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

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FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INTERVENTION: CASE STUDY OF SOMALI PARENT-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT WITHIN A RURAL MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Moorhead, MN

May 15, 2020
FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INTERVENTION: CASE STUDY OF SOMALI PARENT-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT WITHIN A RURAL MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dean, College of Education and Human Services
DEDICATION

Growing up in the rural community of Albert Lea, Minnesota with parents who taught me to always stand up for social justice and equity, led me to select my doctoral research topic. It is with an infinite amount of gratitude and admiration for my parents, that I submit my dissertation for review and consideration. Placing justice for other people and animals at the forefront of everyday is the way I lead my personal and professional life.

Dr. Barry Shaffer, my husband, is an unending resource of knowledge and humor. I could not have completed my Ed.D. without his support, coaching, and advice. He has opened my eyes and heart to many adventures and has helped me navigate many obstacles.

My sister, Dr. Nancy Leland has held me up through many of my educational experiences and has always cheered me on to the finish line, especially supporting my dissertation writing and research. All my siblings have helped me achieve this terminal degree and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Along with the research participants, this project could not have succeeded without cultural, language, and expertise from Mariam Mohamed and Abdullah Sharif Hared. Mariam has become one of my greatest mentors and Sharif’s dedication to the Somali community is untenable.

I expressly want to thank Faribault Public Schools Superintendent, Todd Sesker for encouraging me to pursue my doctorate. I am fortunate to continue my prosperous and fulfilling trek around this planet and am grateful for all the people who have inspired me.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Michael Coquyt, and my committee members, Dr. Julie Swaggert, Dr. Jason Engbrecht, and Ray Ades for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. Dr. Coquyt embraced my research topic from the beginning. His support and guidance kept me focused, thorough, and inspired.

In addition, I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, the department faculty and staff for making my time at Minnesota State University Moorhead an enlightening and wonderful experience. The core five Ed.D. faculty were a helpful, dynamic, and thought-provoking team. I want to also offer my appreciation to those who were willing to participate in my interviews and training, without whom, this dissertation would not have been possible.
ABSTRACT

Current research has recognized considerable benefits of parent and family engagement with their children’s schools. However, research shows many systemic and individual barriers to effective parent and family engagement. 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.

The purpose of this quasi-experimental, qualitative case study was to characterize Somali refugee parents’ understanding of their role in school-parent relationships and investigate the impact of a research-based intervention that aimed to enhance parent-child and parent-school engagement. Questions included: 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?

The study adapted Epstein’s School-Family-Community Partnership Model and used it to design a training intervention that was delivered as a component of the district’s Community School model. Pre- and post-training face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 Somali parents. The training intervention consisted of nine weekly sessions. Interviews questioned parents about their school engagement practices and perceptions about the strategies presented to them through the training sessions. Results from parent interviews were coded to identify common themes.
None of 12 male and female parents in the study had attended school in their
home country or the United States. All lacked English proficiency. Prior to the
intervention training sessions, parents reported that overall, their interactions with their
children’s schools were positive. Their lack of English skills, they indicated, make it hard
for them to understand school policies, their child’s school progress, and teacher
expectations. Findings during the training intervention and in post-training interviews
revealed that the training intervention appeared to result in both increased parent
engagement knowledge and parent engagement behaviors.

This study provides FPS, the two FPS Community School sites, and the broader
education field with specific strategies to improve school, family, and community
relationships with Somali families.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Diana Bull Hiatt’s (1994) article “Parent Involvement in American Public Schools: A Historical Perspective 1642—2000” stated that:

The pendulum has swung from strong parent involvement in the home and community-based schools of the agrarian seventeenth century to the bureaucratic factory model schools of the industrial revolution. The pendulum appears to be swinging back again, slowly at first, but gathering momentum, towards schooling which increasingly involves parents (Hiatt, 1994, p. 37).

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 multiple barriers to genuine involvement.

At the federal policy level, mandated parental involvement was included in legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act and reauthorized again in 2015 as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Within ESSA, Title I mandate considerable parent involvement targeting low-income parents and 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.

Beyond the mandates of ESSA, two additional pieces of federal legislation support and encourage parent and family engagement. The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990 (IDEA), which guaranteed all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate
education, commonly known as Special Education, included detailed processes for
significant parent involvement. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
gives parents a variety of rights regarding accessing their children’s records and other
personal information.

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 that highlights state and federal parent and family
engagement policies and provides web access to numerous related resources for educators,
parents, and families.

Parent and family engagement research have recognized 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, and teacher-parent contact or written communications that are
consistently about negative behavior or problems. On the individual barrier side, many
hindrances to effective parent and family engagement emerge. These barriers include 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, Wise, Kelley, &
Skiba, 2016).
Using a combination of federal, state and local funds, Faribault Public Schools (FPS) implemented a full-service community school model, known as “Community School”, that 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. In the words of the Faribault Buckham Library Director, Delane James:

Community School happens before, during and after school, and is woven into the fabric that makes up school. Community School is a philosophy and an approach that embeds community partners into a school to support students, teachers, and families. Community partners respond to the needs of students and families so teachers can do what they do best…teach (personal communication, September 13, 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Current research has recognized considerable benefits of parent and family engagement with their children’s schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). However, research shows many systemic and individual barriers to effective parent and family engagement (Jeynes, 2011; Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Ahmed, 2017; Epstein, 2019). 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 percentage of Latinx community members in Faribault has increased sevenfold since the late 1990s and is now nearly twice the state average. The most recent wave of new residents are immigrants and refugees from Somalia.

The parent subjects in this study are Somali refugees. As identified through an initial interview process, these parents were found to have 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. These problematic barriers limit parent and family engagement and have the potential to limit their children’s success in school and throughout life. The following quote by Abdullahi Ahmed (2017) vividly describes some of these challenges:

As a Somali, I know firsthand that Somalis in Maine and elsewhere in the United States face many challenges. Learning a new language and culture, dealing with trauma, lacking education and job skills… are a few of the challenges Somali refugees are facing. However, raising children in the U.S. is most difficult aspect for Somali parents (2017, p. 38).

In the 2017-2018 school year, FPS had 899 Somali students enrolled representing 23.8% of the total district student population. 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 (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. Similarly, MCA math scores, show a 40% gap between black versus white students.

Somali adults, many of whom are parents of children enrolled in FPS, also seek basic education opportunities for themselves. Faribault Adult Education (FAE) offers English as a Second Language, citizenship, basic academic and employability skills, high school credentials, and college preparatory programming to an average of 450 students annually. Over the course of two school years, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, FAE served 288 and 297 East Africans respectively. Through a standard intake procedure, FAE collects demographic data, employment status, and prior education in the U.S. versus non-U.S. education history.

Between the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 FAE program years, 90% of Somali adult students reported their primary language as Somali. 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. 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, a benchmark of poverty. Table 1 summarizes this intake information.
Table 1. *Faribault Adult Education East African Student Demographic Characteristics from Intake Information, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faribault Adult Education East African Student Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Program Year 2016-2017 Number</th>
<th>Program Year 2017-2018 Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>East African Students</td>
<td>288</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>183</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades 9 – 12, no diploma</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Education Credential</td>
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<td>Diploma or alternative credential</td>
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<td>Receiving MN Family Investment Program Funding (MFIP)</td>
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Note. Table 1 data derived from Minnesota Adult Basic Education Student Information Database, 2019.

Much like the FAE East African students noted in Table 1, the 12 Somali parents participating in this research study have self-reported that they have zero years of previous formal education. A few of the study participants are enrolled in FAE but are continuing to
struggle with basic reading, writing, listening to, and speaking English.

**Theoretical Basis for Research Study**

This study integrates the theoretical background of Joyce Epstein’s School-Family-Community-Partnership Model (Partnership Model) and the 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, p. 155). 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.

---

**Figure 1** Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement (2019) and Community School Characteristics

**Joyce Epstein – Six Types of Involvement**
- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decision-making
- Collaboration with community

**Community School**
- Flexible delivery hub
- Partnerships between school & community resources
- Variety of wrap-around services delivered on-site
- Family & community engagement
- Health & well-being activities
- Academic support

**Intervention**
Somali Parent Engagement
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, p. 4). The research herein adapts Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2019) and uses it, along with the FPS Community School model as the framework for this case study of 12 Somali parents. Using the two theoretical frameworks provides context for the pre- and post-training interview questions and the parent training. All semi-structured interview questions were coded in relation to the Six Types of Involvement from the Epstein and FPS Community School models.

The nine parent engagement training sessions, designed and implemented in this study, were conducted through the FPS Community School delivery model. Chen, Anderson, & Watkins (2016) define 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 is 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” (2018, 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. Although outside the scope of this study, the research and intervention strategies used may enhance the parents’ sense of empowerment and building skills around their own self-advocacy.

Research Questions

Questions and areas of interest within this research are:

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?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is 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 engagement with and support of their children’s academic and social success. The study provides Somali parents with parent-
school and parent-child engagement knowledge and skills through an intervention that consisted of nine training sessions. The data collected aims to provide useful information that can benefit not only participants, but parents and diverse school systems in general. A major premise of this study is that school systems have a responsibility to promote, enhance, and support parents to attain genuine and effective parent engagement.

**Definition of Terms**

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.

Somali *parent* is a term used to refer to the focus population in the study. This term includes FPS parents who are Somali *refugees* now residing in the school district geographic region who are individuals who have primary responsibility for their children. This individual may be a biological parent, a stepparent, grandparent, foster parent, or other relative or caregiver. The term *refugee* is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion” (“Refugee Facts: What is a Refugee?, 2018).
Assumptions

One methodological assumption inherent in this quasi-experimental, qualitative research involves the use of interviews to gather information from Somali parents. That is, the study assumes that the Somali parents are telling the truth and expressing reality as they perceive it. From an ontological perspective this study assumes that one person’s reality, as demonstrated through their interview responses may be independent, socially constructed, or different from another person’s reality. From an epistemological perspective, the study assumes the interviewer and interviewee mutually influence each other in their conversations.

Another set of assumptions concern this researcher’s values as they pertain to the research topic. The researcher’s interest in social justice and equity is a driving force behind this study. The researcher holds the belief that facilitating parents to act and feel more engaged with the school is a liberating and empowering phenomenon for the individual parent and yields positive outcomes for the school in general. The researcher asserts that the Community School model, which is the delivery system for the training interventions used in this study, is an important methodological assumption. That is, the researcher values and believes that the use of this inclusive and community-focused model as a training delivery system is an effective way to ease the anxieties of parents who are new to parent and family engagement.

A final methodological assumption concerns the choice of Epstein’s Partnership Model theoretical framework that describes the six types of school-parent involvement. Epstein’s extensive research in the domain of school-parent involvement and parent engagement with their children’s learning conveys the assumption of reliability with the application of Epstein’s (2019) framework to the study. That is, Epstein’s well-researched and validated parent engagement instrument is considered a standard within this field of
study. Described in greater detail in Chapter Two, the Epstein model is the backbone of many of the current studies in the school-parent involvement scholarly literature.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations for the research study were established prior to research study implementation. These delimitations include:

1. The study is delimited to one public school district in Minnesota.
2. The case study focuses only on a relatively small group of Somali parents.
3. The participants included in the study are volunteers.

**Significance of the Study**

Most importantly, this study provides investigation into an area little studied. As highlighted by the paucity of reports in the education literature, little understanding exists regarding parent engagement behaviors among Somali refugee parents. Further, this study begins to provide information about issues of great importance to the field.

More specifically, results from this study will have direct application to practice and policy regarding Somali parent and family engagement within 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 will increase FPS understanding about how parent-school relationships can be more positive for Somali parents and how best to support them engage in their child’s education. This will enhance the mission of FPS’ which is “…to empower, energize, and engage all students through its commitment to a quality education and create an effective learning environment.” Results of the study will 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 will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding specific strategies to effectively engage Somali parents with their children’s schools. Many other school districts in Minnesota and across the nation have experienced an influx of Somali refugees (“FY 2015 Served Populations by State and Country of Origin,” 2016). These populations have identical barriers regarding parent and family engagement and school-parent involvement. These barriers include the lack of English language proficiency, cultural misunderstandings, and systemic issues regarding school policies and perceptions (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016). Results from this study may be helpful for other schools, school districts, and advocacy groups as they attempt to increase Somali parent and family engagement in their locations.

Finally, this study aims to benefit Somali parent participants directly 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 taught as part of the study’s hands-on training intervention, encourage parents to be advocates for their children. Further, parents are 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.

Summary

Chapter One provides the reader with a brief historical background of parent and family engagement in American schools. Two theoretical frameworks that support the study are described along with identification of the research study and participants. The remaining content of the dissertation is followed by Chapter Two, the Literature Review, which provides greater detail and understandings from current scholarly literature on concepts of
parent and family engagement barriers faced by Somali and other limited English populations as well as the results of interventions to enhance parent engagement. The process for conducting this qualitative case study is described in Chapter Three, Research Method, and includes pre- and post-interviews of Somali parents accompanied by a parent engagement training intervention. Chapter Four highlights the findings of the study and Chapter Five summarizes the research process, conclusions, and recommendations. A bibliography and appendix conclude the study.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review examines the concept of parent and family engagement in schools, both generally in terms of major concepts, barriers and strategies, and more specifically, in terms of parent engagement in relation to the empowerment and self-advocacy of Somali parents. The review begins with a historical context of perceptions of parent involvement and landmark research. It describes the metamorphosis of the term “parent involvement” into the current term and new understanding of “parent and family engagement.” This change of terminology over time represents new knowledge and thinking about parent-school relationships and the holistic impact and importance of a child’s family on their children’s success in school and in life.

A review of empirical evidence reveals the many benefits of parent and family engagement as well as common barriers that limit or prevent parents from impactful engagement with their children’s schools. Many of the scholarly studies and reports reviewed offer strategies or solutions designed to enhance parent and family engagement.

As the study population in this research are parents who are recent refugees from war-torn Somalia, special attention in this literature review is given to parent and family engagement research that addresses disadvantaged parent and student populations in terms of socio-economic (SES) status, cultural and ethnic diversity, and English language proficiency. These population characteristics are commonly described in the literature as significant barriers to effective parent and family engagement.

The literature review investigates the implementation of the Community School model as it relates to the role of parents, teachers, and the school in developing effective
parent communications and actions to support their children’s education. The conceptual features of Epstein’s *School-Family-Community Partnership Model* (Epstein, 2019) are described in this review as it provides a framework for the development and analysis of parent interview questions used in this case study.

Organizing and conducting this literature review involved an inductive reasoning strategy of identifying and understanding the more general parent involvement literature and then searching for more refined parent and family engagement literature and empirical research that aligned with the specific aspects of this study. For example, a small set of parent and family engagement literature was identified that feature Somali parents and another set of research that featured the use of a full-service community school model. In total, the literature review information described in this study helped shape the case study design including the methodology and analysis as well as the specific content of the Somali parent interview questions and engagement training units. The review is organized into five thematic areas and numerous subtopics that have both general and specific relevance to this case study which investigates the presence of parent engagement behaviors and the application of parent engagement strategies for Somali refugee parents in a small, rural, Minnesota public school district.

