

“BUT I DIDN’T LEARN THAT”: UNDERSTANDING BEGINNING TEACHERS’  
READINESS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN  
URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

A. Jaalil Hart

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Curriculum and Instruction

Charlotte

2024

Approved by:

---

Dr. Bettie Ray Butler

---

Dr. Chance W. Lewis

---

Dr. Susan Harden

---

Dr. Daniel Alston



## ABSTRACT

A. JAALIL HART. "But I didn't learn that": Understanding beginning teachers' readiness for family engagement in urban elementary schools (Under the direction of DR. BETTIE RAY BUTLER)

Family engagement is a crucial component of student success, impacting academic performance, attendance rates, and behavior. However, many families, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, remain disengaged from their child's school due to barriers such as a lack of trust, negative experiences, and language or cultural obstacles. A foundational reason for this disengagement is the unpreparedness of teachers to intentionally engage families. Teacher education programs often do not have an explicit focus on family engagement, resulting in teachers who may feel unprepared and who do not understand the cultural context of their students' families; thus, hindering effective communication. This dissertation explored the preparedness of beginning teachers to engage families in elementary schools, and how they perceive this preparedness, particularly in urban settings. By examining how beginning teachers perceive their readiness, it provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses of teacher education programs in this regard. The research sought to answer two central questions: 1) How are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools, and 2) How do they perceive their teacher education program's preparedness for this task? The study employed a mixed methods approach, involving curriculum analysis, online surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study informed recommendations for teacher education programs, looking to equip future teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for effective family engagement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank God for guiding me through this journey. His strength, grace, and presence have been my foundation and source of resilience. I am truly grateful for His blessings and guidance, which have brought me to this milestone. Completing this dissertation has been one of my life's most challenging and rewarding journeys, and I am deeply grateful to those who have supported and guided me along the way. I could not have reached this milestone without the encouragement, love, and wisdom of so many wonderful people.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Brittany. Your unwavering belief in me has been my anchor throughout this journey. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and countless sacrifices, especially during the long nights and early mornings. Your love and encouragement have been my greatest sources of strength, and I am endlessly grateful for your support.

I am also profoundly grateful to my dissertation committee for their guidance, expertise, and encouragement. To my chair, Dr. Bettie Ray Butler, thank you for your mentorship and commitment to my growth as a scholar. Your insights, patience, and steadfast support have been invaluable, and I am forever appreciative of how you have challenged and inspired me to push my work further. To Dr. Chance Lewis, Dr. Susan Harden, and Dr. Alston, thank you each for your perspective and encouragement throughout this process. Your individual expertise and dedication to elevating and improving the lives of historically marginalized students and families have profoundly impacted my work. I am grateful for your guidance and the critical insights you shared along the way. Thank you also for your thoughtful advice and support. Your passion for education and commitment to fostering meaningful research have enriched my journey and strengthened this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues who have cheered me on and offered words of encouragement along the way. This dissertation is a testament to your unwavering support, and I am incredibly grateful for each of you. To everyone who has been a part of this journey—thank you. Your support has meant more than words can express.

## DEDICATION

To my beloved grandparents, Lawrence and Darlene Coleman, whose wisdom, love, and unwavering belief in me have shaped every step of my journey. You taught me to always chase my dreams and encouraged me to “do the hard things,” reminding me that strength and resilience come from embracing life’s challenges. Though you are no longer here, your guidance and spirit have been with me every moment, driving me forward. This work is a tribute to your legacy and to the lessons you instilled in me. Thank you for everything.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	ix
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
Problem Statement	3
Background	3
Purpose	5
Research Questions	5
Theoretical Framework	6
Overview of Methodology	11
Definition of Terms	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	17
The Evolution of Family Engagement	17
Family Engagement in Urban Schools	20
Teacher Education and Family Engagement	31
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	38
Context of the Study	38
Research Design	38
Data Collection Methods	41
Data Analysis Methods	44
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</b>	48
Findings from Survey	48
Findings from Interviews	67
Findings from Curriculum Review	76

<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICAITONS</b>	<b>82</b>
Summary of Findings	83
Thematic Discussion	88
Recommendations	104
Limitations of the Study	110
Opportunities for Future Research	112
Conclusion	113
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: EPP CURRICULUM ANALYSIS RUBRI</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS SURVEY</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: QUANTITATIVE CURRICULUM REVIEW FINDINGS</b>	<b>134</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1:</b> Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement	9
<b>Figure 2:</b> Mixed Methods Triangulation Design	40
<b>Figure 3:</b> Racial Demographics of Survey Respondents	48
<b>Figure 4:</b> Gender of Survey Respondents	50
<b>Figure 5:</b> Survey Respondents' Years of Experience	49
<b>Figure 6:</b> <i>Participants' Perceptions of EPP Preparedness for Engaging Parents and Families</i>	53
<b>Figure 7:</b> <i>Preparation for Effective Communication with Parents and Families</i>	55
<b>Figure 8:</b> <i>Percentage of Participants Whose EPP Include Tools to Overcome Barriers to Engagement</i>	58
<b>Figure 9:</b> <i>Participants' EPP Coursework Helped Understand Diverse Family Structures</i>	61
<b>Figure 10:</b> <i>EPP Provided Opportunities To Practice Strategies Through Clinical Practice</i>	64

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mr. Coleman was a beginning teacher in his first year of teaching. He graduated from a public historically Black college in the South and was excited about his career as a kindergarten teacher. After graduating, Mr. Coleman began teaching at an elementary school in one of the largest districts in the nation. His class was racially and linguistically diverse, with most of his students being Black and Brown. Known for his dedication and ability to engage even the most challenging learners, Mr. Coleman believed every student could succeed. He saw it as his responsibility to help them realize their potential. He was passionate about creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where every student felt valued and heard.

As part of his commitment to student success, Mr. Coleman also understood the importance of engaging his students' families in the school community. However, he faced challenges with one particular family, the Andrews. They joined the school mid-year, and amidst the bustle of an already busy school calendar, Mr. Coleman missed the opportunity to welcome them personally. Weeks passed, and he noticed that one of the Andrews' children, Sarah, was unusually quiet and rarely engaged in class activities. Concerned, Mr. Coleman suspected something might be affecting Sarah's academic performance and contacted her family several times. Despite his best efforts, Sarah's parents never responded. The silence left Mr. Coleman feeling disheartened and frustrated, prompting him to question his approach and whether he handled the situation effectively.

Driven by his commitment to Sarah's success, Mr. Coleman took the bold step of visiting the Andrews family at home. He knew the visit might seem intrusive, especially given that he hadn't yet established a connection with them, but he felt the risk was worth it if it helped Sarah. When he arrived, Mrs. Andrews answered the door, surprised by his unannounced visit. Her

initial response was cautious, and Mr. Coleman sensed her discomfort. Nevertheless, he introduced himself and expressed his concern for Sarah, carefully explaining his reasons for reaching out.

In an effort to establish rapport, Mr. Coleman asked Mrs. Andrews about her family's routines, some of Sarah's favorite activities, and their goals for her. The conversation was initially awkward and stilted, with Mrs. Andrews offering brief responses. Mr. Coleman wondered if he had overstepped, but he continued, explaining that he believed collaboration between home and school was essential to support Sarah's growth. Gradually, Mrs. Andrews opened up, admitting that their family had been dealing with personal matters, which made it challenging to stay engaged with school communication. Mr. Coleman left the conversation uncertain about the impact of the visit but hopeful that he'd taken a meaningful first step.

In the following weeks, he continued to reach out to the Andrews family with updates on Sarah's progress and encouraged them to attend school events. The process was not smooth. Sometimes, Mr. Coleman felt he wasn't making any headway, especially when Sarah remained withdrawn. But little by little, Mrs. Andrews began responding, attending a few parent-teacher meetings and, eventually, joining a family night event. Sarah's progress was slow but noticeable; she started participating more in class, showing minor signs of engagement that hinted at the impact of her teacher's persistence.

Mr. Coleman's experience with the Andrews family was not a quick success story. It was a messy, sometimes frustrating journey that pushed him to reflect on his approach to family engagement. He learned that building trust with families does not guarantee immediate results and often requires patience and humility. Ultimately, his persistence paid off—not in a dramatic transformation but in the steady, quiet progress that marked Sarah's growth. For other teachers,

his story serves as a reminder of the importance of forging genuine connections with families, even when the path is challenging. Partnerships between families and schools are not easy, but they are crucial to fostering meaningful change for students.

### **Problem Statement**

Sadly, Mr. Coleman's story is not an anomaly. Many elementary school teachers across the country face a similar challenge of engaging parents and families in schools. Banks et al. (2023) argue that family engagement is crucial in enhancing students' academic performance and overall school success. However, despite the recognized importance of these partnerships, many teachers, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, express a lack of confidence and preparedness in effectively engaging families (Ingvarson et al., 2007).

To address this gap, it was essential to understand the extent to which beginning teachers feel equipped to engage families in intentional and meaningful ways. By conducting this research, this study sought to explore the preparedness of beginning teachers to engage families effectively. The findings from this study informed and supported teacher education programs in their efforts to train and prepare elementary school teachers to engage families, particularly in the context of urban schools. Overall, I shed light on the challenges and opportunities associated with family engagement from the perspective of beginning teachers, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of engagement and improving educational outcomes for students and families.

### **Background**

Family engagement in schools is a critical component of student success (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). When families are meaningfully engaged in their child's education, students benefit in many ways, including academic success, better attendance rates, and fewer

behavioral incidents (Avendano & Cho, 2020; Baker et al., 2016; Garbacz et al., 2016).

However, despite the benefits of family engagement, many families remain disengaged and disconnected from their children's school, particularly those from historically marginalized communities (Anguiano et al., 2020).

There are many barriers to family engagement. Reasons for disengagement include a lack of trust between families and schools, negative experiences within the education system, and language or cultural barriers hindering effective communication (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Sanders-Smith et al., 2019). Existing literature underscores the significance of family engagement across both elementary and secondary educational settings. However, despite this extensive discussion on the importance of family involvement, there remains a considerable need for scholarly work concerning the preparation of elementary teachers to effectively engage families. This gap in research and practice is particularly evident in the limited attention given to equip teachers—especially those working in elementary schools, which encompass the most crucial and formative years of a child's educational journey—to meaningfully connect with families.

Elementary schools serve as the foundational stage where family engagement profoundly impacts a child's educational journey. Yet, teachers at this level often enter their careers without adequate training or preparation in cultivating intentional family connections (Jones et al., 2020; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Consequently, this absence of emphasis on family engagement at the elementary level contributes significantly to teachers' struggles in fostering meaningful connections, particularly with families from historically marginalized backgrounds (Ishimaru, 2019). This lack of understanding and bridging the cultural contexts of their students' families leads to distrust and disengagement, directly impacting the academic outcomes of students.

### **Purpose**

This study explored how teacher education programs prepare their candidates for family engagement and the perceptions of beginning teachers regarding their teacher education program's effectiveness in preparing them to engage parents and families. The study also explored how beginning teachers reported that their teacher education program equipped them with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage parents and families and the challenges they face effectively. Through this study, I provided insights into teacher education programs' strengths and opportunities regarding family engagement preparation and identified areas for improvement that can better support beginning teachers in their efforts to engage families.

### **Research Questions**

This study provided recommendations on how teacher education programs can work to support their candidate's knowledge, skills, and dispositions around engaging parents and families by exploring the following research questions:

1. How are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of this study lies at the intersection of family engagement in education and teacher preparation. By addressing the research questions, this study contributes to and extends the current literature and understanding of how teacher education programs can effectively prepare teachers to engage parents and families in elementary schools, especially in urban settings. One of the foremost benefits of this study is the potential to inform and improve

teacher education programs. Valuable insights were gained by examining how beginning teachers perceive their preparedness to engage parents and families. These insights allow teacher education programs to reflect on their curricula and instructional approaches, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary adjustments to better equip future teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to engage families effectively.

Likewise, this study sheds light on the challenges faced by beginning teachers as they engage parents and families. Understanding these challenges helps inform the development of targeted support systems and resources within teacher education programs and schools. It enables stakeholders, such as faculty, school administrators, and policymakers, to implement evidence-based strategies and practices to enhance family engagement and support beginning teachers in overcoming obstacles they encounter.

Ultimately, the findings and recommendations of this study contribute to the broader field of education by providing practical insights and actionable recommendations for teacher education programs, school leaders, and other stakeholders invested in promoting family engagement. The study also stimulates further research and discussions, leading to improved practices and policies that enhance the engagement of parents and families in elementary schools, thereby positively impacting student outcomes and overall educational experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the area of family engagement research, there are a number of theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide scholarly inquiry (Yamauchi et al., 2017). Common frameworks include Bronfenbrenner's (1974) Bioecological Theory, Moll et al.'s (1992) Funds of Knowledge, and Mapp and Bergman's (2019) Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships. Included in the most common guiding frames is Epstein's (2007) framework

for parental involvement, which will guide this study as a foundational and comprehensive model widely recognized for exploring family engagement in schools. While other co-construction/assets-based frameworks are relevant, Epstein's work serves as a fundamental starting point, emphasizing communication and foundational aspects in the initial stages of family-school engagement. Epstein's framework establishes connections and relationships, forming the basis for later, more collaborative strategies. This sequential approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of family-school engagement, progressing from communication to collaborative and asset-based strategies.

### **Epstein's Framework for Parental Involvement**

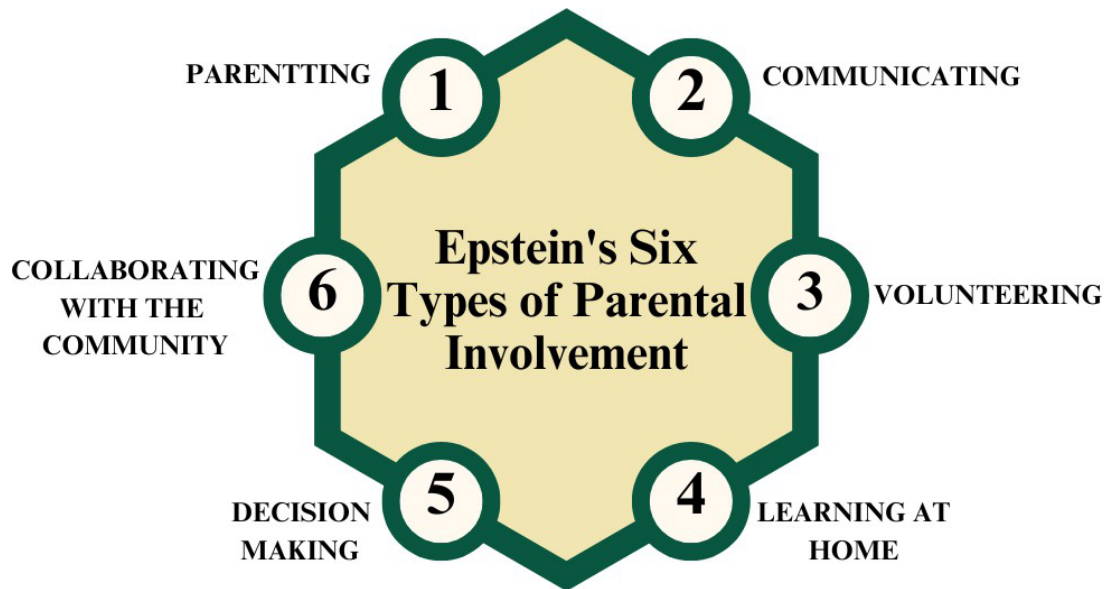
Epstein's (2007) framework for parental involvement comprises six types of involvement that promote meaningful engagement between families and schools (see Figure 1). The first type, *parenting*, emphasizes creating safe and supportive home environments that facilitate learning. It also encourages schools to understand and appreciate families' cultural backgrounds and aspirations, fostering positive relationships and cultural competence. The second type, *communicating*, highlights the need for clear and consistent communication between home and school. Effective communication builds trust, establishes collaborative relationships, and ensures that families and schools work together towards the same goals. Communication methods include phone calls, conferences, and emails.

*Volunteering* is the third type of involvement, which involves parents and community members actively supporting schools in different ways. Volunteers can provide academic or social support to students, assist teachers with administrative tasks, and contribute to creating a sense of community within the school. The fourth type, *learning at home*, emphasizes the collaboration between teachers and families to continue and support learning activities at home.



Teachers provide guidance to parents on monitoring their child's progress and offer strategies for assisting with homework and engaging in curriculum-aligned activities. *Decision-making* underscores the importance of shared decision-making and positive self-advocacy. It encourages parents and community members to actively participate in shaping school policies and procedures through involvement in parent-teacher associations, school boards, and advocacy groups. Finally, *collaborating with the community* highlights the significance of building partnerships between schools and various community organizations. These partnerships provide resources and opportunities to enhance family educational experiences, academic success, and student vocational development. Open communication, trust, and a shared commitment to student success are essential in these collaborations.

In its totality, this framework offers researchers and practitioners a comprehensive guide to developing and improving family engagement. By recognizing the diverse roles and contributions of families, schools, and communities, this framework provides a roadmap for fostering meaningful engagement and collaboration. However, for this study, I only center three specific tenets: communicating, volunteering, and learning at home. These tenets were selected because they are the most foundational and are those over which classroom teachers have the most direct control. Through these types of involvement, schools can foster stronger relationships with families, promote student success, and create a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

**Figure 1***Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

In addition to Epstein's framework work on parental involvement, this study was also guided by the tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). First introduced by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP emphasizes acknowledging and incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the teaching and learning process. The critical ideas of CRP include recognizing and respecting students' cultural identities, integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, and using teaching methods that resonate with students' experiences. The goal of CRP is to create an inclusive and empowering learning environment that enhances the educational experiences and outcomes of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly in urban settings. The three key components of CRP are 1) cultural competence, 2) critical consciousness, and 3) student learning—which further informed this study.

### ***Cultural Competence***

CRP underscores the significance of recognizing and respecting the cultural identities of students. In the context of family engagement, this involves exploring how family engagement practices can align with cultural competence. Investigating ways to affirm and appreciate students' diverse cultural backgrounds through family engagement initiatives is critical. This approach ensures that family involvement strategies are not only inclusive but also tailored to honor and celebrate the unique cultural perspectives of each student. By fostering an environment that values and incorporates cultural diversity within family engagement, schools can create more meaningful and effective partnerships with families, ultimately contributing to a more enriching educational experience for students.

### ***Critical Consciousness***

Another critical component of CRP is the development of critical consciousness, the ability to identify, analyze, and address real-world problems, especially those contributing to societal inequalities (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the realm of family engagement, this implies examining how engagement strategies can empower families to become advocates for equity within the educational system. By fostering critical consciousness through family engagement, this study aims to explore avenues for families to actively participate in discussions and actions that address systemic challenges, contributing to a more socially just education landscape.

### ***Student Learning***

Finally, CRP strongly emphasizes student learning and high expectations, viewing them as inseparable components of effective teaching. CRP advocates for rigorous academic growth alongside the development of students' moral reasoning, problem-solving skills, and critical

thinking abilities (Szech, 2022). This commitment to high expectations is grounded in the belief that all students can achieve at high levels, and it encourages teachers to challenge students intellectually while nurturing their holistic development. Integrating these principles involves examining how teacher education programs prepare candidates to engage families in ways that reinforce high expectations and contribute to students' growth across multiple domains. This includes understanding the role of family engagement in shaping students' intellectual advancement, ethical perspectives, and real-world problem-solving abilities. Through meaningful family partnerships, teachers can create an environment that upholds high standards while supporting students' academic, social, and personal development.

### **Overview of Methodology**

The study explored the intersection of teacher education and family engagement, mainly focusing on beginning teachers (BTs). To understand how BTs are prepared for family engagement and their perceptions of this preparedness, I employed a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to comprehensively understand the research questions.

Quantitatively, this study involved a curriculum analysis of public teacher education programs in a southeastern state in the United States. The analysis examined course offerings and syllabi to identify the extent of family engagement education in these programs. Additionally, online surveys were used to gather data on the amount of coursework and field experiences related to family engagement, the strategies and resources provided, and the perceived confidence in engaging with families in elementary schools. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with beginning teachers to gain in-depth insights into their perceptions of how their teacher education programs prepared them for family engagement.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, codes, and themes.

### **Positionality Statement**

This study is deeply rooted in my background as a classroom teacher, where a rich tapestry of experiences shaped my understanding of family engagement in education. From the beginning of my teaching career, after completing my teacher education program, I quickly discovered that teaching was not simply about conveying information—it was about building meaningful connections with students and their families. My teaching style centered on creating an inclusive and engaging classroom environment where students felt valued, respected, and motivated to learn. I prioritized active learning and encouraged students to think critically, participate openly, and feel a sense of belonging in the classroom.

My initial years of teaching were filled with moments of trial and error, some of which highlighted the importance of family engagement. Early on, I realized that despite my best efforts in the classroom, my impact on students' academic and personal growth was limited without a connection to their home lives. One memorable misstep was an assumption I made about a student's lack of engagement, only to later learn that family circumstances contributed to his behavior in ways I had not anticipated. This experience taught me the value of humility and the need for consistent, open communication with families. I learned that I could not fully support their learning journey without understanding the contexts students came from.

Family engagement became a central focus in my teaching practice, though I quickly recognized the gaps in my preparation. While my teacher education program provided a strong foundation in instructional techniques and classroom management, it offered limited guidance on effectively engaging families, particularly those from diverse racial, linguistic, and

socioeconomic backgrounds. This realization fueled my desire to better understand how teachers could bridge these gaps and work collaboratively with families. Over time, as I connected more closely with families, I saw firsthand how their involvement enriched my students' learning experiences, fostering a more holistic educational journey that extended beyond academic achievement to encompass social, emotional, and moral growth.

As I transitioned into research, I remained anchored in my identity and experience as a classroom teacher. Those experiences have instilled in me a deep sensitivity to the complexities of family engagement. This study is not just an academic pursuit but a personal commitment to uncovering the perspectives of beginning teachers who, like myself, are navigating the challenges and rewards of family engagement in urban schools. I approach this research reflexively, acutely aware that my teaching background, beliefs, and cultural identity inevitably shape my perspective. By embracing this reflexivity, I aim to ensure that the findings of this study are grounded, nuanced, and responsive to the lived realities of beginning teachers striving to build bridges between families and schools. Through this research, I hope to contribute meaningful insights that support future educators in fostering these vital connections, ultimately enhancing students' educational journeys in ways that reflect the importance of family partnerships.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. First, it is essential to note that the participants' perceptions and stories are their own and may not reflect more widely held perceptions of other graduates of the same teacher education program. This study only explored perceptions from beginning teachers in a particular state. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. Similarly, this study does not have predictive validity. That is, just because

programs address topics of family engagement in their coursework, beginning teachers may still not perceive they have been sufficiently prepared, or while course descriptions may not specifically include language covering family engagement in the class, topics may be otherwise embedded. In addition, because teacher education faculty members are not included in the study, comparisons cannot be made between their practices and the early-career teacher's lived experiences.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Beginning Teacher:** teachers in the first five years of their career.

