc.), and were pleased to learn of the research-based long-term benefits of extra-curricular participation

Appendix B

Six Types of Involvement

THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Type 1 — Parenting:
Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

Type 2 — Communicating:
Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

Type 3 — Volunteering:
Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in other locations to support students and school programs.

Type 4 — Learning at Home:
Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.

Type 5 — Decision Making:
Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.

Type 6 — Collaborating With the Community:
Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

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