Findings from the ACPS Family Engagement Initiative Evaluation

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ICF

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Introduction to ICF

- **ICF is a global consulting firm with deep domain expertise, problem-solving capabilities, and a results-driven approach to deliver strategic value across the lifecycle of client programs.**
  - ICF has worked on evaluating and improving education programs and initiatives for over 30 years, and is an industry leader in the field of education evaluation, research, and support, from pre-k through postsecondary.

- **Extensive experience working with family engagement across fields**
  - Family Engagement Inventory, created through our Child Welfare Information Gateway contract
  - Family and Community Engagement Meeting through the REL Mid-Atlantic
  - Cross-site Family Engagement Evaluation for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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Introduction to the Evaluation

- **Mixed methods study conducted in two phases from March-May 2019:**
  - **Phase 1: Surveys of staff and families**
  - **Phase 2: Qualitative data collection**
- **Goals:**
  - **Better understand the needs, barriers, resources, and services to engage all families across all school settings**
  - **Offer concrete recommendations for family engagement enhancement**

Evaluation Concept Map
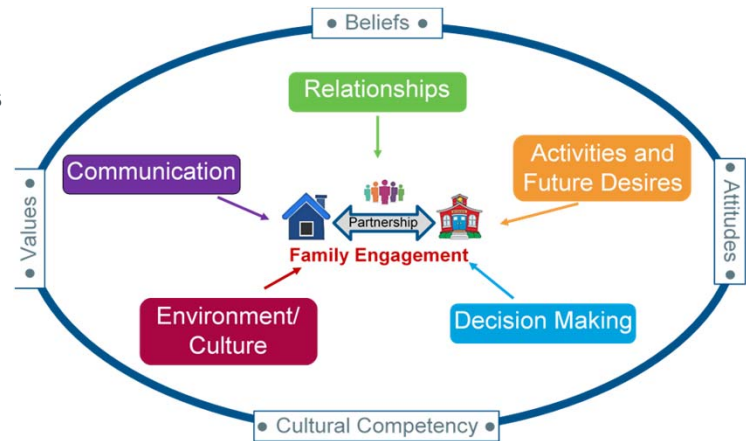
The concept map is theoretically grounded in the Epstein's (1995) model of six types of parental involvement; Mapp's (2013) dual capacity building framework for family-school partnerships; and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1997) theoretical model of parental involvement.

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Guiding Research Questions

- **To what extent do ACPS schools and Central Office departments foster a welcoming and supportive *environment* for families?**

- **To what extent is ACPS developing mutual *relationships* with families?**

- **To what extent does ACPS include families in educational *decision-making* of their children?**

- **To what extent do ACPS' *communication* practices meet the needs of families?**

- **To what extent do current ACPS family engagement initiatives and *activities* meet the needs of families?**

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Overview of the Methodology

- **Phase 1: Surveys administered to division staff and parents**
  - Parent survey: 38% White, 29% Hispanic, 21% Black or African American, 7% Asian, 5% multi-racial
  - Teacher survey: predominately elementary school (60%) and teachers (68%)

- **Phase 2: Qualitative data collection conducted at 12 sites across ACPS**
  - Interviews, focus groups, walk-throughs, observations, document review, "secret shopper" calls
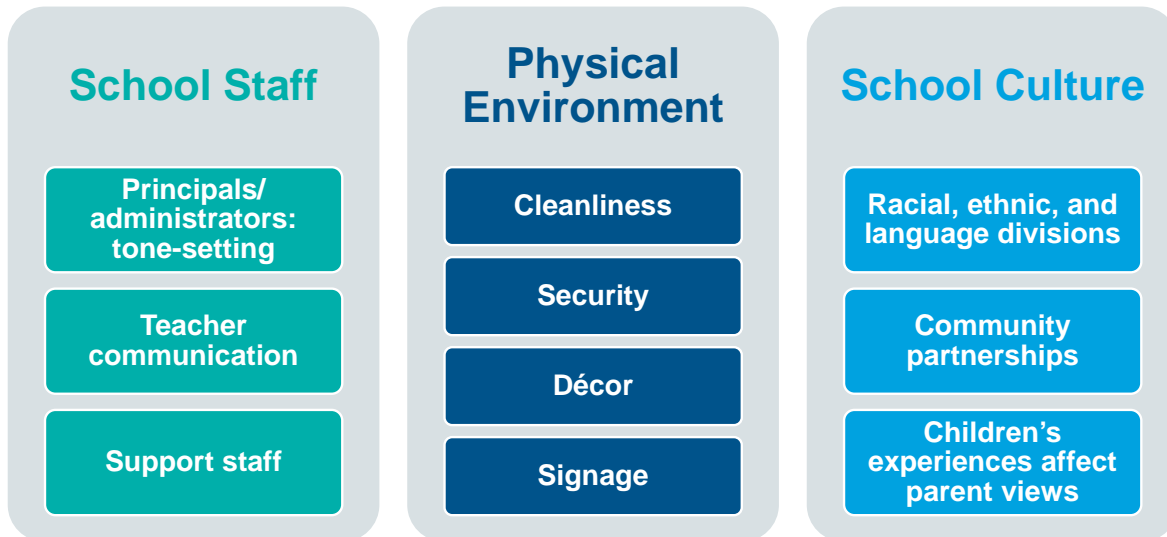 - School administrators, teachers and staff, parents