**Broad Themes and Concepts**

**Historical Perspective**

Throughout our nation’s history, American public schools have always encouraged involvement of parents at some level and in differing fashions. In the early 1900’s, parents virtually owned the schools in the sense that they funded the construction of school facilities, hired the teachers and administrators and had broad oversight over the curricula and school policy (Epstein, 1987). As the century progressed, a separation between parent control and
the public schools emerged as highly structured school bureaucracies were established (Hiatt, 1994). Over the course of the early to middle 1900’s, parent voices became more unified as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA’s) and other similar groups formed. According to Donald Davies, Director of the Institute for Responsive Education, the PTA helped to “Americanize newcomers to the country and to teach middle class parenting” (Davies, 1992).

Concurrently with the PTA movement at the local district level, parents took their demands for greater and more meaningful involvement to their state and federal legislators and to the courts. Landmark decisions such as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) and other major desegregation cases in large, urban cities were developed by parents seeking equality in educational opportunity for their children. In conjunction with these court rulings on educational opportunity and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, early research on the strong association of parent involvement with student achievement began to influence state and federal legislation. Examples of federal programs and policy that mandated or featured significant parent involvement include Project Head Start in 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Education for All Handicapped Act in 1974, and Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994.

In Minnesota, the state system of education oversees and enforces all mandates of federal policy including parent involvement requirements within various federal Acts and administers state level programming such as Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) and School Readiness that stress school-parent engagement and parenting skills appropriate from birth through adolescence. The research for this study takes place in the Minnesota school district of Faribault, Independent School District 656. Following board policy and district programming, this district embraces all mandates regarding parent involvement and
goes well beyond minimum requirements with programming through its Community School model that emphasizes parent and family engagement and the access of community resources by parents and students.

**Definitional Issues**

The term *parent involvement* is common to almost all of the literature on this topic prior to the 21st century. The shift to the use of the term *parent and family engagement* became commonplace in the early 2000’s and most commonly reflects the research of Joyce Epstein on the establishment of school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein, 2019). At the federal education level, the mandate of parent involvement was first expressed in the Head Start program of 1964. This mandate described parent involvement in simple terms viewing it as parent participation in a variety of activities developed or implemented by family services staff and often measured by outputs such as the number of parents who attended a meeting. In later reauthorizations of the Head Start program, parent and family engagement replaced the parent involvement term and was defined as a goal-directed relationship between school staff and families that was ongoing and culturally responsive. The Head Start program stressed that staff members should share responsibility and mutually support what was best for children and families (Head Start, 2014).

Under the recent reauthorization of Title I and Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), the term parent involvement has been replaced with parent and family engagement and the concept of local community engagement with families and schools is emphasized. This movement to include community resources as an integral part of parent and family engagement is highlighted in this study through the delivery of parent trainings within a community school model. Notably, as a part of this study and to support participation, the parent sample received services through the FPS Community School including childcare,
transportation, meals, access to English learning classes, and additional academic counseling to support their children.

As researchers typically define their study themes and terms, their definitions of parent involvement and parent and family engagement are often quite different. Several studies explored and reported on the inconsistencies and differences in the definition of the terms parent involvement and parent and family engagement (Baker & Soden, 1997; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; and Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). The differences in definition are typically those of parent participation versus school-parent and teacher-parent partnerships (Epstein, 1991). Parent participation includes attendance at school meetings, conferences and events as well as parent supportive efforts at home. The essence of parent partnerships as associated with the term parent and family engagement, however, is one that includes the parent participation actions and adds the dimension of teacher-parent and parent-school relationship involving regular communications and increased understandings between teacher and parent (Epstein, 1991).

Fan and Chen (2001) noted in their research how parent and family engagement is measured helps define the term. For example, Fan and Chen (2001) argue that research measuring the parent participation outcomes and behaviors such as meetings, conferences, homework help, and the relationship of those outcomes to student achievement or student discipline, fits the narrower definition of parent involvement. In contrast, measures that include the quantity and quality of parent-teacher interactions, conversations and two-way supporting efforts, is clearly in the camp of a more holistic concept of parent and family engagement (Fan & Chen, 2001).
Parent Expectations

The impact of parent expectations of their children’s academic achievement appears throughout parent and family engagement research. Numerous studies have concluded that students whose parents have high expectations attain higher grades, perform better on standardized tests, and are more likely to complete high school than do those whose parents have lower expectations (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Vartanian, Karen, Buck, & Cadge, 2007). According to Yamamoto and Holloway (2010), “the presence of high parent expectations have four important impacts: increasing student’s motivation, instilling higher competency beliefs in students, stimulating greater parent involvement, and increasing teachers’ expectations of students.” (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010, p. 207)

For students in secondary school, the presence of high parent expectations alone is not enough to ensure student academic attainment or other school success factors (Ross, 2016). Research suggests that at the high school grade levels parents need to actively assist their children to plan for college or other postsecondary training (Chao & Hill, 2009). Other recommendations noted in research include enrolling students in afterschool tutorial or study groups and in community sports programming, setting boundaries around time use, and shifting from a homework supervisory role to a supportive role (Ross, 2016). When parents are encouraged to talk with their children about postsecondary expectations and given guidance and support on how to do this, there is evidence that parents begin to seek additional education for themselves (Peña, 2001).

When analyzing the correlation of the presence of high parent expectations with student success in school, there are inconsistencies in the results if the variables of race and ethnicity are considered (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). For example, the Ross (2016) study on the effects of high parent expectations revealed that being Black was associated with a lower
likelihood of high school completion and postsecondary attendance, even after controlling for SES. Some research suggests that for Black and Latinx parents and students, 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).

**Student Academic Success**

Studies on parent and family engagement uniformly report that parent involvement behaviors have a positive impact on their children’s academic achievement (Jeynes, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). This positive relationship also extends beyond academic achievement to children’s overall well-being (Crespo-Jimenez, 2010). Fan and Chen have stated: ‘The idea that parent involvement has a positive influence on student’s academic achievement is so intuitively appealing that society in general and educators in particular have considered it as an important ingredient for the remedy of educational problems’ (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 2).

In meta-analysis studies conducted by Fan & Chen (2001) and Hill & Tyson (2009), the researchers found that some forms of parent involvement were more effective than others and some parent behaviors had little to no impact on student academic success. Factors that had the strongest positive impact on student achievement included the presence of high expectations and frequent and engaging parent-child discussions about school matters. These meta-analysis studies showed that parent supervision of and assistance with their children’s homework were only weakly associated with positive student achievement. Other studies show, however, that providing a home learning environment that facilitates learning and homework completion along with the provision of additional learning and resource materials
does correlate well with student academic achievement (Feinstein & Symons, 1999; Sammons et al., 2007; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

The meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes (2003) showed that the link between parent involvement and academic achievement is consistently positive across different racial and ethnic groups. This research finding was also supported by Wilder (2014). Wilder reached the same conclusion from his meta-analysis of nine qualitative studies that found, regardless of race or ethnicity, that parent involvement contributes to academic achievement. Both of these meta-analyses, however, reported limitations of validity and generalizability as they highlighted inconsistencies in two important dimensions of parent involvement – definitional differences and academic achievement measurement differences.

Research on parent and family engagement strategies have shown that the implementation of the Epstein model has led to significant gains in student achievement with regard to grades and test scores (Barnard, 2004; Lopez & Donovan, 2009). Some research suggests that the use of the Epstein model as a parent and family engagement strategy shows that the implementation of the model results in greater student academic achievement than does any parent or school SES factor (Hawes & Plourde, 2005). However, in other research there is some evidence that the implementation of the Epstein model to guide parent and family engagement does not correlate well with student academic success. For example, in one study, factors of parent motivation for their involvement, such as becoming involved due to their children’s poor school attendance and negative behavior did not lead to improved academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This finding reinforces the concept that multi-dimensional parent and teacher partnerships such as collaborations between the teacher, the parent, and a specific local community social services provider, are
much preferred and more effective than communications that are solely focused on correcting student behavior or attitude.

**Parent Empowerment and Self-Advocacy**

Most research on the outcomes of parent and family engagement actions discusses benefits that accrue to students (e.g., academic achievement, overall well-being, etc.) and benefits to schools in general such as increased parent support and participatory engagement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009). The present study is unique from most research on parent engagement in that the content focus is on developing, examining, and describing parent skills leading to their empowerment and self-advocacy.

The resistance from school administrators and staff to concepts of power sharing and expanding the breadth of parent involvement within classrooms has some basis in research. In one study evaluating parent empowerment, researchers found that many urban school parents, especially low-income, minority and foreign-born parents, have feelings of fear and mistrust toward their children’s schools and are daunted by the prospect of confronting bureaucratic school systems. (Cooper & Christie, 2005). Their study focused on Latinx parents in an urban setting who were partnering with the school district to develop district-wide reforms for reducing the achievement gap between white and minority students. Parent empowerment developed over time through the implementation of a parent training program that featured power-sharing strategies between school staff and parents. Several studies have documented bureaucratic resistance and staff distrust or misunderstandings of parent actions to increase their authority and involvement, particularly in urban settings (Fine, 1993; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Lopez, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Noguera, 2001). This resistance from school staff to include and engage parents has been shown to increase in
schools with high populations of low-income, minority parents, and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds (Delgato-Gaiton, 1993; Fine, 1993; Lopez et al., 2001; Noguera, 2001).

As a prerequisite to empowerment and self-advocacy, it could be assumed that a parent should have a value or belief that they are a resource to the school, the classroom, and to their children. Having a self-image that supports this attitude is not always present in parents, especially parents whose educational experiences were very limited or not within the American educational system. Epstein’s research on the impacts of parent and family engagement show that parent self-image improves when parents and teachers are collaborating and acting as partners in children’s learning (Epstein, 2001, 2013). Further, when parents are considered by teachers to be a valuable resource base, both in terms of their knowledge and their diversity, parents are more empowered to engage with their schools (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Moll’s research showed that if teachers rejected the perception that working class, minority families are disorganized socially and intellectually deficient, teachers were more likely to view these parents as cultural and cognitive resources for the classroom and the school.

**Other Common Parent and Family Engagement Research Issues**

One issue that has an impact on the level of effective parent and family engagement is differing perceptions between teachers and parents regarding the implementation and success of parent and family engagement actions, both by the school and by the parent. Research by Chen (2001) revealed significant discrepancies between what K-8 teachers perceived as the level of school effort to involve parents in their children’s education and how parents perceived that effort. In the Chen study, teachers consistently were more positive than parents about the degree to which they involved parents in their children’s education. Specific teacher-parent discrepancies were noted in several areas including providing
information to parents on their children’s performance, helping their children learn at home, identifying community services for parents, and providing information to parents on child development. Other similar discrepancies were noted in providing volunteer opportunities for parents and including parents in school decision-making (Chen, 2001). Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement was used as a framework in Chen’s research for the development of the teacher and parent survey questions.

A second issue common to parent and family engagement research is the observation that parent involvement declines as students’ progress through the K-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). When examined with regard to parent variables such as race, SES status, and family stress indicators, some interesting caveats to parent and family engagement are revealed. For example, several studies (Stone, 2006; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015) found that Black parents engaged in more home-based involvement with their children and less school-based involvement, such as volunteerism, than their White counterparts. With regard to parent SES level, studies have shown that higher SES parents engage in more school-based involvement than lower SES parents (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Hill et al., 2004). These studies speculate that parents with higher levels of education may be more comfortable interacting with school staff and more effective in communicating the needs of their children. The neighborhood context is also a variable in the promotion of or inhibition of parent and family engagement. For example, parents from disadvantaged, resource-limited neighborhoods are far less likely to be involved with their children’s schools than parents from neighborhoods that have easy access to abundant community resources and
who show neighborhood support and trust in their local school(s) (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Effective teachers understand the need for effective parent and family engagement (Langdon & Vesper, 2000), yet parents are the most underused resource in most schools (Hargreaves, 2003). Parents have high expectations for their children’s success in school, and they want to work in cooperation and partnership with their children’s teachers (Decker & Decker, 2003). However, many parents don’t believe they have the necessary skills or knowledge to be helpful (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Given this parent involvement insecurity, teachers need to have a positive attitude and suggest and develop parent and family engagement opportunities for all parents (Broderick & Mastrilli, 1997).

Unfortunately, some research suggests that teachers perceive low SES families as a barrier to their children’s success in school (Cooper, 2007).

In addition to parent SES level, other parent characteristics, especially among minority populations, impact parent and family engagement. Latinx parents, for example, typically define parent involvement as actions taken to help their children with homework and to provide a stable, nurturing home life, while their schools hold a much broader expectation that includes parent participation in conferences and school functions (Crespo-Jimenez, 2010). Closely related to SES level, the educational level of the parent is another factor impacting the quality and quantity of parent and family engagement. Some parents lack the content knowledge to be able to help their children with homework and their lack of formal education can have a negative effect on parent perception about the quality of their children’s school in general (Floyd, 1998; Sosa, 1997). Issues of culture and an
understanding of the English language are also linked with low parent involvement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

**Strategies and Trends**

Research on parent and family engagement often reveals or affirms the many issues and barriers schools experience about the quantity and quality of parent involvement. These studies speculate on strategies schools and teachers might use to overcome these barriers and maximize parent and family engagement. A meta-analysis conducted by William Jeynes (2011), found that the most effective parent and family engagement strategies were those that focused on three areas: 1) helping parents develop and communicate parent expectations about in-school and at-home behavior and for their children’s future; 2) fostering regular and focused communications between parents and children; and, 3) developing a welcoming, supportive, interactive school atmosphere for parents.

Common strategies for parent and family engagement interventions and programs appears to come from the idea about what are thought to be the most effective practices. These practices are thought to involve the establishment of mutual relationships between parents and schools (Christensen & Sheridan, 2001; Crespo-Jimenez, 2010; Cutler, 2000). This deeper level of engagement is not a simple teacher-to-parent responsibility but an entire school-community interactive relationship (Jeynes, 2011). Epstein’s *School-Family-Community Partnership Model* provides a useful and evidence-based framework for the development of the relationship approach to parent and family engagement (Epstein, 2019).

The implementation of a full-service community school (FSCS) model has been a recent delivery strategy used by schools to build genuine school-parent relationships and to increase engagement and many other family-supportive goals. The FSCS model promotes parent involvement and stimulates the strengthening of parent social capital through a broad
system of integrated services (Min, Anderson & Chen, 2017). A longitudinal study on the Providence, Rhode Island FSCS implementation concluded that the community service design feature of the model led directly to increased parent and family engagement as measured by parents’ activity in their children’s education, parent-teacher communication, and parent’s attitude toward their children’s schools (Chen, Anderson & Watkins, 2016).

Strategies for moving from the traditional notions of parent involvement such as parent participation in conferences and school activities, typically involve a shift in school-parent engagement philosophy and a commitment to new engagement approaches for schools and new roles for parents (Redding et al., 2004). Viewing and understanding parents and other members of a family unit as equal partners in the quest for student success is often a paradigm shift for schools and school staff (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Specific parent and family engagement strategies that are supported by both parents and school staff include: providing increased opportunities for involvement, improving school-parent and parent-teacher communications, welcoming families into the building, reducing time conflicts to create more flexible engagement opportunities, and supporting parents with training and resources to help their children at home (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Russell, 2016).