**Family Engagement:** a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development (NAFSCE, 2010).

**Family/Parent:** this term is used interchangeably to describe the primary caregivers of a student

**Field Experience:** hands-on training where aspiring educators engage in real classroom settings, applying teaching techniques under supervision to gain practical experience before becoming certified teachers. It involves active participation, observation, and guided practice in educational environments to develop teaching skills and strategies.

**Historically Marginalized Families:** Families who belong to groups that have been systematically excluded or disadvantaged within society. This may include families from racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds that have experienced historical inequities, impacting their access to educational resources, support systems, and opportunities for engagement.

**Linguistically Diverse Families:** families whose home language is not English and whose family members may have varying degrees of proficiency in English, including limited English speaking and reading skills.

**Parent Involvement:** The participation of parents or guardians in their children's education through activities such as attending school events, volunteering, assisting with homework, and maintaining communication with teachers. Unlike family engagement, parent involvement is often more school-initiated and may not encompass a collaborative approach to a child's development.

**Teacher Education Program:** a formal course of study designed to prepare students for a career in teaching. It includes academic coursework, practical teaching experiences, and pedagogical development to equip future teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to educate classroom students effectively.

**Teacher Preparation:** The process by which aspiring teachers are trained and equipped with the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to effectively manage classrooms and facilitate student learning. This encompasses both theoretical instruction and practical experiences, including coursework, fieldwork, and mentorship, to ensure readiness for the teaching profession.

**Urban Schools:** schools located in large metropolitan areas, typically characterized by higher population density and greater cultural and socioeconomic diversity. These schools often serve a large number of students from diverse backgrounds, facing unique challenges such as limited resources and community-related challenges.

**Undergraduate Program:** A post-secondary educational program leading to a bachelor's degree, typically lasting four years. It provides foundational knowledge and skills in a specific



field of study, often including general education requirements, major-specific courses, and practical experiences such as internships or fieldwork, to prepare students for professional careers or further academic pursuits.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last several decades, studies have affirmed the connections between successful family engagement, school improvement, and overall student success (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). More specifically, as Paz-Albo et al. (2022) and Smith et al. (2022) suggest, establishing relationships with families is critical to student success and school improvement, from increasing student achievement to improving school discipline issues. Research further finds that teachers and other school staff play a vital role in establishing meaningful relationships with students, parents, and families. However, while the research is clear about their role in engaging families, what is less clear is how teachers are prepared for this work in their undergraduate teacher education programs. The literature examining beginning teachers' perceptions of their readiness to build partnerships with parents and families is even scarcer. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the extant literature surrounding the evolution of family engagement efforts, including the shift from parent involvement to family engagement and their benefits on schools and students. This literature review also synthesizes scholarship discussing how teacher education programs prepare candidates for this vital work.

### **The Evolution from Parental Involvement to Family Engagement**

Much is written about family engagement, with scholars generally using it as an umbrella term describing the connections between parents/families, homes, and schools (Barker & Harris, 2020). Traditionally, parents can participate in school-related activities such as organizing fundraising campaigns, volunteering in the classroom, or being part of school council decisions without directly influencing the learning conversations or experiences at home with their children (Amatea & Dolan, 2009). Similarly, parents can actively engage in their children's learning without physically being present at school or relying solely on schools to effectively

partner with them. Family engagement in schools varies from place to place, including discussions about family interests, sharing oral stories, or participating in community celebrations. It is important to note that a strong partnership between home and school does not solely determine the extent of families' involvement in their children's learning. Simply put, parent involvement encompasses their interactions and experiences within the school setting. At the same time, family engagement goes beyond that, including efforts to support and connect with their children's learning in home and community environments.

To provide additional support and structures through their work in developing the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, Mapp & Bergman (2019) work to shift schools from simply involving parents and families to engaging them as co-creators in their child's education. That is, rather than assigning the responsibility of "involving" mainly to families, schools must actively collaborate with them to support the children's learning in practical ways that are comfortable for families, culturally sustaining, and grounded in relationships that are deeply rooted in open communication and mutual respect (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). This framework 1) helps schools understand why educators and families have struggled to build trusting and effective partnerships, 2) provides evidence-based recommendations for effectively establishing and maintaining partnerships, 3) spotlights the intended objectives and results for educators and families when the goals are successfully met, and 3) investigates the correlation between enhanced capabilities, the collaborative efforts of educators and families, and the subsequent improvements in both students and schools.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) "present a model for the progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with children's learning" (p. 399). Their

continuum from involvement to engagement delineates different levels of parental engagement. This continuum emphasizes a shift in agency, responsibility, and the nature of the parent-school relationship. At the outset, the school primarily guides parental involvement efforts, with parents receiving information. Progressing along the continuum, parental agency increases, and parents and families become more actively engaged in their children's learning, moving beyond the school setting. This increased engagement reflects a shift in the balance of power between parents and schools. The model underscores the importance of recognizing family engagement as inherently valuable and highlights its potential to positively impact educational outcomes. This continuum is an aspirational framework for enhancing collaboration between parents and schools, offering valuable insights for research about family engagement in schools.

In their study addressing education success and equity for Black male students, Griffin et al. (2021) found that many traditional models of parental involvement divorce themselves from accounting for how minoritized parents and families are engaged in their child's education. These models often are school-centered, discounting the experiences and schema of parents of color. The authors go on to explain that traditional models of parental involvement are biased because "rather than parents, [schools] define parent involvement activities, leading to schools labeling parents as uninvolved when the actual issue is that parents of color do not demonstrate behaviors that are seen as acceptable through a school-based mainstream lens" (Griffin et al., 2018, p. 3). This disconnect, caused partly by cultural competence and proficiency gaps, can significantly affect how educators shape their dispositions and actions around engaging families (Brion, 2022).

At another level, family engagement approaches are child-centered in which all stakeholders collaborate intentionally to enhance educational and schooling experiences for

students across all developmental domains (Griffin et al., 2021; Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Mapp et al., 2017). Family engagement efforts differ from parental involvement efforts in several ways. Most importantly, they are grounded in establishing collaborative relationships with stakeholders that champion effective communication practices and shared roles and responsibilities. These relationships aim to promote co-creating a school culture that encourages student growth academically, behaviorally, and socially emotionally (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Contrary to historical or traditional parental involvement models, family engagement strategies require school staff to initiate, establish, maintain, and repair (as needed) relationships with families. It requires that school staff support families as they support their children's academic progress.

It is important to note that scholars have also identified *family-school partnerships* as the pinnacle of the connection between schools and families (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). At this level, schools and families collaborate as co-creators in their children's educational experiences. More recently, Mapp et al. (2021) emphasized a liberatory perspective on family engagement, explicitly advocating for a shift from mere parental involvement towards intentionally collaborative partnerships that truly honor the strengths families offer. This approach revolves around fostering shared leadership and collaboratively crafting solutions, diverging from prior research that primarily suggested ways for parents to concentrate their involvement on school-related activities.

### **Family Engagement in Urban Schools**

First, it is essential to understand what “urban” schools are. Milner (2012) provides a typology of urban education that scholars use to better understand the context in which we situate our work. *Urban intensive* refers to schools in major metropolitan cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. These educational settings are characterized by high

population density and size, often encountering challenges in resource allocation due to substantial demand. Infrastructure and resource distribution issues impact both schools and the broader community, affecting areas such as housing, poverty, and transportation.

Similarly, *urban emergent* describes schools in relatively large cities, such as Nashville, Austin, Columbus, and Charlotte, with populations smaller than a million. While these schools face resource scarcity on a smaller scale than intensive urban areas, they share similar challenges, albeit with fewer people per capita. Finally, *urban characteristics* apply to schools in smaller cities or districts, potentially rural or suburban, beginning to confront issues reminiscent of urban settings, such as an increase in English language learners. While not as extensive as intensive or emergent urban areas, these schools deal with evolving challenges, though their surrounding environments are not as expansive.

Newman et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive study exploring parental perceptions of school-initiated parental involvement across different demographic groups, employing Epstein's (2007) six typologies of parental involvement. The study surveyed 670 parents from an urban school district in the southeastern United States, utilizing a perception survey based on Epstein's framework. This survey, adapted from the School-Family-Community Partnership survey (Epstein, 2002), asked parents to rate the frequency and effectiveness of school actions related to parental involvement. Parents ranked these items using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing researchers to assess variations in perceptions by race, education level, socio-economic status, and the number of children in the household. The data were analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis H test, a non-parametric equivalent to ANOVA, to identify statistically significant differences among demographic groups.

While the study found no significant variations in perceptions across racial subgroups regarding the frequency and effectiveness of schools' parental involvement efforts, notable differences emerged regarding education level, socio-economic status, and the number of children in the home. Parents with a GED perceived a higher degree of involvement effectiveness than those with more advanced educational backgrounds who felt more involved. Similarly, parents of higher socio-economic status reported more frequent school-initiated engagement, while middle-income parents perceived a higher effectiveness of these practices. Parents with larger households also rated the frequency and efficacy of involvement efforts more positively, suggesting that a supportive family network may enhance perceptions of school engagement.

The findings underscore the importance of intentional family engagement, highlighting factors such as education level, socio-economic status, and household size as influential in shaping parental involvement. However, the study also reveals a gap in understanding the specific strategies teachers employ to support and enhance family engagement, pointing to a need for further research on the role of educators in school-initiated parental involvement efforts.

### **Benefits for Students**

Research consistently shows family engagement is critical to students' success in all schools, particularly those in urban areas (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2021). For instance, Smith et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis on family-school partnership (FSP) interventions, examining their impact on children's academic and social-emotional development across 77 studies. These studies included urban and other naturalistic school settings and used experimental or quasi-experimental designs to measure outcomes. FSP interventions significantly improved students' academic achievement, social-behavioral

competence, and mental health. Specific components, such as home-based involvement, bi-directional communication, and school-to-home collaboration, emerged as particularly effective in fostering these positive outcomes.

Additionally, Smith et al. (2020) noted that specific FSP components, like two-way communication and behavioral support, proved especially beneficial for older students. Notably, the study's findings showed that FSP interventions were equally effective across racial and ethnic groups, suggesting their value for diverse urban populations where families may have varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This reinforces that FSP interventions can be a powerful tool for promoting equitable educational outcomes in urban contexts, where diverse student needs often require adaptable and inclusive engagement strategies.

Building on Smith et al.'s findings, House et al. (2019) examined family engagement practices in two high-achieving, urban secondary schools in New York State, often termed "odds-beating" schools due to their high graduation rates despite challenging urban circumstances. These schools succeeded in engaging families by leveraging local resources, fostering culturally responsive relationships, and actively addressing power imbalances. Through case studies of Freeport and Sherburne-Earlville schools, House et al. underscored the value of tailoring family engagement strategies to meet the unique needs of urban communities, where socio-economic challenges and cultural diversity demand flexible, context-specific approaches. By understanding families' specific circumstances and priorities, these schools managed to build stronger, more effective partnerships that contributed to their students' success.

Together, the studies by Smith et al. (2020) and House et al. (2019) illustrate the profound benefits of family engagement in urban school settings. While Smith et al. highlighted the positive impact of FSP interventions on academic and social outcomes across diverse



demographics, House et al. demonstrated how urban schools can effectively overcome barriers by customizing engagement practices to align with the needs of their communities. These insights reinforce the importance of family engagement as a tool for academic success and promoting holistic development in students attending urban schools.

## **Barriers to Family Engagement**

### ***Cultural Competence***

In the context of urban schools, where approximately 50% of students identify as individuals of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), a cultural mismatch often arises due to the underrepresentation of teachers and school leaders of color (The Hunt Institute, 2021; Superville, 2022). This mismatch can lead to gaps in cultural competence, which is critical for effective family engagement in diverse urban settings. Cultural competence, broadly defined as the ability to understand, respect, and work effectively with individuals from varied cultural backgrounds, becomes particularly important in urban schools where teachers may face challenges in accurately interpreting and respecting the cultural norms and values of the communities they serve (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Without this competence, misunderstandings and miscommunications can occur, potentially leading to diminished trust and lower engagement from families (Sanders-Smith et al., 2019). Urban educators must work to bridge this gap to foster meaningful and inclusive relationships with families, which can have a positive ripple effect on student success.

### ***Communicating with Linguistically Diverse Families***

Communication is foundational to family engagement, yet it often presents a barrier in urban schools, where many families speak languages other than English (Bachman et al., 2021; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) four-year study on family engagement

initiatives for Spanish-speaking parents in an urban school district highlights the unique challenges linguistically diverse families face. The study found that traditional school activities often did not align with these families' expectations or needs, making it difficult for them to participate meaningfully in their children's education. The author emphasizes the importance of providing structural support, such as hiring bilingual staff and funding parent education programs, to create a more inclusive environment. These findings are particularly relevant in urban schools, where the diversity of home languages can make family engagement efforts complex.

Michael et al. (2023) further underscored the importance of communication in their scoping review of family engagement strategies in U.S. schools. The study identified various communication methods—newsletters, websites, information sessions, and event calendars—used to engage families, particularly in urban schools. However, the review noted a lack of attention to pre-service teacher training for working with linguistically diverse families, a gap that is especially critical in urban environments. Michael et al. recommend that schools establish regular, culturally sensitive communication channels to strengthen family-school partnerships. These strategies are especially applicable in urban schools, where diverse linguistic backgrounds require schools to remove communication barriers proactively.

### ***Building Relationships with Families***

For urban schools, building relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families, especially those with children who have disabilities, requires intentionality and sensitivity. Kea et al. (2023) highlight four high-impact strategies for fostering family-school partnerships: building trust, effective communication, embracing cultural diversity, and promoting collaboration. Trust-building is particularly vital in urban settings, where historical

disparities in resources and support have often left marginalized families feeling disconnected from schools. Khalifa et al. (2015) argue that establishing trust involves schools engaging with families through genuine, culturally responsive practices, such as home visits and interviews with family members, which allow educators to understand the community's unique values and challenges.

Home visits, in particular, offer urban educators a chance to connect with families on their own terms, gathering insights that can be integrated into classroom practices to make the learning environment more inclusive and reflective of students' backgrounds (Bywaters et al., 2022). In an urban context, where teachers may not share the same cultural or linguistic background as their students, these personal interactions become essential for establishing rapport and fostering a reciprocal model of learning. By respecting and valuing families' unique knowledge, educators can cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and belonging, which is critical for effective engagement in diverse urban schools.

Traditionally, school, home, and community spaces have been viewed as separate entities, but family engagement in urban schools aims to bridge these spaces collaboratively (Gerzel-Short et al., 2019). Families in urban communities bring a wealth of knowledge and resources that, when integrated into school practices, enhance culturally sustaining approaches to learning. These recommendations are not limited to special education but apply broadly to urban school settings. This approach underscores the need for teacher education programs to prioritize training in family engagement, equipping future educators to build strong partnerships that reflect the complexities of urban school communities.

### ***Parents' Past Experiences with School***

People often have negative experiences with schools, their staff, and their culture that largely shape how they approach and engage with them (Räty, 2011). These experiences may include negative relationships with teachers, feeling disconnected from the school community, or a lack of support in their education. Parents may also feel they need more trust. To explore this, Räty (2011) conducted a study aimed to investigate how parents' own school memories influence their recollection of their child's school experiences and their involvement in their child's education. The study involved parents (n=326) participating in a 9-year follow-up study of their child's schooling through questionnaires that explored their ideas about their personal memories of school, recalling their children's early years of schooling, and how they participated in their child's school (p. 351). The findings revealed that parents' own school memories played a significant role in shaping their recollection of their child's school years, particularly among fathers and vocationally educated parents. For instance, parents with negative school memories were more likely to help their children prepare for tests compared to parents with more positive memories. The study suggests that parental school memories function as a broader educational attitude, influencing parents' perceptions and actions regarding their child's education.

These findings are further supported by Baker et al. (2016) who engaged 50 families and 76 teachers from six schools in a Midwestern state in focus groups to elicit information about various subjects, including the school's discipline practices, communication, parent involvement, and overall satisfaction with the school (p 166). Through these focus groups, the researchers uncovered several barriers to engaging families. Most notably, teachers described having to navigate parents' perceived negative experiences with schools. School staff perceived that some parents may not wish to engage with the school due to negative school experiences, apathy, and

perceived lack of education. Teachers believed that parents displayed varying degrees of apathy, potentially undervalued education, and might feel intimidated or lack education themselves (p. 176). There was a concern among staff that intimidation could discourage parental presence at the school. Furthermore, staff members recognized that past negative school experiences, along with apathy, hindered parental involvement. They also highlighted that parents might face uncertainty about how to participate or whom to contact, emphasizing the interplay between apathy and this uncertainty in understanding parents' limited involvement in their children's education.

The findings from these studies are telling. They highlight the imperative to reframe our understanding of parents and their experiences, acknowledging their potential and desire to engage in their children's education. Second, it underscores the critical need to create school environments that are welcoming and actively inviting for parents. By doing so, we can help dispel feelings of intimidation, reduce uncertainty, and foster a sense of belonging, ultimately encouraging parents to become more actively involved in their children's educational journey. This shift in mindset and the creation of inviting schools also present valuable opportunities for teacher education programs to better prepare educators to engage with and support parents effectively.

### **Politics and Family Engagement**

Understanding the impact of political contexts at local, state, and national levels becomes crucial in comprehending the landscape of family engagement in education. Local policies, state legislation, and federal mandates significantly influence the environment for parental involvement, highlighting the necessity of navigating diverse perspectives and advocating for robust parental engagement in their children's education. This dynamic presents divergent

parental viewpoints: one faction supports schools in educating students about the historical impacts of race on American society, while another contends that such teachings are racially divisive, starting from a young age (Baldwin Clark, 2023). This surge in parental engagement stems from conflicting stances on integrating critical race theory-related content in K-12 education, sparking intense dialogues regarding teaching history, social studies, and racial themes. Consequently, this polarization has empowered parents to actively shape their children's learning experiences, resulting in a transformed landscape of family engagement in education entwined with educational content, parental concerns, and broader political discourse.

Simultaneously, a series of legislative actions has emerged, delineating constraints on race-related teachings, policies affecting transgender students, and the removal of books from educational settings (Gross, 2021). This backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, instigated primarily by Republican lawmakers and conservative groups, categorizes LGBTQ topics as unsuitable for education and suggests that teachings on race could foster self-loathing among white students (Anderson, 2021). This trajectory traces back to the executive order by Former President Donald Trump in September 2020, laying the groundwork for limiting diversity training (Exec. Order No. 13950). Despite its revocation, remnants of the order persisted in various bills nationwide. Laws restricting discussions on 'divisive concepts' materialized in states like Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, coinciding with professional repercussions for educators addressing racial issues in their classrooms (Pendharkar, 2022). Legal challenges, exemplified by Arizona, succeeded in halting divisive concepts laws, while Florida enacted the 'Don't Say Gay' law in March 2022, curtailing LGBTQ discussions in classrooms. Book bans, shifts in school accreditation, anti-transgender policies in Virginia, and

right-wing group influence in school board elections have further shaped this evolving educational landscape (Pendharkar, 2022).

### **Parental Organizations**

These developments underscore a nationwide trend limiting discourse on contentious topics within educational settings, signifying a substantial shift in educational policies and practices. In large support of this movement, organizations like Moms for Liberty (n.d.) and Freedom in Education (2023), whose membership generally consists of conservative white women, symbolize a broader movement advocating for parental empowerment in shaping their children's education. Prioritizing parental rights, transparency, local control, and accountability, these groups assert that active parental engagement positively correlates with enhanced academic performance and student motivation.

However, despite their focus on their ideas of parental empowerment and educational governance, these groups have faced criticism for the content and implications of their messages (Yousef, 2023). Critics argue that their emphasis on restricting certain educational content and controlling curricular decisions could limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives and impede a comprehensive understanding of societal issues. The stance against LGBTQ discussions in classrooms, limitations on race-related teachings, and book bans have drawn condemnation for potentially fostering exclusion, censorship, and hindering open dialogue within educational settings (Alfonseca, 2023). Moreover, concerns have been raised that such stringent control over educational content might inhibit critical thinking skills and hinder the development of inclusive learning environments, contradicting the principles of academic freedom and fostering a well-rounded education.

Critics also contend that while advocating for parental involvement is commendable, the extreme positions taken by these groups could marginalize certain communities, restrict access to valuable educational resources, and perpetuate societal divisions rather than fostering an inclusive educational atmosphere that accommodates diverse perspectives and experiences. The polarizing nature of their advocacy has raised questions about the broader implications of parental control in shaping educational content and its potential impact on a well-rounded and holistic educational experience for all students. This type of family engagement in schools often leaves teachers feeling anxious about what they can and cannot say/do in their classrooms. For example, members of Moms of Liberty often attend school local board meetings to denounce content, curricula, and even specific books in school libraries that address topics such as race, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ rights (Swenson, 2023).

### **Teacher Education for Family Engagement**

For decades, scholars and practitioners have discussed how teachers, administrators, and counselors are prepared to engage families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Kea et al., 2023). However, despite the extensive research demonstrating the necessity of meaningful family engagement strategies, education policy and practice surrounding this area still need to be increased (NAFSCE, 2022). More concerning is that teacher education programs essentially relegate this work to a single class or embed its topics into courses around special or early childhood education, further widening the gap between parents, families, and schools working together (Boonk et al., 2018; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). In a 1980 study surveying 133 teacher education programs across six states, nearly all teacher and administrator participants identified family engagement as a gap in their formal education. They agreed that better preparation for this area was needed (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). Another



study surveyed elementary school teachers and found that only a few credited their family engagement practices to knowledge and skills learned in their preparation programs (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Findings from the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement's (NAFSCE) (Hernandez, 2019) report, "*State of the States: Family, School, and Community Engagement Within State Educator Licensure Requirements*," only 17 out of the 56 U.S. states and territories explicitly incorporate teacher training encompasses elements crucial for effective family engagement. Additionally, 25 out of the 56 states and territories address family engagement in the training of administrators. Moreover, it is noteworthy that nearly 70% of states do not have requirements for educator preparation programs to adequately equip future teachers with the essential skills in all aspects of family engagement (NAFSCE, 2019). Similarly, over half of the states and territories do not mandate administrator preparation in all four areas. This unpreparedness has significant implications for the educational experiences of students, parents, and families.