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Key Findings and Thematic Recommendations

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Environment/Culture: Major Themes

School Staff	Physical Environment	School Culture
Principals/administrators: tone-setting	Cleanliness	Racial, ethnic, and language divisions
Teacher communication	Security	Community partnerships
Support staff	Décor	Children's experiences affect parent views
	Signage	

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Environment/Culture: Strengths & Barriers

Strengths

- **Teachers and Staff**
  - Positive interactions → positive impressions
  - Staff exceed expectations to make families feel valued

- **Visual Representation**
  - Cleanliness
  - Art, student work
  - Representative photos, images

Barriers & Challenges

- **Community Barriers**
  - Transience
  - Gentrification

- **Racial Challenges and Negative Interactions**
  - Sense of alienation
  - Implicit bias/negative interactions with staff
  - Overt comments

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Environment/Culture: Recommendations

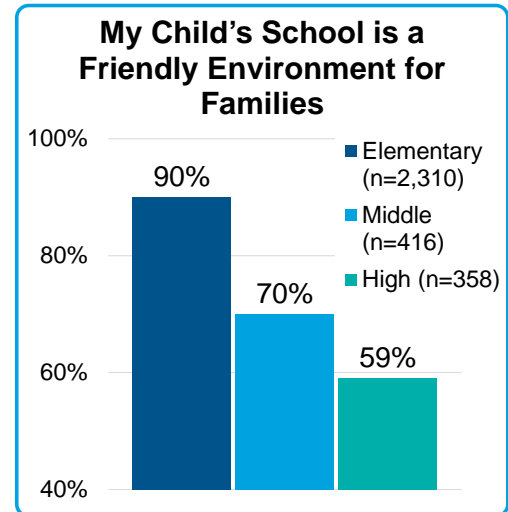1. **Positive interactions with staff**
   - Improve familiarity with language services
   - Additional support/training for front office staff at secondary schools
   - Resources for parents transitioning into secondary school

2. **Support community partnerships**
   - Sustain and expand existing strategic partnerships (Casa Chirilagua, LINK at Brent Place, Ethiopian and Eritrean Alliance for Education)
   - Explore new partnerships

3. **Physical environment**
   - Improve multi-lingual signage

My Child's School is a Friendly Environment for Families

- Elementary (n=2,310): 90%
- Middle (n=416): 70%
- High (n=358): 59%

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Relationships: Major Themes

Two-way partnerships
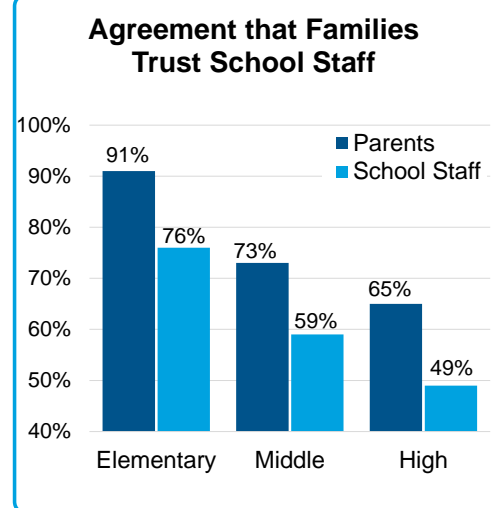- Communication
- Trust
- Decision-making

Respect for culture, values, language
- Instances of discrimination, feeling unwelcome
- Culturally responsive events
- Model of Principal Coffees

Agreement that Families Trust School Staff

	Parents	School Staff
Elementary	91%	76%
Middle	73%	59%
High	65%	49%

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Relationships: Strengths & Barriers

Strengths

- **Teachers and Staff**
  - Accessibility of teachers (primarily elementary)
  - Parent liaisons (school-based and division-wide)
- **School-Specific Resources**
  - Educational (e.g., SAT prep, educational games)
  - Basic necessities (food pantry, snacks, PTA efforts, etc.)