Responding to parent and family engagement barriers of cultural, ethnicity, and language differences between school staff and parents, schools have made efforts to hire translators and cultural liaisons (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2006; Johnson, Pugach, & Hawkins, 2004; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011). Beyond the hiring of school staff that reflect the culture, ethnicity, and language of parents and students, some schools are requiring staff to participate in professional development that teach
communication techniques that are culturally responsive (Iruka, Curenton, & Elke, 2014; Tran, 2014).

The common acceptance and availability of mobile technology and the growing use of online media has resulted in some interesting uses of modern technology to enhance school-parent and home-school communications. For example, schools are regularly keeping parents informed regarding school activities, events, homework assignments and progress, suggested learning strategies, and student progress (Curtiss et al., 2016; Graham-Clay, 2005; Olmstead, 2013; Ziegler & Tan, 2012). Although there is some level of concern among school staff and parents about the over-use of technology, schools are the ideal facilitators of best practice strategies regarding the use of electronic communications technology. According to Eva Patrikakou, schools can “assist parents in navigating the use of technology and media with their children and, quite importantly, enhancing the use of technology and media to strengthen the learning continuum between school and home” (Patrikakou, 2016, p. 21).

**Parent and Family Engagement Benefits and Barriers**

The benefits and positive outcomes of parent and family engagement have been realized by schools, parents, and families for many decades. Although the definitions and implementation strategies of parent involvement and engagement have changed over the years, educational research has been and remains overwhelmingly supportive of the concept. Research also shows that as US schools become more diverse, along with changing family structures and cultural differences, barriers to effective parent and family engagement emerge. Prior sections of this literature review have described some parent and family engagement outcomes and issues, but this section will aggregate and feature the most prevalent and impactful benefits and barriers.
Benefits for Students

“The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed and not just in school, but throughout life” (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p.1).

There are a large number of studies that have confirmed the influence of parent and family engagement on children’s academic achievement (Jeynes, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). According to Wilder, this relationship remains intact regardless of race or ethnicity (Wilder, 2014). In a meta-analysis review of 49 studies of parent involvement by Henderson (1988), higher student academic achievement, better test scores, and higher grades were reported for students whose parents were effectively engaged with their children’s school. When analyzing multiple factors that correlate to student success, parent engagement with the child’s school is the number one predictor of that success (Dodd & Konzal, 2002). Students whose parents are engaged with the school and with their children’s teachers are more likely to take personal responsibility for their own learning (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005). Further, students are more prepared for their lessons and teachers exhibit less frustration with student performance when families are more engaged with their children’s education (Cutler, 2000).

Another aspect of school success is positive student behavior, grade level progress and graduation. According to the research of Henderson and Mapp (2002), when partnerships exist between school, families, and community groups, and delivered through a full-service community school model, children do well in school, stay in school longer, graduate on time, and like school more. Specific parent engagement activities such as volunteering in school and taking an active role in school activities and events have been associated with a reduction in the number of students disciplined in school, fewer detentions and a reduction in the
number of students receiving multiple disciplinary consequences (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). When parents and teachers have a collaborative and trusting relationship, students are more aware that both their teachers and their parents genuinely care about them as a person and as a learner (Vosler-Hunter, 1989).

**Benefits for Parents**

The primary benefit or outcome for parents resulting from their engagement with the school and school staff is the many benefits attained by their children. There are, however, benefits and positive outcomes that the parents themselves realize. For example, when collaborative relationships occur between parent and teacher, parent self-image improves. This is particularly true among minority parents who often have the perception that they have little to offer as a resource to the teacher (Epstein, 2001, 2013; Vosler-Hunter, 1989). One study involving minority parents revealed that parent satisfaction with their children's school increases in proportion to three factors: the quantity and quality of school-parent and teacher-parent communications; participation in school and classroom events and activities; and participation in school decision-making and governance (Marzano, 2003).

Building relationships and developing trust is important to the parent and family engagement purpose. Positive relationships between adults create a sense of belonging and identity. Trusting relationships between parents and teachers enable parents to willingly collaborate and share their knowledge with their children's teacher (Hislop, 2013). Parent attitudes of respect and appreciation for their children's school and teachers are often a result of frequent, positive, and fruitful interactions between teachers and parents (Redding et al., 2004).

The goal of empowering parents to work in partnership with their children's schools leads to multiple positive outcomes, including building positive connections and social
capital between families and schools; creating a supportive community engaged in fostering children’s well-being and education; and parents becoming more effective family leaders (Families and School Together, 2019). The Families and Schools Together (FAST, 2019) program is one example of a parent and family engagement training program that schools, or school districts can adopt or adapt to increase parent involvement. Specific evaluation outcomes from the FAST program show that parents involved in the program report that family conflict declines, they are better able to care for and nurture their child, their family is more cohesive, and they have improved community relationships and knowledge of community resources.

The perceptions that teachers hold about the value of parents as classroom resources is an important determiner of parent empowerment. Research by Moll, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) on urban schools shows that parents are more empowered to engage with their schools when they are considered by teachers to be a valuable resource base both in terms of their knowledge and their diversity. Other research shows that when teachers work with parents to give them training focused on developing high aspirations for their children, parents feel empowered to consider additional education for themselves (Peña, 2001).

**Barriers to Parent and Family Engagement**

In order to build effective parent and family engagement, schools must identify and address obstacles that exist within the school setting and obstacles that are reflective of parent and family attitudes and conditions. Multiple studies show that the parent’s level of education and their ability to access educational resources for their children are common barriers perceived by both parents and teachers (Peña, 2000; Harris, Andrew-Power, & Goodall, 2009; Brown, 1989). Parents express that having a lack of specific content knowledge related to student’s homework is a barrier to parent student involvement (Floyd,
In a study by Kim (2009), teachers perceived minority parents in general as being less able to help their children and less able to be engaged with the school due to the factors noted above.

Most new immigrants and refugees in American schools do not have English as their native language and many of those parents that have acquired English have accents that are difficult to understand by native English speakers. Parents that feel a lack of comfort with the English language feel disempowered and are less likely to be involved in school (Garcia-Coll et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2009). Further, teachers are less likely to ask for involvement from non-English speaking parents (Garcia & Ruben, 1991; Huss-Keeler, 1997).

In addition to language related barriers, immigrants and refugees often have different expectations and perceptions about schooling that are cultural in nature. Some parents, particularly Somali and East African, have cultural understandings that parent involvement in their children's school is strictly limited to maintaining a stable and supportive household and entrusting all aspects of their children's education to the school (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

The culture of the school can be a barrier to parent and family engagement. According to research by Crespo-Jimenez (2010), the culture of the school typically reflects the majority group and often is exclusive, different from, and in conflict with the culture of minority group parents. If teachers are resistant to the more collaborative concept of parent and family engagement, they may experience a high level of frustration with school requirements or programming that stretches their beliefs and skills (Miretzky, 2004).

Teachers may also cite time constraints as a major inhibitor of increased connections to parents and families (Epstein, 1995; Houston & Williamson, 1993). An unwelcoming school
culture and perception of exclusivity may lead to an inhospitable climate for parents and lack of trust which inhibits parent engagement actions (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010). Unfortunately, when trust is not a characteristic of a relationship between a teacher and a parent, it is doubtful that the clear exchange of knowledge and a cooperative relationship can occur (Currie & Kerrin, 2004).

Issues of daily life are sometimes cited by parents as reasons for their lack of engagement with the schools (Baker, 2016). For example, parent work schedules vary, and some parents have little to no access to communications from the school during their workday. Other parents may have evening commitments that make them unavailable on certain days. Some parents may be on assignment away from the home and their children, trusting others to meet only the basic needs of their children. The lack of adequate transportation and limited access to childcare can also result in missed teacher-parent conferences or other school activities. School officials and teachers need to take parent schedules and availability into account to ensure that all communications are being received by the parent (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

The structure of the family may also present a barrier to effective parent and family engagement. Families that have a large number of school-age children find it difficult to set aside enough time for each of their children to interact with their child and with their child’s school (Baker, 2016). Unfortunately for some students their family life may be dysfunctional, chaotic, or they may be going through major changes in guardianship. Children from families that experience homelessness typically are functioning below grade level, have issues of self-esteem, and are more likely to be a drop-out (Obradovic et al., 2009; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). As with homeless children, children in foster care typically have issues
of low-literacy, irregular attendance, and academic failures (Clausen, Landsverk, Ganger, Chadwick, and Litrownik, 1998). These family structure and stability issues require a greater effort by schools and teachers to involve parents and guardians in ways in which understanding and support (for the child and the parent/guardian) is the goal of the parent and family engagement strategy (Wilkens, 2016).

For some parents, communications from the school or the teacher is about negative feedback such as their child’s disruptive behavior or missing assignments. Receiving only negative communications from the school tends to reduce the parent’s desire to increase their engagement with the school. Other parent complaints about communications from the school include the timeliness of the communication, and the clarity of the communication (Baker et al., 2016). For example, parents exhibit displeasure when they receive notices of events that are only a day or two away, or when they receive notices about their child’s progress only after major problems have arisen. The same negative reactions are also a result of school-parent communications that are unclear, poorly worded or not translated into the parent’s native language.

Teachers have the major responsibility to establish and maintain the home-school partnership (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, and Walberg, 2005). Most teachers believe that building cooperative relationships with parents leads to better student outcomes, but they have a different understanding of what actions need to occur to establish these relationships (Miretzky, 2004). Teachers often blame parents for not understanding the breadth of effective parent and family engagement (Lawson, 2003). Research by Swap (1993) revealed that teachers often lack the skills to work as partners with parents. At the school administrative level, most school officials are not prepared or are unwilling for financial reasons or lack of
skills to design, implement, and evaluate parent and family engagement programs or activities (Epstein, 1995).

**Parent and Family Engagement within the Somali-American Refugee Population**

**Somali History and Culture**

The participants in this qualitative case study are all from the country of Somalia which is located in the eastern-most part of the Horn of Africa. It is a country of diverse topography that includes plains, mountains, and deserts. A majority of Somali’s ten million residents are nomads and for many centuries Somali families have lived off the land and its natural resources. Somalia is considered to be one of the poorest nations in the world. According to the United States Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook (2018):

Somalia scores very low for most humanitarian indicators, suffering from poor governance, protracted internal conflict, underdevelopment, economic decline, poverty, social and gender inequality, and environmental degradation. A lack of educational and job opportunities is a major source of tension for Somalia’s large youth cohort, making them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist and pirate groups. Somalia has one of the world’s lowest primary school enrollment rates – just over 40% of children are in school – and one of world’s highest youth unemployment rates. During the two decades of conflict that followed the fall of the SIAD regime in 1991, hundreds of thousands of Somalis fled their homes. Today Somalia is the world’s third highest source country for refugees, after Syria and Afghanistan. Insecurity, drought, floods, food shortages, and a lack of economic opportunities are the driving factors.

Somalia has two official languages, Somali and Arabic. The Somali language, however, was not a written language until the 1970’s. The literacy rate is very low due in part to the absence of school infrastructure and lack of governmental cohesion. In contrast to the
low literacy of the Somali people in general, they have a strong oral tradition and memorization ability. Poetry, songs, rituals, and stories are passed along from generation to generation through oral means (Farid & McMahan, 2004).

From the late nineteenth century until 1960, most of Somalia was under the colonial rule of Britain and Italy. During this time a small portion of the population received an education and a select few of the most educated Somali’s were employed in military and lower-level governmental roles. Culturally, these educated Somali’s were well respected among the general population and Somali individuals that held official positions in the government or in the military had an esteemed status (Abdikadir & Cassanelli, 2007). Somalia operated as a democracy until 1969 when General Mohamad Siyad Barre took over the country in a bloodless coup. General Barre ruled as a dictator for 21 years and in 1991 he was overthrown, and a civil war developed between groups of Islamic extremists and local autonomous militia. This civil war displaced over one million Somali who fled the turmoil resulting in about 500,000 Somali refugees resettling in the US and Canada. Unlike immigrants who voluntarily migrate to other countries typically due to economic reasons, the definition of a refugee is one who leaves their country to escape conflict and persecution and often experience hardships before, during, and after migration (Beiser, 2009).

Studies have determined that there are several factors that result in Somali refugees settling in certain locations within the US. In a study by Farid and McMahon (2004) and another study by Ihotu (2011), these motives for relocation in a specific town or area included good schools, a quality health care system, low crime rate, the presence of other Somali community members, access to public welfare, and the availability of resettlement assistance programs. In Ihotu’s (2011) study, the social and political attitude of a community
was also important. That is, Somali refugees prefer to settle in communities that demonstrate progressive political attitudes and are viewed as pro-immigrant.

**Somali Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Education**

In the mid-1960’s the Somali government established a centralized, hierarchical, top-down education system. This system featured the oral Somali language for some curricula and the Arabic language for other curricula (Abdikadir & Cassanelli, 2007). At the time, this dual language system was common in other colonized countries and served the purpose of maintaining a national identity while accommodating a growing minority (Wei, 2000). Under General Barre’s regime, and for the first time in Somali history, attending primary school became a common expectation for all Somali’s living in the major cities (Farid & McMahan, 2004; Wei, 2000).

Somali culture over the centuries was patriarchal in terms of authority and family power. This cultural view applied to educational beliefs as evidenced in part by the large gap between the percentage of males versus females attending school. Very few females were permitted to attend school by their father-controlled families. However, during the later rule of General Barre, females were expected to attend primary school and some progress was made in that regard (Abdikadir & Cassanelli, 2007). This progressive reform was not well accepted, especially in rural communities, and gender equity in terms of educational opportunity was never realized.

The two major purposes of education under the Barre rule were character formation and academic achievement. Instruction in Somali schools consisted mainly of oral recitation, memorizing and reproducing information, and character development (Farid & McMahan, 2004). Somali parents expected the schools to teach subjects of reading, math, science, history, world languages, and current events (Ahmed, 2017). In a broader sense, Somali
parents believed the goal of an education was to prepare children for economic and social gains (Ogbu, 1978).

**Somali Perspectives on Parent and Family Engagement**

Due primarily to cultural beliefs and norms, parent perspectives about their role with their children’s education has not changed significantly from life in the homeland to life in the US. That is, Somali parents view their main role as one of simply ensuring their children attend school and expect educators to prepare their children for a productive, economically sound life (Farid & McMahan, 2004).

In the Ahmed (2015) study of Somali parents in Portland, Maine, he noted that although Somali parents reported that they were involved in their children’s school and this involvement was limited to parenting, supplying the students’ needs for school, and helping with homework. They were not involved in school decision-making or affairs, and generally did not volunteer in their children's schools. Other relevant parent perceptions from the Ahmed (2015) research were: parents felt pressure from their Somali community to help their children succeed in school; parents had considerable respect for their children’s teachers; parents felt they lacked familiarity with the American educational system; and parents do not believe they have a role with school affairs and decision-making. Interestingly, and perhaps typical of teenagers, some Somali parents reported that their teen children did not want them involved with the school.