### **Training Through Coursework**

Scholars and practitioners are beginning to understand more fully the importance of supporting teachers in developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to engage families in schools (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). The prevalence of teacher preparation programs engaging students in courses around family engagement has grown from an estimated 4% to nearly 60% from the late 1980s to the early 2000s (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein & Becker, 1982). Likewise, because the amount of programs offering these courses has grown, more researchers have been able to explore their impact on teacher outcomes. Consequently, some studies suggest that when trained effectively, teachers show more positive dispositions

when working with families (Bartels & Eskow, 2010) and a better understanding of how families' roles contribute to educational success for students (Blasi, 2002).

More recently, through a meta-analysis of nearly 40 research studies from 1988-2015, Smith & Sheridan (2019) sought "to systematically analyze the influence of family-engagement TTPs on teachers' family-engagement attitudes, knowledge, and practice" (p.146). They wanted to explore the effects of teacher training programs, practices, attitudes, and knowledge related to family engagement. Their study revealed that teacher training programs positively impacted specific teacher outcomes. Summarily, they found that when teachers receive specific training focused on family engagement, they typically feel more confident and knowledgeable about working with families, and how they interact and consult with them is enhanced. This study is consistent with others, further underscoring the importance of training teachers for this work (Evans, 2013; Grolnick et al., 2014).

While the study above illuminated the importance of training teachers to engage families, others have identified that this work is often situated in early childhood classes and programs. One such example can be found in the work of Vesely et al. (2021). Students at their predominantly white university must take "*Engaging Families of Diverse Young Learners*" as part of their early childhood education graduate and undergraduate programs. Teacher candidates in this course build knowledge and skills for engaging families from culturally diverse backgrounds. Because enrollment in this program is primarily white female students, this course is critically essential, emphasizing relationship building, "understanding and developing cultural humility, " and addressing implicit personal biases (Vesely et al., 2021, p. 175). The major assignment for this course requires students to engage with and interview a family of a

historically marginalized group (a home visit), after which students reflect on the overall experience and its implications for their practice as classroom teachers.

### **Training Through Field Experience and Clinical Practice**

Field experience and clinical practice are pivotal components in teacher preparation, as they allow teacher candidates (TCs) to apply academic theories and strategies in a practical setting (Dresden & Thompson, 2021). These experiences, often rooted in a constructivist approach, emphasize active engagement, reflective learning, and readiness for future interactions (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016). However, Zenkov and Pytash (2019) argue that mere exposure to classrooms may lead to superficial understanding without adept supervision and deliberate planning. The clinical practice involves mentor teacher-guided exploration of classroom dynamics, blending theory and practice for comprehensive learning (Dresden & Thompson, 2021). It provides a space for TCs to engage authentically with the nuances of contemporary classrooms.

However, as Nathans et al. (2022) share, recent reaffirmation (Epstein, 2018; Walker, 2019) highlights the ongoing inadequacy in preparing teachers to engage with families in education. Teacher education programs consistently lack a routine inclusion of strategies for building partnerships with parents and communities (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Miller et al., 2013). Consequently, TCs exhibit concerns about effectively communicating and partnering with families due to limited skills, sometimes influenced by curriculum limitations and accreditation pressures (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; Miller et al., 2013). Faculty note challenges in integrating experiences that nurture partnership skills with diverse family cultures, yet intentional teacher preparation programs positively impact candidates' attitudes toward family engagement (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011). Engagement with families and communities in field

experience and clinical practice enhances candidates' confidence and instructional practices (Zeichner et al., 2016; Evans, 2013). As schools shift towards strategic collaboration with families, acknowledging their crucial role, the importance of equipping TCs with family engagement skills becomes increasingly evident (Miller et al., 2013)

### **An Integrated Approach: Putting in All Together**

In Nathans et al.'s (2022) study, the implementation of the Parent Teacher Education Curriculum (PTEC) was examined across four diverse universities, exploring its impact on teacher candidates' (TCs) knowledge and attitudes regarding family engagement. The PTEC aimed to integrate family engagement content into existing teacher education courses, featuring six online modules centered on distinct aspects of parental involvement in schooling—communication, parenting support, home involvement, volunteering, decision-making, advocacy, and community collaboration. These modules provided TCs with research-based insights, case studies, and interactive activities within an online platform conducive to discussions, questions, and feedback from experienced educators.

The study revealed a successful implementation of PTEC across universities, fostering improved knowledge and attitudes among TCs concerning family engagement. However, the effectiveness varied across institutions due to differing implementation strategies. For instance, one university's focused online course with practical engagements yielded more favorable outcomes. Universities showcased varying commitments to family partnerships within their teacher education programs, emphasizing the importance of tailored field experiences for diverse parental involvement. Two universities specifically emphasized exposure to Latino and Native American family experiences, receiving positive feedback from TCs on engaging with diverse families.

In exploring the impact of the PTEC, Nathans et al.'s (2022) study highlights the significant strides made in enhancing teacher candidates' understanding and attitudes toward family engagement at four universities. While the study showcased successful implementation and varied effectiveness across institutions, it underscores the potential for tailored approaches, like focused online courses, to yield more favorable outcomes. The commitment to diverse family partnerships within teacher education programs further emphasizes the need for tailored field experiences, as evidenced by universities' positive outcomes when exposing candidates to varied cultural experiences. This study also reveals a need for more extensive research and broader implementation of such curricula. While PTEC demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing TCs' knowledge and attitudes, widespread adoption of a similar approach could significantly impact future educators' preparedness to engage with families.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, research indicates that family engagement is pivotal in student success, particularly in urban schools where diverse populations create unique challenges and opportunities for connection. Studies consistently underscore the value of building strong, reciprocal partnerships between families and schools. Frameworks such as Epstein's (2007) framework, the Dual-Capacity Building Framework (Mapp & Bergman, 2019), and the continuum from parental involvement to family engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) highlight the importance of these partnerships not only in enhancing student outcomes but also in fostering community investment and collaboration within schools.

Despite substantial evidence on the benefits of family engagement, there remain significant gaps in teacher preparation for engaging families, particularly in diverse urban settings. The literature reveals a persistent lack of culturally responsive training within many

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), which limits beginning teachers' confidence and capability to engage effectively with families from varied backgrounds. While some programs have started incorporating aspects of family engagement, these efforts are often inconsistent, with limited emphasis on cultural competence, practical communication strategies, or hands-on experience in family engagement.

This study aims to build on the existing literature by investigating beginning teachers' specific perceptions and experiences regarding their preparation for family engagement within urban elementary schools. By focusing on the perspectives of these novice teachers, this research seeks to identify the areas where EPPs can improve their curricula to better equip teachers for the realities of engaging families in diverse communities. Through this lens, the study aims to extend the current body of research by providing insights that may inform policy and practice changes, advocating for a more integrated and culturally responsive approach in teacher preparation for family engagement. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discussion on fostering meaningful partnerships between families and schools, ultimately supporting student achievement and holistic development in urban educational contexts.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Context of the Study**

This study examined the intersection of teacher education and family engagement. More specifically, how beginning teachers (BTs) undergraduate coursework prepared them for family engagement and how they perceived the extent to which they were prepared to engage families in their classrooms and schools. As such, the following research questions drove this study:

1. How has beginning teachers' undergraduate coursework prepared them to engage parents/families in elementary schools?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?

### **Research Design**

This study employed a mixed methods approach to ensure a holistic exploration of the research questions, delving into BT's preparedness to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) define mixed methods as “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4). In this study, mixed methods were essential to obtain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. Quantitative methods were invaluable for identifying patterns and relationships between variables and making generalizable findings for a broader population. Nevertheless, they alone could not provide the in-depth understanding needed to decipher the underlying reasons for these patterns and relationships. On the other hand, qualitative research methods offer a detailed understanding of participants' experiences, attitudes, and perspectives, but they lack the power of generalizability. This study recognized that

qualitative and quantitative methods have advantages and limitations, each finding a distinct place within this study.

As highlighted by Palinkas et al. (2011), qualitative methods are often used for topics where researchers aim for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, while quantitative methods typically seek to test hypotheses through experimentation. In this context, the rationale for employing a mixed methods approach was founded on the premise that it offered a means to address the limitations of either method when used in isolation. The confluence of these methodologies, as suggested by Tashakkori and Creswell (2007), allows for a more complete and nuanced picture of research questions by capitalizing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, the insights of Greene (2007) underscored that mixed methods research designs enable scholars to make sense of the rich and complex data collected, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of understanding. In the context of this study, this approach was pivotal for obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of BT's perceptions regarding their preparedness for family engagement.

### **Study Context**

This study is set within the context of public teacher education programs in a southeastern state, focusing on beginning teachers (BTs) who graduated from these programs and are currently teaching in urban elementary schools. The teacher education programs included in this study are part of a statewide public university system, comprising 17 member institutions. These institutions represent a diverse array of higher education settings, including both predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs), and span a wide geographic and demographic range across the state. Each of these institutions offers undergraduate elementary teacher education programs that lead to initial licensure, creating a



pathway into the teaching profession for diverse student populations. The state's public university system is dedicated to addressing local educational needs, with a focus on preparing teachers to meet the challenges of serving diverse urban communities. This context provides a valuable framework for exploring how teacher education programs equip graduates for family engagement in urban elementary school settings.

### **Sample**

A combination of volunteer and snowball sampling methods was employed to recruit beginning teachers (BTs) as study participants. These techniques were chosen to aim for a participant pool that, while acknowledging the predominantly white and female demographic of the teaching profession, would include a range of perspectives and experiences. Specifically, initial volunteers were sought based on the following inclusion criteria: participants had to be employed as BTs in urban elementary schools and completed a teacher education program in the state within the past three years. A snowball sampling technique was then utilized to extend the recruitment reach further, allowing initial participants to recommend other BTs who met the study criteria. This approach was intended to capture a broader spectrum of insights, ideally incorporating varied backgrounds in terms of race, gender, teaching assignments, and school contexts while acknowledging that the sample might still reflect the typical demographic composition of the profession.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, several data protection measures were implemented. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. To further protect identities, each participant was assigned pseudonyms, and data collection and storage were managed with strict security protocols.

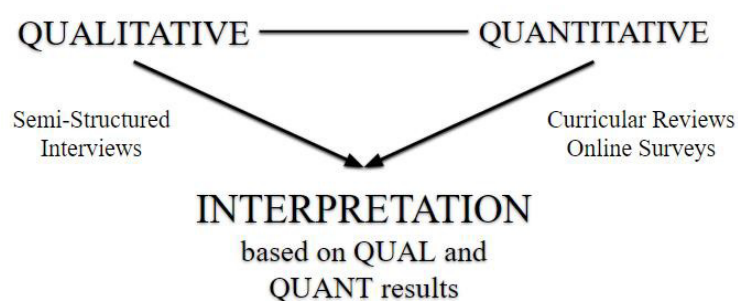
Personally identifiable information was excluded from all stored data, which was securely kept in a password-protected digital folder on a password-protected device. These safeguards ensured that participants could contribute their insights in a secure environment, free from concerns about confidentiality or anonymity breaches.

### **Data Collection**

This mixed methods study employed a triangulated design. Regarded as the most widely used model, this approach seeks to gather diverse but complementary data on the same topic to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It involves blending the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research methods. For this study, I collected and triangulated data from multiple sources including an examination of curricula from teacher education programs, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Employing the convergence model as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), these data were collected independently of each other, but will be analyzed together (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Mixed Methods Triangulation Design*



### **Quantitative Data Collection**

#### **Curriculum Examination**

To understand how teacher education programs coursework prepared students to engage families, data was collected in two ways. The first step involved an extensive review of

curricular offerings at public universities located within the state to determine which schools offered elementary education programs leading to initial licensure. To initiate this review, a spreadsheet was created that documented all the public universities offering these programs. This list was compiled by sourcing publicly available data from the state's Department of Public Instruction and the university system's official website (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023). Once this spreadsheet was created, I examined the course offerings for each teacher education program. This examination went beyond a mere perusal of course names; it encompassed a detailed review of course descriptions and other course/program requirements (see Appendix A). The objective was to discern how these courses incorporated content related to parent and family engagement within the context of schools.

### **Surveys**

To supplement the review of teacher education curricula, online surveys were administered through Qualtrics software to collect additional data (Check & Schutt, 2011). The surveys were distributed through social media to BTs who had graduated from public teacher education programs within the past three years and were currently employed in urban elementary schools. Survey links were shared on social media platforms and disseminated to initial participants via snowball sampling to increase participation. The survey questions (see Appendix B) were designed to deepen understanding of how teacher education programs prepared candidates for family engagement. Questions focused on the extent of coursework and field experiences related to family engagement, the strategies and resources provided to candidates, and their perceived confidence level in engaging families in elementary schools. Additionally, the survey inquired about the challenges and successes participants experienced when engaging with families, providing insights into practical applications of their training.

## **Qualitative Data Collection**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative interviews 1) seek specific insights into individuals' experiences 2) comprehend how they interpret and create reality concerning a particular phenomenon, event, or interaction, and 3) investigate potential connections between their viewpoints (Mertens, 2020). “The qualitative interview attempts to understand the world from the [participants’] points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world before scientific explanations” (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p.3). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with at least five total BTs to obtain more in-depth accounts of and insights into their perceptions of how their teacher education programs prepared them to engage families. Ravitch and Carl (2021) submit that because they provide such individualized and specific data, interviews are a highly-regarded data collection method in qualitative research. The five participants were selected first by reviewing survey responses to identify those who indicated an interest in participating in one-on-one interviews. Once those interested were extracted from the survey participant list, I used purposeful sampling to form a diverse sample of participants to conduct interviews. Purposeful sampling strategically allows researchers to select participants using specific criteria (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To identify interview participants for this study, I made the following considerations to ensure a diverse sample: 1) years of experience, 2) grade levels, 3) demographics, 4) teacher education program location, and 5) characteristics of the teacher education program based on the curriculum analysis. These considerations allowed for a more robust understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

I used semi-structured interviews to allow flexibility and adaptability in the data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Because the participants have varying lived

experiences, the semi-structured interviews allowed me to make necessary adjustments during the interview to accommodate those differences. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were driven by the study's research questions and purpose and were designed to elicit rich, detailed participant data. The interviews were 60-90 minutes long and were conducted via Zoom video conferencing. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using NVivo to ensure accuracy in data analysis. All interviews with participants were audio-video recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo software through an inductive approach.

### **Data Analysis**

In this mixed methods study, a triangulated design and convergence model, as described by Creswell (1999), was used to ensure a comprehensive and robust analysis (refer to Figure 2). The analysis of these data sets facilitated the creation of a cohesive analysis, merging the distinct but complementary insights provided by each method. The ultimate goal was to maximize the combined strengths of quantitative and qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic, resulting in a comprehensive and holistic examination of the research problem.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

#### **Curriculum Analysis**

To analyze the course offerings at each university, I identified the presence of courses that directly addressed family engagement or incorporated family engagement concepts within other courses. The comprehensive review thoroughly examined teacher education program catalogs and elementary education course descriptions at the selected universities. This examination yielded information about the nature and extent of family engagement content within the curriculum, including 1) identifying courses that explicitly addressed family engagement, 2) those that exposed students to relevant readings, 3) introduced methods for

creating inclusive classroom environments, 4) fostered community and cultural awareness, and 5) the stage within the program at which students encounter these courses, and 6) any associated field experiences. This approach enabled a quantitative analysis of the prevalence of family engagement education within teacher education programs in the state. Once this review was completed, the data was analyzed to uncover trends and patterns.

### **Surveys**

Once the survey data was collected, a descriptive analysis was conducted to identify how teacher education programs prepare their candidates for family engagement. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and presenting data to provide insights into the patterns and trends in the data (Mertens, 2020). The data was cleaned and checked for errors or missing values. Then, descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were calculated to summarize the data and identify patterns and trends (Coladarci et al., 2011). For example, the mean amount of coursework related to family engagement was calculated to provide insight into how much emphasis is placed on this topic in teacher education programs. Similarly, the percentage of BTs who feel confident engaging with families was calculated to determine the effectiveness of current preparation strategies. In addition, the data was analyzed using cross-tabulations and chi-square tests to identify any relationships between variables (Coladarci et al., 2011). For example, cross-tabulating the amount of coursework related to family engagement with BTs' perceived confidence level in engaging with families can help identify whether there is a relationship between the two variables.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

As Ravitch & Carl (2021) suggest, “qualitative data analysis is the intentional, systematic scrutiny of data at various stages and moments throughout the research process” and should not be thought of as a task to be completed “at one summative moment” (p. 234). In that light, I analyzed data in different cycles, beginning with a descriptive analysis of each interview transcript and concluding with a cross-case thematic analysis. The thematic coding process involved intentional and systematic scrutiny of interviews at various stages throughout the research process. Analyzing the data as an ongoing activity rather than a one-time task was crucial, recognizing that insights may emerge gradually. The analysis was conducted in multiple cycles to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data.

The process began with a descriptive analysis of each interview transcript. During this initial phase, each transcript was meticulously reviewed and re-reviewed to become intimately familiar with the content and to gain a deep understanding of the context, participant narratives, and nuances. Following the descriptive analysis, within-case analyses were conducted. During this phase, the focus shifted to identifying and extracting thematic codes from the transcripts. Careful attention was paid to phrases, keywords, and text segments that conveyed meaning, insights, or patterns. Codes were systematically applied to these segments to capture the essence of the content, with a focus on surface-level concepts. The thematic coding process was highly iterative. Codes were generated and refined through a series of cycles in which I continuously revisited the data and the codes to ensure accuracy and reflect emerging patterns and themes. As new insights emerged, adjustments were made to the codes and themes to ensure they accurately represented the data.

After conducting within-case analyses for each interview, the research progressed to cross-case thematic analysis. This involved comparing and contrasting the thematic codes and emerging themes across different interviews or cases; seeking commonalities, variations, and connections between participants' experiences and perspectives. During the cross-case analysis, data triangulation was used to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. Data triangulation involved comparing data from course curricula, survey responses, and semi-structured interviews to identify converging themes and insights, thereby ensuring the robustness of the identified themes. As themes emerged and became clearer through the iterative process, they were defined and named in a way that captured their core essence. Each theme was named descriptively, reflecting significant concepts or ideas supported by the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

To increase the trustworthiness of this study, data was triangulated from course curricula, survey responses, and semi-structured interviews and used member-checking. Member checking allows participants' unrestricted access to transcripts and interview questions to ensure their perspectives are faithfully represented (Birt et al., 2016). Simpson and Quigley (2016) further argued that member checking serves as a means to transfer some decision-making authority from the researcher to the participant(s). Given the nature of this study, a deep understanding of the data was developed, which included personal connections, such as participants graduating from the same teacher education program as the researcher.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study explored how beginning teachers are prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools, focusing on the adequacy of their training and the practical experiences provided. This chapter presents the findings from surveys, interviews, and reviews of educator preparation program curricula to explore how beginning teachers perceive the effectiveness of their teacher education programs in preparing them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools. The findings are organized according to the following research questions:

1. How are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?

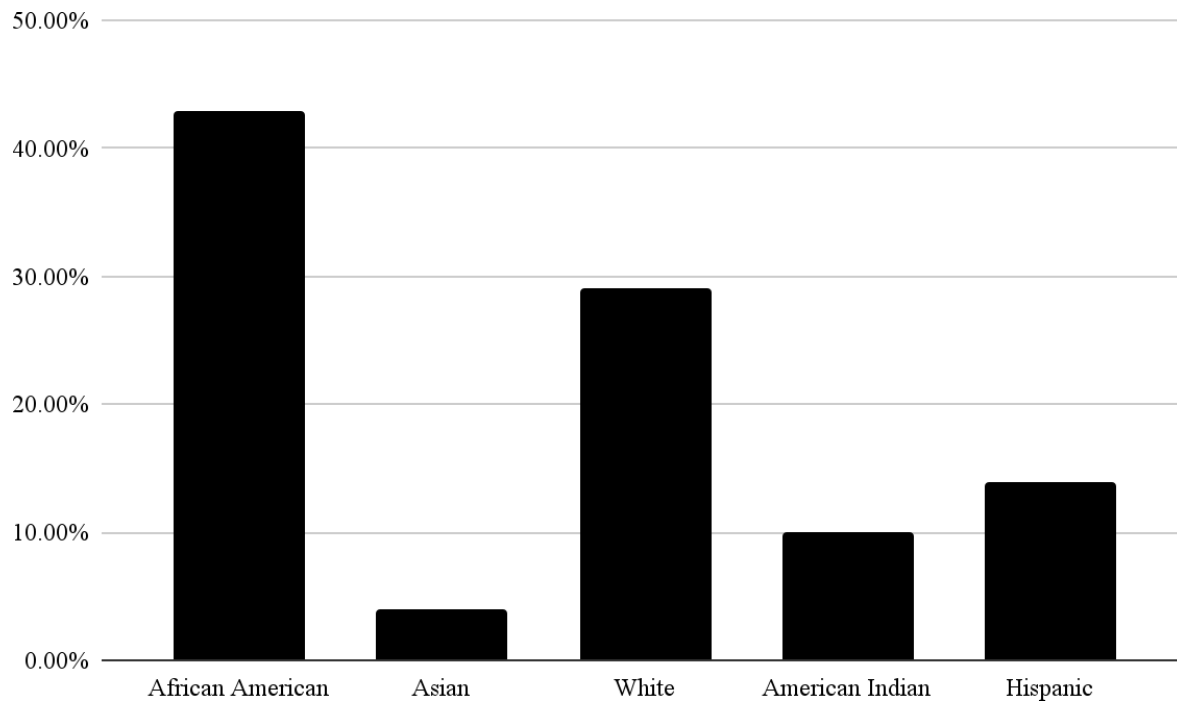
### **Findings from Survey Data**

#### **Sample**

There were 21 survey respondents representing a diverse group regarding racial demographics, gender, years of teaching experience, and educational backgrounds. This diverse racial composition adds depth to the qualitative data, providing insights from various cultural and ethnic perspectives (see Figure 3).