Barriers & Challenges

- **Cultural Challenges**
  - Understanding of the American school system
  - Consideration of religious holidays
- **Community Barriers**
  - Influx of immigrant families, transient families
- **Staff Resources**
  - Time
  - Need for more support staff

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Relationships: Recommendations

- **Additional events to facilitate relationships**
  - Could include expanded length of parent-teacher conferences, social events at middle/high schools, Principal Coffees at additional schools, or greater number of events later in the year to foster sustained relationships
- **Staff and administrator training**
  - **Staff:** Cultural sensitivity, welcoming environments
  - **Administrators:** Modeling positive school-family relationships and respectful school culture

- **Provision of more staff**
  - **Primarily:**
    - Parent liaisons (school-based and division-wide)
    - Bilingual staff (Arabic, Amharic)
  - **Secondary considerations:**
    - Counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses
    - Support staff, floaters (middle, high school)

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Decision Making: Major Themes
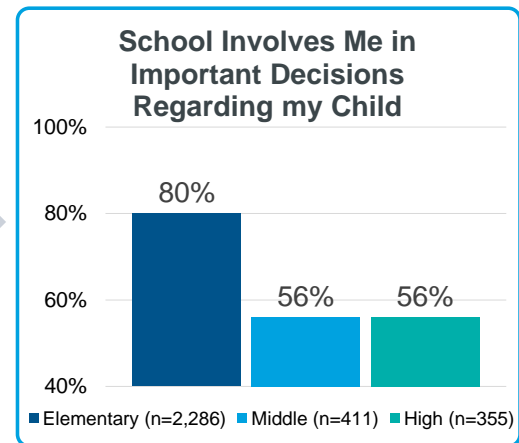
Inputs and Opportunities

Parent Teacher Conferences
- Primary decision-making opportunity
  - Oversight and advisory meetings

Informational events and digital platforms
- Provided information to inform decision making

Perceptions

School Involves Me in Important Decisions Regarding my Child

- Elementary: 80%
- Middle: 56%
- High: 56%

■ Elementary (n=2,286) ■ Middle (n=411) ■ High (n=355)

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Decision-Making: Strengths & Barriers

Strengths

- **School Type**
  - **Elementary schools**
  - **Title I schools**
- **Decision-Supporting Events**
  - **Elective fairs, science/math/literacy nights, AVID night, etc.**
- **Supportive PTA**

Barriers & Challenges

- **Racial/Ethnic/Socio-Economic Representation**
  - **PTAs**
  - **Advisory groups**
- **Individual Needs**
  - **Support individual learning at home**
  - **More broadly accessible materials**

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Decision Making: Recommendations

1. **Expanded parent-teacher conferences**
   - **Particularly at middle school level**
   - **Can also consider adopting other models for information-sharing like Academic Parent-Teacher Teams**
2. **Capitalize on existing materials**
   - **Broaden dissemination or availability**
   - **Increased training or awareness campaigns**
   - **School-based parent resource rooms**
3. **Support representation and diversity of division and school committees**
   - **Model additional equity and inclusion practices in Principal Coffees**
   - **Identify promising leaders via community partners**

[T]hose 10 or 15 minutes blocks, if we have to translate, it's not gonna work. You get one or two questions in. So that conferences, the way they're set up here, it's not useful."
   - Middle school teacher

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Communication: Major Themes

- **Effectiveness of communication methods**

Print	Telephone	In-person	Digital
• Classroom folders • Flyers • Translation	• Robo calls • Individual outreach • Language Line	• Interpreters • Conferences • Staff	• Emails • Unique apps • Division platforms

- **Communication process and content**
  - **Responded to concerns promptly**
  - **Connected to appropriate staff or resources**
  - **Additional communication about academic progress and support**

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Communication: Strengths & Barriers

Strengths

- **Teachers and staff**
  - **Particularly bilingual staff**
- **Division-wide resources**
  - **FACE Center**
  - **Interpreters/translators/Language Line**
- **Elementary school practices**
  - **E.g., weekly folders, digital texting-based apps, open door policies, etc.**
- **Technology**
  - **Canvas, PowerSchool, Remind, Dojo**