Research shows that a welcoming school climate is important for fostering parent and family engagement (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010). However, not all communities and schools have been welcoming to immigrant and refugee students and families. Studies on language minority students have shown the presence of overt and covert discrimination from majority language students and from school staff (Bacallao and Smokowski, 2009; Machado-
Casas, 2006). Discriminatory attitudes and perceptions about race, religion, and immigration status are cited as factors that may impact the acceptance of Somali students and families within a school (Ihotu, 2011). Ihotu (2011) found that the integrity and intentions of Somali families are in question when discriminatory issues persist in schools and in the community at large. The presence of an unwelcoming school climate due to prejudice or bias would easily, if not assuredly, lead to the absence of parent and family engagement among the Somali refugee population.

A study was conducted in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, public schools in 2003 and 2004 which attempted to ascertain differences between teacher perceptions and Somali parent perceptions regarding parent and family engagement and if these differences were primarily cultural in nature (Nderu, 2005). The study found that Somali parents often did not receive guidance or training from the school for expected parent engagement activities and they perceived much of the written communications from school as confusing or unclear. From a cultural point of view, the study found that parents held a different view than teachers regarding the role of the school versus the role of the parent as well as simple issues of time management and appointment-keeping. Studies such as this one has much to offer in terms of strategies that schools might use to enhance and support Somali parent and family engagement.

International research on Somali parent and family engagement is very limited. The country of Sweden has accepted many Somali refugees since the early 1990’s. A study of Somali parents in Flen, Sweden, found that the majority of Somali parents were disengaged from their children's schools and had a distrust towards school and their children's teachers and school administrators (Ahmed, 2013). Similar to studies conducted in the US, the
Swedish study also found that barriers for parent engagement for Somali parents included understanding the native school system, parent’s language and education level, and communication difficulties.

When viewed as a body of research, studies focusing on Somali parent and family engagement are consistent regarding the many types of engagement barriers that Somali refugee parents perceive. These language, culture, and school-parent relationship barriers tend to seriously stifle parent and family engagement and result in the disempowerment and absence of self-advocacy in Somali parents. However, many studies reported ideas and proven strategies that schools, and parents could use to develop and enhance effective parent and family engagement.

**Research Models and Theoretical Frameworks**

**Epstein’s School-Family-Community-Partnership Model (Partnership Model)**

This qualitative research adapts Epstein’s School-Family-Community-Partnership Model (Epstein, 2019) to guide the case study of Somali parents within the FPS Community School (CS) service delivery model. The Epstein Partnership model and the community school model are the two theoretical frameworks that provide the context for the Somali parent pre- and post-training interview questions and the parent engagement training. Epstein’s theoretical framework has been widely used in the parent and family engagement arena to examine the intersection and influence of family, school, and community partnerships (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). One component of Epstein’s Partnership Model is the “Overlapping Spheres of Influence” concept as depicted in Figure 2.

The spheres represent the reality that schools, families, and communities each have a stake and influence in the education of a child. The overlap of the spheres represents mutual interests and actions of the stakeholders in a child's education. This area of sphere
intersection also represents an expectation that partnerships and collaborations are formed between the schools, families and communities that develop and enhance a common goal of student success (Epstein, 1991, 2001).

Figure 2 Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The second component of Epstein’s Partnership Model is known as the Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1994). The Six Types of Involvement include: 1) parenting; 2) communicating; 3) volunteering; 4) learning at home; 5) parent-school decision-making; and 6) collaborating with the community. The research conducted through this study features the application of these involvement types in the parent interviews and the nine parent and family engagement trainings.

In Epstein, Simons, and Salinas’ (1997) initial research on the Six Types of Involvement, she studied the impact of the model being used in 39 elementary schools. Through this study she concluded that as the quantity and quality of family, school, and
community partnerships increased, the rate of student achievement and attendance also increased. Each of the Six Types of Involvement identified by Epstein have evidence-based links to both qualitative and quantitative research. For example, Carter (2002) studied the impact of parent volunteering on student success and concluded that when parents are both visible and informed about school activities and operations, trusting relationships are developed. Research by Moll (1992) on teacher-parent communications, found that parents are more empowered to engage with their schools when they are viewed and used by teachers as a classroom resource base, both in terms of their knowledge and their diversity. With regard to community collaboration, research shows that to maximize student success in school, there is a clear need for positive school-community relationships and community service integration that create more opportunities for parents to strengthen the existing parent-child and parent-school relationship (Dryfoos, 2000).

Since Epstein’s development of the Partnership Model, there have been numerous studies applying the whole model or parts therein. In Epstein’s fourth edition of her book, _School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action_ (2019), she lists six key findings from the many studies using the Partnership Model (2019, p. 2). First, she argues that the term _school, family, and community partnerships_ is a better phrase than _parental involvement_. The term _partnership_ is a more inclusive term implying concepts of involvement, engagement, participation, and collaboration. Secondly, Epstein found that school, family, and community partnerships have many dimensions and ways to help schools plan and conduct parent engagement actions. A caveat to this finding, however, is that teachers, parents and other stakeholders must have common understandings and expectations regarding roles and goals (Epstein, 1991; Voyles, 2012). Thirdly, a program of school,
family, and community partnerships is an essential component of school and classroom organization and operations. That is, parent engagement actions must be systemic, transparent, and accountable. Her fourth key finding is that the development of effective school, family, and community partnerships is dependent upon multilevel leadership and actions that range from local education staff and faculty to the state and legislative level as well as involvement from community members. A fifth key finding is expressed as the effective school, family, and community partnership must have a student goal at the forefront. Examples of these goals include student achievement, attendance, behavior, and attitudes. The sixth key finding is that school, family, and community partnerships are ultimately about equity. It is not enough to engage parents that are easy to access and eager to be involved, schools must enable all families to help their children succeed in school.

The Full-Service Community School

The parent and family engagement trainings conducted in this qualitative study were delivered through the Faribault Community School model which in most educational literature is generally known as a full-service community school (FSCS) model. The FSCS model reflects the research that supports the contention that the traditional education system is not well designed for the broad range of health, mental health, social, and psychological challenges students may experience (Epstein & Walker, 2002; Robertson, Anderson, & Meyer, 2004). The FSCS model is designed to offer comprehensive support services to students, school staff, and families to accomplish those multiple challenges. The purpose of the FSCS model as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2014) is to “provide comprehensive academic, social and health services for students, students’ family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children” (para.3).
Although the early work of John Dewey and Jane Addams (Chen et al., 2016) promoted parent involvement along with other family supports as a worthy goal of the schools, the FSCS model formally emerged during the 1980’s when Joy Dryfoos proposed the concept that schools become “neighborhood hubs” (Dryfoos, 2005, p. 7). The hub concept was described as a neighborhood-friendly school that housed a variety of community-based partnership services that enhanced social relationships with the local community and sought resources to meet the diverse needs of children and families (Dryfoos, 2005).

A four-year longitudinal study conducted by Chen, Anderson, and Watkins (2016) on the implementation of the FSCS model concluded that parent connectedness with the school and their child’s achievement significantly increased as a result of FSCS interventions. This study affirmed the authors’ hypothesis that the FSCS model improved parent involvement as social capital. Similarly, a study by Anderson, Houser, and Howland (2010) investigated parental involvement outcomes in a midwestern FSCS model called the Full Purpose Partnership (FPP). This research identified four essential organizational and implementation factors leading to increased parent connectedness. These factors included: (a) employing a care coordinator at each FPP site; (b) buy-in of the FPP model was essential for all stakeholders; (c) shared values around school culture and climate; and (d) mental health services and behavioral supports.

Some research indicates that there may be important differences in how teachers perceive the needs of parents and families versus how parents perceive their needs. Voyles (2012) examined the FSCS planning and implementation process and found that the parents of at-risk students held different perspectives than teachers on the structure and delivery of
the support services. Teachers perceived that parents primarily needed the array of social and health services provided through the community school model, yet the parents highest priority need was expressed as respect and acceptance from the school and service providers.

The FSCS model is growing in popularity across the nation and the U.S. Department of Education is supporting this expansion due to the recent research showing the effectiveness of this model (Anderson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016). Grant funds are now available through the USDOE Office of Innovation and Improvement to support the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools.

**Methodological Issues**

Within a qualitative research design, this case study examines the increased empowerment and engagement of Somali parents and families as they are provided with knowledge and skills designed to eliminate engagement barriers and foster an active role in their children’s education. According to Bogdan & Biklan (1998), a qualitative approach is selected in order to better understand human behavior and experiences as well as the way in which people construct meaning for their actions.

“Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). Aligning with this definition, this study collects and interprets Somali parent perceptions of school-parent relationships and parent engagement, and the meanings these relationships have for parents and schools.
Within a qualitative paradigm, this study uses a case study methodology. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the case study method involves in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information, such as observations and interviews. The results from the interviews are coded and themed to identify common insights. In this study, interview questions for parents and families include their existing school engagement practices and their perceptions of the new strategies presented through the intervention (training) process.

This study employs the use of face-to-face interviews to collect pre and post information about Somali parent and family engagement. Some researchers define the interview as a social interaction based on two-way conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), while others, such as Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) postulate that the interview is where “knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.4). The definition of the interview methodology that best describes this study is described by Brinkmann and Kvale as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.3)

One methodological assumption related to the use of interviews is the acceptance that the interviewees are telling the truth and expressing reality as they perceive it. From an ontological perspective this study assumes that one person’s reality, as demonstrated through their interview responses may be independent, socially constructed, or different from another person’s reality. From an epistemological perspective, the study assumes the interviewer and interviewee mutually influence each other in their conversations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Synthesis of the Review of the Research

Although the term parent involvement is commonly used by the general population and the educational community, research by Epstein (1995) supports the shift to the use of the term parent and family engagement which more accurately reflects the more effective concept of school, family, and community partnerships. Several definitional issues were illustrated in the literature including varying definitions of terms such as parent involvement, parent engagement, academic achievement, and student success in school. The synthesis of parent engagement research is somewhat hindered from the point of view that many studies did not adequately define their key terms yet reported findings and conclusions around these important concepts. However, when definitions were unstated in the literature, the context and details within the study text often clarified the meaning of important terms.

The review of literature on parent and family engagement overwhelmingly demonstrated positive benefits of school-parent relationships and active parental engagement on student outcomes including academic achievement, behavior, and postsecondary attendance (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Vartanian et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). Further, and of significance, the outcome of academic achievement was found to be consistent regardless of race or ethnicity (Wilder, 2014; Jeynes, 2003). Other important student-centered outcomes of the studies reviewed included improved student behavior, school attendance, graduation (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), and evidence that parent engagement assists students to take personal responsibility for their own learning (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005). Some key benefits of parent and family engagement noted in the literature included increased parent empowerment and self-advocacy (Moll, et al., 1992; Epstein, 2001, 2013), establishment of trust between parents
and teachers (Hislop, 2013), and improved parent attitudes of respect and appreciation for their children's school and teachers (Redding et al., 2004).

There is a strong positive association between parent expectations for their children's success in school and student achievement and school graduation (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Vartanian et al., 2007). Other research however, revealed that the presence of high parent expectations alone is not enough to ensure student academic attainment or other school success factors (Ross, 2016).

Several studies revealed that parent involvement declines as students’ progress through the K-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).

Research on parent and family engagement after 1994 was found to rely in whole or in part on the theoretical framework of Epstein’s Partnership Model (Epstein, 1994). The comprehensiveness of the Partnership Model is one reason for its broad acceptance and use as well as its grounding in evidence-based research on components and concepts found in Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement. Looking across the findings from several studies that incorporated the Partnership Model, it is clear that the broader and more philosophical goal of parent and family engagement actions, especially school-parent and parent-teacher partnership development, is equity. That is, to fully implement programs of parent and family
engagement programs must address the needs and expectations of all parents, not just those eager and willing to engage.

Studies that implemented and examined the Partnership Model in detail uniformly found that the development of two-way, trusting parent-teacher relationships were is key to effective parent and family engagement and had a strong association with student success. 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). However, in other research there is some evidence that the implementation of the Epstein model to guide parent and family engagement does not correlate well with student academic success. For example, in one study, factors of parent motivation for their involvement, such as becoming involved due to their children’s poor school attendance and negative behavior did not lead to improved academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Several studies directly linked positive outcomes of parent and family engagement with the implementation of a FSCS model (Chen et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2010; Voyles, 2012). These studies are important not only for the implementers and stakeholders of the FSCS model but also for contributing to the growing base of information about the success of the Full-Service Community School concept. Although the research on FSCS models showed considerable variability as to the types and actions of community-based support services, all studies lauded the model’s ability to develop increasingly meaningful school-parent partnerships.
Limited research exists on parent and family engagement practices of the Somali refugee population in America or abroad. The existing research shows that due primarily to cultural beliefs and norms, Somali parents view their main role as one of simply ensuring their children attend school and expect educators to prepare their children for a productive, economically sound life (Farid & McMahan, 2004). Studies of Somali parent involvement tend to reveal that 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. When comparing parent and family engagement research between the Somali population and other minority groups such as Latinx and Black populations, it appears that the basic findings, such as parent involvement yields improved student achievement, are consistent. However, the characteristics unique to refugees, like trauma, feelings of alienation, and resettlement stress, are greater barriers to parent and family engagement for Somali’s than for non-refugee minority groups.

Many of the studies that reported the positive benefits of parent and family engagement could not be generalized to other similar populations due to the methodological constraint of non-randomization. As noted by the authors of the meta-analysis studies, it appears that most of the research on parent and family engagement is qualitative in nature and several of the researchers cited in this review noted the need for more randomized, longitudinal studies with control and experimental groupings.

Summary

Over the past fifty years, the concept of parent involvement in the schools has evolved into the more comprehensive and meaningful paradigm of parent partnerships. Leading educators and researchers such as Joyce Epstein, Joy Dryfoos, and William Jeynes
have moved this field of study and action into a new, sophisticated era of relationship-
building and evidence-based strategies that lead to improved outcomes for students, parents,
and schools. Epstein’s Partnership Model, which is used in this study as a guiding theoretical
framework, is the leading example of the emergence and systemic integration of school-
parent-community collaborations.

It appears from the research that the partnership approach to parent and family
engagement is not completely intuitive or easily embraced by all populations of parents. That
is, many studies have shown that parent ideas of engagement are limited to helping their
children at home and attending infrequent school functions and teacher conferences.
Unfortunately, many educators seem to hold this view as well, and for a wide variety of
reasons. There is no doubt, however, that a partnership approach to parent engagement is
time and labor intensive, but the research on the many benefits accruing to students, parents,
and schools is undeniable.