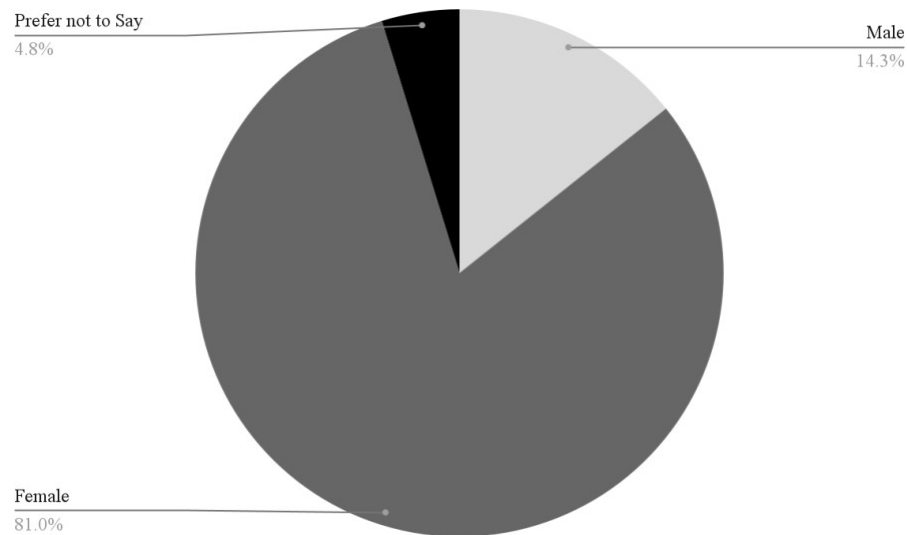
**Figure 3**

*Racial Demographics of Survey Respondents*



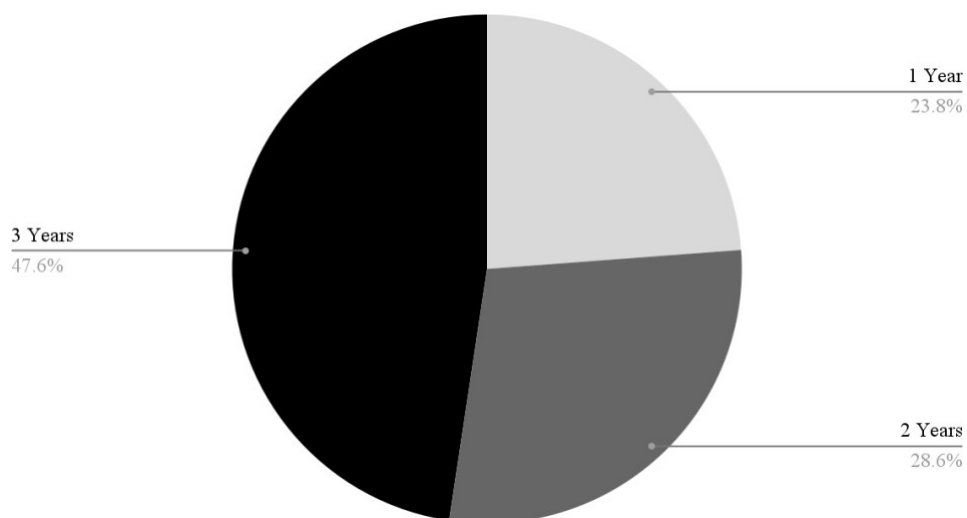
The majority of the participants were female, which reflects broader trends in the teaching profession (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
*Gender of Survey Respondents*



The participants had varying levels of experience, with the largest group having three years of teaching experience. This range of experience levels is important for capturing different stages in the teaching career and understanding how experience may influence perspectives.

**Figure 5**  
*Survey Respondents' Years of Experience*



Survey respondents in this study represented a diverse array of EPPs across North Carolina, with notable representation from several institutions. For example, EPPs #1, #2, and #4 were attended by multiple respondents, whereas other programs, such as EPPs #9 #15, had fewer participants. This range of EPP attendance provides insights into the different preparation experiences that teachers bring into their roles, though it is important to note that the study does not aim to establish causal links between the institution attended and teacher preparedness.

Despite the varied institutional backgrounds of the participants, many respondents expressed similar sentiments regarding their perceived preparedness to engage with families, particularly in urban school contexts. Teachers from both larger and smaller institutions indicated that while their programs provided them with foundational knowledge in communication strategies, such as conducting parent-teacher conferences, they felt underprepared to engage in deeper, culturally responsive family partnerships. This finding highlights the need for a more comprehensive and practical focus on family engagement across EPPs, regardless of size or geographic location.

For instance, respondents from EPP #1 and EPP #5, which are among the largest programs in the state, echoed the concerns of participants from smaller, rural institutions like EPP #12. All expressed a shared need for more targeted training in areas such as overcoming language barriers, addressing socioeconomic challenges, and understanding diverse family dynamics, especially in urban settings.

The diversity of the institutions represented suggests that these challenges in teacher preparedness may be widespread across North Carolina's EPPs, regardless of program size or focus. This reinforces the importance of reevaluating how family engagement is integrated into

teacher training, ensuring that all EPPs provide the necessary skills for new teachers to build effective and culturally responsive partnerships with families.

### **Research Question 1**

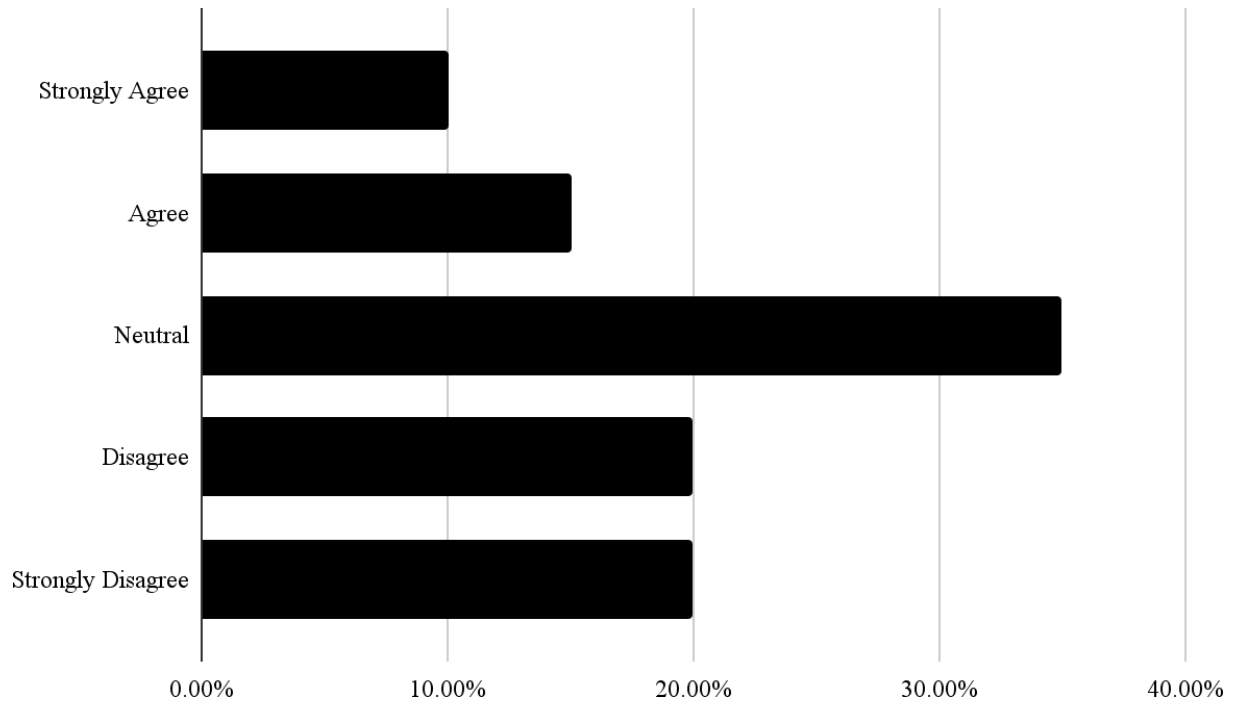
The first research question sought to understand how beginning teachers were prepared by their teacher education programs to engage with parents and families in elementary school settings. This research question asked, “*how are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools?*” Several key themes emerged from the survey data, which are outlined below.

#### ***Adequacy of Preparation***

The survey first asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement: “*My teacher education program adequately prepared me to engage parents and families in school settings.*” The findings revealed a varied response among the participants (see Figure 6). 20% of respondents *strongly disagreed* with the statement. In contrast, another 20% *disagreed*, indicating that 40% of the beginning teachers did not feel sufficiently prepared by their programs to engage parents and families. The most significant proportion of respondents (35%) remained *neutral*, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Meanwhile, 15% of the participants *agreed* that their programs had prepared them adequately, and 10% *strongly agreed*, suggesting that only a quarter of the respondents felt optimistic about the preparation they received to engage families.

**Figure 6**

*Participants' Perceptions of EPP Preparedness for Engaging Parents and Families*



This distribution highlights significant uncertainty and lack of consensus among beginning teachers regarding the effectiveness of their teacher education programs in equipping them to engage parents and families effectively. For those who expressed dissatisfaction, the primary concerns centered on the need for more practical, real-world applications of family engagement, particularly in diverse urban settings. While foundational communication strategies—such as conducting parent-teacher conferences—were often covered, many participants felt underprepared to navigate the more complex and culturally nuanced aspects of family partnerships.

Interview participants echoed these survey findings, further highlighting gaps in their training. For example, Angel reflected, *“We had no specific training on working with families who don’t speak English or families that face socio-economic challenges.”* This sentiment

emphasizes the inadequacy of culturally relevant training addressing family engagement in diverse school communities. Similarly, James added, *“It’s really important for universities to make sure that they are truly exposing future teachers to the things they could see in their classrooms every year.”* This gap between theory and practice left many respondents unprepared to manage the diverse and complex family dynamics they encountered in their teaching environments.

Another critical issue raised by participants was the need for more practical opportunities to apply family engagement strategies in real-world settings. James noted, *“In my student teaching, my cooperating teacher asked me if I wanted to sit in on her conferences. That was huge, but that was not required. I didn’t have to do that. It was not part of my student teaching contract.”* This illustrates how some of the most valuable learning experiences came from informal, optional opportunities rather than structured, required components of their teacher preparation programs.

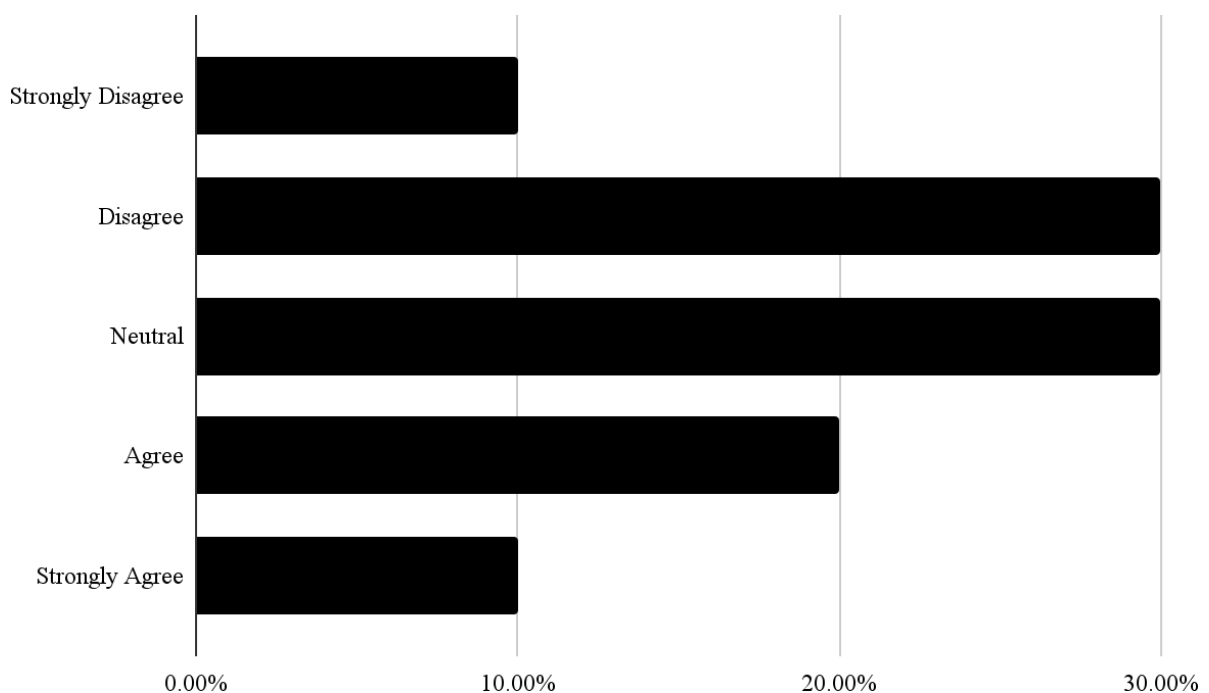
Moreover, the 35% of respondents who remained neutral might reflect variability in how family engagement training was integrated across different EPPs. Some teacher candidates may have experienced limited exposure to these concepts, while others may have needed more instruction to build confidence in their abilities. As these findings suggest, teacher education programs have a significant opportunity to strengthen their curricula by providing more targeted, culturally responsive strategies and more hands-on opportunities to practice engaging families in meaningful partnerships. As James put it, the dissatisfaction expressed by many beginning teachers stems from the realization that *“the training we received did not reflect the families we now work with.”*

### ***Instruction on Family Engagement***

The results were mixed in response to the statement, *“During my teacher education program, I received training and support in effective communication with parents and families.”* A combined 40% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, with 10% strongly disagreeing and 30% disagreeing that they had received such instruction (see Figure 7). Another 30% of respondents were neutral, indicating they neither agree nor disagreed with the statement, possibly reflecting uncertainty or variability in their experiences. On the other hand, 20% of the participants agreed that they had received specific instruction, while 10% strongly agreed. This suggests that while some beginning teachers felt adequately prepared, a significant portion perceived their training as insufficient in addressing the engagement of parents and families.

**Figure 7**

*Preparation for Effective Communication with Parents and Families*





The mixed results from the survey were further illuminated by the interview data, which highlighted varying levels of depth and quality in the instruction on family engagement across different educator preparation programs (EPPs). For example, Angel expressed frustration with the lack of comprehensive instruction, saying, *“I don’t remember any specific training on how to communicate with families beyond the basics. It was mostly theory, but not much about how to actually interact with parents who don’t share the same cultural or language background.”* This reflection underscores the gap between theory and practical application, particularly in communicating effectively with diverse families.

Similarly, James remarked on the limited scope of the training provided, sharing that *“we learned about parent-teacher conferences, but nothing about engaging families outside of those formal interactions. There was no focus on how to build ongoing relationships with families, especially those who might be hard to reach.”* This comment highlights a common theme among the participants: while basic communication strategies were often addressed, the deeper, more relational aspects of family engagement were overlooked.

The lack of emphasis on real-world challenges was another consistent concern. James pointed out, *“We didn’t cover how to deal with difficult conversations with parents or how to manage situations where the family doesn’t have consistent communication with the school. It was very one-size-fits-all, which doesn’t work in a real classroom.”* This further illustrates how teacher candidates felt their programs fell short of preparing them for the complexities of family engagement, especially in urban or culturally diverse contexts.

For the respondents who felt neutral, it’s possible that the variability in their experiences reflects inconsistent coverage of family engagement topics across different EPPs. Some participants may have received surface-level instruction that did not leave a lasting impression,

contributing to their uncertainty. As Participant Four noted, “*I don’t remember if we even talked about family engagement much—it just wasn’t something that was emphasized.*”

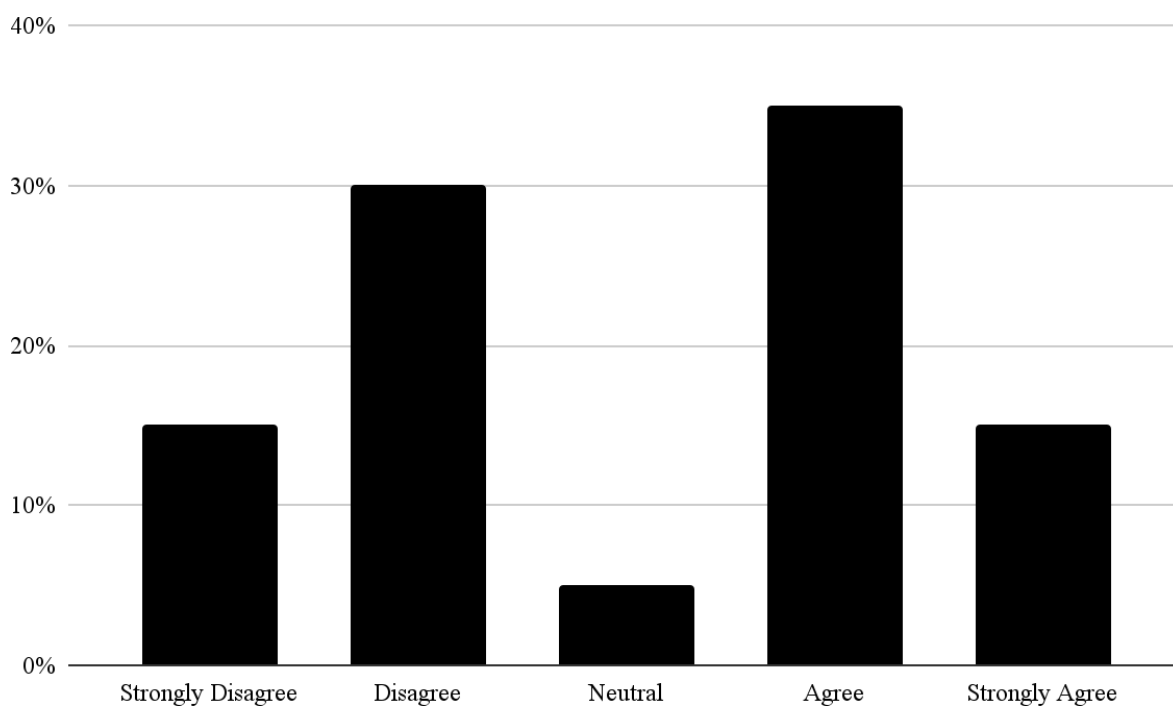
On the other hand, the 30% of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that they received training in this area likely had more positive experiences with family engagement coursework. However, the overall findings suggest that many EPPs still struggle to provide comprehensive training on effective family communication, leaving beginning teachers underprepared to engage parents and families in meaningful ways, particularly in diverse school settings. As Angel emphasized, “*There’s a huge need for more practical training—learning to communicate with families should be a key part of what we’re taught, not an afterthought.*”

### ***Strategies for Overcoming Barriers***

Participants' responses were similarly split when asked whether their teacher education programs provided strategies or tools to overcome barriers to parent and family engagement (see Figure 8). A significant portion (45%) *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed*, indicating that they did not feel their programs equipped them with adequate strategies for overcoming these barriers. However, 35% of respondents *agreed* that their programs did suggest effective strategies, and an additional 15% *strongly agreed*, showing that 50% of the participants felt positively about the support they received in this area. A small group of 5% remained *neutral*, suggesting some uncertainty or variability in their experiences.

**Figure 8**

*Percentage of Participants Whose EPP Include Tools to Overcome Barriers to Engagement*



The survey results revealed that many teacher education programs did not provide participants with the tools to engage families effectively, particularly when faced with language barriers, socio-economic factors, or cultural differences. This gap in preparation was further emphasized during the interviews. James, for instance, shared their frustration with the lack of practical solutions: *“We talked about the importance of family engagement, but I don’t remember being taught any actual strategies for working with families that face barriers—whether it was language, time, or just trust issues with the school.”* This highlights how

theoretical discussions often fail to translate into real-world applications that teachers could use in diverse classroom settings.

Similarly, Angel expressed concern about the limited attention given to overcoming specific challenges, stating, *“There was nothing about how to work with families who don’t speak English or how to deal with parents who might be hard to reach because they work multiple jobs. I had to figure that out on my own once I was in the classroom.”* This sentiment reflects a common theme among participants who felt that while they understood the importance of family engagement, their programs did not adequately prepare them for the realities they would face in urban school environments.

For the participants who felt their programs did provide some tools, there was often a sense that the strategies discussed were too general or superficial. James remarked, *“We were given some tips on how to invite families to school events, but nothing really in-depth about how to keep them involved or overcome more serious barriers, like language differences or economic hardship.”* This reinforces the idea that while some programs addressed family engagement, they often fell short in offering comprehensive strategies that teachers could apply to various challenges.

The neutral responses, accounting for 5% of participants, may suggest that the variability in training left some teacher candidates feeling uncertain about their preparedness to overcome barriers. As Participant Four mentioned, *“I can’t say I felt unprepared, but at the same time, I don’t remember getting specific strategies for dealing with families who might be difficult to reach.”* This indicates that some participants may not have retained or recognized the value of the instruction they received, possibly due to its limited depth or lack of practical examples.

Ultimately, the mixed responses from participants reflect a pressing need for more comprehensive strategies in educator preparation programs to address the challenge of overcoming barriers to family engagement. While 50% of participants felt positively about the strategies they learned, a significant portion—particularly those in more diverse urban contexts—felt that their programs did not adequately prepare them for the complexities of engaging all families. As James concluded, *“We needed more than just the basics. There should have been a bigger focus on strategies for families that face real barriers to getting involved.”*

## **Research Question 2**

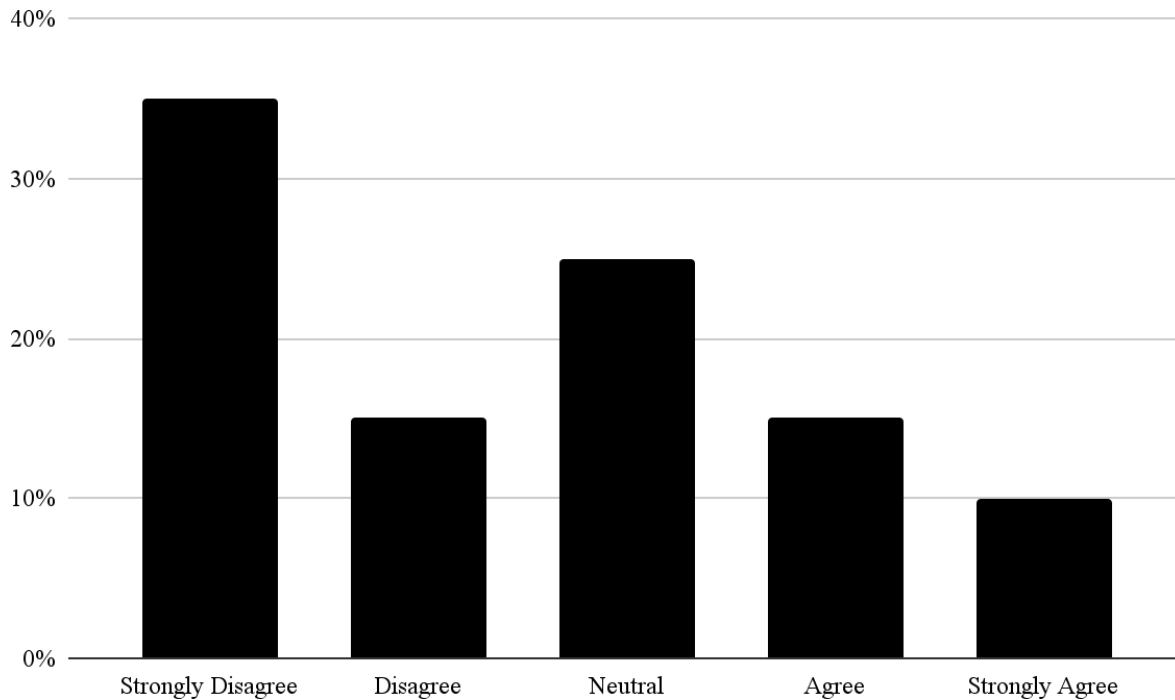
The second research question sought to understand how beginning teachers perceive their EPP prepared them for family engagement. This question asked, *“How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?”* This study’s data revealed several key themes around this question, which are outlined below.

### ***Cultural Relevance of Engagement Strategies***

The first theme that emerged was around the idea of culturally relevant family engagement strategies. Survey data elicited a wide range of responses, with one survey respondent sharing that *“the coursework included in my program helped me understand diverse family structures and dynamics commonly found in urban settings.”* Similarly, a combined 50% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how well their coursework covered this topic. Meanwhile, 25% of the participants were *neutral*, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, which might reflect a lack of clarity or mixed experiences with the content provided. On the other hand, 15% of respondents *agreed*, and 10% *strongly agreed* that their coursework effectively helped them understand culturally relevant engagement strategies (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9**

*Participants' EPP Coursework Helped Understand Diverse Family Structures*



The survey findings align with the feedback provided in interviews, where most participants shared that their teacher education programs did not sufficiently prepare them to engage with diverse families, particularly in urban school settings. James reflected on this, saying, *“My program had a course on multicultural education, but it didn’t really prepare us for working with families in urban schools. We learned about family diversity, but there wasn’t much focus on how that actually plays out in a classroom setting.”* This highlights a gap between this EPP’s theoretical concepts of diversity and the practical application of culturally relevant strategies in urban environments, where teachers often face a wide range of family structures and dynamics.

Similarly, Angel commented on the lack of emphasis on understanding the complexities of urban family structures, sharing, *“We talked about diversity, but it was mostly focused on race*

*or ethnicity. There was very little about the different types of family structures we'd encounter in urban schools—like single-parent households, extended families, or families dealing with economic challenges.*” This suggests that while diversity was acknowledged, the practical realities of working with diverse family systems in urban settings were often overlooked, leaving teachers feeling underprepared.

For those who expressed *neutral* survey responses, it is likely that their coursework provided some information on diverse family dynamics, but lacked the depth needed to make a lasting impact. In their interview, James noted, *“We were taught that family diversity is important, but I don't recall any specific strategies on how to engage families from different cultural backgrounds. It was more about awareness than action.”* This reflects the sentiment that, while awareness of diversity may have been addressed, the courses did not go far enough in equipping teachers with actionable tools to engage with urban families effectively.

On the other hand, the minority of participants (25%) who responded positively may have experienced more thorough instruction, though the depth and consistency of this training still varied. Participant Four shared a more positive view, stating, *“We did have some discussions about urban family dynamics and cultural relevance, but I think we needed more hands-on practice. The theory was there, but the application in real-life urban settings was missing.”* This perspective suggests that while some programs touched on these critical issues, they often lacked practical experiences that could better prepare teachers for the complexities of urban family engagement.

Overall, the data indicates that while some beginning teachers found value in their coursework, a significant portion did not feel adequately prepared to engage with families in urban school settings in a culturally relevant manner. As James emphasized, *“In urban schools,*

*we're working with so many different types of families, and I don't think my program gave me enough tools to feel confident in navigating that."* This underscores the need for teacher education programs to deepen their focus on culturally relevant engagement strategies and provide more practical training opportunities that reflect the realities of urban school environments.

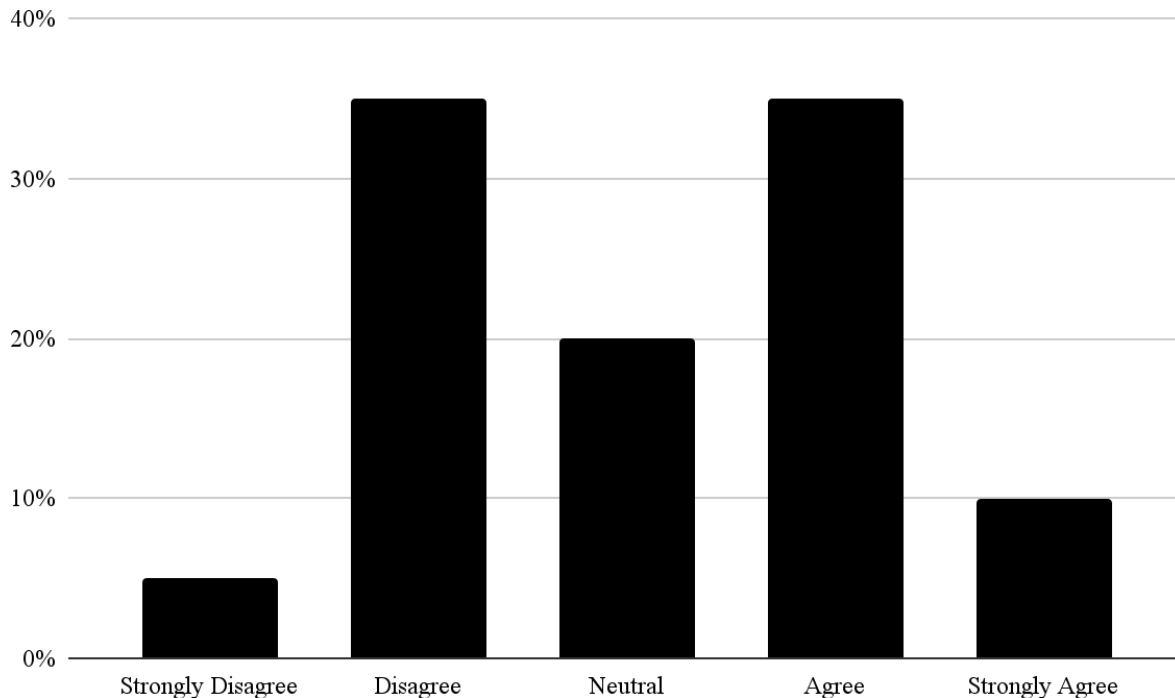
### ***Practical Application of Engagement Strategies***

The survey asked participants whether their EPP provided opportunities to practice family engagement strategies through internships or fieldwork in urban schools. The responses were somewhat varied. A small portion of respondents (5%) *strongly disagreed* that they had such opportunities. In comparison, 30% *disagreed*, indicating that 35% of participants felt their programs needed to offer more practical experience in this area. On the other hand, 20% of respondents were *neutral*, reflecting uncertainty or mixed experiences. A more significant portion (35%) *agreed* that their programs provided these practical opportunities, and 10% *strongly agreed*. These results suggest that while some beginning teachers found their programs unsupportive in offering real-world practice for engaging parents and families, a notable percentage felt they had adequate opportunities to practice these skills through internships or fieldwork in urban settings (see Figure 10).



**Figure 10**

*EPP Provided Opportunities To Practice Strategies Through Clinical Practice*



This variability in responses was further supported by the interview data, where participants reflected on the quality and consistency of practical engagement opportunities during their teacher preparation programs. Angel remarked, *“I wish we had more chances to actually interact with families during our student teaching. We learned about family engagement in theory, but there weren’t many real opportunities to practice that with urban families.”* This statement highlights the gap between the theoretical instruction teachers received and the practical opportunities needed to build confidence in family engagement, especially in urban school settings.

Similarly, James shared their disappointment with the limited field experiences, saying, *“We didn’t have any formal requirements to engage with families during my student teaching. I had to ask my cooperating teacher if I could sit in on parent conferences, but it wasn’t a part of*

*our training.*” This reinforces the idea that, while some teachers were able to gain practical experience, it was often due to individual initiative rather than a structured part of their educator preparation program. Such inconsistencies across programs left many feeling unprepared for the complexities of engaging parents and families in diverse urban settings.

The *neutral* responses from 20% of participants might reflect a mixed or inconsistent approach to practical experiences in their programs. James commented, *“I think we had some opportunities, but they weren’t always directly related to family engagement. It was more about classroom management or working with students, but not much focus on the family side.”* This suggests that while practical experiences were offered, they often lacked a direct focus on building skills for parent and family engagement, leaving some participants uncertain about how much real preparation they received.

On the other hand, the 45% of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that their programs provided practical opportunities to engage with families likely benefited from more hands-on experiences. As Participant Four described, *“We had a few family nights at the school where we could meet and talk with parents. It wasn’t perfect, but at least it gave us a chance to interact with families in an urban setting.”* This reflects a more positive experience, where practical opportunities were available, even if they were not consistent or as comprehensive as some participants might have hoped.

The data indicates that 45% of respondents felt they had opportunities to practice engaging with parents and families during their training, whereas 35% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*. This suggests that while some programs do not offer adequate practical experience, many do provide such opportunities, albeit inconsistently across different institutions. As James concluded, *“I think more programs need to make family engagement a bigger part of student*

*teaching. We're expected to know how to do it, but a lot of us never really get the chance to practice.*" This highlights the need for teacher education programs to more systematically incorporate hands-on experiences in family engagement to better prepare beginning teachers for the realities of working in urban schools.

### **Summary of Survey Findings**

The survey findings reveal a complex picture of beginning teachers' perceptions of their preparation for family engagement in urban elementary school settings. Overall, respondents expressed mixed views, with a significant portion indicating that their EPPs provided limited practical training on family engagement. Specifically, 40% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that their programs adequately prepared them to engage parents and families in school settings. A substantial proportion of respondents (35%) remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or variability in the quality of preparation they received. Only 25% of participants felt that their programs prepared them adequately, highlighting an overall lack of confidence in their training related to family engagement.

Survey results further indicate gaps in culturally relevant engagement strategies. Approximately 50% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how well their coursework covered culturally relevant strategies for engaging diverse families in urban settings. Participants indicated that while theoretical ideas of diversity were often presented, there was little practical guidance on engaging with families of varying cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. This lack of emphasis on practical application left many respondents feeling unprepared for the complexities they face in urban school environments.

Additionally, the survey findings show significant variability in hands-on experience. While 45% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided opportunities to

practice family engagement strategies in real-world settings, 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 20% remained neutral. Many respondents indicated that practical opportunities, such as parent-teacher conferences or family nights, were not structured components of their programs but somewhat optional experiences based on individual initiative or informal arrangements with cooperating teachers.

The data also suggests an evident need for EPPs to offer more consistent and comprehensive training on overcoming barriers to family engagement, such as language differences, economic challenges, and limited parent-school interaction. Almost half of the respondents (45%) reported that their programs did not provide practical strategies to overcome these barriers, further underscoring a practical, culturally responsive training gap. Participants emphasized the need for EPPs to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions on family diversity and actionable strategies that can be applied in diverse, urban classrooms.

In summary, these findings suggest that beginning teachers perceive a significant disconnect between the theoretical preparation provided by their EPPs and the practical skills needed for effective family engagement, particularly in urban school contexts. The data underscores a pressing need for EPPs to incorporate more targeted, culturally relevant strategies and structured, hands-on experiences in their curricula to equip beginning teachers with the tools necessary to engage families effectively.

### **Findings from Interviews**

The following findings provide a comprehensive analysis of three interviews conducted to understand how beginning teachers are prepared to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools and, more importantly, their perceptions of that preparation. These insights reveal significant gaps in teacher education programs, particularly in addressing the needs of

culturally diverse families and providing practical, real-world experiences. The themes highlight critical areas where preparation programs can improve to better equip teachers for effective family engagement, especially in urban and diverse school settings.

## **Participants**

### ***Angel***

Angel is a 29-year-old Black female with three years of teaching experience in Georgia. She specializes in English Language Arts and Social Studies, focusing on developing foundational literacy skills and fostering a deep understanding of social contexts among her students. Having completed her educator preparation at EPP #5, she is passionate about introducing diverse literary voices and historical perspectives into her curriculum. Angel recognizes the critical role of families in a child's education, and she actively works to engage them in the learning process as much as possible. She believes strong home-school connections are essential for student success and regularly communicates with families about their children's progress. However, Participant 1 shared that her educator preparation program could have provided more specific training on how to build these essential partnerships with families, particularly when confronted with sensitive cultural differences or socioeconomic barriers. As a result, she often learns through trial and error, seeking out professional development and leaning on colleagues for advice on how to bridge the gap between home and school. Despite these challenges, she remains committed to improving her approach to family involvement.

### ***James***

James is a 24-year-old White male in his first year of teaching, currently working in North Carolina. He teaches Mathematics and Science, and he uses interactive methods to make the subjects accessible to his students. Graduating from EPP #12, a small and more rurally-

located university, he quickly recognized the critical importance of family engagement in student success. However, he often feels unprepared to fully engage parents in their children's learning. His preparation program did not cover enough practical strategies for involving families, leaving him uncertain about effectively communicating with them or navigating sensitive situations. While James actively reaches out to parents and invites them to participate in school events, he feels the need for more training and support to handle cases where family dynamics or external challenges create barriers to involvement. Despite these struggles, he continues to experiment with different methods to build stronger connections with students, parents, and families.

### ***Amanda***

Amanda is a 24-year-old White female teaching Science and Social Studies in North Carolina. She integrates Black history, knowledge of social justice issues, and cultural history into her lessons, recognizing the importance of connecting her students' education to their heritage. Like Angel and James, Amanda believes strongly in the importance of family engagement. However, she sometimes struggles to make those connections, particularly with families who may be hesitant to engage with the school. She attributes this difficulty to a lack of formal training in her educator preparation program at EPP #11 and few professional development opportunities offered through her school district. While her program provided her with excellent content knowledge and teaching strategies, it did not adequately prepare her for the challenges of fostering solid and consistent partnerships with families, especially in communities where mistrust of schools or language barriers exist. As a result, Amanda often has to seek out solutions, such as building informal networks with families, learning from colleagues, and leaning on her own community experiences to bridge the gap on her own.

## Research Question 1

### *RQ1-Theme 1: Insufficient Preparation for Diverse Family Needs*

James and Angel reported a significant gap in their preparation related to understanding and addressing the diverse needs of families. When asked what they would like to have seen in their programs, Angel said, *“Learning how to teach in a diverse classroom and understanding that diversity is not just about race.”* Echoing a similar sentiment, James stated, *“We had no specific training on working with families who don't speak English or families that face socio-economic challenges.”*

The teacher education programs primarily focused on academic content rather than practical strategies for engaging with diverse family backgrounds. This was evident in the limited multicultural course content and the need for more training on how to work with families facing language barriers or inconsistent communication. For example, Angel noted, *“I don't remember any content around this is how you work with a family that doesn't speak English, or this is how you work with a family that may not have consistent communication.”*

Additionally, the scenarios provided during training were not culturally relevant, leaving teachers unprepared for the real-world challenges of engaging with diverse families. Participants observed that many of the case studies or role-playing activities in their programs focused on traditional nuclear families, where both parents spoke English, had flexible work schedules, and were highly involved in their children's education.

These scenarios rarely accounted for more complex family structures, such as single-parent households, grandparents as primary caregivers, or families with limited English proficiency. Teachers were also not exposed to scenarios involving parents who worked multiple jobs and had limited availability, making attending school functions or conferences difficult.

Furthermore, the training overlooked cultural differences in communication styles, such as families who may avoid direct eye contact out of respect or prefer community-based decision-making rather than individual interactions with the teacher. As Amanda pointed out, *“These one-size-fits-all scenarios did not reflect the nuanced realities of urban schools, where cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity presents unique challenges to family engagement.”*

### ***RQ1-Theme 2: Need for Practical Family Engagement Experience***

The participants highlighted a strong need for practical, hands-on experiences in family engagement during their teacher preparation programs. The interviewees noted that their student teaching experiences, which included opportunities to observe and participate in family engagement activities, were crucial for their learning. For example, Amanda shared, *“This is not a part of the program, but in my student teaching, my cooperating teacher asked me if I wanted to sit in on her conferences. That was huge, but that was not required. I didn't have to do that. It was not part of my student teaching contract.”* These informal experiences, such as attending parent-teacher conferences or participating in family nights, were seen as significantly more valuable than the formal training provided.

While the formal training focused more on theoretical aspects of family engagement—such as general communication strategies and broad guidelines for conducting parent-teacher conferences—these were often detached from the specific, day-to-day realities teachers faced in diverse urban classrooms. Angel said, *“We learned about family engagement in theory, but there weren't many real opportunities to practice that with urban families.”* The formal training tended to offer one-size-fits-all approaches, which failed to address the nuances of working with families from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. For example, training might have included instructions on how to write newsletters or host parent nights but lacked practical



insight into how to engage families who don't speak English, have demanding work schedules, or come from communities that historically distrust the school system.

The participants emphasized the importance of integrating practical family interaction opportunities into teacher preparation programs to better prepare future educators for real-world engagement. Amanda suggested, *“Programs could have better prepared us by offering more practical experiences, like attending PTA meetings or engaging with families directly.”* These real-life interactions provided essential learning opportunities that helped bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping teachers with the skills and confidence to navigate the diverse challenges they would encounter in their classrooms.

#### RQ1-Theme 3: Gaps in Teacher Preparation Programs

Interviewees identified several gaps in their preparation programs, most notably in providing relevant and effective strategies for family engagement. When asked about navigating difficult situations with parents, James shared that he *“had to [figure out the situation], yeah, but no, I didn't have any practice with that or any discussion about that.”* Similarly, Angel said, *“We didn't have anything, yeah, that I didn't think so”* when discussing the lack of effective engagement activities and relevant practices left her feeling underprepared. For example, activities like sending books home were discussed but were not always impactful or aligned with the diverse needs of families, or the strategies did not reflect the realities of the classroom.

Angel shared, *“It's really important for, I think, universities to make sure that they are truly exposing future teachers to the things they could actually see in their classrooms every year.”* This sentiment reflects the need for teacher education programs to focus on providing relevant strategies and practical experiences that mirror the realities of urban education.

## Research Question 2

### ***RQ 2-Theme 1: Significance of Family Engagement***

The first theme that emerged in relation to research question two was the significance of family engagement. This questions examined how beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools. The participants noted that, as pre-service teachers, they didn't fully grasp how vital family engagement was to students' success. Angel reflected, *"It's not something I thought about before becoming a teacher at all. I mean, I heard people say that parents are an important part of being a teacher, but I never thought about it past that."* Amanda shared, *"[They] never really thought about it. I did notice that families that were [White] were the ones I saw at school. I didn't see families that look like mine at school."*

Collectively, the participants expressed that they hadn't fully understood the role of parents and families in schools and felt unprepared to engage them in their child's education. However, they also acknowledged the critical importance of involving families in schools, recognizing that effective family engagement significantly impacts educational outcomes. As James pointed out, *"Effective family engagement is crucial for student success; it should have been a bigger focus in our training."* This realization highlighted a gap in her initial training and underscored the need for more comprehensive preparation in this area.

### ***RQ 2-Theme 2: Cultural Proficiency in Educator Preparation***

Another major theme emerged around the need for greater cultural proficiency in teacher training. Amanda remarked, *"I think my program had a course on multicultural education. But I think it was more about the content of books and literature. I wish we talked about communicating with families whose culture was different than mine; particularly families of*

*color.” Amanda echoed this sentiment, saying, “Um, how do you work with a family that you know is a single parent that works multiple jobs? There was never any talk about how you wanted your books and your classroom to reflect different cultures; we didn’t talk about families being different.”*

The participants felt that their programs lacked sufficient focus on engaging with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While they had some exposure to multicultural education, it was primarily centered on content rather than practical strategies for real-world scenarios. They reported inadequate preparation in understanding and addressing the diverse needs of families, including cultural and linguistic differences. Although one participant appreciated the exposure to various school settings, which helped her understand the impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on family engagement, the overall consensus was that more comprehensive training was needed to equip teachers with the skills necessary to effectively engage with families from varied backgrounds.

### ***RQ 2-Theme 3: Gaps in Teacher Training***

The beginning teachers expressed concerns about the disconnect between their teacher preparation programs and the realities of real-life teaching. They emphasized the importance of practical experiences in engaging with families, noting that their student teaching experiences, though not always required, were essential in learning how to involve families effectively. Formal opportunities to interact with families during teacher preparation were seen as highly beneficial.

However, the participants felt that their education programs were designed with ideal conditions in mind rather than the complex realities of urban teaching environments. This gap in training left many feeling unprepared for the challenges of engaging with families in less affluent

or culturally diverse settings. Amanda stated, *“The program felt like it was built for a perfect world; it didn’t prepare us for the actual challenges we’d face.”* They believed that the programs needed to provide more relevant and effective strategies for family engagement. Some activities and scenarios presented during their training were viewed as insufficiently impactful or applicable to the real-life situations they would face in their teaching careers.

#### ***RQ 2-Theme 4: Practical Challenges in Family Engagement***

Practical challenges in engaging families emerged as a significant concern among the participants. While they had learned about strategies like sending home materials and creating home learning activities, these approaches often proved ineffective in practice. As James explained, *“We learned about all these great strategies, but when it came down to it, I didn’t know how to make them work in my classroom.”* This highlighted the need for more impactful and applicable engagement strategies that could better connect with families and support students’ educational experiences.

The participants recognized the importance of practical experience in this area, particularly through student teaching, which, though not always required, was crucial in learning how to effectively involve families. They emphasized the value of intentional and formal opportunities to interact with families during their teacher preparation programs. Although their programs provided valuable experiences, the beginning teachers felt underprepared for specific real-world challenges, such as engaging with parents who are illiterate or unavailable due to work commitments. Angel noted, *“We need more honest experiences that reflect the real challenges of family engagement.”*

## Summary of Interview Findings

These findings highlight significant gaps in teacher preparation related to family engagement. Participants initially underestimated the importance of involving families in students' education, realizing only after they began teaching that effective family engagement is crucial for student success. Their training lacked practical strategies for engaging with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, leaving them unprepared to connect with families in less affluent or culturally varied communities.

Moreover, participants felt a disconnect between their training programs and the realities of teaching, particularly in urban or under-resourced environments. While student teaching experiences were valuable, the programs were often designed for ideal conditions, failing to address the complex challenges of real-world family engagement. As Amanda emphasized, *“We need to shift the focus of teacher education to be more realistic about the challenges we face, especially in urban schools.”* As a result, the teachers emphasized the need for more relevant, realistic preparation that includes effective strategies for overcoming the practical challenges of engaging families in diverse educational settings.

## Findings from Curriculum Review

This section presents an analysis of data on how beginning teachers are prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools, with a specific focus on their experiences in urban settings.

The curriculum review revealed the number of courses each EPP offers that address critical components of family and community engagement (see Appendix D). For instance, the number of courses that:

- Address the importance of family and community engagement.

- Include readings relevant to family and community engagement.
- Introduce methods for creating inclusive classroom environments.
- Introduce strategies for communicating effectively with parents and families.
- Develop an understanding of family dynamics/structures.
- Highlight the importance of cultural competence/proficiency.
- Address using families' funds of knowledge/assets to increase engagement.

The curriculum review found that most EPPs offer between zero and two courses in these areas, indicating a limited-to-absent focus on preparing teachers to engage with parents and families. Some programs offer more courses on methods for creating inclusive classroom environments, suggesting a slightly higher emphasis on student inclusivity compared to direct family engagement.

### **Inclusion of Key Readings**

After reviewing course titles and descriptions, the integration of essential readings by influential scholars in family and community engagement is minimal. Across the EPPs, all programs were found to have fewer than two courses, including readings of research and practice. This data underscores a widespread need for exposure to foundational texts that could deepen teachers' understanding of effective family engagement strategies.

However, it is essential to note that this analysis was based solely on course titles and descriptions, as course syllabi were not reviewed for this study. While titles and descriptions provide an overview of course content, they often do not offer detailed insights into the specific readings, assignments, or depth of coverage on family and community engagement. As a result, this finding is limited, as the absence of syllabi means that particular key readings or instructional materials may have been included but not explicitly reflected in course descriptions.

Future research could benefit from a more comprehensive review that includes syllabi to better understand the curricular content and the depth of family engagement training in educator preparation programs.

### **Training in Inclusive Classroom Environments**

There is a bit more variation among the programs regarding methods for creating inclusive classroom environments. Based on survey data, for example, two universities (EPP 1 and EPP 5) offer 3-5 courses on this topic, while the remaining universities still provide only 0-2 courses. Although some programs are taking steps to ensure that beginning teachers are trained in creating welcoming classroom environments, the overall trend shows that many teacher candidates might need more instruction in this area, which is critical for fostering positive interactions with diverse parents and families.

### **Timing of Courses and Field Experiences**

Survey and interview participants noted that the timing of courses that include family and community engagement reflects a similar trend. If required, these courses are generally offered in the later stages of the teacher preparation programs, with most occurring in the second or third year. For example, EPP 1 and EPP 5 offer relevant courses in Years two and three, while some universities do not specify the timing or which courses require field experience. Additionally, field experiences, crucial for applying theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, are often linked to these later courses. However, most programs need to clearly connect field experiences with family and community engagement, potentially limiting the opportunities for beginning teachers to practice these skills in a classroom setting.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal significant challenges and gaps in how beginning teachers are prepared to engage parents and families, particularly in urban elementary school settings. Survey results indicate a considerable portion of participants feel underprepared, with 40% expressing dissatisfaction regarding their teacher education programs' effectiveness in equipping them for family engagement. This sentiment is echoed in the mixed responses concerning instruction on family engagement and strategies for overcoming barriers, where nearly half of the participants expressed negative or neutral feelings about the adequacy of their training. Furthermore, the interviews underscore a recurring theme of insufficient preparation, especially in addressing diverse family needs and offering practical engagement experience.

The curriculum review supports these findings, showing a minimal focus on family and community engagement across most educator preparation programs. As Angel concluded, *"There's a real need for our programs to step up and prioritize family engagement. It's too important to be an afterthought."* These results highlight an urgent need for teacher education programs to enhance curricula by integrating more culturally relevant content and providing hands-on experiences that prepare future educators for the complexities of engaging diverse families in urban schools.

### **Response to the Research Questions**

#### **Research Question 1: How are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools?**

The findings indicate that while teacher education programs generally cover basic communication strategies for family engagement, many beginning teachers feel inadequately prepared for the complexities they encounter in diverse school environments. Key themes that emerged include:



- **Adequacy of Preparation:** A significant proportion of participants (40%) expressed dissatisfaction with their program's overall adequacy in preparing them for family engagement. Many participants reported exposure to foundational strategies, such as conducting parent-teacher conferences, but felt these did not equip them to handle culturally diverse or socio-economically complex family interactions. This suggests that the adequacy of preparation is often limited to surface-level strategies rather than comprehensive, hands-on experience.
- **Practical Experience Deficits:** Teachers noted a lack of structured, practical experiences within their programs. Although some participants had informal opportunities to observe family engagement (such as attending parent-teacher conferences), these were not consistent across programs or required as part of their training. The limited practical exposure left teachers feeling unprepared to engage meaningfully with families, especially in urban and culturally diverse settings.

In summary, around Research Question 1, the data reveals that beginning teachers receive a foundation in family engagement but need more comprehensive, culturally responsive, and practical training, leaving them underprepared for real-world applications in elementary school contexts.

***Research Question 2: How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education program prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?***

For Research Question 2, findings highlight the perceived gaps in teacher preparation programs regarding cultural relevance and practical applicability in urban environments. The main insights include:

- **Cultural Relevance of Engagement Strategies:** Participants consistently reported that

while their programs included some discussions of diversity, these were often theoretical and needed to be more practically focused. Many felt unprepared to navigate the unique dynamics of urban families, such as language barriers, economic challenges, and diverse family structures. Only a minority (25%) felt their coursework provided adequate strategies to address these issues.

- Challenges in Application: Teachers felt that strategies covered during training were frequently too general, lacking direct applicability to the complexities of urban schools. Survey and interview data indicated that teachers needed more support in handling culturally relevant family engagement challenges, such as engaging families from varied socio-economic backgrounds or addressing mistrust toward educational institutions.

The data around Research Question 2 suggests that beginning teachers perceive their training as inadequate for urban school settings. They recognized the importance of cultural competence but felt their programs lacked the depth and hands-on training needed to build confidence in engaging diverse families effectively.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Grounded in Epstein's (2007) Parental Involvement model and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995), this research sheds light on the preparedness of beginning teachers to effectively engage with parents and families, particularly within urban elementary schools. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are beginning teachers prepared to engage parents and families in elementary schools?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive their teacher education programs prepared them to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools?

While these questions are at the core of this work, the broader significance of this study extends beyond individual teacher's perceptions of their readiness. Effective family engagement is a key factor in fostering student success, particularly for students from historically marginalized or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (House et al., 2019; Smith et al. 2019). In urban schools, where the intersection of socioeconomic and cultural factors creates additional complexities, teachers play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between home and school (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2021). This research not only highlights the critical need to enhance teacher preparation programs but also emphasizes the urgency of developing culturally responsive, critically-conscious, and equity-driven family engagement practices that are adaptable to diverse educational contexts.

As such, this chapter discusses the study's major findings within the context of current research on family engagement and teacher education. By analyzing the alignment between existing teacher preparation practices and the needs of beginning teachers, this chapter identifies key areas for improvement and offers targeted recommendations. These recommendations aim to

strengthen the capacity of EPPs to equip future teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to foster meaningful, reciprocal partnerships with families. In doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research that calls for a more robust integration of culturally responsive family engagement training into teacher education curricula (Kea et al., 2023; NAFSCE, 2022).

In addition to exploring the study's contributions, this chapter also considers the limitations of study and identifies opportunities for future inquiry. The findings not only provide insights into the experiences of beginning teachers in urban elementary schools but also point to broader implications for the field of teacher education. As educators and policymakers continue to address the persistent inequities in the education system, particularly in relation to underserved communities, this research underscores the need for systemic change in how we prepare teachers to engage with families.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes that effective family engagement is not an ancillary skill but it is thought to be a core component of successful teaching, particularly in culturally and socioeconomically diverse settings. Therefore, it is imperative that EPPs prioritize comprehensive, culturally relevant family engagement training to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to support all students in partnership with their families.

### **Summary of Findings**

To begin, this study applied Epstein's (2007) six types of parental involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration—as the framework for examining how EPPs equip beginning teachers to engage with families. While EPPs offer foundational knowledge in communication and basic family engagement strategies, the findings indicate that most of the participants felt underprepared to

engage parents and families effectively, particularly in urban elementary schools. This study is also guided by the tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), of which the goal is to create an inclusive and empowering learning environment that enhances the educational experiences and outcomes of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly in urban settings.

### **Teacher Preparedness and Implications for Family Engagement**

A key finding is the significant gap between beginning teachers' perceived readiness and the practical demands of family engagement. Although communication strategies, such as parent-teacher conferences and newsletters, are frequently addressed in EPPs, other crucial elements of Epstein's framework, such as community collaboration and shared decision-making, receive far less attention. As James noted, *"We learned how to hold a conference, but no one really prepared us for how to involve parents in decisions about their child's education."* This lack of comprehensive training leaves teachers ill-equipped to foster meaningful relationships with families, especially those from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (NAFSCE, 2022).

The implications of this under-preparedness are profound. Teachers who lack practical strategies for engaging parents are less likely to build trust and collaboration with families, which directly impacts student outcomes (Smith & Sheridan (2019). Research shows that family involvement is critical to student success, yet many of the participants in this study expressed frustration with their limited ability to support parents in helping their children learn at home or involve them in school decision-making. Angel shared, *"I feel confident about talking to parents, but when it comes to making them feel like true partners, I just don't know how to do that."* This gap not only hampers the effectiveness of family-school partnerships but may also contribute to

inequities in student achievement, particularly in underrepresented communities (Sanders-Smith et al. 2019).

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Family Engagement**

This study is grounded in Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) work on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). The data revealed that participants in this study believe their EPPs often fall short in preparing teachers to engage families in urban schools, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. CRP emphasizes understanding and incorporating students' cultural contexts into teaching, setting high expectations for students' success, fostering critical consciousness, and promoting academic achievement. However, several survey and interview participants reported feeling unprepared to apply these principles, particularly maintaining high expectations, within their family engagement practices.

For instance, Amanda shared, "We learned about cultural responsiveness in theory, but I didn't get enough hands-on practice to feel comfortable engaging families from different cultures." This lack of confidence can result in missed opportunities to establish inclusive environments where all families feel valued and respected. The disconnect between theory and practice highlights a significant gap in teacher training, as many educators lack the tools to bridge cultural divides and uphold high expectations for all students with family support.

Moreover, CRP's emphasis on high expectations means that teachers should strive to understand diverse family backgrounds and leverage these insights to drive student achievement. Yet, findings indicate that many beginning teachers lacked strategies to effectively communicate and collaborate with families in ways that reinforce these expectations and support academic success. One survey respondent expressed, "I want to help my students succeed, but I don't know how to involve their families in that process." This underscores the necessity of integrating

family engagement into teacher education programs, ensuring future educators can use culturally relevant practices to foster both family involvement and high expectations for student outcomes.

CRP also calls for developing a critical consciousness that encourages educators to reflect on their own biases and the systemic inequities affecting students and their families. However, some participants felt their training did not adequately address these critical aspects. Angel remarked, “We talked about diversity, but there wasn’t enough focus on addressing inequities that impact families. I wish we had more discussions about those issues.” This suggests a need for EPPs to go beyond the theoretical foundations of CRP and offer practical applications that prepare teachers to recognize and address systemic barriers to family engagement.

In summary, while Culturally Relevant Pedagogy provides a foundational framework for enhancing educational practices, the data from this study suggests that EPPs must do more to ensure beginning teachers are fully prepared to engage families from diverse backgrounds. By incorporating comprehensive training that encompasses cultural responsiveness, high expectations, and critical consciousness, EPPs can better equip future educators to create inclusive and supportive environments for all families, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

### **Moving Beyond Communication**

While communication was the most frequently cited form of engagement, it often remained surface-level and transactional, focusing primarily on academic updates rather than building deeper relationships. This aligns with Epstein’s framework of family engagement, which not only identifies the current limitations but also offers a promising path forward. The framework emphasizes the importance of creating collaborative partnerships between schools and families. However, many teachers acknowledged that they frequently communicated with

parents about behavior and grades, but less often about how to create supportive home learning environments or collaborate on broader school decisions. This focus on one-way communication, rather than a reciprocal partnership, may limit the effectiveness of family engagement efforts. As James explained, *“I feel like I’m just checking a box when I email parents; there’s no real connection.”*

These findings underscore the need for EPPs to move beyond basic communication strategies and provide teachers with more robust, practical tools for fostering two-way, collaborative relationships with families. By integrating Epstein’s six types of involvement into teacher preparation, programs can guide future educators in developing comprehensive engagement strategies beyond mere communication to create meaningful partnerships. For instance, schools should focus on informing families about academic progress, engaging them in discussions about their children’s learning, and involving them in decision-making processes.

Additionally, incorporating field experiences where candidates can practice engaging with families in diverse settings could help bridge this gap and improve teachers’ overall confidence and effectiveness in family engagement. However, it is crucial that these experiences are anchored in an asset-based and critical perspective. Simply increasing the number of interactions with families will not necessarily lead to deeper understanding or effectiveness if underlying biases and deficit perspectives are not acknowledged and disrupted. This self-awareness is a crucial step in improving family engagement strategies.

To cultivate critical consciousness, teacher preparation programs should emphasize the importance of viewing families through an asset-based lens, recognizing the strengths, resources, and knowledge families bring to the educational process. As one survey participant articulated, *“I want to connect with my students’ families, but I need to be aware of my own biases and*



*understand the rich backgrounds they come from.*” By framing field experiences in this way, teacher candidates can develop the skills needed to engage families meaningfully and disrupt the traditional narratives that often position families from diverse backgrounds as deficits.

Fostering critical consciousness through intentional, reflective practice can empower teachers to build authentic relationships with families, leading to more effective engagement and improved student educational outcomes. By prioritizing these aspects in their training, EPPs can better prepare future educators to create inclusive and supportive environments that value every family’s contribution to their child’s education.

### **Thematic Discussion**

This section synthesizes the major themes that emerged from the study, framed through the lens of Epstein’s (2007) Parental Involvement model and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each theme provides insights into how beginning teachers perceive their preparedness for family engagement, and the complexities of building effective relationships with culturally diverse families in urban elementary schools. The discussion also acknowledges the limitations of self-reported data and its impact on the interpretation of certain themes.

#### **Theme 1: Perceived Preparedness for Family Engagement**

A central theme that emerged from the data is the significant gap between beginning teachers’ recognition of the importance of family engagement and their sense of preparedness to effectively foster these relationships. While the majority of survey and interview participants expressed understanding that family involvement is crucial for student success, they felt inadequately equipped by their EPPs to translate this knowledge into practice. Many survey participants indicated that family engagement was only addressed tangentially in their EPPs.

Often, it was embedded within broader discussions of communication strategies or classroom management, rather than being given explicit, focused attention. Angel observed, *"We had a class that mentioned parents here and there, but there was no course solely dedicated to how to engage families, especially in a culturally responsive way."* This aligns with findings from prior research, which suggests that family engagement is frequently treated as a peripheral component of teacher education rather than a central aspect of the curriculum (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Consequently, beginning teachers enter the profession with limited tools and strategies for effectively engaging families, particularly in urban and culturally diverse settings where this skill set is most urgently needed (Smith & Sheridan, 2019; Willemse et al., 2018).

This lack of direct instruction and hands-on practice left many respondents feeling underprepared for the realities of building relationships with families. One survey participant noted *"I knew family engagement was important, but when it came to actually doing it, I realized how little I had been taught. I didn't know how to approach parents, especially in situations where there were cultural or language barriers."* This sense of unpreparedness is particularly concerning given that research consistently links effective family engagement with improved student outcomes, including higher achievement, better attendance, and stronger social-emotional development (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Without the skills to foster meaningful partnerships with families, teachers may miss valuable opportunities to support their students' holistic development.

A notable pattern in the data was the way family engagement training was often an afterthought, embedded in broader coursework without sufficient depth or focus. For example, Amanda shared that, *"We learned general communication skills, like how to run a parent-teacher*

*conference, but there wasn't much about how to actually build long-term, trusting relationships with families, especially those who come from backgrounds different from our own."* This points to a structural issue within many EPPs, where family engagement is not treated as a core competency for teachers. Rather than receiving targeted training, teachers are expected to learn these skills on the job, often without the necessary support or guidance.

The study's participants also noted a lack of practical, field-based experiences in family engagement. Although some EPPs introduced theoretical frameworks like Epstein's (2007) model of parental involvement, many teachers felt they had few opportunities to apply these concepts in real-world settings. Amanda reflected, *"We talked about family engagement in theory, but it was always abstract. I never had the chance to practice these skills during my student teaching, so when I entered the classroom, I felt lost."* This disconnect between theory and practice is a critical gap, as research suggests that experiential learning is key to developing effective family engagement strategies (Zeichner, 2010).

## **Theme 2: Challenges in Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families**

Engaging families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds emerged as a significant and multifaceted challenge for beginning teachers in this study. Participants frequently reported feeling unprepared to bridge cultural gaps between themselves and the families they serve, often citing a lack of training in cultural competence during their EPPs. This deficiency is consistent with broader critiques of teacher education programs, which often fail to adequately prepare teachers for the realities of increasingly diverse classrooms (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2012).

James shared a candid reflection:

I grew up in a predominantly white, middle-class community. When I started teaching in an urban school with families who spoke different languages and came from various cultural backgrounds, I felt completely out of my depth. I wanted to connect with them, but I didn't know where to start.

This sentiment underscores the demographic mismatch between a largely white teaching force and a diverse student population—a well-documented issue in educational research (NCES, 2022). Such mismatches can lead to misunderstandings and impede the development of trusting relationships between teachers and families (Delpit, 2006).

Participants also expressed fear of unintentionally offending families due to cultural misunderstandings. Through the survey, one teacher admitted, *"I often held back from reaching out to certain families because I didn't want to say the wrong thing or disrespect their cultural norms. It was easier to wait for them to approach me, but that rarely happened."* This hesitation can create barriers to effective family engagement, as teachers may avoid initiating contact, leading to missed opportunities for collaboration and support (Baker et al., 2016).

Language differences were frequently cited as a significant obstacle. Teachers reported challenges in communicating with families who were English Language Learners (ELLs). One participant recounted, *"I had a student whose parents only spoke Spanish. We had interpreters for official meetings, but day-to-day communication was a struggle. I felt like I couldn't keep them informed about their child's progress or understand their concerns."* Such language barriers can exacerbate feelings of isolation for families and hinder their ability to participate fully in their child's education (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Moreover, some teachers recognized that cultural differences extended beyond language to include differing expectations about the roles of teachers and parents. Amanda observed:

*In some cultures, parents see teachers as the authority and may not feel it's their place to question us or offer input. Without understanding that, I might misinterpret their lack of involvement as disinterest, which isn't the case at all.*

This highlights the importance of cultural awareness in interpreting family engagement behaviors accurately (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005).

These challenges highlight the critical role of CRP in family engagement. CRP emphasizes that teachers must not only acknowledge cultural differences but also understand how these differences shape family-school relationships and student learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Developing cultural competence enables teachers to create inclusive environments where all families feel valued and respected. However, participants felt their EPPs did not provide sufficient training in cultural competence. One teacher lamented, *"We had a course on multicultural education, but it was mostly theoretical. There weren't opportunities to practice engaging with diverse families or to reflect on our own biases."* This gap suggests that EPPs may need to move beyond theoretical discussions and incorporate practical, experience-based learning opportunities that allow teacher candidates to interact directly with culturally diverse communities (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Additionally, the lack of preparation for working with families from diverse backgrounds can lead to deficit thinking, where teachers may inadvertently adopt lower expectations or negative assumptions about students and their families (Valencia, 2010). For example, a teacher might assume that a lack of parental involvement is due to disinterest rather than potential barriers such as work schedules, language proficiency, or unfamiliarity with the school system. This mindset can harm the student-teacher relationship and negatively impact student outcomes.

The challenges faced by beginning teachers in engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families underscore a critical need for EPPs to enhance training in cultural competence and CRP. By providing teacher candidates with both the theoretical frameworks and practical experiences necessary to navigate cultural differences effectively, EPPs can better prepare them to build meaningful partnerships with all families, regardless of cultural or linguistic background. This preparation is essential for fostering equitable educational environments and improving student outcomes across diverse settings.

### **Theme 3: Communication as the Primary Engagement Strategy**

Communication emerged as the most frequently used strategy for family engagement in this study, with participants relying heavily on traditional methods such as parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, and emails, and phone calls. While these forms of communication were familiar to teachers and often emphasized in their training, participants described these interactions as largely transactional—focused more on conveying information than fostering genuine, two-way relationships with families.

On the survey, one respondent remarked, *"We were trained to communicate regularly with parents, but it often felt like we were just giving updates rather than really building a connection."* This sentiment reflects a broader pattern where communication is limited to one-directional exchanges about student behavior or academic progress, rather than engaging families in deeper discussions about their child's overall development. This type of communication can feel impersonal and insufficient for building trust, which is essential for creating strong family-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Research emphasizes that authentic, two-way communication is a cornerstone of effective family engagement (Mapp, 2003). True collaboration involves not only providing

families with information but also inviting them to share their insights, concerns, and hopes for their child. However, many participants indicated that their communication with families rarely extended beyond logistical or surface-level updates. Angel explained, *"I would send out newsletters or updates about what was happening in class, but it didn't feel like real engagement. Families were informed, but I don't think they felt involved."* She highlights a missed opportunity for schools to create more inclusive spaces where families feel empowered to actively participate in their child's education, and for EPPs to develop pre-service teachers' ability to engage in a deeper level of communication.

A significant barrier to deeper communication, particularly in urban settings, is the language gap between teachers and families who speak languages other than English. On the survey, several teachers reported feeling frustrated by their inability to communicate effectively with non-English-speaking families. As James shared,

*I had families who only spoke Spanish, and while we had interpreters for conferences, there was still a disconnect. It felt like I wasn't able to fully communicate what was happening in the classroom, and they couldn't share their concerns with me as easily.*

This disconnect is a common issue in linguistically diverse schools, where translation services, though available for formal meetings, may not be consistently used for day-to-day communication (Turney & Kao, 2009). Without consistent access to translation services or culturally responsive communication practices, non-English-speaking families may feel excluded from the educational process.

Teachers' struggles with language barriers reflect broader gaps in their preparation to engage linguistically diverse families. While many EPPs offer general guidance on communication strategies (e.g., emails, newsletter, phone call), few provide in-depth training on

how to effectively communicate across language differences or how to use culturally responsive practices to build meaningful connections with families. Amanda observed, *"We were told to use interpreters when needed, but there wasn't much discussion on how to communicate regularly with families who don't speak English. It was like we were expected to figure it out as we went."* This lack of structured training leaves teachers ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of engaging families from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

As an example of how to address this challenge, EPPs should explore modern solutions to bridge these gaps, such as utilizing AI tools for translating materials and emails helping teachers overcome language barriers more efficiently. By incorporating contemporary tools and methods into teacher preparation, EPPs can equip future educators to communicate more inclusively with all families. However, this must complement—not replace—the emphasis on culturally responsive, reciprocal communication strategies.

These findings underscore the importance of equipping teachers with strategies that go beyond transactional communication and embrace the principles of culturally responsive communication. Culturally responsive communication acknowledges the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families and adapts methods to meet their needs. This could involve integrating translation services into routine communications, using technology to bridge language gaps (e.g., multilingual communication apps), or adopting non-verbal communication strategies such as visuals or symbols that can transcend language barriers.

Additionally, culturally responsive communication emphasizes the importance of listening to families and understanding their perspectives. This requires moving away from one-way information sharing toward fostering dialogues where families feel heard and respected. One survey respondent reflected on this gap, saying, *"I wish we had been taught more about how*



*to listen to families, not just how to talk to them. There's a difference between giving information and really engaging them in a conversation about their child's education."* This shift from passive to active engagement is critical for building relationships based on mutual trust and collaboration, particularly in culturally diverse school settings (Delgado Gaitan, 2012).

To enhance culturally responsive communication, EPPs can integrate structured, technology-based interventions that promote two-way dialogue between teachers and families, as demonstrated by research on educational technology engagement. Asher et al. (2024) highlight how two-way texting interventions, particularly in linguistically diverse communities, can create accessible communication channels that actively involve families. This type of interaction allows for real-time feedback and support, helping families overcome barriers such as language differences and technology gaps. EPPs might include these strategies in courses on family engagement by having teacher candidates design and implement similar two-way communication systems during their field placements, with a focus on cultural and linguistic inclusivity. Additionally, incorporating practice-based assignments where candidates analyze patterns of family communication would prepare future teachers to anticipate and address diverse family needs, shifting from one-way information sharing to meaningful dialogues that foster trust and collaboration.

Despite these challenges, it is important to recognize that the data in this study is based on teachers' self-reported perceptions, which may not fully capture the nuances of their communication practices. For example, teachers may not have had full awareness of how their communication efforts were received by families, particularly in instances where language barriers were present. Furthermore, without feedback from families themselves, it is difficult to gauge the true effectiveness of these communication strategies from a parent's perspective.

While communication is essential for maintaining a baseline of family involvement, the study's findings reveal a need for teachers to move beyond transactional, one-way exchanges and toward more reciprocal, culturally responsive communication. Educator preparation programs must prioritize training that equips future teachers with the tools to engage families across linguistic and cultural divides, ensuring that all families feel included, respected, and valued as partners in their child's education. By doing so, EPPs can better prepare teachers to foster the kinds of trusting, collaborative relationships that are crucial for student success in diverse school environments.

To address the need for more reciprocal and culturally responsive communication, EPPs can integrate practical strategies that emphasize building relationship-rich partnerships with families. Kea et al. (2023) suggest that EPPs incorporate training focused on understanding students' cultural backgrounds and the diversity of their families, fostering trust, and encouraging two-way communication. In a course on family engagement, teacher candidates might participate in role-playing activities where they practice conducting home visits, engaging in reflective discussions about their own cultural biases, and learning how to gather valuable information from families through active listening. Additionally, EPPs can introduce tools such as family engagement surveys or focus groups, where candidates learn to communicate in linguistically appropriate ways and address barriers such as language differences. By embedding these practices into fieldwork experiences, EPPs can ensure that future teachers are equipped to engage families in meaningful, reciprocal dialogues that respect and value their cultural identities.

#### **Theme 4: Teacher Positionality and Critical Consciousness in Family Engagement**

This theme underscores the significant role that teachers' positionality—their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs—plays in shaping how they engage with families.

Many participants acknowledged that their personal identities influenced their comfort levels and approaches to family engagement. Teachers from middle-class, predominantly white backgrounds often reported difficulties in connecting with families from lower-income or racially diverse communities, a challenge exacerbated by a lack of reflexivity in their training. One respondent reflected, "I realized that I was bringing my own biases into my interactions with families. I expected them to engage in certain ways, and when they didn't, I assumed they weren't interested." This aligns with research on teacher positionality and implicit bias, which can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and lower expectations for families who do not engage in ways that align with teachers' own cultural norms.

Simply increasing the amount of time teacher candidates spend interacting with families is not sufficient if these interactions are not anchored in asset-based mindsets and systems-level thinking. EPPs must go beyond superficial exposure and actively encourage critical self-awareness, equipping teachers to recognize and challenge institutionalized "isms"—such as racism and classism—that shape family-school dynamics. Without this foundation, teachers may unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes, make assumptions about families' willingness or ability to engage, or reinforce deficit-based thinking.

This theme is deeply connected to the concept of critical consciousness, which Ladson-Billings (1995) argues is essential for teachers working in culturally diverse settings. Critical consciousness involves teachers not only acknowledging their own positionality but critically reflecting on how societal inequities—such as racism, classism, and systemic biases—shape their interactions with students and families. For EPPs to foster this mindset, they must integrate structured opportunities for teacher candidates to critically examine their own positionality and engage in discussions about institutionalized inequities. This should include an explicit focus on

developing an understanding of systemic oppression and how it manifests in educational settings. Teachers must be trained to see families as partners with valuable knowledge, rather than viewing family engagement through a deficit lens. Without these reflective practices and a systems-oriented approach, teachers may unconsciously reinforce existing inequalities, particularly in urban schools where the cultural and socioeconomic gaps between teachers and families are often most pronounced.

Incorporating this critical reflection into EPPs as a core component of teacher preparation can better equip future teachers to engage families across cultural and socioeconomic divides. By fostering asset-based mindsets and focusing on systems-level thinking, EPPs can help teachers build more equitable, trusting, and collaborative relationships with families, ensuring that all families feel respected and valued as partners in their children's education.

In this study, few participants reported having undergone the kind of reflective training that would enable them to develop critical consciousness. Many indicated that their educator preparation programs provided little guidance on how to navigate cultural differences in meaningful ways. Amanda admitted, *"We were never really asked to think about how our own backgrounds affect our interactions with families. It's something I didn't even consider until I was already in the classroom."* This lack of critical self-awareness can contribute to disengagement and misunderstanding, as teachers may interpret families' behaviors through the lens of their own experiences, rather than considering the cultural and systemic factors at play (Kea et al., 2023; Lucas & Villegas, 2010).

Educator preparation programs must prioritize the development of critical consciousness as part of their curricula, but they must approach this in a way that acknowledges potential resistance, particularly when working with majority-white teacher candidates. Culturally

Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) emphasizes three essential tenets—academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995)—which are crucial for preparing teachers to engage effectively with diverse families. Faculty can introduce these concepts incrementally, starting with the tenets of academic success and cultural competence to build trust and buy-in. By first helping candidates understand how culturally relevant teaching practices promote student achievement, faculty can create a non-threatening entry point for discussions about culture and bias. This can lead to more productive conversations about critical consciousness, where teacher candidates are guided to reflect on their own positionality within broader social and historical contexts.

Programs can utilize reflective assignments such as journaling, case studies, and structured discussions around bias and identity to build candidates' cultural competence while encouraging them to recognize the ways in which cultural differences impact family-school interactions. By framing these practices as essential for promoting students' academic success, rather than focusing solely on bias, EPPs can reduce pushback and create a more supportive environment for teacher candidates. Over time, candidates can be encouraged to explore the third tenet of critical consciousness—developing the ability to challenge societal inequities and systems of oppression that influence education. For example, in fieldwork, candidates might reflect on their experiences with diverse families through scaffolded assignments that help them build understanding in stages. Beginning with neutral or familiar contexts, they can progressively analyze how cultural differences shape relationships with families and students, which allows them to apply culturally responsive and equitable practices in their future classrooms.

While the study's reliance on self-reported data limits the ability to assess the depth of candidates' critical consciousness development, the findings suggest that more intentional and

reflective training in all three tenets of CRP is necessary. Without addressing these interconnected components—academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness—teachers may struggle to engage families whose cultural norms differ from their own, ultimately perpetuating cycles of misunderstanding and disengagement in diverse school environments. Balancing these tenets in EPP coursework can ensure that future educators are not only more responsive to the needs of their students but also better equipped to challenge inequities that affect family-school partnerships.

### **Theme 5: Field Experience and Its Limitations**

Field experiences are widely regarded as a critical component of teacher preparation (Maddamsetti, 2024), providing candidates with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world classroom settings. However, participants in this study reported that their fieldwork often lacked meaningful opportunities to engage with families. While field experiences frequently focused on classroom management and instructional strategies, opportunities to practice family engagement were either minimal or non-existent. This gap left many beginning teachers feeling unprepared to build relationships with families when they entered the workforce. On the survey, one teacher shared:

During my student teaching, we spent a lot of time on lesson planning and classroom control, but we never really talked about how to work with parents. I felt like family engagement was something we were expected to figure out on our own once we got our first jobs.

This sentiment was echoed by many respondents, who felt that their field placements did not adequately prepare them for the relational aspects of teaching. While candidates were often

introduced to theoretical frameworks like Epstein's (2007) model of parental involvement, they had limited opportunities to apply these concepts in practice.

A notable barrier to meaningful family engagement during field experiences is the variability in school culture and priorities. Some schools may not prioritize family-school partnerships, particularly in under-resourced or urban environments where there is often a historical lack of trust between families and schools. Schultz (2019) highlights this distrust as a significant barrier to educational reform in urban settings, emphasizing that without intentional efforts to build trust, lasting and equitable reform is challenging to achieve. In such environments, teacher candidates may find it difficult to engage with families if the school does not actively facilitate these opportunities, leaving them unprepared to address the complexities of family engagement in diverse communities. Furthermore, time constraints during field placements, where the focus is often on meeting academic standards and managing the classroom, can limit candidates' ability to prioritize family engagement. Without structured, intentional opportunities, candidates may feel overwhelmed by other responsibilities and miss out on developing these essential skills.

The absence of practical experience in family engagement is particularly concerning given that building relationships with families is essential for fostering student success, especially in urban and culturally diverse schools (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). As James explained, *"I understood the theory behind family engagement, but when it came time to actually reach out to parents, I realized how little I knew about what to say or how to approach different situations."* This lack of hands-on experience left beginning teachers feeling ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of family-school partnerships, particularly when working with families from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Cultural and linguistic differences between

teacher candidates and the families they serve can pose significant barriers, as many candidates may feel uncertain about how to communicate or connect with families whose backgrounds differ from their own.

Another barrier is the variability in mentor teacher practices. While mentor teachers play a crucial role in modeling effective family engagement, several participants reported that their mentor teachers did not prioritize or model these skills. James recalled, *“My mentor was great at classroom management, but she didn’t interact with families much, so I didn’t have anyone to model those skills for me.”* This underscores the importance of selecting mentor teachers who not only excel in instructional practices but also demonstrate a strong commitment to building relationships with families. However, many in this study EPPs face challenges in consistently placing candidates with mentors who prioritize family engagement.

To address these barriers, EPPs should consider partnering more closely with schools to ensure that family engagement is integrated into fieldwork. This could involve working with school administrators to set clear expectations for family engagement during student teaching, as well as providing professional development for mentor teachers on modeling effective family-school partnerships. Additionally, EPPs can create flexible, scaffolded opportunities for family engagement, such as virtual meetings with families, participation in community events, or assignments that involve creating home-learning projects. These strategies can help candidates gain practical experience in a variety of settings, allowing them to build the skills needed to engage with families effectively.

Finally, it is essential to provide teacher candidates with culturally responsive training that prepares them to communicate across cultural and linguistic divides. By incorporating structured, hands-on experiences with diverse families, EPPs can better prepare future teachers to



navigate the challenges of family engagement in diverse school environments. In the survey, one participant noted, *“If we had more chances to actually practice engaging with families during our student teaching, I think the transition to full-time teaching would have been a lot smoother.”*

### **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of this study’s findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance educator preparation programs in preparing educators to engage families in dynamically diverse and vibrant urban schools:

#### **Expand the Integration of Epstein’s Full Framework**

EPPs should broaden their approach to family engagement by moving beyond traditional methods like direct communication and essential home learning support. Based on participants’ responses, it is clear that a more comprehensive approach—including community collaboration, shared decision-making, and opportunities for volunteering—is essential to prepare teachers effectively for building meaningful family partnerships. This holistic view encourages teacher candidates to understand family engagement as a multi-faceted practice beyond the classroom, fostering collaborative relationships with families and communities as co-creators of the educational experience.

To implement these changes, EPPs should embed specific modules and field experiences focusing on each aspect of Epstein’s Framework for Six Types of Involvement. This could include:

- Community Collaboration: Teacher candidates should learn how to connect with and leverage community resources to support student learning. EPPs can facilitate this by partnering with local organizations, arranging for candidates to participate in community-

led projects, and inviting community leaders to speak about effective family and school partnerships.

- Shared Decision-Making: EPPs must prepare candidates to involve families in school-based decision-making processes. This can be achieved by including field experiences where candidates actively participate in school governance activities, such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, advisory councils, or school board sessions. By observing and engaging in these settings, candidates can learn how to work collaboratively with families on decisions that impact student success.
- Volunteering and Family Support Initiatives: EPPs should encourage candidates to facilitate volunteer opportunities for families within school settings, allowing them to contribute to and participate in their children's educational experiences. Field placements could require candidates to design and implement family-inclusive volunteer programs, empowering families to engage with schools in meaningful ways and fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

Additionally, EPPs could address the participants' concerns by incorporating more explicit training on establishing reciprocal, trust-based relationships with families, particularly those from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Candidates need practical tools for engaging with families who may face barriers to participation, such as language differences, work constraints, or mistrust of educational institutions. EPPs could include case studies, role-playing exercises, and reflective practices that allow candidates to navigate and overcome common engagement challenges, preparing them to engage inclusively with all families.

By integrating these elements across coursework and field experiences, EPPs can provide teacher candidates with a realistic and well-rounded understanding of family engagement that

aligns with the practical demands of urban and diverse educational environments. These program enhancements would also address a core participant concern: that family engagement training often feels superficial or “add-on.” Instead, EPPs must treat family engagement as an essential part of teacher preparation, ensuring candidates enter the classroom equipped to build effective partnerships with families and communities.

### **Include and Expand in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

To prepare teacher candidates effectively for the diverse needs of urban educational settings, EPPs must not only include but expand training around CRP. Based on participant feedback, it is essential that EPPs equip future educators with practical tools to recognize, celebrate, and incorporate the cultural backgrounds of students and their families into every aspect of the learning environment, as well as into school-family connections. CRP should emphasize the development of cultural competence—the ability to understand and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives—and critical consciousness, enabling teacher candidates to recognize and address systemic inequities, including racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination. By building these competencies, EPPs can prepare candidates to engage equitably with all families, fostering inclusive and respectful school environments.

To implement these changes, EPPs should consider the following recommendations based on participant concerns:

- **Practical Training in Culturally Relevant Engagement:** EPPs should go beyond theoretical coursework by incorporating practical training modules that include case studies, role-playing, and simulations tailored to culturally diverse family engagement scenarios. For instance, candidates could engage in simulations that address real-world challenges, such as navigating language barriers or addressing socio-economic disparities

in family engagement. By working through these scenarios, candidates can build confidence and adaptability, preparing them to work effectively with diverse families.

- Hands-On Experience with Diverse Communities: To make CRP training impactful, EPPs should partner with local schools in culturally diverse communities, giving candidates opportunities to observe and participate in family engagement practices that are responsive to the cultural backgrounds of students. In these settings, candidates can practice CRP-informed strategies firsthand, interacting directly with families from varied cultural contexts. Such experiences enable teacher candidates to understand community perspectives deeply and to practice inclusive engagement techniques that respond to real-world needs.
- Structured Reflection on Bias and Cultural Competence: After field experiences, EPPs should require guided reflections where candidates can critically analyze their own biases and explore how these might affect their interactions with families. Reflection activities could include journaling exercises, group discussions, and workshops designed to help candidates recognize personal biases and understand their impact on family engagement. By reflecting on their experiences and biases, teacher candidates can develop higher levels of cultural competence, preparing them to foster high expectations and establish meaningful relationships with families across cultural divides.
- Embedding Critical Consciousness in Family Engagement Training: To address participant concerns about systemic inequities, EPPs should integrate training that builds critical consciousness directly into family engagement coursework. This training would encourage candidates to recognize broader social and historical contexts affecting students and families, such as economic inequality or institutional racism, and to consider

how these factors impact family engagement. EPPs could include coursework on historical and systemic barriers to equitable family engagement, helping candidates understand the importance of dismantling these barriers in their future practice.

By adopting these strategies, EPPs can directly address participant feedback on the need for deeper, more applied training in CRP. These enhancements ensure that teacher candidates are not only aware of cultural diversity but are also well-prepared to engage with families in respectful, responsive, and equitable ways. This approach treats culturally relevant engagement as a core component of teacher preparation, equipping candidates to build strong partnerships with all families, regardless of background.

### **Review and Revise Field Experience Requirements**

Field experiences are critical to teacher preparation, providing candidates with practical opportunities to engage directly with families, especially those from historically marginalized, underserved, or culturally diverse communities. Participant feedback suggests that these experiences should be designed to go beyond passive observation, involving active participation in family-school interactions. This approach allows candidates to build meaningful, respectful relationships with families and gain firsthand experience creating inclusive, culturally responsive environments. To be effective, these field experiences should be structured under the guidance of experienced, culturally competent mentors who can offer support and model asset-based approaches to family engagement.

To enhance field experience effectiveness, EPPs should consider the following recommendations:

- Incorporate Specific Family Engagement Objectives: EPPs should restructure field placements to include clearly defined family engagement objectives, encouraging

candidates to actively practice skills such as co-facilitating parent workshops, conducting family interviews, and leading small-group parent meetings. These activities should expose candidates to the realities of engaging with families from diverse backgrounds, building their confidence and competence in these essential skills.

- Partner with Culturally Competent Mentor Teachers: Establishing partnerships with mentor teachers who have a proven track record in family engagement, especially in culturally diverse settings, is essential. Candidates benefit from working alongside mentors who model effective family-school collaboration practices, offering them real-life examples and strategies for building trust and respect with families. Such mentorship helps candidates observe successful engagement practices and provides opportunities to ask questions and receive on-the-spot guidance.
- Structured Reflection and Feedback Sessions: After each family engagement activity, candidates should participate in structured reflection sessions to discuss challenges, share insights, and receive constructive feedback from mentors. These sessions could involve journaling, group discussions, and one-on-one debriefs, helping candidates critically analyze their experiences, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce positive engagement practices. This reflective component is vital for helping candidates internalize family engagement skills and develop a growth mindset as they progress.
- Emphasize Asset-Based Approaches and Cultural Responsiveness: Field experiences should encourage candidates to approach family engagement from an asset-based perspective, recognizing families' strengths and cultural backgrounds in the school community. EPPs could include training on culturally responsive communication and family-centered approaches, ensuring that candidates see families as valuable educational

partners. Mentor teachers should model these practices and support candidates in adopting inclusive, respectful engagement strategies.

By adopting these enhanced field experience requirements, EPPs can provide teacher candidates with the necessary skills and confidence to engage effectively with all families. These recommendations directly respond to participants' feedback by embedding meaningful, hands-on family engagement opportunities within field placements. These foster the practical skills candidates need to build strong, collaborative relationships with families from diverse backgrounds.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study provides valuable insights into the preparedness of beginning teachers for family engagement, several limitations must be acknowledged that may affect the interpretation and generalization of the findings.

#### **Sample Size and Generalizability**

The study focused on a specific population of beginning teachers in urban school settings who graduated from specific universities in North Carolina, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other teaching contexts. Family engagement dynamics in rural or suburban areas, for instance, may be different due to factors like community size, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural norms. As such, the experiences and challenges faced by urban teachers may not directly reflect those of teachers in non-urban settings, making it difficult to apply these findings universally.

#### **Self-Reported Data**

The data collected in this study was primarily self-reported through surveys and interviews, which introduces the possibility of response bias. Teachers may have presented

themselves in a more favorable light or overestimated their preparedness for family engagement due to social desirability or recall biases. Further self-reported data may not fully capture the complexities of teachers' actual practices and interactions in the classroom. Another limitation is that beginning teachers had to reflect on their own experiences as undergraduate students when discussing family engagement. This reliance on memory could have skewed their perceptions, as the passage of time may have affected the accuracy of their recollections.

### **Lack of Longitudinal Data**

This study did not track the participants over time, meaning there is no data on how teachers' family engagement mindsets and practices evolved throughout their careers. Without a longitudinal approach, it is difficult to determine whether teachers' initial perceptions of preparedness translate into effective long-term engagement with families. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies that follow teachers across different stages of their careers to better understand how their family engagement strategies mature and adapt in response to different classroom contexts and challenges.

### **Exclusion of Family Perspectives**

A final notable limitation of this study is the exclusion of family perspectives. Since the focus was solely on teachers, the study does not offer insights into how families perceive their interactions with educators or how they feel about the effectiveness of these engagement efforts. Family engagement is a reciprocal process, and including family voices in future research would provide a more robust understanding of both the successes and opportunities in building strong family-school partnerships in urban schools. This would help educators refine their practices based on direct feedback from families themselves, ensuring a more collaborative approach.



### **Opportunities for Future Research**

Future research should address the following areas to deepen understanding and improve practices related to family engagement in education:

#### **Integration of Family Engagement Strategies**

An opportunity for further study should include the investigation of effective methods for integrating family engagement strategies, particularly in urban schools or those characterized by high cultural and linguistic diversity. Research should focus on the impact of comprehensive family engagement training on beginning teachers' practices and subsequent student outcomes. Special attention should be paid to how these strategies can be embedded within existing EPP curricula and programming, and, further, how schools can foster continuous partnerships between teachers, families, and communities over time. Additionally, exploring the role of school leaders in supporting and sustaining these engagement efforts would provide valuable insights into systemic approaches for improvement, allowing more robust inquiry.

#### **Perspectives of Historically Marginalized Families**

Similarly, in the future, scholars should explore the perspectives and experiences of families from historically marginalized backgrounds regarding family engagement in schools. Understanding these perspectives will provide insights into how EPPs can be better aligned with the needs and expectations of families, enabling them to better align their curricula to reflect real-world experiences of students, families, and teachers. This research should investigate how cultural and socioeconomic factors influence families' engagement experiences and how schools can build trust and create culturally responsive engagement practices that address barriers like language, socioeconomic status, and immigration status. Additionally, examining how systemic

inequities within the education system shape family engagement patterns could reveal new pathways for policy reform.

### **Impact of School Policies on Family Engagement**

A final area for future research is to explore the impact of school policies—such as attendance, discipline, and homework—on family engagement in urban schools. Studies could explore how these policies either promote or hinder family engagement. For example, examining zero-tolerance discipline policies could reveal whether they strain family-school relationships, suggesting opportunities for reforms like restorative justice approaches with family input. Additionally, research could investigate how attendance and homework policies may create barriers or opportunities for more inclusive family participation, offering insights for policy changes that enhance engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes to the growing body of research that highlights the critical role of family engagement in urban elementary schools, where diverse student populations often require more personalized and culturally responsive approaches. The findings reveal that while beginning teachers in this study understand the importance of family involvement, several of them struggle with the practical aspects of building meaningful partnerships. This study reveals that one reason for this gap is a lack of sufficient training and confidence in navigating the complex relationships between schools and families. EPPs, as they currently stand, often fail to provide the necessary tools for addressing the diverse cultural and socioeconomic realities of urban school communities. Without adequate preparation and practice in communication, collaborating with the community, critical consciousness, cultural competence, communication

strategies, and practical engagement, novice teachers may find themselves ill-equipped to create the supportive, collaborative environments that are crucial for student achievement.

To address these challenges, the study underscores the need for EPPs to adopt a more comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to preparing future teachers. This can be achieved by rethinking how family-school partnerships are introduced and reinforced throughout teacher training. By incorporating Epstein's framework for family engagement alongside Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, programs can offer more robust preparation that includes not only theoretical understanding but also practical experience. This integration would help enable teacher candidates to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to foster inclusive and meaningful engagement with families. Embedding these practices into both coursework and field experiences can empower teachers to navigate the diverse needs of students and their families, ultimately leading to stronger partnerships that support student success (Boonk et al., 2018; Hernandez, 2019; Nathans et al., 2022).

## REFERENCES

- Alfonseca, K. (2023, April 19). *So-called 'Don't say gay' rules expanded through 12th grade in Florida*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/called-dont-gay-rules-expanded-12th-grade-florida/story?id=98691183c>
- Amatea, E. S., & Dolan, K. (2009). Fostering student and family engagement in learning through student-led parent conferences. In E. S. Amatea (Ed.), *Building culturally responsive family-school relationships* (p. 252–276). Pearson.
- Anderson, B. (2021, November 4). *Critical race theory is a flashpoint for conservatives, but what does it mean?* PBS NewsHour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/so-much-buzz-but-what-is-critical-race-theory>
- Anguiano, R., Thomas, S., & Proehl, R. (2020). Family engagement in a catholic school: What can urban schools learn? *School Community Journal*, 30(1), 209-241.  
<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>
- Avendano, S. M., & Cho, E. (2020). Building collaborative relationships with parents: A checklist for promoting success. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 52(4), 250–260.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059919892616>
- Bachman, H. F., Anderman, E. M., Syromski, B., & Boone, B. (2021). The role of parents during the middle school years: Strategies for teachers to support middle school family engagement. *School Community Journal*, 31(1), 109–126.  
<https://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>
- Baker, T. L., Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R. J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. *School Community Journal*, 26(2), 161–184.  
<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>

- Baldwin Clark, L. A. (2023). The critical racialization of parents' rights. *Yale law journal*, 132(7), 2139–2204.
- Banks, J., Kea, C., & Coleman, M. R. (2023). Making meaningful connections: Facilitating schoolwide family engagement with culturally diverse families. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599231182048>
- Barker, B., & Harris, D. (2020). *Parent and family engagement: An implementation guide for school communities*. Canberra: ARACY. Retrieved from <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/647>
- Bartels, S. M., & Eskow, K. G. (2010). Training school professionals to engage families: A pilot university/state department of education partnership. *The School Community Journal*, 20(2).
- Blasi, M. J. W. (2002). An asset model: Preparing preservice teachers to work with children and families “of promise.” *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17(1), 106–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568540209595003>
- Brinkman, S. & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. (3rd Ed.). SAGE.
- Brion, C. (2022). Cultural Proficiency: The necessary link to family engagement. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 25(1), 72–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554589211037723>
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Boonk, L., Gijssels, H. J. M., Ritzen, H., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2018). A review of the

relationship between parental involvement indicators and academic achievement.

*Educational Research Review*, 24, 10–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.001>

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723–742.

Burn, K., & Mutton, T. (2015). *A review of 'research-informed clinical practice' in initial teacher education*. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(2), 217–233.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1020104>

Bywaters, K. A., Russell, A. T., Simmons, J., Morgan, J. J., & Spies, T. G. (2022). Preparing to engage in culturally sustaining practices in urban education environments. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 58(2), 118–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512211051077>

Casper, V. (2011). Terms of engagement: Preparing pre-service teachers to form authentic partnerships with families and communities. *Education as Change*, 15(S1), S5-S19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2011.643615>

Chang, W. C., & Viesca, K. M. (2022). Preparing teachers for culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy (CRP): A critical review of research. *Teachers College Record*, 124(2), 197-224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221086676>

Chavkin, N. F., & Williams, D. L. (1988). Critical issues in teacher training for parent involvement. *Educational Horizons*, 66(2), 87–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42925903>

Check, J., & Schutt, R. K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. Sage publications.

Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). *Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning*. New York: Guilford.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Villegas, A. M. (2016). Research on teacher preparation: Charting the landscape of a sprawling field. In D. Gitomer & C. Bell (Eds.), *Handbook of research on*

- teaching (Fifth edition)* (pp. 439–547). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association
- Coladarci, T., Cobb, C. D., Minium, E. W., & Clarke, R. B. (2011). *Fundamentals of statistical reasoning in education* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd Ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1991). Involving parents in the schools: A process of empowerment. *American Journal of Education*, 100(1), 20–46. <https://doi.org/10.1086/444003>
- Dresden J., & Thompson, K. F. (2021). Looking closely at clinical practice: A clear-eyed vision for the future of teacher education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 96(1), 8-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2020.1864242>
- Epstein, J. L. (2007). Connections count: Improving family and community involvement in secondary schools. *Principal Leadership*, 8(2), 16-22. <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/connections-count-improving-family-community/docview/233334139/se-2>
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Education and Teaching*, 44(3), 397-406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465669>
- Epstein, J. L., & Jay Becker, H. (1982). Teachers' reported practices of parent involvement: Problems and possibilities. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83(2), 103-113. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1001099>
- Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2006). Prospects for change: Preparing educators for school, family, and community partnerships. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(2), 81–120. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930pje8102\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930pje8102_5)

- Evans, M. P. (2013). Educating pre-service teachers for family, school, and community engagement. *Teaching Education*, 24(2), 123–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2013.786897>
- Exec. Order No. 13950. p. 60683-60689. (2022).  
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/28/2020-21534/combating-race-and-sex-stereotyping>
- Flanigan, C.B. (2007). Preparing pre-service teachers to partner with parents and communities: An analysis of college of education faculty focus groups. *The School Community Journal*, 17(2), 89-109.
- Freedom in Education. (2023, December 5). *About*. Freedom In Education.  
<https://freedomined.org/about/>
- Gaitan, C. D. (2012). Culture, literacy, and power in family–community–school–relationships. *Theory Into Practice*, 51(4), 305–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2012.726060>
- Garbacz, S. A., McIntosh, K., Eagle, J. W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Hirano, K. A., & Ruppert, T. (2016). Family engagement within schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports. *Preventing School Failure*, 60(1), 60–69.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2014.976809>
- Gerzel-Short, L., Kiru, E. W., Hsiao, Y.-J., Hovey, K. A., Wei, Y., & Miller, R. D. (2019). Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 55(2), 120–126.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219837637>
- Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, 66(4), 399–410.



<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576>

Greene, J. C. (2007). *Mixed methods in social inquiry*. Jossey-Bass.

Griffin, D., Williams, J. M., & Bryan, J. (2021). School–family–community partnerships for educational success and equity for black male students. *Professional School Counseling*, 25(1, Part 4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X211040036>

Griffin, D., & Steen, S. (2018). *School-family-community partnerships: Applying Epstein's theory of the six types of involvement to school counselor practice*, 13(4), 218-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X1001300402>

Grolnick, W. S., Raftery-Helmer, J. N., Marbell, K. N., Flamm, E. S., Cardemil, E. V., & Sanchez, M. (2014). Parental provision of structure: Implementation and correlates in three domains. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 60(3), 355–384. <https://doi.org/10.13110/merrpalmquar1982.60.3.0355>

Gross, T. (2021, June 24). *Uncovering who is driving the fight against critical race theory in schools*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/24/1009839021/uncovering-who-is-driving-the-fight-against-critical-race-theory-in-schools>

Harvard Family Research Project. (2010). Is teacher preparation a key to improving teacher practices with families? What are the alternatives? Retrieved from <https://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators/>

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: SEDL. Retrieved from <https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

Hernandez, R. (2020). *State of the states: Family, school, and community engagement within state educator licensure requirements*. National Association for Family, School and

Community Engagement.

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/custompages/NAFSCE\\_States\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/nafsce.org/resource/resmgr/custompages/NAFSCE_States_Report_FINAL_0.pdf)

Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: an update.

*Educational Review*, 70(1), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1388612>

House, S. H. (2019). Implementing culturally responsive practices in family-school partnership

programs. In S. A. Garbacz (Ed.), *Establishing family-school partnerships in school psychology: Critical skills* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 135-151). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781138400382>

Ishimaru, A. M. (2019). From family engagement to equitable collaboration. *Educational Policy*,

33(2), 350–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691841>

Jones, J. C., Hampshire, P. K., & McDonnell, A. P. (2020). Authentically preparing early

childhood special education teachers to partner with families. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(6), 767–779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01035-7>

Kazemi, E., Ghouseini, H., Cunard, A., & Turrou, A. (2016). Getting inside rehearsals: Insights

from teacher educators to support work on complex practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(1), 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487115615191>

Kea, C. D., Sirgany, L., & Young, F. (2023). Family engagement: Developing relationship-rich

partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families to improve students' long-term life outcomes. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599231175187>

Kelty, N. E., & Wakabayashi, T. (2020). Family engagement in schools: Parent, educator, and

community perspectives. *SAGE Open*, (10)4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020973024>

- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/003465431663038>
- Kim, E. M., & Sheridan, S. M. (2015). Foundational Aspects of family-school Connections: Definitions, conceptual frameworks, and research needs. In S. M. Sheridan & E. M. Kim (Eds.), *Foundational aspects of family-school partnerships research* (pp. 1-14). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13838-1\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13838-1_1)
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *Educational Research Journal*, 32(3). <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Lucas, T. T., & Villegas, A. M. (2010). *A framework for preparing linguistically responsive teachers*. In Teacher preparation for linguistically diverse classrooms (pp. 75-92). Routledge.
- Maddamsetti, J. (2024). Cultivating asset-, equity-, and justice-oriented identities: Urban field experiences of elementary preservice teachers of color. *Urban Education*, 59(1), 210-243.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859211017984>
- Mapp, K. L., Carver, I., Lander J. (2017). *Powerful partnerships: A teacher's guide to engaging families for student success*. Scholastic.
- Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships*. Austin, TX: SEDL & U.S. Department of Education.  
Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*,

31(2), 132–141.

Mertens, D. M. (2020). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) SAGE.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085912447516>

Michael, S. L., Barnes, S. P., & Wilkins, N. J. (2023). Scoping review of family and community engagement strategies used in school-based interventions to promote healthy behaviors.

*The Journal of School Health*, 93(9), 828–841. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13367>

Miller, G., Lines, C., Sullivan, E. & Hermanutz, K. (2013). Preparing educators to partner with families. *Teaching Education*, 24(2), 150-163.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2013.786889>

Milner, H. R. (2012). But what is urban education? *Urban Education*, 47(3), 556-561.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085912447516>

Milner, H. R. (2015). *Rac(e)ing to class: Confronting poverty and race in schools and classrooms*. Harvard Education Press.

*Moms for liberty*. (n.d.). <https://www.momsforliberty.org/about/>

National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement. (2010). *Family engagement defined*. <https://nafsce.org/page/definition>

National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement [NAFSCE]. (2022). *Educator preparation framework for family and community partnerships*.

<https://nafsce.org/page/edprep>

Nathans, L., Brown, A., Harris, M., & Jacobson, A. (2022). Preservice teacher learning about parent involvement at four universities. *Educational Studies*, 48(4), 529-548.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1793297>

- Newman, N., Northcutt, A., Farmer, A. & Black, B. (2019). Epstein's model of parental involvement: Parent perceptions in urban schools. *Language Teaching and Educational Research*, 2(2), 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.35207/late.559732>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2023, September 1). *NC approved EPP licensure areas*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/educators/educator-preparation/approved-programs>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Chamberlain, P., Hurlburt, M. S., & Landsverk, J. (2011). Mixed-methods designs in mental health services research: A review. *Psychiatric Services*, 62(3), 255–263. [https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.62.3.pss6203\\_0255](https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.62.3.pss6203_0255)
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Patte, M.M. (2011). Examining pre-service teacher knowledge and competencies in establishing family–school partnerships. *The School Community Journal*, 21(2), 143-159
- Pendharkar, E. (2022, December 14). *The evolution of the Anti-CRT movement: A timeline*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-evolution-of-the-anti-crt-movement-a-timeline/2022/12#:~:text=The%20first%20three%20divisive%20concepts,was%20inherently%20racist%20or%20sexist>
- Räty, H. (2011). Past in the present: The way parents remember their own school years relates to the way they participate in their child's schooling and remember his/her school years. *Social Psychology of Education* 14, 347–360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-010-9149-4>
- Richard, L. (2022, February 18). *North Carolina dad goes viral for anti-CRT school board speech: 'Parents are taking back the wheel'*. Fox News.

- <https://www.foxnews.com/us/north-carolina-dad-viral-crt-school-board-parents-wheel>
- Ravitch, S. M. & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. (2nd Ed.). SAGE.
- Sanders-Smith, S. C., Smith-Bonahue, T. M., Cordoba, T. E., & Soutullo, O. R. (2019). Shifting perspectives: preservice teacher preparation in family engagement. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 40(3), 221–237.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2018.1557765>
- Schultz, K. (2019). *Distrust and educational change: Overcoming barriers to just and lasting reform*. Harvard Education Press.
- Simpson, A., & Quigley, C. F. (2016). Member checking process with adolescent students: Not just reading a transcript. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(2), 376-392.  
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2386>
- Smith, T. E., & Sheridan, S. M. (2019). The effects of teachers training on teachers' family-engagement practices, attitudes, and knowledge: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 29(2), p. 128-157.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2018.1460725>
- Soutullo, O. R., Smith-Bonahue, T. M., Sanders-Smith, S. C., & Navia, L. E. (2016). Discouraging partnerships? Teachers' perspectives on immigration-related barriers to family-school collaboration. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 31(2), 226–240.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000148>
- Strickland-Cohen, M. K., Kyzar, K. B., & Garza-Fraire, F. M. (2021). School-family partnerships to support positive behavior: Assessing social validity and intervention fidelity. *Preventing School Failure*, 65(4), 362–370.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1913084>

Swenson, A. (2023, July 2). *Far-right group moms for liberty poised to clash with teachers unions over school board races nationwide*. PBS NewsHour.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/moms-for-liberty-poised-to-clash-with-teachers-unions-over-school-board-races-nationwide>

Szech, L. (2022). Fostering culturally relevant teaching through family visits.

*International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 24(3), 51–71.

<https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v24i3.3189>

Tashakkori, A., & Creswell, J. W. (2007). Exploring the nature of research questions in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (1), 3. 207–211.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689807302814>

The Hunt Institute. (2022). A campaign for one million more teachers of color. <https://hunt-institute.org/one-million-teachers-of-color/>

Trumbull, E., & Pacheco, M. (2005). *Leading with diversity: Cultural competencies for teacher preparation and professional development*. Education Alliance at Brown University.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED494221.pdf>

Turney, K., & Kao, G. (2009). Barriers to school involvement: Are immigrant parents disadvantaged?. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(4), 257-271.

<https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.102.4.257-271>

Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.

Vesely, C. K., Mehta, S., Sansbury, A., Gundling, R., & Arora, S. (2021). Reimagining teacher education for family engagement: A response to the 2020 health and socio-historical

context. *Teacher Educators' Journal*, 14. 170-191.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1296560.pdf>

Walker, J. M. T., & Legg, A. M. (2018). Parent-teacher conference communication: A guide to integrating family engagement through simulated conversations about student academic progress. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 366–380.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465661>

Willemse, T. M., Thompson, I., Vanderlinde, R., & Mutton, T. (2018). Family-school partnerships: a challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 252–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465545>

Yamauchi, L. A., Ponte, E., Ratliffe, K. T., & Traynor, K. (2017). Theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in research on family-school partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 27(2), 9-34. <http://www.adi.org/journal/2017fw/YamauchiEtAlFall2017.pdf>

Yousef, O. (2023, June 7). *Moms for liberty among conservative groups named 'extremist' by civil rights watchdog*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/07/1180486760/splc-moms-for-liberty-extremist-group>

Zeichner, K., Payne, K. & Brayko, K. (2015). Democratizing teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 66(2), 122-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114560908>

Zeichner, K., Bowman M., Guillen L., & Napolitan, K. (2016). Engaging and working in solidarity with local communities in preparing teachers of their children. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(4), 277-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487116660623>

Zenkov, K., & Pytash, K. E. (2019). Critical, project-based clinical experiences: Their origins and their elements. In K. Zenkov & K. E. Pytash (Eds.), *Clinical experiences in teacher education: Critical, project-based interventions in diverse classrooms* (pp. 1–17). New



York, NY: Routledge.

Zygmunt-Fillwalk, E. (2011). Building family partnerships: The journey from pre-service preparation to classroom practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 32(1), 84-96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2010.547653>

## APPENDIX A: TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM CURRICULUM ANALYSIS RUBRIC

Criteria Number of Courses that...	0-2	3-5	6-8	8 or more
Address the importance of family and community engagement.				
Include readings relevant to family and community engagement ( <i>i.e.</i> , Joyce Epstein, Karen Mapp, Susan Sheridan).				
Introduced methods for creating inclusive classroom environments.				
Address community resources ( <i>should be content related to the local community</i> ).				
Introduced strategies for communicating effectively with parents and families.				
Developed an understanding of family dynamics/structures ( <i>i.e.</i> , LGBTQ+ parents, single parents, stay-at-home parents, etc.).				
Highlights the importance of cultural competence/proficiency ( <i>i.e.</i> , Gloria Ladson-Billings, Django Paris, H. Samy Alim).				
Addresses using families' funds of knowledge/assets to				

increase engagement ( <i>i.e. Luis Moll</i> ).				
	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
When are these courses offered in the program?				
When are field experiences associated with the program?				

## APPENDIX B: PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PREPAREDNESS SURVEY

### Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will help us understand how beginning teachers perceive the preparedness of their teacher education programs in engaging parents and families in urban elementary schools. This survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

---

### Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Please select your current teaching position:
  - a. 1st-year
  - b. 2nd-year
  - c. 3rd-year
  - d. 4th-year
  - e. 5th-year
2. Please select your gender/gender identity:
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Prefer not to say
3. How old are you?
  - a. Under 25
  - b. 25-34
  - c. 35-44
  - d. 45-54
  - e. 55 or older
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - a. Bachelor's degree
  - b. Master's degree
  - c. Doctoral degree
  - d. Other (please specify)

### Section 2: Teacher Education Program Preparedness

Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree."

1. My teacher education program adequately prepared me to engage parents and families in school settings.
2. During my teacher education program, I received training and support in effective communication with parents and families.

3. My teacher education program provided strategies for building positive relationships with parents and families.
4. The coursework included in my program helped me understand diverse family structures and dynamics commonly found in urban settings.
5. Strategies or tools were suggested to overcome barriers to communication, such as language differences or limited access to technology.
6. Family engagement was well-integrated into practicum or field experiences during my teacher education program.
7. Case studies or real-life scenarios discussed in coursework emphasized the importance of family engagement in student success.
8. I am confident in applying the family engagement strategies taught in my program to real-world scenarios.

### **Section 3: Challenges and Suggestions (Open-Ended Responses)**

1. Are there any specific courses, workshops, or resources from your teacher education program that you found particularly helpful in preparing you to engage families?
2. What key skills or knowledge areas should be emphasized in teacher education programs to better equip future teachers for effective parent and family engagement?
3. What were your most significant challenges when engaging parents and families?
4. Describe an instance where you successfully applied a family engagement strategy learned in your teacher education program.

### **Interview Participation [OPTIONAL]**

If you would like to participate in a 1-hour interview, please provide your name and email address below.

Name:

Email:

## APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Introduction Statement

Hello \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for joining me today. I'm currently conducting a research project for my dissertation at UNC Charlotte, focusing on the experiences of beginning teachers like yourself. I want to understand how your teacher education program prepared you to engage parents and families in urban elementary schools. I appreciate your willingness to share your insights and experiences with me. Although this is an interview, I want this to be a conversation so I can learn about your experiences and where we can have a meaningful discussion about your perceptions and reflections. There are no right or wrong answers!

Before we start, I want to assure you that your thoughts and opinions are highly valued, your privacy will be respected, and no identifying information will be shared. Please feel free to ask if you'd like to know anything about the interview process or have any questions. Your comfort and understanding are important to me.

As a reminder, I'll record our conversation and let you know before I start recording. However, I want to emphasize that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are welcome to skip any questions you're uncomfortable answering. This interview should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. However, I want to be mindful of your time. Please let me know if you have any time constraints or anything else you'd like to discuss, and we can make adjustments.

Thank you, again, for your time and willingness to contribute to this research project. Your experience and insight will contribute to a deeper understanding of how beginning teachers perceive their teacher education programs with engaging parents and families.

### Interview Questions

1. Could you describe your teacher education program?
2. How did your teacher education program address family engagement?
3. How were you trained to communicate with parents effectively?
4. How did your teacher education program prepare you to engage parents as volunteer schools?
5. How did your program teach you to support parents in supporting learning at home?
6. How were you prepared to involve parents in decision-making processes at the school?
7. Thinking about your entire teacher education experience, what aspects of your program most effectively prepare you to engage parents and families?

## APPENDIX D: QUANTITATIVE CURRICULUM REVIEW FINDINGS

Number of Courses That...	Address the Importance of Family Engagement	Include Readings about Family Engagement	Discussed Inclusive Classroom Environments	Address Community Resources	Introduced Strategies for Communicating with Families	Developed an Understanding of Family Structures	Highlights Cultural Competence	Addresses Families' Funds of Knowledge
1	0-2	0-2	3-5	3-5	0-2	3-5	3-5	0-2
2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	3-5	0-2
3	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	3-5	0-2
4	3-5	3-5	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	3-5	0-2
5	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
6	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
7	0-2	0-2	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	0-2
8	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
9	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
10	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
11	0-2	0-2	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5
12	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
13	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2
14	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2