Barriers & Challenges

- **Technology access**
- **Language barriers**
- **Translation limitations of tools and resources**
  - **Language Line**
  - **Limitations of PowerSchool and Canvas**
  - **Internal protocol work-arounds**
  - **Arabic challenges**

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Communication: Recommendations

1. **Extend resource strengths**
   - **Additional Language Line training and compliant hardware**
   - **Full-time Arabic and Amharic parent liaisons**

2. **Academic communication**
   - **Access to course syllabi**
   - **Use of translated report cards**

3. **Consider digital communication translation guidance for email and support apps**

[P]arents expressed, 'I would like to get a weekly newsletter that talks about the nuances and detailed level of what our kids are learning this week in reading, and how I can help them at home.' And, that's reflecting a valid request, but one that logistically… that's just a challenging demand."
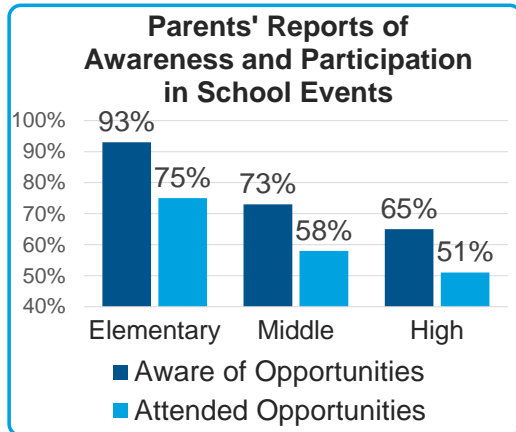
- Elementary principal

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Activities & Future Desires: Major Themes

Activities and Opportunities

Parents' Reports of Awareness and Participation in School Events

- Aware of Opportunities
- Attended Opportunities

Elementary: 93% Aware, 75% Attended
Middle: 73% Aware, 58% Attended
High: 65% Aware, 51% Attended

Processes and Procedures for Engagement

- FACE Center
- Community Partnerships
- Event timing

Staff Professional Development

- Cultural engagement
- Welcoming customer service
- Resource training

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Activities & Future Desires: Strengths & Barriers

Strengths

- **School type**
  - **Elementary and Title I Schools**

- **Available programs**
  - **Community partnerships**
  - **Social programs**

Barriers & Challenges

- **Family work schedules**

- **Transportation/proximity**

- **Volunteering**
  - **Processes not well understood**
  - **Personal logistical barriers**

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Activities & Future Desires: Recommendations

1. **Events and opportunities for engagement**
   - **Use elementary school relationship-building social events as model**
   - **Provide PD and practical guidance to teachers and staff to expand the use of home visits across the division**

2. **Broaden potential reach of critical events**
   - **E.g., select Principal Coffees, school board meetings**

3. **Expand non-traditional volunteer opportunities**

4. **Increase family engagement-related PD for all staff levels**

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Concluding Recommendations

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Prioritized Recommendations for Systemic Improvement

Priority: Relationship Building
Domains: Environment, Communication, Relationships

Recommendations:

- **More comprehensive family engagement-related training for all staff, with a focus on front office staff and middle/high school staff**

- **Increased parent liaisons and/or bilingual staff, particularly supporting Arabic- and Amharic-speaking families**

- **Expanded opportunities for face-to-face interaction between school staff and parents at middle/high school level**

Priority: Expanded Resource Utilization
Domains: Communication, Decision-Making, Future Desires

Recommendations:

- **Engage in a more systematic assessment to determine why many ACPS resources were reported to be un- or under-utilized**

- **Increase awareness and/or effective utilization of existing resources**
  - Including the Language Line, PowerSchool and Canvas, course syllabi, translated report cards, and activities at middle/high school

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For more examples of family engagement professional development, see resources available through Teaching for Change, the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, or the BUILD Initiative. 23

Moving the Work Forward

- **November-December**
  Convened Ad-Hoc Action-Planning Committee to conduct a deeper dive into the report, identify "Drivers of Change" and explore draft action steps.

- **January**
  Presented Committee feedback & solicited input from Senior Leadership Team

- **February**
  Present report findings & solicit input from ACPS School Board & Principals

- **March-April**
  Present report findings & solicit input from families, departments, community organizations and community members

- **April/May**
  Submit suggested timelines, scope of work and action plan to ACPS School Board

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Questions?

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