Differences in the perceptions of adequate parent involvement exist between teachers
and parents that impede a partnership approach to engagement. Multiple parent
characteristics such as language, ethnicity, culture, level of education, family structure, and
resident status also present formidable barriers to effective parent and family engagement.
This research study involves a population of parents who are refugees from Somalia that live
in a rural midwestern school. These refugee families face many if not all of the barriers to
effective parent and family engagement noted above. The parent and family engagement
intervention used in this study is delivered through a full-service community school model
which research has demonstrated to be an effective model for improving the connectedness
of parents and families to the schools.
From a social justice and equity perspective, research shows that effective parent and family engagement using a partnership approach can empower parents and create self-advocacy. In an era where our communities still harbor social injustices and sub-group disenfranchisement, the actions that schools can take to create more equity would benefit all community members and institutions. Developing and strengthening parent and family engagement in our schools is not just a dream for social justice, it is a realizable challenge, a small step toward equity, and one that this research embraces.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study examines parent and family engagement of the Somali refugee population in the Faribault Public Schools (FPS). Many research studies have reported significant positive outcomes when parents engage in and support their child’s learning (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein, 1996; Jeynes, 2003; Crespo-Jimenez, 2010; Wilder, 2014). A limited number of studies on parent involvement of Somali refugees also supported these beneficial findings and emphasized the role of culture and language as a significant barrier to teacher-parent and parent-school relationships (Ahmed, 2017; Hassan, 2018). Through the examination of Somali perceptions and practices about parent-school and parent-teacher relationships, this research will contribute to the limited body of parent engagement knowledge for this population and aid the school district and this researcher in determining best practices for engaging Somali parents in their children’s education.

The motivation to investigate parent and family engagement among the FPS Somali refugee population was threefold. First, from a practical, student achievement perspective, FPS has a significant 2018-19 population of over 800 Somali students enrolled in K-12 accounting for approximately one-quarter of the district’s total enrollment. The achievement gap in reading and math between Somali and White students is well documented through state assessments and FPS educators are struggling to find best practices that address this alarming discrepancy. Evidence suggests that increasing Somali parent engagement in their children’s education holds promise for improving Somali student achievement. Second, research has shown that the perceptions of parents about school and teacher expectations are often incongruent, especially for parents from the minority culture in a school (Chen, 2001;
Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). One component of this research examined the perceptions that Somali parents hold about their perceived role as a parent relative to enhancing their children’s learning. A third motivation for this study is somewhat altruistic. That is, this research provided training and examined Somali parent engagement outcomes of empowerment and self-advocacy that are related to a broader concept of equity and social justice.

This quasi-experimental, qualitative case study investigated the presence of parent engagement behaviors and the application of parent engagement training strategies for Somali refugee parents. Using a face-to-face pre-training interview process, the researcher examined the attitudes and perceptions of a non-randomized group of 12 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. 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.

Fifteen interview questions for parents were conceptually framed around Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 1993). The nine-part parent engagement trainings were also designed around Epstein’s framework and delivered by this researcher as a component of the FPS Community School model. The Community School model is designed to be a flexible delivery hub inside a school building, leveraging school and community resources and support services to develop and enhance family-school partnerships.
The researcher conducted a detailed literature review using a wide variety of educational databases and repositories that spanned 1954 to 2019. Databases reviewed included Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, Minnesota State University (MSU) online journal search, and the MSU Livingstone Lord Library digital references. Keywords typically used in this review included parent engagement, family engagement, parent involvement, full-service community school, parent partnerships, and parent relationships.

**Research Design**

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

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?

**Design Framework**

The type of research used in this study was a qualitative case study. The research design was quasi-experimental with a one-group, pre- and post-training interview question format. Subjects for this study were not randomly selected. 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 with the assistance of Somali interpreters.
As Creswell and Poth (2017) noted, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world and researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This research on Somali parent engagement reflects that definition by examining and interpreting Somali parent perceptions of engagement expectations, school-parent relationships, and the meanings that these relationships have for the parents.

The Somali parents selected to take part in this study participated in a three-phase process – a pre-training face-to-face group interview, a series of parent engagement trainings, and a post-training face-to-face interview. Using a case study approach, the phenomenon of parent engagement is investigated within a real-life context of the FPS Community School. As Patton (2002) noted, the qualitative process is ideal when studying a process, since the experience of a process usually varies for different people. A qualitative case study design using an interview data collection methodology was deemed the most efficient and thorough approach for capturing the detailed and unique perceptions of participants regarding the topic of parent engagement.

**Context of the Study**

This research took place within Faribault Public Schools (FPS) which is a rural, midwestern school district located in southcentral Minnesota. Primarily as a result of multiple manufacturing and agricultural employment opportunities in this locality, the population of Faribault has been steadily increasing in diversity. In particular, the Somali refugee population has been drawn to this area for employment reasons and family reunification.

Faribault Public Schools reflects this local population diversity, as one-quarter of the 2018-19 enrollment are Somali students. The majority of the Somali student population of
middle and high schools were not born in the US and received little or no formal education in their homeland. Likewise, the majority of FPS Somali parents have been in the US for less than ten years and most have very limited English skills. These population dynamics result in achievement gap issues for students and challenges for school-parent communications and parent involvement.

Research shows that cultural differences with regard to educational expectations and the perceived role of parents in their children’s education are present between ethnically and culturally diverse groups (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016). In the Somali homeland culture, parents are only expected to take care of a child’s basic needs and ensure that their children attend school, if one is available, and behave properly while at school. American educational culture norms engage the parents more comprehensively and expect that the parent and family be actively involved with their children’s teachers and the school itself. Holding high expectations for the child’s success in school and motivating children toward postsecondary education or training is also a cultural norm with the American schooling process. Not knowing if Somali parent expectations correspond to those in the American system, the research conducted herein this study examined Somali parent perceptions about these cultural norms. Furthermore, the study tested whether an intervention aimed at enhancing Somali parent engagement would increase parents’ knowledge and skills enabling them to become more engaged with their children’s learning.

Research Methods

Within a quasi-experimental, qualitative paradigm, this study used a case study methodology featuring parent pre-training interviews, an intervention consisting of nine training sessions on parent engagement skills, and post-training interviews to capture training practices. Following case study protocol as defined by Creswell & Poth (2018), the research
process involved in-depth data collection using semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Results from the 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 post-training interview data regarding parent perception about specific engagement strategies. Furthermore, notes were taken by the researcher during the implementation of the training session. These notes were analyzed and summarized in results.

The research looked at Somali parent engagement both from an ontological perspective and an epistemological perspective. Using an ontological paradigm, the reality of existing Somali parent perceptions of their own engagement and the purpose of such engagement was examined. From an epistemological perspective, this research explored answers to the underlying problem of parent engagement and addressed each of the stated research questions. From a theoretical and methodological perspective, the research design featured a pragmatic and qualitative component using a case study approach.

Research Ethics and Human Subjects Protections

Ethical Considerations

The Parent Consent Form for this research contained information for participants which included the purpose of the study, time required, risks, benefits, confidentiality protections, and participant withdrawal information (see Appendix D for a copy of the Consent Form). This form was explained in English by the researcher and in Somali by an interpreter who was also the cultural liaison for the study. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality for their identity and assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher stored the names and other identifying information of the participants in
a password protected file. A small compensation of fifty dollars was provided to each participant that completed the pre- and post-training interviews and parent engagement trainings. The study design did not inflict physical or psychological harm on the participants.

One ethical consideration for this study was a concern that the participants may have perceived the researcher’s position as community education director as a position of power, both within FPS and within the community. Research by Stake (2010) showed that interview processes have the potential to create a power imbalance through a hierarchical relationship between the participant and the researcher. That perception by participants, if valid, could possibly bias participant interview responses resulting in participants responding to questions the way they think the researcher would want them to, or the participants may be fearful or embarrassed about giving the researcher the “wrong” answer. The researcher’s approach to mitigating this potential positional power and ethical issue was to provide participants with a clear understanding of the study’s purpose and intent and assure them that their answers to interview questions would be confidential. The use of an interpreter for all interviews and training components of the study was essential to the comfort level and trust of the participants.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is employed as the FPS community education director and among other duties oversees the Community School that operates within one elementary and one middle school in the district. The Community School functions to provide multiple support services and develop relationships between the schools, families, and the community. With encouragement from the FPS superintendent and school board, this research on Somali parent and family engagement took place within the context of the FPS Community School during the 2018-19 school year. In the researcher’s role as community education director and
administrator for the FPS Community School, the researcher has regular communications and involvement with community organizations, and groups including Somali resettlement services, health and social service agencies, and other family support groups that were useful resources for this study.

The researcher’s interest in social justice and equity was a driving force behind this study. The researcher believes that facilitating parents to act and feel more engaged with the school is a liberating and empowering phenomenon for the individual parent and yields positive outcomes for the school and for the community in general. Numerous studies have shown that the full-service community school model, as implemented in the FPS Community School, develops and enhances parent and family engagement, empowers parents, and increases student success in school (Dryfoos, 2005; Anderson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016). The researcher values and believes that the use of this inclusive and community-focused model as a parent engagement training delivery system is an effective way to ease the anxieties of parents who are new to parent and family engagement.

During all phases of the study, the researcher used the services of a Somali interpreter/cultural liaison. This individual was a Somali female who is an educational consultant and is well known to the Faribault Somali community for her work with community organizations in the area. The interpreter/cultural liaison worked cooperatively and in partnership with the researcher to deliver the verbal interview questions and interpret the responses from the participants. Although some of the participants could understand and speak a small amount of English, the use of an interpreter ensured that all verbalized parent responses to questions and related comments were captured during the feedback processes of the study.
Participants

General Description

The broad population of interest for this research study was Somali families in Faribault, Minnesota, and specifically those who had children between the ages of five and 13 in Faribault Public Schools. In the 2017-18 school year FPS there were 899 Somali students enrolled representing 23.8% of the total district student population. The majority of Somalis who reside in Faribault are either first or second migration refugees. This population has been perceived by district educators and community organizations to have significant barriers to school involvement and engagement such as, language, culture, little or no formal education, mental health, and a lack of understanding of the American education system. The achievement gap in math and reading between Somali students and other FPS students is significant and of concern to school staff and to parents. Somali youth under five years old are often unprepared for kindergarten and many middle school and high school Somali youth are behind their peers in credits and many age-out or drop out of school before graduating.

Somali cultural liaisons are employed for each FPS school to assist students and staff with the challenges confronting them. These liaisons operate within the FPS Community School model which is in place in the elementary and the middle school for the purpose of providing comprehensive academic, social and health services for students, students’ family members, and community members. Under the managerial authority of the community education director, all faculty and staff of the Community School work together with the cultural liaisons and with a wide variety of community resources to address the needs of the individuals and families.
Participant Recruitment and Selection

In January 2019, the researcher met with staff from the Somali Community Resettlement Services (SCRS) organization to develop the process for recruiting and selecting study participants. The SCRS is a valued partner of the FPS Community School and was eager to assist in the parent and family engagement research. Through the fall of 2018, the SCRS had been meeting with groups of Somali parents that were seeking information and assistance on broad issues of resettlement and the education of their children. A decision was made with SCRS to recruit Somali parents from these existing parent groups to participate in the study.

As established by the researcher, the only delimiting criteria that SCRS used to identify a pool of eligible parent participants was that the Somali parents had to have one or more children enrolled in either the FPS middle school or the high school during the 2018-19 school year. From the identified eligible pool, the SCRS was asked to select a small number of participants who were 1) willing to participate in all phases of the study – pre-training interviews, parent and family engagement trainings, and post-training interviews, and 2) wanting to improve their relationship with their children’s school and teachers. Information about the study purpose, the study process, and the role of participants was provided to SCRS and that information was delivered to the eligible pool of parents in both English and Somali. Using this selection criteria and process, twelve Somali parents were selected. One exception to the selection was including a parent who had two children enrolled in the FPS pre-K program.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed and used a set of semi-structured interview questions for the twelve Somali parents participating in the study (see Appendix B for Interview
Questions). The interview questions were developed by the researcher 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, Chong, and Agrawal (2012), the use of semi-structured instruments allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into complex issues being addressed in the interview questions.

The 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 parent 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 32 separate questions were asked of each participant. Questions on the instrument were read in English by the researcher and in Somali by the interpreter to the twelve parents as a group. A summary of the training/intervention activities by time period is located in Appendix E.

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.

**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.

Phase one of data collection involved pre-training interviews with the twelve Somali parent participants. 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.

Phase 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). 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.

Phase 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.

All notes taken by the researcher during parent interviews, as well as the researcher’s observations of the training events, were digitally recorded. This information was password protected and will be stored for five years and then electronically deleted. The digital recordings generated by the pre- and post-training interviews were stored in a locked file and will be destroyed or erased after five years.

Data Analysis

Analysis Process

The demographic data from Somali parent participants was aggregated by the researcher and a table of these data was developed and summarized for study. This
demographic information 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 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 phase 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 would 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 the six types of parent involvement. A seventh category of involvement was added to the analysis which represented any form or type of parent involvement or engagement that did not fit Epstein’s framework. These individual responses were included in the summary descriptions and were analyzed by the researcher. 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 that were directly aligned with Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement. The researcher took notes during the trainings that were coded around 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. These observations were summarized by the researcher in the study findings. Researcher recommendations as to how the parent and family engagement trainings could be improved, both in terms of content and process, were based on these observations and are included in the findings.

Data collected by the researcher from the post-training interviews were coded into Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement framework. The intent of the post-training interview phase 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. Summary statements were generated by the researcher and coded around each of the six types of parent involvement. A seventh category of post-training involvement was added to the analysis which represented any form or type of parent involvement or engagement that did not fit Epstein’s framework.

**Validity and Reliability**

The concept of validity has been somewhat controversial in qualitative research. That is, some researchers have argued that the most authentic approach to determining the validity of a qualitative study is through a process of identifying validity threats and reporting on how those threats were mitigated in the study (Maxwell, 2013). One important validity threat considered by the researcher was interview bias. The researcher was aware of this potential bias and took care not to influence the participants’ responses allowing the data to emerge from the respondents. Although the researcher has considerable content knowledge about parent and family engagement, she worked to limit her responses to the participants’ interview comments so that their responses were not biased by researcher feedback. The
researcher maintained a neutral stance during the interviews and maintained a neutral stance on the content.

Since qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability, it is important to establish that the research study’s findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The credibility of this study has two dimensions. The first is the nature of the information gathering process. That is, the researcher used semi-structured interview methods to allow participants to fully express their ideas and concerns. Secondly, the interviews were framed around a widely used and validated set of parent involvement concepts developed through rigorous research by parent and family engagement expert and researcher, Joyce Epstein.

The transferability of this study is particularly relevant for educators and institutions that serve populations of Somali refugees who seek or need a greater degree of parent and family engagement in their children’s schools. The cultural uniqueness of this population is of specific concern in this research and these concerns are highly transferable to similar Somali and/or refugee populations that reside in selected areas of the US.

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study’s findings. The findings in this study are based on participants’ responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. The researcher has maintained unbiased and thorough records of participant responses to the interview protocol and has accurately portrayed and summarized all participants’ responses to the best of her ability. Qualitative research dependability is the extent that the study can be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. The purpose, methodology and findings for this study are clearly described and in significant detail to enable other researchers to replicate this study.
A methodological assumption related to the reliability of this research concerns the choice of Epstein’s Partnership Model theoretical framework that describes the six types of school-parent involvement. Epstein’s extensive research in the domain of school-parent involvement and parent engagement with their children’s learning conveys the assumption of reliability with the application of this framework to the study. As described in greater detail in Chapter Two, the Epstein model is the backbone of many of the current studies in the school-parent involvement scholarly literature.

According to Vogt (1993), an extraneous variable is “any condition not part of a study (i.e., one that researchers are not interested in for the purposes of the particular study) but could have an effect on the study’s dependent variable” (p. 87-88). Table 2 describes how the researcher addressed a number of extraneous variables which had the potential to negatively impact study validity.

Table 2 Actions Taken to Eliminate or Minimize Effect of Extraneous Variables, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extraneous Variable</th>
<th>Action Taken to Eliminate or Minimize Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language challenges</td>
<td>• Trained interpreter/cultural liaison prior to conduct of research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of interpreter/cultural liaison during all interviews and training sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural challenges</td>
<td>• Use of interpreter/cultural liaison during all interviews and training sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Substantial background and experience of researcher with Somali culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling Issues for Participants</td>
<td>• Scheduling of interviews and training sessions determined after consultation with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reminders to participants regarding interview and training session times and dates 2 days prior by interpreter/cultural liaison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Female training instructor  
- Researcher attentive to her female gender in terms of Somali Muslim culture and challenge this poses and worked to minimize this by:
  - Developing relationships with Somali families and staff across district over last 6 years
  - Numerous visits to local Mosque over last 6 years
- Researcher has substantial understanding of some cultural norms from living and working in a Muslim country

Female interpreter/cultural liaison  
- Use of well-known and respected interpreter/cultural liaison who is a female Somali national working in Faribault for ten years

White training instructor  
- Researcher aware ethnicity a factor in explicit or implicit biases of herself and participants. To the best of her ability researcher has worked to establish genuine rapport with each participant and reflected on her blind spots before, during, and after this study

Fraenkel, et. al (2015) describe five areas of threat to internal validity that include: location, data collector characteristics, data collector bias, attitude of subjects, and implementation. Table 3 addresses the potential design weaknesses or limitations regarding internal validity.

Table 3 Strategies Employed to Address Internal Threats to Validity, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Threat</th>
<th>Strategy Employed to Address Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>• Used same location for all participant activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Made transportation available at no cost to participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collector characteristics</td>
<td>• Used one data collector (the researcher herself) and one single interpreter/cultural liaison for all data collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collector bias
- Data collector, to the best of her ability, maintained neutral stance on collection of data and attempted to allow participants to fully express responses, ideas, and thoughts
- Data collector, to the best of her ability, was cautious and reflective to not allow personal beliefs and attitudes to impact participant responses

Attitudes of participants
- Researcher, to the best of her ability, focused on remaining neutral and standardized interactions with each study participant.
- Researcher, to the best of her ability, focused on ensuring that no participant was perceived as receiving special attention

Implementation
- Used one researcher for implementation of all technical aspects of study
- Researcher trained interpreter/cultural liaison on proper research protocol

Summary
Within a quasi-experimental, qualitative paradigm, this research used a case study methodology featuring: 1) parent pre-training interviews incorporating Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement as a concept framework, 2) an intervention consisting of parent engagement skill trainings following that same model, and 3) follow-up post-training interviews. The purpose of this study was to characterize Somali refugee parents’ understanding of their role in school-parent relationships and investigate the impact of a research-based intervention that aimed to enhance parent-child and school engagement. Using a pre-face to face training interview, the researcher examined the attitudes and perceptions of a group of 12 FPS Somali parents about their own understanding of and level of engagement in their children’s education. Following these interviews, an intervention was implemented that consisted of 9 parent engagement trainings. Last, a final set of interviews
were conducted post-training to determine changes in the level of application of parent
engagement strategies as well as any changes in parent engagement perceptions.

This study was conducted within the institutional structure and philosophy of the full-

service community school model. The FPS Community School model is designed to be a
flexible delivery hub inside a school building, leveraging school and community resources
and support services to develop and enhance family-school partnerships. All parent
interviews and training sessions were conducted at the Community School in a comfortable,
welcoming environment.

A set of semi-structured interview questions for the twelve Somali parents were
developed by the researcher. The interview questions were developed by the researcher using
Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement as a conceptual model. The six concepts of the
Epstein model include: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home,
5) parent-school decision-making, and 6) community collaborations (Epstein, 1993).

The use of semi-structured instruments permitted the participants to fully express
their views and allowed the researcher to gain richer insights into complex issues being
addressed in the interview questions. An interpreter/cultural liaison was present for all
interviews and for all training components of the study. The researcher believes that this
Somali individual participating as the interpreter/cultural liaison was essential to the comfort
level and trust of the participants and extremely valuable as a reliable oral interpreter. The
researcher took detailed notes during the interviews and each interview session was digitally
recorded for data analysis reference purposes.

Using a pre- and post-training interview methodology, this research examined the
impact of the parent and family engagement training on Somali refugee parents and
identified their perceptions about their involvement with their children’s learning as well as perceived barriers. Chapters four and five of this study describe the findings and conclusions from this investigation and recommendations are provided for schools to effectively increase the parent and family engagement of Somali parents.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Introduction

With a focus on Somali refugee parents with children in the Faribault Public Schools, this study explored two areas. The first involved examining parent perceptions regarding engagement with school and their child’s learning. The second examined the impact on parents of an intervention consisting of nine training sessions aimed to enhance understanding of and skills regarding engagement with schools and children. Twelve Somali parents participated in the study. Interview questions for parents were conceptually framed around Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 2019) and the trainings were delivered through a full-service community school model. Two research questions were established for the study:

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?

This study was motivated by the need to address the significant gaps in school readiness and performance among Somali refugee children in FPS and strong empirical evidence that these issues can be positively impacted by enhanced parent engagement with school and children’s learning. Hence, this study focused on the broader problem of minimal or inconsistent parent engagement among parents that have multiple barriers to authentic and effective involvement with their children’s learning and with their children’s school. In the case of Somali refugee parents whose children attend FPS, these barriers include language, minimal parent engagement skills and knowledge, and cultural issues. The literature review
presented in this study confirmed that issues of effective parent engagement are commonly present for this population and similarly disadvantaged populations in the US (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Jeynes, 2003). Further, numerous studies have shown that the full-service community school model cultivates and enhances parent and family engagement, empowers parents, and increases student success in school (Dryfoos, 2005; Anderson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016). This study adds to the limited knowledge base of parent engagement issues and promising strategies for disadvantaged populations and provides useful information that can benefit not only the study participants, but parents within diverse school systems in general.

This chapter includes a detailed description of the study sample followed by a summary of the research methodology applied to the data analysis. The presentation of data and the results of data analysis dominates this chapter and sets the stage for the description and summary of study findings.

**Description of the Sample**

As described in Chapter 3, the population of Somali families in Faribault, are either first or second migration refugees. This population has been perceived by district educators and community organizations to have significant barriers to school involvement and engagement such as, language, culture, little or no formal education, mental health, and a lack of understanding of the American education system. The achievement gap in math and reading between Somali students and other FPS students is significant and of concern to school staff and to parents. Somali youth under 5 years old are often unprepared for kindergarten and many middle school and high school Somali youth are behind their peers in credits resulting in aging-out or dropping out of school before graduating.
In November 2018, prior to the final design of this study, FPS Somali parents were invited to a meeting hosted by the FPS Community School to discuss general education related topics of interest to parents. As the design for this study evolved in early 2019, this group of parents was contacted as to their interest in participating in parent engagement discussions and trainings. From the 45 parents that attended the November meeting, a group of 13 indicated interest in participating in the study and became the sample group. However, one individual failed to attend the first two sessions and was excluded from the sample.

As displayed in Table 4, Somali parents participating in this study sample were demographically similar to the FPS overall population as shown in Table 1 in Chapter 1.

Table 4 Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample of 12 Somali Refugee Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics of 12 Parents</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 – 68 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US legal status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level of child (duplicate count)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of school age children, all parents</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of school age children per household</td>
<td>2-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of years of arrival in US</td>
<td>2009 - 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further, the group of Somali refugee parent participants share many characteristics with each other. All parents had less than 10 years residing in the US and none of the parents had attended school in Somalia or US. The most significant shared characteristic of the participant group that impacted the study methodology was their overall lack of English proficiency. The researcher gave considerable attention to this challenge and sought to mitigate concerns by employing an interpreter for all pre- and post-training conversations and as an assistant during the implementation of the nine training sessions.

A Parent Consent Form was provided to the sample group and contained information about the purpose of the study, time required, risks, benefits, confidentiality protections, and participant withdrawal information. This form was explained in English by the researcher and in Somali by an interpreter who was also the cultural liaison for the study. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality for their identity and assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. The researcher stored the names and other identifying information of the participants in a password protected file.
Research Methodology Applied to Data Analysis

Following the finalization of the study sample selection, the data collection proceeded in four phases. First, demographic information of the study sample, consisting of 12 Somali parents with children in FPS was collected. These data were collected through one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher and entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis and description. The second phase of data collection involved two sessions of pre-training interviews conducted by the researcher. This set of interviews was administered in a group setting. The content of the pre-training interviews was framed around Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, 2019). Phase three took place during implementation of the nine intervention training sessions that took place over a ten-week period. In this phase the researcher delivered the training session and took notes. Phase four data collection followed the intervention of training sessions and consisted of another round of interviews administered in a group setting. During this phase, participants were interviewed to: 1) determine the extent to which parents applied parent engagement strategies they were taught during their training sessions, and 2) identify changes in their perceptions regarding engagement strategies.

All pre-, post-data collection sessions were digitally recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interviews. An interpreter/cultural liaison was used during all participant interview and training sessions to mitigate and minimize language and conceptual barriers. Prior to the parent interviews, the researcher conducted a training for the interpreter/cultural liaison to review the interview vocabulary and verify the interpreter’s understanding of the content.

The use of a framework analysis matrix for displaying and analyzing qualitative data was adopted by the researcher in order to analyze data by both case and theme (Creswell &
Poth, 2018). Using the framework analysis approach, the researcher developed a detailed by-participant response matrix that captured and displayed all participant responses to the pre- and post-interview questions. Each interview question was assigned to one of Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement categories for purposes of thematic analysis. Using this response matrix, the researcher was able to aggregate individual participant responses. In this aggregated format the researcher was able to identify and analyze response commonalities and differences between and among the participants as well as ascertain broader findings for the group directly related to the two identified research questions.

**Presentation of Data and Results of Analysis**

Data analysis flows from the Somali parent responses to two sets of semi-structured interview questions. One set of six questions was developed for the pre-training phase and a set of nine interview questions with multiple prompts was used during the training and post-training phases. The latter interview questions were categorized as to their relationship to Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement conceptual model. The six concepts of the Epstein model include: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) parent-school decision-making, and 6) community collaborations (Epstein, 2019). The use of semi-structured instruments permitted the participants to fully express their views and allowed the researcher to gain richer insights into complex issues being addressed in the interview questions.

**Pre-Training**

During the two pre-training parent sessions, parent attitudes and perceptions about their children’s education were assessed. Table 5 describes the content areas discussed and a summary of the parents’ responses that were synthesized from the framework analysis matrix of all parent responses.
Table 5 Synthesis of Responses Regarding Initial Pre-Training Questions From 12 Somali Refugee Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Pre-Training Questions</th>
<th>Synthesis of Parent Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How comfortable are you speaking English?</td>
<td>• Five parents not comfortable at all speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you read Somali?</td>
<td>• Seven parents understand some English but have little to no proficiency with reading, writing, or speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have confidence your child’s school is doing a good job?</td>
<td>• All parents read Somali but have some difficulty with certain Somali dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel the school and staff respect and understand the Somali culture?</td>
<td>• All parents believe their children’s school is doing a good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel equipped with financial aid and supportive resources to be actively involved at your child’s school?</td>
<td>• High confidence in children’s school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you receive adequate communication from your child’s school?</td>
<td>• Parents positive about how they are treated and respected by school and school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents perceive that they have access to resources that help them be actively involved in their children’s school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents perceive lack of English skills as a barrier to full utilization of school resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents positive about the quantity and quality of communications from their children’s school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents often need assistance with English interpretation of written materials from school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, parents reported positive interactions with their children's school and positive perceptions of the school and school staff in general. However, the issue of not being fully informed due to their lack of English proficiency was often articulated. Several interesting
comments revealed insights into the difficulty parents perceived with regard to their children's education. Speaking about his lack of English proficiency, one parent stated,

I always need someone in my family to interpret messages from the school and I am not comfortable that they are telling me the truth. I worry a lot because I cannot understand my kids when they speak English. I think they are gossiping about me and it keeps me up at night.

On the topic of monitoring their child’s progress, one parent stated, “I’m not sure my kids are telling me the truth, so I talk to the school counselor regularly to check on their grades. I tell my kids to stay after school and get more help with their schoolwork.”

Research on parent needs and attitudes in the full-service community school model revealed that the number one priority of parents was to be respected and accepted by school staff and community school service providers (Voyles, 2012). In this study, the majority of Somali parents reported that they felt respected as individuals and as a distinct culture. For example, one parent stated, “I am always welcomed at the school with smiles. They know I don’t speak English and they bring an interpreter for me. The principal understands my culture and religion, so he doesn’t shake hands and is respectful.”

**Training Domain One: Parenting**

The Parenting Domain is the first of Epstein’s Six Levels of Involvement. This domain features understandings and actions parents may take to support their children’s learning and development. For example, parents should be encouraging, regularly monitor and discuss their child’s progress, and provide a healthy, stable home environment which values learning and schooling. During the third meeting of the sample group, prior to presenting a training activity on this Parenting Domain, the researcher posed one overarching question to the group that addressed the domain: *What is your role and responsibility as a*
parent to support your child’s learning? Four discussion prompt questions were also asked by the researcher which yielded more detailed and varied responses (See Table 5 for questions). The same questions were repeated in the post-training sessions that occurred 15 weeks after the Parenting Domain training. The post-training questions sought to determine if and to what extent parents applied any of the training strategies or if new parent perceptions had emerged following the trainings. Table 6 provides a summary of the parents’ responses within this domain that were synthesized from the framework analysis matrix of all parent responses. The discussion question and prompts for the Parenting Domain are as follows:

- What is your role and responsibility as a parent to support your child’s learning?
  - What do you do to encourage your child to do well in school?
  - Do you have discussions with your child about their school progress and attitude toward school?
  - Do you have an established routine related to bedtime, homework time and free time?
  - Do you feel that you would like more opportunities for parent education to enhance your role in supporting your child?
Table 6 Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain One Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parents reported significant responsibility for teaching children behaviors and values of respect, kindness, openness, and humility</td>
<td>• Parents reported a using a variety of new behaviors including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>o monitoring their children’s homework,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents raised concerns about the difficulty of parenting including dealing with:</td>
<td>o providing a set time and location for homework and study,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o strong-willed teenagers,</td>
<td>o accessing the FPS parent online portal,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o finding quality parenting time as working parents,</td>
<td>o communicating more frequently with their children’s teacher,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o accessing quality daycare, and,</td>
<td>o providing incentives and rewards for school progress and grades, and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o maintaining a focus on the Somali culture and Muslim religion</td>
<td>o giving their children daily praise and affirmations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As reported in Table 6, parenting in war-torn Somali had a much different focus than the expected or perceived parenting responsibility in FPS. Prior to the trainings, parents understood and were able to describe their expanded current role to some extent, but their responses to the post-training questions revealed that many new parenting behaviors, especially with direct application to schooling, were acquired. During the post-training interviews, one parent stated, “My first responsibility is to supervise my children at home and
at school, and my second responsibility is to know how my child is doing in school and getting to know his teacher.” Another parent revealed, “In the morning when they wake up, I send them to off school, bless them, tell them to not to fight or disrespect others, and because they have done their homework, they won’t have to go to summer school.”

Various parenting concerns were raised during the parenting training sessions such as the issue of being an effective parent to teenagers who by nature may be rebellious. These concerns were discussed leading to some level of comfort among the parents. For example, in one training session the FPS high school principal discussed his openness to in-person communications with parents whenever they were concerned about their teenager’s behavior or school progress. Parents expressed a desire to learn more about child development and good parenting behaviors and urged district administrators and staff present at some of the trainings to provide these opportunities.

Training Domain Two: Communication

Communication is the second type of involvement within Epstein’s framework (Epstein, 2019). In order to engage in genuine exchanges of communication, a reciprocal relationship between the school system and the parents need to result in building a school-parent bond that supports the whole child. These exchanges of communication and information can be in the form of newsletters, phone calls, school site events (e.g., conferences or grade level nights), or report cards. According to Epstein, to be actively engaged in school-parent communication, school systems must acknowledge and address parent challenges in understanding verbal or written information (Epstein, p. 20, 2019). Parent challenges can range from lack of formal education, level of education and English proficiency, and level of knowledge of American education expectations.

Training content used to address the communication domain with the research group
focused on developing face to face relationships with school staff and administration. Several Faribault High School administrators and district representatives, including staff such as the Finance and Operations Director and the Adult Education Coordinator, were tasked to actively listen to parent concerns and questions. Problem-solving involved creating action items, for example, increasing the number of communications from the district office to be translated in the Somali language and having computer-generated messages from the superintendent that go to all parents translated. Table 7 provides insight to parent perceptions before and after the training content. The discussion questions and prompts for the Communication Domain are as follows:

- Do you feel welcomed at your child’s school?
  - How often do you contact the school and what do you contact them about?

- Do you feel your child’s teacher cares about your child?
  - Do you respond to your child’s teacher’s emails, notes or letters sent home, or phone calls?

- Do you feel comfortable talking with the staff at your child’s school?
  - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s teacher?
  - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s school administrator?
  - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s cultural liaison?

- Do you have confidence that your child’s school is doing a good job?
Table 7 Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain Two Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• All parents identified feeling very welcomed by school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All parents reported receiving communication from the school only when their child was late to school or class</td>
<td>• Some parents reported using some training strategies to communicate expectations with school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents came to realize lack of communication with high school staff was:</td>
<td>• For example, parents thought high school staff were making their children stay after school every day when it was their child’s choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o leading to confusion about school rules and policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o giving their children opportunity to distort rules and policies</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other questions that were included in the communication domain demonstrated positive progress from the time before the training started until after the training concluded. The culminating training event was a tour of Faribault High School for all of the parents conducted by the principal. Parents were accompanied by a Somali cultural liaison during the 90-minute tour. Highlights that the parents shared included: seeing science classrooms for the first time and the 30-year old snake that lives in one of the biology classrooms and touring the state of the art student fitness center where all of parents took turns weighing themselves on the digital scale.

The communication domain shed light on the pervasive inequities that continue to exist in American school culture. Two mothers spoke up about their experience with teachers several years ago in the FPS system. They reported that, after only one to two weeks, they
wanted to “give up” on their children. Similarly, these mothers had teachers at different buildings and grade levels, tell them that their children were “out of control” and “needed to see a doctor before they came back to class.” These students and parents were new to America, new to Minnesota, and had barely escaped surviving a refugee camp in Africa. Despite their circumstances, both mothers spoke passionately about acting on their intuition as parents and went directly to the schools to speak with the teachers and the administrators, …and instead of using an interpreter, I used my broken English and tears to ask for my child to have a chance at success.” This mother went on to say, “Once I showed my emotions and talked to the teachers as a fellow parent, they understood and asked me how they can problem-solve the situation together.”

Training Domain Three: Volunteering

Among Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2019), parent volunteering in terms of the standard American school expectations for example, going to the child’s football game or asking to help with a fundraiser, appeared to be outside of the research group’s knowledge and past experience. Several parents commented on their expectations of school staff in Africa, “teachers took care of everything in terms of learning, homework help, and discipline, our role was to feed and wash them and make sure they had a place to come home to.” According to Epstein, school-parent relationships that involve parent volunteers in school activities are “designed to improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs” (p. 16, 2019).

Many of the Somali parents in the research group expressed their willingness to bring sambusa, a delicious cultural food item to school, and give gifts to teachers during times when their children transitioned to another elementary grade level. However, prior to the
training, only one of the parents had been asked to volunteer by a teacher “to hand out pizza at certain school events” and none of them had been asked or engaged in volunteer activities that would genuinely deepen their bond with their child’s teacher or school. Results of having parents volunteer on behalf of their child at school can yield a significant impact on parent self-confidence and skill-building and for teachers to recognize parent talents. Table 8 captures a brief summary of the pre- and post-training responses about the concept of parent volunteerism to support their children and their children’s school. Discussion questions and prompts for the Volunteering Domain are as follows:

- Do you feel that you can contribute as a volunteer at your child’s school?
- Do you volunteer in any capacity? If no, are you aware of volunteer opportunities?

Table 8 Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain Three Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• Two parents reported being hired at the middle school, I as a lunchroom paraprofessional and both to help with community school programming as site assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Several parents reported that they had been asked to participate in regular parent group meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training Domain Four: Learning at Home

The fourth type of involvement according to Epstein’s Six Levels of Involvement is Learning at Home. Training activities under this domain featured information and activities designed to involve families with their children in a variety of learning activities that could be conducted in the home, including topics such as homework, reading for pleasure, the
availability of educational resources, and technology assisted learning opportunities.

Epstein’s levels of involvement are not mutually exclusive. For example, topics such as attention to homework and attendance may be discussed in both the Parenting domain and the Learning at Home domain. Within this learning at home domain, much of the training provided to the Somali parents focused on specific strategies around homework, access to FPS Infinite Campus Parent Portal, and other at-home learning and support strategies. Table 9 summarizes the parent responses to one broad interview item within this domain and five more detailed prompt items. Discussion questions and prompts for the Learning at Home Domain are as follows:

- Do you feel that you have a role and responsibility to help your child learn at home?
  - How do you ensure your child’s homework is completed?
  - Are you able to provide help with your child’s homework? If no, do you find help for your child?
  - Do you take your child to the library to access reading materials or help with homework?
  - Do you encourage your child to participate in an after school program that provides homework help or extended learning opportunities?
  - Do you feel that you have an adequate space at home for your child to learn? Is the space well-lit and free from interruption?
Table 9 Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain Four Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• All parents reported knowing how to use and that they were using FPS’s online portal for parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• All parents reported that being able to access and use the portal was extremely helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• 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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• All parents reported increased understanding of school expectations for attendance and available support service resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although parents reported a genuine understanding that they had responsibility for their children’s learning at home as seen in the pre-training column in Table 9, they were unable to articulate examples of how to fulfill that responsibility and they raised a number of concerns. At pre-training, parents reported some level of frustration with having to rely on their children’s assessment of school progress and assignment completion. In contrast, at post-training parents expressed a great sense of relief and satisfaction upon learning how to use the FPS parent portal where they could monitor their child’s school progress. With assistance from FPS staff present at the training, each parent developed a personal email
account and downloaded the Infinite Campus Parent Portal application to their mobile device. Detailed instructions on how to use the application was provided. The following quote from one Somali parent was an indication of success with this specific training module,

Thank you so much for the lesson on the parent portal. Even though we don’t know how to write, now we know how to do this and to help our children. This will change the way we interact with the school and improve our relationship. This is not only good for us, but we see the equality and justice at the school.

As seen in Table 9, Parents learned from the training and from each other about using the public library in a variety of ways to increase learning opportunities for their children. Also, during the parent training in this domain, school staff and administrators who were present at these trainings reported a new level of awareness with regard to Somali youth out-of-school time. For example, school personnel were not aware of the many hours Somali children attend Quranic study sessions at the mosque. The high school assistant principal commented,

These trainings have been enlightening. I want all Somali parents to know that our faculty and staff respect and value the Somali culture and we are proud to have your children make our schools a culturally diverse learning community that enriches each and every one of us. With your support, together we can accomplish great things for your children and for the Faribault community.

**Training Domain Five: Decision Making**

During the communication and decision making training phases, parents uncovered what had been a mystery and bone of contention for them. What they thought was a school policy, of keeping students, specifically Somali students after school when parents wanted
their children home right after school, was not a policy at all. Challenging the high school assistant principal on what was believed to be school policy, one parent stated, “I see all the white kids and Hispanic kids leaving the building, why are the Somali kids staying?” The parents discovered that this was not an existing policy but in fact a shared goal between high school staff and parents. All parties involved wanted every student, unless involved in extra-curricular activities or after school programs, to leave the building after the last bell. Although discussed at length, regardless of the reasons behind both school staff and parents wanting students out of the building and to go home, Somali parents expressed gratitude for hearing that information directly from an administrator. Table 10 summarizes the parent’s perceptions of the meaning and practice of decision making between school and parent.

Discussion question for the Decision-Making Domain are as follows:

• Do you feel you have a role or responsibility to help the school make decisions?
  (Examples: school building or district wide committees and Parent Teacher Organization)
Table 10 *Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain Five Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parents reported lack of confidence in their English skills prevents them from joining school committees or organizations</td>
<td>• Parents reported feeling much more comfortable approaching administrators regarding the making of decisions about their children’s school life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Examples of frustrations were expressed by parents wanting to change policies and practices, but all felt they lacked the ability</td>
<td>• 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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another contention that these parents discussed during the training sessions was the complication of their children not graduating on time or at all from FPS and being retained in non-credit English learning classes. Somali parents in general have brought this concern up for many years with district officials resulting in a new English learning approach for non-native English speakers to gain credit toward graduation more easily and with extra support structures. The dynamics of this parent group along with conversations during the training intervention resulted in life-changing approaches by school district staff in working alongside Somali parents. As of the 2019-2020 school year, FPS has seen changes to English learning curriculum, put in place parent working groups with the Somali and Latinx communities at the middle and high school. Action on this scale could be called mild reform but for individuals and family systems that are marginalized daily by inequitable principles and practices see this as a victory.
Training Domain Six: Collaboration with the Community

The sixth type of parent involvement, collaboration with the community, requires cooperative, two-way parent interactions with the community in general and community resources specifically. In FPS, the Community School model fosters and enhances this type of parent engagement as multiple community resources and support services are an integral part of the school setting. All parent involvement activities used in this study were delivered through the Community School as a service to the community.

Within this domain, parents in the sample were asked about their relationship with the community as it relates to their children’s education and prompt questions were used that addressed specific community interactions such as supportive community resources and extra-curricular opportunities. Table 11 summarizes the parent pre- and post-training responses for this domain. Discussion question and prompts for the Collaboration with the Community Domain are as follows:

- Do you feel that the Faribault community has a responsibility to support your child’s school?
  - Do you use community resources to provide your children with additional learning experiences?
  - Do you encourage your child to participate in either or both school and community-sponsored extra-curricular activities?
Table 11 Synthesis of Pre- and Post-Training Responses to Domain Six Questions From 12 Somali Parents, Faribault, Minnesota, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Training Response Synthesis</th>
<th>Post-Training Response Synthesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• All parents reported broader knowledge of community supportive services including organizations and services previously unknown to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents reported that the Faribault community had an obligation to financially support the school district and make community resources available to students and schools</td>
<td>• 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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several parents revealed that they knew little about available community resources other than those featured at the Community School</td>
<td>• Three parents inquired about school volunteering opportunities and discovered ways in which they could assist the schools even though their English skills were low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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.</td>
<td>• 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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pre-training discussion within this domain revealed some amount of community isolation that the sample parents felt as a distinct ethnic population. However, during and following the training, parents indicated they had a much better understanding of their overall educational role as a general community member in Faribault. Discussions about the upcoming district levy were gratifying to the researcher as the parent sample group indicated their support for the levy and their willingness to advocate for better schools in general. It appeared from these discussions that parents gained an increased sense of responsibility and empowerment in relation to their participatory role in school reform.

The discussions on extra-curricular participation had mixed results in that some
parents saw the short- and long-term benefits, while others were most concerned with the logistical participation barriers. All parents were impressed with the wide array of extra-curricular activities available in FPS, many of which were unknown to them before the training. Finally, parents bestowed praise on the district for the establishment of the Community School model as it aligned many community resources that were needed by the refugee community and by parents of all children that needed special services.

During the training on community collaboration, two general school policy issues were surfaced by several parents. The first was an issue of students not immediately exiting the high school building at the end of the school day and causing discipline issues in the hallways or classrooms. The second issue was a discussion on the value of a high school diploma versus some type of practical vocational or technical skill. Both issues were addressed during the trainings by the high school assistant principal and parents indicated appreciation for the administration’s openness to criticism and willingness to seek solutions to those and any other issues. Following these discussions, one parent commented,

“Most kids see only what is in front of them, they don’t think about their long life ahead of them. It is our responsibility to help students understand the great importance of a good education.”

Summary of Findings

The Somali Refugee parents in this study were found to share similar demographic characteristics. All had less than 10 years residing in the US and none had attended school in Somalia or 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.
Prior to the training intervention, findings indicate 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. 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 effectually 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. And 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.

Research questions for this study 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? Regarding the first question, findings indicate that parents had broad expectations (e.g., student success in school and in life) in parallel with those of Faribault Public Schools. Somali parents in this study, however, 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. 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.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Results

The need for this study was threefold. First, Somali children in the Faribault School System were falling behind. Second, in a very practical sense, the Somali refugee parent population of FPS had low engagement rates with their children’s schools and needs for greater parent involvement had been expressed by both district administrators and faculty as well as the Somali parents themselves. Secondly, the current literature on parent engagement for populations that have multiple barriers including language, culture, and unfamiliarity with American school system policies and expectations, is extremely limited.

Third, from a local perspective, this study is significant in that it establishes the basis in both process and content for future parent engagement training activities at FPS. This research adds to the limited knowledge base of parent engagement understandings and actions for populations of parents that have significant barriers to parent involvement and self-advocacy. The results of the study appear beneficial for the study sample of 12 Somali refugee parents as all participants reported increases in their parent engagement knowledge and behaviors as a result of the parent engagement trainings delivered through the study process.

This qualitative research study featured semi-structured interview questions and parent engagement trainings for 12 Somali refugee parents within the FPS Community School. The study questions and training content were intended to gain an understanding of parent involvement expectations and enhance school-parent relationships and engagement.

Prior to the training interventions, the Somali parents in the study sample indicated they were committed to their children's success in school and they had experienced positive
relationships and interactions with their children’s schools. However, the parents expressed concerns around their own lack of English skills, their understanding of school policies and teacher expectations, and ways in which they could monitor their children's progress. Similar barriers to parent engagement were reported in educational literature for parents from other minority populations (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016).

During the parent engagement trainings, the parents were presented with information and hands-on activities that were modeled on Joyce Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement (2019). As many options for increased parent engagement were presented via the sequenced trainings, parents were eager to apply the information from the trainings and report their successes and difficulties in subsequent training and post-training sessions.

Post-training conversation with the parents revealed changed attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. For example, parents reported that they could now effectively monitor their children’s school progress, grades, assignments, and attendance, they felt more comfortable and welcomed in the school and with their children's teachers, and they felt empowered to effectively advocate on behalf of their children. Parents reported increased knowledge of school policies and experienced positive staff receptiveness to parent volunteering.

The results of the pre-training and post-training interviews led to understandings relevant to the following two research questions: 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?

Study findings indicate that parents had broad expectations (e.g., student success in school and in life) in concert with the expectations of FPS schools. However, the Somali
parents in this study lacked specific, actionable knowledge about parent engagement skills. Along with their low English skills, this lack of parent engagement strategies and behaviors was a significant obstacle to fulfilling the school’s and their own parent engagement expectations. With regard to the second research question, the post-training responses from the study sample of Somali refugee parents revealed that parent engagement trainings that focused on an evidence-based model of parent involvement, the Epstein model, and delivered through a Community School model, resulted in both increased parent engagement knowledge and positive parent engagement behaviors.

**Discussion of Results**

Although the study population of FPS 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. The nature of these barriers are described in Chapter 2, the Literature Review and findings from research reviewed provided the basis for developing a series of evidence-based trainings designed to give the Somali parents knowledge, skills, and behaviors to address their needs and the schools’ needs for their effective engagement. Through post-training semi-structured interviews, parents affirmed that they had 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. 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 and volunteering invitations for parents, and new perception by parents that administrators did much more than the nuts and bolts of school management, they genuinely cared about the success of their children and were open to personal conversations about their children’s learning.

In a practical sense, this research validated 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 and 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. Although the first research question appeared to limit the interview inquiry to a simple discussion of parent expectations, 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. Furthermore, the Somali parents grew to understand that 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, actions with administrators and staff, actions with the school or district in general, and actions within the community at large.

The second research question was addressed comprehensively as 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 perfectly 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 (Dryfoos, 2005; Anderson et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2016). 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 as one of simply ensuring 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 (2013) 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 that 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).

As reported in the literature review, 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 relationship 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 noted above, this study of Somali parent engagement included intentional collaborations 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 Based on the Results**

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this study of Somali refugee parent engagement. First, 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. This 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.

A second conclusion evident from this research is that the use of a comprehensive
parent engagement model, the Epstein (2019) Six Levels of Parent Involvement 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 and other parent educators and researchers.

Although outside the scope of this study, observations of and responses from parents support the notion that increased parent engagement most likely 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. This indicates a key area for future research.

Limitations

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has dual functionality. It functions as a qualitative research endeavor and secondly as a practical application of a strategy to address an important school district need – the need to develop and enhance parent engagement among the FPS Somali population. Beyond the usefulness for FPS, this research is a model for other schools or districts to assess parent engagement needs within minority parent populations and to address those needs through comprehensive trainings. The use of Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement as
the training or intervention model and the delivery of trainings through a full-service community school model were keys to the success of this research and it would be prudent for other schools and districts with similar needs to consider these approaches.

This research adds to the limited knowledge base of parent engagement understandings and actions for populations of parents that have significant barriers to parent involvement and self-advocacy. The results of the study proved beneficial for the study sample of Somali refugee parents as all participants reported increases in their parent engagement knowledge and behaviors as a result of the parent engagement trainings delivered through the study process.

The basic research design of pre-training information collection, followed by parent engagement trainings and post-training information collection, yielded a variety of findings that led to important conclusions. In hindsight, the design could have been enhanced in three ways to allow for deeper analysis. First, the study was limited by the a relatively small sample size of Somali parent participants. Adding time to study one or more additional cohorts of parent participants would have provided an interesting comparison to determine if all cohort groups reported the same parent engagement outcomes and needs. Secondly, the design may have been enhanced through the application of more than one parent and family engagement training model. Using one or more evidence-based parent engagement model would provide the researcher with an opportunity to compare outcomes between the models. Finally, the research design could have been enhanced to collect post-training information on parent engagement behaviors through an interview process of teachers and administrators who would be given the opportunity to report first-hand descriptions of changed behaviors of Somali parents resulting from the parent engagement trainings.
Further research is recommended along three study concepts. First, from a methodological perspective, research is needed on a larger scale. That is, a more thorough and illuminating study of Somali parent engagement could use a much larger sample population size, across different types of school districts (i.e., rural, urban, suburban), and attention paid to important parent variables such as socio-economic status, English language skill ranges, and level and type of parent engagement in Somalia. In this manner, more specific findings could be analyzed with regard to important variables often noted in educational literature.

Secondly, further research on specific parent engagement training models is recommended to determine if some training models or strategies achieve more favorable outcomes than other models or strategies. In this study the use of the Epstein (2019) model proved effective in several ways, but the investigation of other models to deliver parent engagement training could be studied in relation to explicit outcomes desired. A variation on this theme for further research could be an examination of not only the specific training model, but a more comprehensive investigation of exactly how delivery through a full-service community school impacts the parent engagement outcomes.

There is a significant lack of educational research on the parent engagement of minority or disadvantaged populations. Therefore, further parent engagement research on a variety of minority populations within school districts, (i.e., Latinx, Black subgroups, Indigenous Peoples) is recommended. For example, according to Peña (2001), when parents talk with their children about postsecondary expectations and are provided with tools to assist in this process, there is some evidence that parents seek additional education for themselves. This relationship lends itself to important further research.
The dissemination of this research may take several forms. Beyond the inclusion of this research in the Minnesota State University Moorhead Repository of Digital Collections, this research can be disseminated by the researcher in a number of other ways. The researcher is committed to reporting the results of this study to the FPS superintendent, administrative staff, school board and the Community Education and Community School Advisory Board. Further, there is an opportunity to present the results of this study at conferences to Minnesota statewide organizations including the Minnesota Community Education Association and the Minnesota Parent Teacher Association. The researcher will also present the results of this study at meetings of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement and a variety of human services related groups and organizations at the local, regional, and state level.

As a personal reflection, the researcher notes that in working with the Somali parents involved in this study, bias and preconceived notions about their level of and interest in parent engagement were ‘left at the door’. That is, the researcher maintained neutrality and was completely open to the study population’s reactions to and perceptions about their pre-training levels of engagement and their desire to actualize the parent engagement skills presented during the trainings. Working closely with the study interpreter and cultural liaison, was a rewarding experience and generated a sense of awe and respect for the study participants as they diligently and passionately responded to study interview questions and shared many personal stories of their struggles as parents to proudly raise their children in chaotic Somalia, in refugee camps, and now in Faribault, Minnesota. The study finding that Somali parents are eager to expand their parent engagement actions and that in doing so they feel empowered to advocate for their children’s success, was both rewarding and inspiring.
Conclusion

This quasi-experimental, qualitative case study investigated the presence of parent engagement behaviors and the application of parent engagement strategies for Somali refugee parents in a small, rural, Minnesota public school district. The study explored Somali parent knowledge and skills about parent engagement prior to and after delivery of a training intervention consisting of a series of nine parent engagement sessions. The content for the parent engagement trainings was aligned with Epstein’s Six Levels of Parent Involvement (2019), and the training was delivered through the FPS Community School which is a full-service community school model.

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.

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, 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.
### Appendix A: Six Types of Involvement

**THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Learning at Home: Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Parent Interview Questions

Parent Semi-Structured Group Pre- and Post-Training Interview Questions

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender identity (circle)</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity (circle)</td>
<td>Somali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s or children’s school name (circle one or more)</td>
<td>McKinley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children at this school (write-in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of child or children (write in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s year of arrival in US</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s highest grade level (non-USA, write-in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s highest degree completed (non-USA, write-in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s highest grade level (USA, write-in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s degree completed (USA, write-in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parent perceived barriers to involvement (only pre-training questions):

1. How comfortable are you understanding and speaking English?
2. Do you have confidence that your child’s school is doing a good job? (This question is also in the Communicating Domain.)
3. Do you feel you have enough time during the day, week, and weekend to support your child’s learning?
4. Do you feel that the school and staff respect and understand the Somali culture?
   a. Beliefs
   b. Struggles
   c. Social
   d. Personal
5. Do you feel equipped with financial and supportive resources to be actively involved at your child’s school?
6. Do you feel that you receive adequate communication from your child’s school?
PARENTING DOMAIN
7. What is your role and responsibility as a parent to support your child’s learning?
   - What do you do to encourage your child to do well in school?
   - Do you have discussions with your child about their school progress and attitude toward school?
   - Do you have an established routine related to bed-time, homework time and free time?
   - Do you feel that you would like more opportunities for parent education to enhance your role in supporting your child?

COMMUNICATION DOMAIN
8. Do you feel welcomed at your child’s school?
   - How often do you contact the school and what do you contact them about?

9. Do you feel your child’s teacher cares about your child?
   - Do you respond to your child’s teacher’s emails, notes or letters sent home, or phone calls? (Support)

10. Do you feel comfortable talking with the staff at your child’s school?
    - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s teacher?
    - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s school administrator?
    - Do you feel comfortable talking with your child’s cultural liaison?

11. Do you have confidence that your child’s school is doing a good job?

VOLUNTEERING DOMAIN
12. Do you feel that you can contribute as a volunteer at your child’s school?
    - Do you volunteer in any capacity? If no, are you aware of volunteer opportunities?

LEARNING AT HOME DOMAIN
13. Do you feel that you have a role and responsibility to help your child learn at home?
    - How do you ensure your child’s homework is completed?
    - Are you able to provide help with your child’s homework? If no, do you find help for your child?
    - Do you take your child to the library to access reading materials or help with homework?
    - Do you encourage your child participate in an after school program that provides homework help or extended learning opportunities?
    - Do you feel that you have an adequate space at home for your child to learn? Is the space well-lit and free from interruption?

DECISION-MAKING DOMAIN
14. Do you feel you have a role or responsibility to help the school make decisions?
   Examples: school building or district wide committees and Parent Teacher
Organization.

**COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY DOMAIN**

15. Do you feel that the Faribault community has a responsibility to support your child’s school?
   - Do you use community resources to provide your children with additional learning experiences?
   - Do you encourage your child to participate in either or both school and community-sponsored extra-curricular activities? If no, are you aware of these opportunities?
Appendix C: Full-Service Community School Model

What is a Community School?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. Community schools offer a curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings, and weekends.

Community Schools are results focused:

- Children are ready to enter school and attend school consistently
- Students are actively involved in learning and their community
- Families are involved with their children’s education
- Students succeed academically
- Students are healthy - physically, socially, and emotionally
- Students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment
- Schools are engaged with families and communities
- The communities are desirable places to live

Or think about community schools this way...

Most people think of schools today as serving a single purpose: a binary, analog-system of delivery - teachers teach and students learn.

Community schools are more akin to smart phones. Schools and communities connect, collaborate, and create. Children and families have an array of supports from community partners right at their school.

Communities and schools leverage their shared physical and human assets to help kids succeed.

Community schools contain a host of built-in opportunities and supports that give students and parents all the tools they need to learn and grow.
Appendix D: Institutional Permission Letter

Mission Statement

Faribault Public Schools strives to empower, engage, and energize all students through its commitment to a quality education and creating an effective learning environment.

Parent Consent Form: Participation in Research

Title: Enhancing Parent Engagement and School-Parent Relationships Among Faribault Somali Parents

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to enhance parent engagement and parent-school relationships within Faribault Public Schools.

Study information: The study design will feature an adaptation of Epstein’s School-Family-Community Partnership Model (Epstein, 2001) and the delivery of parent engagement strategies presented as a component of the district’s full-service community school (FSCS) model. Pre-interviews will be conducted with 10-15 Somali parents followed by weekly parental engagement trainings over a period of six weeks and culminating in post-interviews that seek to determine the presence and application of the training strategies. Participants will receive training on effective strategies to enhance school-parent relationships and support their children in the education setting. In addition, 5 to 10 successful Somali high school students will also be interviewed to identify parenting strategies that had a positive impact on their academic and social success.

Time: February 4, 2019 through September 30, 2019

Risks: It is anticipated that participants in this study will not be at risk of any physical or psychological harm. All information gained from the interviews, which will be asked verbally, written down, and recorded will be secured in locked cabinet. It is my intent that information will be shared with the education field for research purposes only.

Possible Compensation: If financially feasible, participants will receive $50 who complete the interviews and training.

Benefits: Participation may enhance participant’s engagement with child’s school and school-parent relationships.

Confidentiality: Participant’s identity will not be shared with anyone beyond the co-investigator, Anne Marie Leland, and the interpreter, Mariam Mohamed. All individual
information will be recorded and tracked under an identification number associated with their first name.

**Participation and withdrawal**: Participation in this study is optional. Parents can choose not to participate or choose to withdraw at any time without any negative effects on their children, relationship with Faribault Public Schools, or relationship with the administrators.

**Contact**: If you have questions about the study, you may contact:

Anne Marie Leland
Community Education Director
Faribault Public Schools
Faribault, MN 55021
507.333.6033
aleland@faribault.k12.mn.us

**Additional information**: Any questions about your rights may be directed to Lisa Karch, Ph.D., Chair of the Minnesota State University Moorhead Institutional Review Board at 218.477.2699 or at lisa.karch@mnstate.edu.

*A copy of this informed consent will be provided to you.*

“I have been informed of the study details and understand what participating in the study means. I understand that I will be protected and that I can choose to stop participating in the study at any time. By signing this form, I am agreeing to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age or older.”

_________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of Participant                  Date

_________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of Investigator                  Date
Appendix E: Summary of Training/Interventions by Time Period

The weekly activities paralleled Epstein’s (2019) Six Levels of Parent Involvement. Participant questions and needs related to the training topic were addressed during the training session or at subsequent training sessions. The Six Levels were combined for certain sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Training/Intervention Activities by Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 18, 2019</td>
<td>Pre-training questions and participant demographic information collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to the Parenting Domain, Volunteering Domain, Communication Domain, and Decision-Making Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to the Parenting Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to the Communication Domain and Collaboration with the Community Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to Learning at Home Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 3, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to Learning at Home Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to the Communication Domain, Learning at Home Domain, and Parenting Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics, specifically to high school completion and diploma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 8, 2019</td>
<td>Presented information and discussed skills related to the Parenting Domain and Decision-Making Domain. Responded to questions concerning this domain and other topics. Participant graduation day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6, 2019</td>
<td>Post-Training questions and high school tour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


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New York: Teacher College Press.


Epstein, J. L. (2005). School-initiated family and community partnerships. In *This we believe in action: Implementing successful middle level schools* (pp. 77–96). Westerville, OH: Association for Middle Level Education.


the National Center for Education Statistics Web site:


