A Comparative Study of Latina Mothers and

Teachers' Experiences with Special Education Partnerships

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THESIS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual Education Program
CLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
ISP	Individual Service Plan
ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
LBS 1	Learning Behavior Specialist 1
OT	Occupational Therapy
PT	Physical Therapy

Summary

Family engagement with schools, and parental involvement with the Individual Education Program (IEP) process, are linked to positive student outcomes. Increased family engagement with school activities, such as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering in schools impacts student academic achievement (Jeynes, 2007). With the re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), increased expectations for family involvement has become standard practice (Harry, 2008). However, families in Latino, Spanish-speaking communities report barriers to inclusion in school communities and often have limited engagement with school personnel (Olivos, 2009; Salas, 2004; Turney & Kao, 2009).

The purpose of this comparative study was to dissect the concept of family engagement and the collaborative process through the perspectives of Latino, Spanish-speaking caregivers of children with disabilities and special education teachers. The study explored three key dimensions of collaborative relationships: (a) expectations and experiences around family engagement, (b) definitions and engagement with collaboration, and (c) the role and impact of advocacy on partnerships. The results deepen our understanding of what different stakeholders, from diverse backgrounds, expect from collaborative partnerships. The study contributes to family engagement literature by extending research on culturally relevant approaches to collaboration with Latino families.

This qualitative study is designed to compare the perspectives of Latino caregivers and school professionals (special education teachers, general education teachers, principal) through focus groups, interviews, and observations with field notes. The research interprets and analyzes

the experiences of each stakeholder group to identify areas of alignment and divergence around collaborative relationships, advocacy, and family engagement.

I: INTRODUCTION

The Problem and its Significance

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) guarantees families of children with disabilities the right to equal and shared decision-making regarding the services and placement of their child in special education. The importance of collaboration between school professionals and families is amplified by re-authorizations to the law expanding the role of family members in creation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Re-authorizations such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Public Law 108-446 (2004), and Public Law 94-142 (1975) require increased engagement between stakeholders (Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). Specifically, the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 legally mandated parental involvement in the IEP process in section (*§300.322 parent participation)*. According to the mandate, under subsection (a) Public agency responsibility – general, "Each public agency must take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of a child with a disability are present at each IEP Team meeting or are afforded the opportunity to participate" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p.72). Per IDEA (2004), parents are mandated to give consent before evaluations or initial special education placements (Burke & Goldman, 2015). Home-school partnerships are a central tenet to special education practice with the understanding that families will engage in the IEP process as full partners.

Role of Partnerships

Research indicates family and school partnerships are an essential practice for children (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Epstein, 2010; Olivos et al., 2010; Osher & Osher, 2002), specifically for children with disabilities (Blue-Banning, Summers,

Frankland, Lord Nelson, & Beegle, 2004). *Partnerships* refer to "mutually supportive interactions between families and professionals, focused on meeting the needs of children and families, and characterized by a sense of competence, commitment, equality, positive communication, respect, and trust" (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston, and Lord Nelson, 2005, p. 66). Research has shown many partnerships between families from Latino communities and schools are not supportive, equitable, nor foster positive outcomes for students (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004). For instance, Carreón et al. (2005), in their case study of three immigrant parents from Mexico and El Salvador, portrayed highly engaged caregivers who described feeling like outsiders despite many attempts to participate in school activities. Parents in the study did not feel respected nor valued by professionals in the school (Carreón et al., 2005). Latino family research describes caregivers' perceptions of disrespect occurring when professionals rush through IEP meetings or parent/teacher conferences (Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004; Shapiro, Rueda, Monzó, Gomez & Blacher, 2004). Some caregivers felt their time was not valued nor respected by school professionals who didn't show up for meetings or rescheduled IEP meetings at the last minute (Carreón et al., 2005; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004).

Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) argue *partnerships* for Latino families is "a code word for a one-way approach to supporting schools, their agenda, curricula, and mission" (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 167). However, research with Latino families also identify two-way communication, caring relationships with teachers, and opportunities for positive advocacy as facilitators to successful, collaborative partnerships and increased parent satisfaction (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey, Skinner,

Rodriguez, Gut, & Correa, 1999; Carréon et al., 2005; Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2008; Olivas, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda, Monzó, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004; Zuniga, 2011). Development of collaborative partnerships is not impossible but hinges on key factors such as how each group perceives, defines, and engages in the relationship, the levels and types of engagement, and how the engagement is valued. Research that examines the perceptions of partnerships between Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and teachers can fill gaps in understanding and begin to move the conversation away from roadblocks and towards collaboration.

Latinos in the United States

Latino cultural communities. The term Latino is a broad, homogeneous term that neglects the diversity amongst and between people from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries. There is a significant amount of diversity both within and among various Latino groups including variability in language, socioeconomic status, assimilation and experiences of discrimination (Vega, Lasser, & Fernandez, 2017). The term Latino, if not defined and contextualized, implies all human experiences within the construct *Latino* are universal, stagnant, and culture-free. In this paper, *Latino* refers to a group of individuals from Spanish-speaking countries that "encompass more than 15 countries of origin, different immigration statuses, and many levels of acculturation and socioeconomic status" (Blanche, Diaz, Barretto, & Cermak, 2015, p. 7).

Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) argue that "characteristics" of cultural groups are not located within individuals as traits rather commonalities in how individuals engage and experience cultural activities determine "cultural ways of knowing" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff,

2003, p.19). Furthermore, the authors suggest analysis of culture must examine the diverse interactions and experiences within *dynamic cultural communities* (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). They define a cultural community as a "coordinated group of people with some traditions and understandings in common, extending across several generations, with varied roles and practices and continual change among participants as well as transformation in the community's practices" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). In this paper, explorations into Latino cultural communities are modeled after Gutiérrez and Rogoff's (2003), Blanche et al.'s (2015) and Vega et al.'s (2017) definitions of *Latino* and are meant to exemplify the national diversity within the group and differences amongst specific caregivers' experiences.

Statistics on Latinos today. According to the U.S. Census (2016), in 2016, Latinos comprised 17.4% of the total population, or 55 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). In 2060, the Latino population is projected to increase 115% to 119 million people, 29% more than one-fourth of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Furthermore, Latinos make up 23% (1,359,140) of the total number of students receiving special education services in the United States (5,825,505), followed closely by African-American students who comprise 18% or 1,097,252 (Office of Special Education Programs, 2016). Latino people and students are substantially represented in the special education system and numbers are on the rise within the total population.

Despite the statistics, studies concerning Latino caregivers' experiences with the special education system are limited. Research on home-school relationships with Latino families is disproportionate to the substantial representation of Latino students in special education programs. There is a shortfall of research on Latino families' and professionals' perspectives and experiences with home-school partnerships (Olivos, 2009; Olivos et al.,

2010; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Furthermore, research has identified significant issues that impact Latino caregivers' abilities to forge collaborative partnerships with teachers and schools, such as limited engagement with schools, barriers to shared decision-making with teachers, and failed efforts to advocate for appropriate services (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Buren, Maggin, & Brown, 2018;; Burke, 2016; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Carréon et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008; Olivas, 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004; Zuniga, 2011).

Family Engagement and Student Success

Family engagement with school is linked to a multitude of successes for students with disabilities as demonstrated by improvements in academics, fulfillment of IEP goals and benchmarks, an increase in attendance rates, and decreased at-risk behaviors (Geenen, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005; Ishimaru, Torres, Salvador, Lott II, Cameron Williams, & Tran, 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Summers et al., 2005). Jeynes (2007) found parental style and expectations had greater impact on student academic outcomes than attendance at school functions or keeping house rules. Furthermore, Jeynes (2007) determined parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement including racial minority students. Ishimaru et al. (2016) suggest caregivers' social and intellectual resources could transform student academic outcomes. Additionally, caregivers with increased access to information on school policies, more experience with school procedures, and opportunities to advocate are more likely to meet the academic needs of their child and increase IEP gains (Geenen et al., 2005). In general, caregivers' relationships with their children, familiarity with school culture, information about school practices, and positive advocacy efforts contribute to

positive student academic outcomes (Geenen et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2007). Moreover, there are numerous, diverse ways for caregivers to engage with schools, children, and teachers to increase student success.

Effective practices to support family engagement. In her seminal piece on school and family partnerships, Epstein (2010) describes the impact of overlapping external and internal spheres of influence on student's academic growth. She describes how a child's learning and growth capacity are influenced by interactions between external contexts such as family, school, and community and internal contexts such as interpersonal social interactions between individuals within the home, school, and community (Epstein, 2010). These social interactions can be conducted through institutional types of engagement (school events) and individual types of engagement (one on one meetings, phone calls), but both influence a child's learning and academic growth (Epstein, 2010). Epstein (2010) created the six types of caring framework meant to guide families towards increased, purposeful partnering and involvement with schools and the community. The six forms of caring, or involvement, are; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2010).

Epstein's (2010) six types of caring were originally created in 1995 and reflect traditional perspectives on home-school partnerships from the 1960s'school reform era. During those reforms, educators believed increased parent involvement in schools could combat prevailing student underperformance (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Osher & Osher, 2002). In addition, provider-driven approaches to service delivery prevailed, rooted in the belief that a specialized body of knowledge exists and only experts trained in the field are qualified to implement that expertise (Osher & Osher, 2002). School-based efforts to educate parents through increased involvement

in programs and events were meant to decrease poor academic performance (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Osher & Osher, 2002). These 'solutions' to the student achievement issue situated caregivers as a central part of the problem and as passive receivers in need of remediation from schools (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005). Caregivers were expected to participate in institutional interactions (Epstein, 2010) such as parent teacher conferences, family night, volunteering, and classes on parenting (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Osher & Osher, 2002). Caregivers functioned in a passive role receiving information, learning to assimilate to school procedures, and volunteering (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005). Parent involvement in this context views caregivers as lacking, helpless, and in need of rehabilitation with participation in school events offered as a "remedy" to the "problem" of low-income parents (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 151). Similar assumptions undergird family research in the special education field.

Summers' et al., 2005 study measuring the quality of home-school partnerships in special education reinforces the notion of parents at a deficit in need of professional help. The rationale for the study was based on the premise positive partnerships are increased when special educators adopt a "collaborative helping style" (Summers et al., 2005, p. 66). Underlying this goal is an assumption that families need *help* from professionals with an emphasis on increasing professional's helping skills by creating evaluative tools to measure such behaviors (Summers et al., 2005). Similar to Epstein (2010), Summers et al. (2005) encourage parent involvement with schools in both institutional and individual types of interactions, albeit within limited capacities and without equal contributions. Through the lens of the parent involvement paradigm, professionals in special education are tasked with *fixing* parents by educating them about school norms, parenting techniques, IEP procedures, and their rights (Blue-Banning et al., 2005; Christenson, 2004; Summers et al., 2005).

Today, a new approach to caregiver involvement, meant to empower families and children, is gaining traction in America's schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Olivos et al., 2010). Caregivers are no longer passive participants in a service provider-driven school culture nor involved with schools in fixed and proscribed ways, but active producers of knowledge and ideas as leaders engaging with schools in an ongoing process of collaboration (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Olivos et al, 2010; Osher & Osher, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The *empowerment approach* is built on the belief that caregivers have equal voice and participate in "decision-making, planning, and implementation of solutions to problems affecting their children" (Bryan & Henry, 2012, p. 410). This belief contradicts long-held beliefs that professionals are experts and the only participants qualified to make decisions about children's schooling (Osher & Osher, 2002). With an empowerment approach, parents are not only *involved* with schools but *engaged* in a process of collaboration and shared decision-making.

Family engagement rests on the notion that caregivers and children have "equally valued contributions to make (Kozleski, Engelbrecht, Hess, Swart, Eloff, Oswald, Molina & Jain, 2008; Olivos et al., 2010). The construct family engagement refers to a more inclusive definition of partnerships with families than "traditional parent involvement approaches by recognizing broader notions of family as well as a broader set of behaviors related to student learning and development" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 853). More specifically, research demonstrates a need to identify specific social, historical, and cultural contexts of families (Olivos et al., 2010) to identify possible racial, cultural, or socioeconomic barriers that may prevent families from engaging with schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Notwithstanding research linking family engagement with schools and increased student

achievement (Geenen et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Summers et al., 2005), additional studies have demonstrated family engagement is low within the Latino community (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Olivos, 2004; Olivos, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vega et al., 2016) despite the desire to be more engaged (Carréon et al., 2005).

Limited Family Engagement in Latino Communities

Every family has a unique, contextualized experience with schools. However, the American school system presents certain expectations of parent engagement based on specific ways of acting, contributing and volunteering that often reflect a white, middle class standard (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Valle, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Minimal research examines how these school standards align or contrast to collective, Latino caregiver perceptions of engagement (Miller, Valentine, Fish & Robinson, 2016) although ample research points to limited Latino caregiver engagement with schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Olivos, 2004; Olivos, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vega et al., 2016) and how Latino caregivers are perceived because of such absences (Ojeda, Flores, Rosales Meza & Morales, 2011; Valencia and Black, 2002).

Turney and Kao (2009), in their study of barriers preventing immigrant caregiver's engagement with schools, found immigrant, Latino caregivers are less likely than native born, Latino caregivers to have high levels of involvement in their children's schools and less likely to volunteer (Turney & Kao, 2009). Results found immigrant, Latino caregivers are often not aware of unstated expectations to be involved in their child's school (Turney & Kao, 2009), or they cannot provide the support expected by schools because of geographical, financial, and linguistic barriers (Cohen, Holloway, Dominguez-Pareto & Kuppermann, 2014). Additional barriers influence Latino family engagement with schools.

Language and lack of specialized knowledge are common barriers that decrease the likelihood of engagement, collaborative partnerships and caring relationships between Latino caregivers and school professionals (Burke, 2016; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). For example, language barriers between caregivers whose native language is Spanish and school professionals can take many forms. In a study by Salas (2004) of Mexican-American mothers of children with developmental disabilities in the rural Southwest, 90% of the families in the school were Spanish speaking and 80% of the teachers were White and not bilingual. Thus, interpretation services were spotty, if available at all, and documents for home-school communication were often left untranslated (Salas, 2004). Alvarez McHatton and Correa (2005), Hardin et al. (2009), and Bailey et al. (1999), discovered a similar situation of scare interpretive services and translated documents while Ramirez (2003) described school board meetings held in a majority Latino, Spanish speaking school without interpretation services.

Isolation resulting from communication and language barriers can lead to feelings of exclusion from school events stemming from a lack of translated documents or omission of communication from the schools (Harry,1992; Shapiro et al., 2004). Mothers who traditionally speak up, ask questions, and visit with teachers, described feeling isolated from conversations and opportunities to form relationships with school professionals because of their limited English language skills (Harry,1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). This issue is significant because research has demonstrated strong family engagement in schools leads to positive academic outcomes for students (Geenen et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Summers et al., 2005). With limited engagement with schools, Latino caregivers and their children have equally limited opportunities to reap the rewards of such experiences. However, education remains a top

priority for many Latino families despite opportunities to engage with schools with the value of education described as an "inheritance that no one will be able to take away" (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013, p. 199). Geenen, Powers and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) compared the levels of parent involvement in transition planning activities of African-American, Latino, Native-American, and White families. According to the findings, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families are actively involved with transition planning but much of the engagement happens outside of school planning (Geenen et al., 2001). Additionally, when asked to rank the importance of various transition planning activities, Latino families ranked preparing for education after high school as most important (Geenen et al., 2001); emphasizing education as a top priority within Latino communities. Latino caregivers often look to teachers and school personnel for guidance and support and seek caring relationships based on trust and kindness (Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003).

Role of caring relationships. Throughout the literature, Latino, Spanish-speaking families expressed the importance of caring, trusting, loving relationships between school professionals, families, and their children with disabilities (Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003). Harry (1992), in her ethnographic study with Puerto Rican mothers of children with intellectual and learning disabilities, discussed the emphasis on *cariño* (care) in the classroom and the importance of close, caring relationships to participants in the study. Harry (1992) defined *cariño* as "characterized by a close and caring relationship as well as by a 'shared understanding' of the children's home situations and family values" (Harry, 1992, p. 479). Mothers believed school should be a place where teachers care and worry about their child as a mother would, not unlike the way schools operated in Puerto Rico (Harry, 1992). Parents want teachers who listen to them like a friend and treat teaching as

more than a job (Ramirez, 2003). Additional research reveals caregivers are reluctant to trust school professionals due to the nonexistence of such caring and respectful relationships (Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003). Families expressed the desire for teachers with a "human quality" (Shapiro et al., 2004), who give their time and really listen to families' concerns regarding their children (Bailey et al., 1999; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003). Lack of caring relationships, isolation from family near and far, language barriers, and deficit-based decision making are some of the complex and multifaceted challenges affecting positive home-school partnerships between professionals and Latino, Spanish-speaking caregivers (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Without caring relationships or mutual trust, development of aligned, collaborative partnerships aimed towards increasing student academic success and securing appropriate services, becomes a difficult task to achieve.

Barriers to Collaboration and Relationships

Latino, Spanish-speaking families continually report negative experiences with school partnerships based on cultural differences and deficit perspectives (Aceves, 2014; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Harry, 1992; Olivos, 2009; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al.,2004; Vega et al., 2016). The literature describes a myriad of barriers preventing equitable home-school partnerships between Latino families of children with disabilities and school professionals. For example, many Latino caregivers expressed frustration and confusion with the use of special education jargon during IEP meetings (Harry, 1992; Hardin et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Some studies discovered a general satisfaction with implementation of services but confusion as to how their child got the services, the purpose of

the IEP document, and the referral process (Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002). Four identified barriers to collaborative partnerships discussed in the literature are: (a) cultural differences (power barrier), (b) meaning lost or missing (language barrier), (c) respect (relationship barrier), and (d) lack of support (partnership/resource barrier). These barriers impact legally mandated partnerships between stakeholder groups and often necessitate advocacy efforts on behalf of the caregivers to ensure appropriate services for their children. Specifically, the literature reveals; (a) cultural misunderstandings lead to cultural insensitivity and assumptions about families based on lack of awareness of cultural norms and beliefs and stereotyping (Geenen et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004), (b) families lack special education knowledge or information about their rights (Geenen et al., 2005; Harry, 1992), (c) interpretation services are either not available or unprofessional with interpreters lacking sped knowledge (Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2004), (d) families feel disrespected (Cohen, 2013; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004), (e) decisions are made by school professionals based on deficits and deficit model thinking (Geenen et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004), (f) families are not aware of resources available within the schools, and (g) families often seek support from outside agencies to supplement what is lacking in schools (Cohen, 2013; Geenen et al., 2005). Additional research is needed to explore the relationship dynamics between caregivers and teachers from different cultural and/or socioeconomic backgrounds and how the exclusion of collaboration impacts the relationships.

Facilitators to Successful Partnerships

Despite the abundance of issues discussed in previous literature, (Aceves, 2014; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Burke, 2016; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Harry, 1992; Olivos, 2009; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al.,2004; Vega et al., 2016), a select

group of studies revealed school policies and practices that helped facilitate successful home-school partnerships (Bailey et al., 1999; Hardin et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008). Three facilitators identified in the research literature have the potential to improve collaborative relationships: (1) frequent and quality communication (Burke, Meadan-Kaplansky, Patton, & Cummings, 2017; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Hughes et al., 2008), 2) caring, close relationships with teachers built on mutual respect (Burke & Goldman, 2015; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003), and 3) the presence of a key person to advocate and help families navigate the system (Bailey et al., 1999; Burke & Goldman, 2018). Each facilitator to success involves relationships with other people, which directly address the alienation and isolation of immigrant, Latino families prevalent in the literature.

Frequent and quality communication. Frequent and quality communication, as defined by the research, involves keeping parents up to date on what is happening in the school, the classroom, and with their child as well as availability of interpreters on site and translated documents (Hughes et al., 2002). In their study of Latino families of children with disabilities, Hughes et al. (2002) reported 91% of the families were satisfied with the "quantity and quality of communication" (Hughes et al., 2002, p. 14). Upon closer inspection of the research, several school-wide practices and policies emerged as possible facilitators to the successful communication between school and home. Parents attributed satisfaction to the availability of interpreters, translated documents, school meetings held in both English and Spanish, bilingual office staff, monthly family meetings, and school-initiated contact (Hughes et al., 2002). Another study with Latino families in the special education system by Hughes et al. (2008) found similar levels of satisfaction with communication. Caregivers felt positive about opportunities to engage with the school and teachers, ascribing their satisfaction to frequent class visits, one on one

meetings with teachers, availability of interpreters, and plentiful opportunities to stay and speak informally with teachers after school drop off (Hughes et al., 2008).

Caring relationships with teachers. Mothers in Rueda et al.'s (2005) study relayed a deep desire for school professionals to believe in the capabilities of their children as a symbol of respect and care. Families longed for personalized relationships with teachers that transcend the traditional, professional rapport typically used in America's schools (Bailey et al., 1999; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005). Unfortunately, the research did not yield examples of close and caring relationships between teachers and Latino caregivers despite the potential for collaborative partnerships and increased family satisfaction.

Key family advocate. A third potential facilitator for successful home-school partnerships is the presence of a family advocate to assist families with navigation of the special education, medical, and therapeutic systems (Bailey et al., 1999; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Hardin et al., 2009). An advocate is defined as someone who "assists parents in securing appropriate educational services for their children" (Burke, 2013). Bailey et al.'s (1999) mixed methods study of 200 Latino parents of children under six with developmental disabilities discussed the correlation between parents who were mostly or entirely satisfied and access to a key person (usually a social worker or early interventionist) who helped them navigate the system. The advocate assisted with "finding an interpreter, acting as intermediaries between doctors and parents, helping them find financial assistance, and being emotionally supportive" (Bailey et al., 1999). Circling back to the power of caring relationships discussed in the previous section, connecting with other people in the interest of the child appears to provide satisfaction and peace to the families represented in the research. According to the research, advocates can be teachers, social workers, therapists, early interventionists, or trained special education advocates

(Burke, 2013; Hardin et al., 2009). Mirroring Bailey et al.'s (1999) findings, Hardin et al. (2009) similarly found high levels of parent satisfaction when a key person works individually with a family to secure services for their child with disabilities. The study continues to explain how personal connections between families and school and/or service providers helped parents better comprehend the evaluation and placement process (Hardin et al., 2009).

Role of Advocacy

Identified barriers between Latino caregivers and teachers suggest roadblocks to collaborative partnerships and a possible negative impact on student services and academic outcomes. As a result of one-sided decision making and other obstacles to collaboration, Latino families are often forced into advocacy to secure appropriate services (Burke, 2013; Burke, Magaña, Garcia, & Mello, 2016; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Research suggests standard practice in many schools consists of a one-sided approach to decision making, with professionals in charge of assessment, placement, and service decisions and minimal input from Latino families (Burke et al., 2016; Olivos et al., 2010; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Although these practices are not unique to Latino families, specific obstacles such as language barriers, IEP documents only in English, and a lack of effective interpretations exacerbate their negative experiences (Burke et al., 2016; Buren et al., 2018; Salas, 2004). Thus, Latino caregivers are left feeling dissatisfied with services, excluded from critical academic and social decisions concerning their children, and relegated to silent acceptance or forced to advocate (Burke, 2013; Geenen et al., 2005; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). To gain a deeper understanding of relationship dynamics between families and teachers, it is important to understand why Latino caregivers must advocate for services for their children and how advocacy efforts relate to the absence of collaboration.

Resistance to advocacy efforts. Advocacy, as defined by Burke (2013) in her study of special education advocacy training models, involves "securing appropriate educational services for children" (Burke, 2013, p. 22). Parents need support learning to navigate the system with tasks such as interpreting the jargon in an IEP and understanding their rights (Burke, 2013). Many Latino families feel they must advocate to receive appropriate services for their children (Burke, 2013; Cohen, 2013; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004), only to be met with resistance from school personnel (Burke et al., 2017; Geenen et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Hess et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2004). For instance, in a qualitative study by Shapiro et al. (2004) examining the perspectives of Latina mothers of young adults with developmental disabilities on the special education system, they found mothers recognized the need to advocate to ensure they were not ignored, to secure services, and protect their children from the impersonal bureaucracy of special education. Many of the mothers felt the special education system ignored their maternal expertise about their own child and left no room for collaborative decision-making, thus causing caregivers to switch to adversarial, advocate roles to protect their children (Shapiro et al., 2004). Research suggests Latino, Spanish-speaking caregiver input tends to be rejected or doubted by school professionals with little or no opportunities to disagree or fight for their children's services (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Harry, 1992; Hess et al., 2006; Olivos, 2004; Salas, 2004).

As a result of failed advocacy efforts, research suggests caregivers often turn to "passive resistance in the hope of demonstrating disapproval" (Harry, 1992, p. 486) or "adversarial interactions designed to ensure that their child was not neglected or ignored" (Shapiro et al., 2004, p. 46). Consequently, such behaviors did not increase parent's level and effectiveness of input in meetings, rather, many parents shut down, gave up, and withdrew (Harry, 1992; Salas,

2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Another approach to advocacy is the stance of no advocacy for fear of disrespecting school professionals and making matters worse at school (Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992). With each failed attempt at advocacy, Latino parents' concerns, ideas, and expertise were ignored, doubted, or kept hidden from school professionals, thus further compromising home-school partnerships.

Special education services are guaranteed by law and no family should have to advocate for what their children legally deserve. Legally, Latinos have the same rights as all families to get services for their children through collaborative decision-making and without the use of advocacy efforts to secure appropriate services. However, research suggests Latino families and teachers are not collaborating, advocacy efforts are perceived negatively, and students are not getting the services they require for positive academic outcomes.

Development of effective collaborative partnerships with Latino caregivers is significant. Latino communities are growing rapidly around the United States becoming a larger and more represented cultural group in the schools. The Latino population has grown by more than 40% in the past decade and constitutes more than half the population growth in the United States (Magaña, Aguinaga, & Morton, 2013). Latino families are the fastest growing minority population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) with 23.1% of children under the age of 18 (Magaña et al., 2013, p. 141). Magaña, Lopez and Machalicek (2017) developed a culturally informed advocacy intervention (Parents Taking Action), tailored to Latino families of children with autism, and found significant gains in maternal understanding between pre- and posttests. Magaña et al.'s (2017) collaborative, Latino-specific intervention fostered an increase in mothers' knowledge about autism, advocacy, rights, and ways of teaching and learning specific to their children. This example highlights the importance of

expanding the research base on Latino caregivers of children with disabilities' perceptions and engagement with collaboration to better understand the nuanced experiences of the group and develop new, culturally responsive interventions and approaches towards partnerships.

Latinos represent a historically marginalized and vulnerable community whose voices have been silenced or ignored through widespread misinformation regarding job stealing, taxes, and free health care (Ojeda et al., 2011; Valencia and Black, 2002). Home-school research involving Latino, Spanish-speaking caregivers with children with disabilities and their partnerships with schools paint a grim picture replete with language issues, deficit-based perspectives of students and families, isolation, and a dearth of caring relationships (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Stakeholders' perceptions shape attitudes and impact behaviors. Investigations into how Latino caregivers and teachers perceive family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy will provide crucial insight into how those perceptions influence behaviors; both current and future. Most importantly, the process creates a space for traditionally underrepresented caregivers from Latino cultural communities to share their experiences, vent, cheer, and tell their side of the story.

Purpose of the Study

Research linking positive student outcomes, academic achievement, and student success to family involvement with schools is abundant (Burke, 2013; Geenen et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Summers et al., 2005). One way to increase collaboration and reciprocity among Latino families and schools is to examine and compare how both groups define positive

partnerships and family engagement and to dissect the influence of culture on those definitions. Family research must include multiple perspectives from multiple stakeholders.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis to investigate how Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and school professionals define and engage in collaboration, decision-making, and family engagement. The study aimed to understand why barriers to equitable partnerships exist, how to increase satisfaction with services, and how to create an empowerment approach to collaboration for all stakeholders.

To better understand how caregivers and school professionals define and enact collaboration and advocacy, I conducted a comparative analysis of caregivers and school professionals' definitions and engagement with these constructs. In doing so, I hoped to better understand how to strengthen partnerships. Currently, we need more information on how different types of meaning making inform home-school partnerships or impact future partnerships (Burke & Goldman, 2015; Olivos et al., 2010; Valle, 2011). Limited special education research targets common challenges, areas of alignment and divergence in terms of roles, responsibilities and outcomes, and ways to reduce barriers and increase caregivers' satisfaction with services (Burke, 2016; Burke et al., 2016; Olivos, 2004; Olivos, 2009; Osher & Osher, 2002; Vega et al., 2016). A paucity of research exists that operationalizes cultural conceptions of collaboration, partnerships, or shared decision-making (Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2007; Miller et al., 2016). Therefore, this study attempted to identify, compare and operationalize culturally specific (both Latino families and teacher cultures) conceptions of family engagement, collaboration, and partnerships to create a framework for collaboration specific to all stakeholder's cultural considerations.

By asking what the meaning of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives within a cultural, school and special education context is, my aim was to reduce barriers to collaborative partnerships. I hoped to uncover commonalities and differences in an effort to create a culturally, geographically, and individually contextualized approach to collaboration that reflected the Latino caregivers and professionals' beliefs and represent all stakeholders. If we reduce barriers by redefining and increasing collaboration, we can increase the likelihood of enhanced student outcomes.

Rationale

Special education is a field with specific rules of engagement. The re-authorization of IDEA in 2004 bore new rules and expectations for families and school partnerships based on an assumption of a shared understanding. Families are expected to possess extensive and comprehensive knowledge of special education law and jargon. Caregivers must demonstrate an ability to assist in determining special education eligibility and the appropriate services for their child. Parents and school professionals are encouraged to establish equitable relationships built on trust and mutual respect. Within these complex, multifaceted rules of engagement lie an assumption that all parties involved interpret and perceive the expectations the same. This approach fails to acknowledge the influence of identity and culture on decision-making, perceptions of educational outcomes, and definitions of disability. Conversely, people who identify membership in the same ethnic group, i.e. Latino families or White teachers, are not homogenous and failure to recognize within-group differences, or treat *culture* itself as a universality, is a mistake. One's culture is not a character trait nor immutable quality of an entire group of people.

Alternative Points of View

Historically, immigrant Latino families from Spanish-speaking countries have been positioned as outsiders within American society. A large percentage of Latino, immigrant families are intentionally blocked from society's rewards and systematically kept in subordinate roles. It is because of today's political climate that special education scholars must strive to increase and include research on the experiences and perceptions of Latino families in schools. To date, much research has focused attention on ways for schools to help caregivers become more involved by "teaching" the standard rules of engagement in school communities (Aceves, 2014; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Epstein, 2010; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006). These approaches are based on the dominant cultural narrative that Latino families are 'helpless' or 'disadvantaged' because of language and cultural differences but fails to recognize ways schools need to change to shift how they define and participate in collaboration and family engagement. Dominant cultural narratives, or stories spread over time through media and other social institutions that maintain status quo (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, Adames, Keys, García-Ramírez & Paloma, 2011), silence the voices of marginalized groups by offering only one acceptable cultural orientation. Collaboration, family engagement, and truly equitable partnerships will not occur if the school environment is dominated by one cultural orientation (Osher & Osher, 2002). Kozleski et al. (2008) articulate the need for this type of research in stating, "it is critical in a comparative study that the narratives of families that are not part of the dominant culture are examined to understand the impact of institutional practices on families and their capacity to negotiate educational services for their children" (Kozleski et al., 2008, p.27).

There is a dearth of research on why barriers exist, how the different groups (families and schools) conceptualize partnerships and what partnerships should look like when accounting for both groups' ideas of collaboration**.** Consideration of multiple stakeholders' cultural perceptions of collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy will help define and illuminate new, parent-informed strategies for professionals. Identification of strategies can bridge cultural gaps in understanding by emphasizing how to work *with,* not *for* parents. This study attempted to create opportunities for Latino families and professionals to actively inform and participate in positive and equitable partnerships in the field of special education.

When parents and teachers have positive perceptions of one another and families are engaged, positive outcomes occur with increased student academic success (Miller et al., 2016). However, if there is a mismatch between parents and teachers' perceptions of collaboration and positive relationships, there may be negative consequences (Diken, 2006; Miller et al., 2016). Therefore, to pinpoint facilitators that may increase family engagement and dissolve barriers between caregivers and professionals, we need to examine both areas of alignment and areas of divergence between stakeholders. This study explored how the meaning of family engagement and collaboration may differ from different perspectives and how those definitions inform and shape the dynamics of home-school relationships.

This study compares school professionals and caregivers' perspectives on collaboration and partnerships and how those constructs can be operationalized. For the sake of comparison, the following research questions were explored:

Research Questions

1. What are the expectations and experiences around family engagement for Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers in an urban, Catholic elementary school?

2. How do the Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers define and engage in collaboration?

3. How do teachers advocate and how are these efforts understood by the Latina mothers?

II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis that investigates how Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and special education teachers define and engage in collaboration, decision-making, advocacy, and family engagement. The study aims to understand what factors contribute to the construction of barriers that inhibit home-school partnerships, how to increase Latino caregivers' satisfaction with services, and how to create an empowerment approach to collaboration for all stakeholders. Friend and Cook's (2010) influential body of research on *collaboration* define the construct as "the style professionals select to employ based on mutual goals; parity; shared responsibility for key decisions; shared accountability for outcomes; shared resources; and the development of trust, respect, and a sense of community" (Friend & Cook, 2010, p. 3). Friend and Cook (2010) focus on the role of professionals when defining collaboration; however, this study explores and compares the collaborative style of caregivers and professionals to identify areas of alignment for future practice.

Identifying obstacles to collaboration and family engagement is significant. Research suggests increased family engagement with schools and collaborative partnerships between caregivers and teachers leads to positive academic outcomes (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2007; Summers et al., 2005). In this study, *families and caregivers* are defined as biological or adoptive parents, foster parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, or anyone who "provide a significant level of care and support to a child" (Osher & Osher, 2002, p. 48). This study of home-school relationships is situated at the crossroads of three bodies of literature: families from nondominant cultural communities' experiences, Latino caregivers' experiences, and the role of advocacy in Latino communities. The review of

literature will begin by exploring the equitable collaboration framework and how it applies to this study (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Successively, the next two areas of research will be reviewed and linked to central themes. Next, literature examining caregivers' interpretations of advocacy efforts within the special education system, with a spotlight on the experiences of Latino families, will be reviewed. The aim of this literature review is to analyze and dissect similar themes across three bodies of research.

Theoretical Framework

Equitable collaboration framework. Conceptual frameworks provide a tentative theory of the constructs you wish to examine and guide the research design and process (Maxwell, 2013). Implementation of a grounded theory approach calls for development of new theory as it emerges from the recursive, multi-staged data collection process. However, a pre-existing theoretical framework is useful in structuring your results and with extending existing theory. The equitable collaboration conceptual framework was developed by Ishimaru et al. (2016) to investigate and reimagine the way families and school professionals engage in relationship building. The framework is grounded in sociological theory and draws from community engagement research (Ishimaru, 2014; Stone, 2001; Warren, Hong, Leung Rubin, & Sychitkokhong Uy, 2009). Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) study belongs to a nascent body of critical engagement literature. The equitable collaboration framework is based on the premise that educational institutions often ignore the cultural and social resources of families from nondominant cultural communities thus creating boundaries between families and school professionals that can influence disengagement from caregivers (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Critical engagement literature contends conventional school engagement efforts often ignore families' cultural and social resources (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Warren et al., 2009; Yosso, 2005)

and utilization of an equitable collaborative framework to compare experiences is useful in creating more equitable relationships (Ishimaru, 2014; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Valle, 2011). Currently, family research in the field of special education has yet to examine or compare the home-school experiences of Latino caregivers with Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) equitable collaboration framework. This study introduces research from the unique perspective of Latino parents of children with disabilities to contribute new insight towards increasing equity between stakeholder groups.

Four fundamental components characterize equitable collaboration: (a) the goal for systematic change, (b) families in equal leadership roles, (c) a focus on educational change as a political process connected to social issues in the broader community, and (d) key strategies to build capacity and relationships (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The last component, strategies for building capacity and relationships, stems from Bourdieu's (1986) cultural and social capital theory that contends increased social relationships, knowledge, resources, and networks can increase opportunities and access. However, Ishimaru et al. (2016) argue Bourdieu's (1986) theory reinforces current social hierarchies by maintaining status quo and inequalities. Bourdieu's (1986) theory upholds the knowledge of the middle class as valuable capital in a hierarchical society with formal schooling as the ticket to the middle or upper classes (Yosso, 2005). Some researchers suggest this theory underpins notions on how to help "disadvantaged" students of color succeed by replicating white, middle class paths to success (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005). As such, some research asserts that attention must be paid to the context of capacity and relationship building to avoid reinforcing established, hierarchical norms (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005) by examining the level of

interventions, power, and directionality of interactions (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The equitable collaboration framework is built on this premise with three, key principles as its foundation.

The three principles I will use to compare, contrast, and extend during data analysis are (a) levels of intervention, (b) power dynamics, and (c) directionality of relationships. First, the levels of intervention principle dissect forms of engagement established in collaborative relationships by distinguishing between individual versus collective engagement. Individual engagement efforts emphasize parent training and advocacy on behalf of an individual child (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Parent education programs that prepare caregivers for one-on-one parent teacher conferences and train families on how to advocate for their child exemplify individual engagement interactions. Collective engagement efforts seek to bring caregivers together to share resources, knowledge, and support (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Community based organizations, such as parent advocacy groups, offer a platform for collective engagement interactions. Research suggests collective efforts to engage families together is more culturally responsive; especially for families from nondominant cultural communities (Burke et al., 2016; Cohen, 2013; Warren et al., 2009). Ishimaru et al. (2016) believe underrepresented families provide valuable information and support to each other with a collective sharing of resources. According to this perspective, these collaborative interactions facilitate increased family engagement and advocacy. By shifting the focus from individual forms of engagement to collective forms of engagement, advocacy efforts are extended beyond the approach of helping only your child.

Second, the power dynamics principle explores the notion of unilateral power, or power *over* someone else, versus relational power, or power held *with* someone else (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Relational power can affect institutional change because the act of families and school professionals engaged together towards a common goal increases access to resources and lowers

families' dependence on outside agencies (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Mueller, Milian & Lopez, 2010; Olivos, 2009; Sauer & Lavani, 2017).

Third, the directionality of relationships principle measures and categorizes the reciprocal nature of home-school partnerships as unidirectional (one way) or reciprocal (back and forth) (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The equitable collaboration framework describes the direction of a relationship and provides a framework to gauge whether it functions from the top-down (uni-directional) or is reciprocal; incorporating and valuing families' specific skills, resources, and "culturally embedded knowledge" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p. 859). The authors posit that caregivers bring specific, cultural ways of knowing (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) and intellectual resources that have the potential to inform and transform institutional practices. Additionally, partnerships only benefit from inclusion of culturally specific skills sets when relationships are reciprocal (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

The equitable collaboration framework is a lens to view interactions between groups. I utilized this lens to examine the relationships between Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and teachers. It is not enough to study how families engage with schools; we must explore the nuances of the interactions with the context of the caregivers' culture, the culture of the school, and the context of the broader community. The equitable collaboration framework provides a lens to investigate various dimensions of relationships and engagement to examine the "personal sociocultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about appropriate cultural outcomes" (Yosso, 2005) that influence families' engagement with schools and schools' notions of what family engagement should entail.

Families from Nondominant Cultural Communities

Throughout this study I use the term *families from nondominant cultural and linguistic communities* to represent people from non-white or non-English speaking cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This term includes, but is not limited to, families from racial, immigrant/refugee, and other communities of color, who have struggled with marginalization as a result of the dominant culture's policies and practices (Bal & Trainor, 2016; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Educational research has shown an imbalance of power between families from nondominant cultural and linguistic communities and school professionals that tends to isolate parents from the school community (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; deFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Harry et al., 2005; Jung, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2004; Trainor, 2010).

Studies of white, middle class families' experiences with the special education process and their perceptions concerning teacher relationships do not necessarily represent the experiences of families from nondominant cultural communities. A schism exists between the experiences of families from nondominant cultural and linguistic communities and those from dominant, White and English-speaking, cultural communities. White families' levels of satisfaction with special education services, efforts to advocate, and partnerships with school personnel have been well described and studied (Summers et al., 2005; Underwood, 2010; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013) but whether these findings mirror the experiences of families from nondominant cultural communities is debatable. Identification of specific barriers that characterize the experiences of families from nondominant cultural communities, specifically Latino families, is critical to understand how caregivers in these communities define and engage in collaboration. Insight into the nuanced experiences of Latino, Spanish-speaking caregivers

with collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy warrants a targeted review of literature focused on the intersection of three, specific bodies of literature: experiences of families from nondominant cultural communities, experiences of Latino caregivers, and special education advocacy in Latino communities.

First, to increase understanding of racial, cultural, language, and socioeconomic variables on home-school partnerships between caregivers and special education personnel, several studies have called for a critical examination of families from nondominant cultural communities' experiences with collaboration (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Geenen et al., 2005; Lo, 2008; Wilson, 2015). Literature in this area provides a broad overview of perceptions and experiences across and within various groups of caregivers from nondominant cultural communities. A review of these studies begins the conversation around the role of barriers to collaboration and their impact on relationships.

Subsequently, to narrow the focus and search for common themes, a review of literature specific to Latino caregivers' experiences with schools is necessary. Studies of families from nondominant cultural communities cannot identify the distinct, culturally situated experiences of Latino, Spanish-speaking caregivers. For instance, barriers such as language and communication, while not unique to Latino communities, play a large role in preventing home-school partnerships due to the prevalence of Spanish-only speakers in the home. Thus, inclusion of this body of literature in the review provides a more focused synthesis of current research.

Lastly, to contextualize experiences with advocacy within the Latino community and how efforts to advocate have impacted relationships and perceived levels of support, a discussion of advocacy literature is included in the review. Some studies suggest Latino family engagement is impacted by how caregivers' efforts to advocate are received by school personnel (Balcazar et

al., 2011; Shapiro et al., 2014); however, further analysis of the literature is necessary to substantiate and expand on these assertions. The review begins with a synthesis of literature concerning Latino caregivers' experiences with collaboration, narrows the discussion to specific literature around Latino caregivers' experiences with cultural, communication, relationship, and support barriers in schools, and concludes with a focus on one dimension of collaboration and home-school relationships- advocacy. Instances of cultural, language, relationship, and support barriers impacting collaborative relationships are identified throughout the literature review. Because similar barriers are identified across the three bodies of literature, these themes inform the framework.

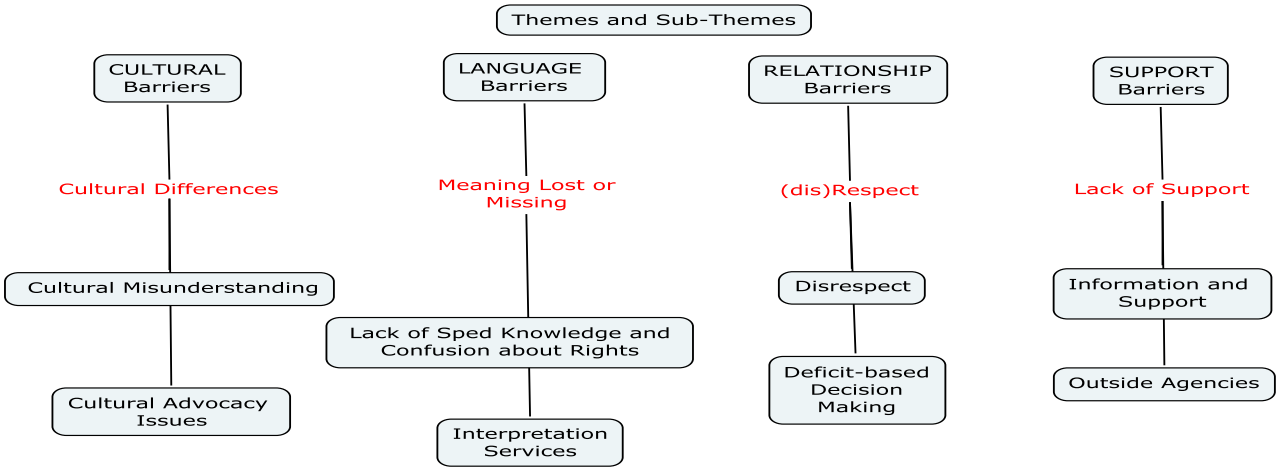

Figure 1. Model of themes and systemic barriers identified within reported studies.

Contextualizing the Experiences of Latino Families

Notwithstanding intra-cultural similarities within Latino cultural groups, each community and every family have unique, individual and diverse experiences. The perspectives, experiences, and possible challenges faced by a middle-class Latina mother born in the United States and a lower income, immigrant Latina mother who has lived in the United States for a few years (Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004) are likely varied with some similarities and some differences; and all unique. This diversity, coupled with a deficiency of in-depth analysis of nuanced challenges faced across, and within cultural groups, calls for further research. Therefore, the next body of research looks at the contextualized experiences of Latino caregivers and the impact of culture and language on partnerships with school personnel.

Latino Caregivers Experience with Collaboration

Current research on home-school partnerships. Similar to other cultural communities from nondominant backgrounds, immigrant, Latino families' cultural norms, beliefs, opportunities, and life experiences dictate how they perceive and experience the special education system (Cohen et al., 2014; Olivos, 2009). The experiences of immigrant, Latino families represented in research on home-school partnerships reveal a plethora of issues spanning from language barriers to a deficit of caring relationships between parents and school professionals (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Cohen, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Olivos, 2004; Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004). A handful of studies present positive and satisfied caregivers with descriptions of facilitators for successful partnerships that include frequent and comprehensive communication between home and school and having a key person in the school as an advocate for the student and their family (Bailey et al., 1999, Hardin et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2002;

Hughes et al., 2008). Before delving into specifics concerning challenges to successful collaboration, a glimpse into the overarching issues plaguing home-school relationships gives the necessary background context for analysis.

Challenges to Collaborative Relationships

Many immigrant, Latino families in home-school research harbor feelings of alienation and isolation from school culture and professional partnerships (Carreón et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Four central challenges that attribute to Latino caregivers' sense of alienation from school partnerships are misunderstood cultural beliefs, poor communication, disrespectful school personnel and a lack of information of support (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Bailey et al., 1999; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Carreón et al., 2005; Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Holloway, 2014; Geenen et al., 2001; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Olivos, 2004; Olivos, 2009; Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Each challenge represents a barrier to the establishment of equitable, sustainable home-school partnerships.

Table 1

Cultural Barriers: Study Characteristics and Themes Identified within Reported Studies

Author/Year	Participants	Key Findings
Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013	Mexican Immigrant Parents	Four interrelated constructs to strengthen family 1. family norms and practice 2. goals/motivation 3. work/education 4. transmitting and maintaining Latino culture
Cardoso & Thompson, 2010	Latino Immigrant Families	Identified four domains related to resilience amongst Latino immigrant families 1. individual characteristics 2. family strengths 3. cultural factors 4. community supports Because Latino culture focuses on **collective** not individual experience, everything must be interpreted within that context
Cohen, 2013	Latino Families	Interconnectedness must be honored and reinforced by welcoming all family members to school events and meetings Latino caregivers want educators to focus more on their children's social skills instead of increasing independent living skills
Olivos et al., 2010	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families	Tensions between bicultural families and school professionals can be alleviated through research that examines differing, cultural beliefs about disability and child development Without attention to cultural interpretations, misunderstandings and efforts to advocate will continue to characterize bicultural home-school relationships and create obstacles to collaboration

Cultural Barriers

Culturally situated beliefs. Culture is an amorphous construct with dynamic, shifting properties specific to groups of people and contextualized within common experiences

(Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). As such, although Latino families hail from a variety of diverse nations around the world, research has identified recurring, common beliefs that govern Latino caregivers' actions and perspectives on family and child development (Burke et al., 2016; Cohen, 2013). To identify culturally relevant supports for Latino families with children with intellectual disabilities and enhance advocacy efforts, Cohen (2013) explored culturally situated beliefs common in the Latino community. The study targeted specific culturally situated beliefs about family and child development when a child has a disability and identified. The four culturally situated beliefs are *bien educado, añoñar, familismo,* and *respeto* (Cohen, 2013). *Familismo* is the belief that family relationships come before the individual and the family members are committed to one another, interconnected, for emotional and physical support (Cohen, 2013). Cohen (2013) argues this notion of interconnectedness must be honored and reinforced during IEP meetings, parent teacher conferences, or whenever professionals work with Latino families by welcoming all family members to school events and meetings. *Bien educado* and *respeto* refer to beliefs concerning child development. *Bien educado* and *respeto* are beliefs that children must be well-mannered and show respect to both themselves and adults (Cohen, 2013). Cohen (2013) further identified the role of *añoñar,* or the belief in nurturing and pampering children. Cohen (2013) found many families extend the period of *añoñar* for children with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, Latino caregivers wanted educators to focus more on their children's social skills, or *bien educado* and *respeto,* instead of increasing independent living skills (Cohen, 2013).

Comparable to Cohen (2013), in their attempt to locate practices and beliefs that promote Mexican immigrant families' well-being, Ayón and Quiroz Villa (2013) found seven interconnected dimensions to family norms, grounded in Latino culture, that strengthened

families and influenced expectations of others. Cardoso and Thompson (2010) similarly identified four domains related to resilience amongst Latino immigrant families; individual characteristics, family strengths, cultural factors, and community supports. They discovered culture played a unique role within each domain by fostering a sense of identity that increased resilience (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). They assert an essential piece of Latino culture is the emphasis on collective, versus individual, experiences and professionals should interpret perspectives and interactions within that context (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Olivos et al. (2010) complement Cardoso and Thompson's (2010) assertion by arguing for a holistic view and approach with families that incorporates social, historical, and cultural contexts. Olivos et al. (2010) claim tensions between bicultural families and school professionals can be alleviated through research that examines differing, cultural beliefs about disability and child development. Without attention to cultural interpretations, misunderstandings concerning services, partnerships, decision-making, and efforts to advocate will continue to characterize bicultural home-school relationships and create obstacles to collaboration (Olivos et al., 2010). Specifically, for Latino families, research suggests communication barriers present a significant roadblock to collaborative partnerships.

Table 2

Communication and Language Barriers: Study Characteristics and Themes Identified within Reported Studies

Author/Year	Participants	Key Findings
Alvarez, McHatton & Correa, 2005	Puerto Rican and Mexican Mothers	Documents not translated into Spanish, a lack of bilingual staff in the schools, and scarce availability of effective interpretation services
Bailey et al, 1999	Latino Parents	Scare interpretive services and translated documents
Blacher et al, 1997	Immigrant, Mexican Mothers	Language barriers can be linked to depression and a possible negative side effect is damage to caregivers' self-esteem and mental health
Blanche et al., 2015	Latino Parents	Inadequate number of professionals are trained to understand family values, cultural beliefs and language Families had difficulty accessing services due to language barriers and lack of bilingual resources
Orozco, 2008	Immigrant Mexican Families	When children act as interpreters for parents and grandparents, the traditional roles are reversed and under minded
Ramirez, 2003	Latino Mothers and Fathers	School board meetings held in a majority immigrant, Spanish speaking school without interpretation services
Salas, 2004	Mexican American Mothers	90% of the families in the school were Spanish speaking and 80% of the teachers were White and not bilingual Interpretation services were spotty, if available at all, and documents often didn't go home translated in Spanish

Communication Barriers

Challenges with communication between families and schools go beyond, and include, issues with interpreters and translated documents. A *communication challenge* is present when there exists no "bridge between written and oral communication differences between mostly

English speaking professionals and mostly Spanish-speaking parents" (Hardin et al.,2009, p.97) and when families are not "contacted often and kept abreast of their child's progress" (Hughes et al., 2002, p. 14). Several caregivers complained of documents not translated into Spanish, a lack of bilingual staff in the schools, and scarce availability of effective interpretation services, if any at all (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Parents described feelings of shame and embarrassment stemming from professionals' attitudes towards language use (Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Additionally, many caregivers expressed frustration and confusion with the use of special education jargon during IEP meetings (Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Some studies discovered a general satisfaction with implementation of services but confusion as to how their child got the services, the purpose of the IEP document, and the referral process (Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002). Last, a third recurring communication challenge is the lack of information about services, special education, suggestions for home activities, and outside resources (Bailey et al., 1999; Hardin et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2004).

Language barriers. Language barriers between caregivers whose native language is Spanish and school professionals can take many forms. In a study by Salas (2004) of Mexican-American mothers of children with developmental disabilities in the rural Southwest, 90% of the families in the school were Spanish speaking and 80% of the teachers were White and not bilingual. As a result, interpretation services were spotty, if available at all, and documents often didn't go home translated in Spanish (Salas, 2004). Alvarez McHatton and Correa (2005), Bailey et al. (1999), and Hardin et al. (2009), discovered a similar situation of scare interpretive services

and translated documents while Ramirez (2003) described school board meetings held in a majority immigrant, Spanish speaking school without interpretation services.

Interpretation services. Orozco (2008), in her study of immigrant, Mexican families from low socioeconomic backgrounds employed mainly as farm workers, revealed the effect of language barriers on the fundamental family system when children must assume the role of interpreter for their parents. The study explains, "This situation can be particularly difficult because the traditional Hispanic culture holds its elders – grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles – in high esteem with a deep sense of respect…When children are placed in positions of power over the parents, the traditional parental role is undermined, causing damage to the family system" (Orozco, 2008). Orozco's (2008) research and a study by Blacher, Lopez, Shapiro, and Fusco (1997) examining depression in immigrant, Mexican mothers with children with intellectual disabilities, demonstrate the possible negative side effects of language barriers on caregivers' self-esteem and mental health.

Blanche, Diaz, Barretto and Cermak (2015) examined why autism is often diagnosed later and less often in Latino families by exploring the daily experiences of Latino families including household routines, coping strategies, and utilization of disability services. Their study revealed an inadequate number of professionals are trained to understand family values, cultural beliefs and language (Blanche et al., 2015). As such, results indicated families had difficulty accessing services due to language barriers and lack of bilingual resources (Blanche et al., 2015).

Table 3

Relationship Barriers: Study Characteristics and Themes Identified within Reported Studies

Author/Year	Participants	Key Findings
Alvarez, McHatton, & Correa, 2005	Puerto Rican and Mexican Mothers	Caregivers generally felt doctors and school professionals viewed their family through a deficit lens, not just their child Experienced discrimination against the family from the school and medical community
Olivos, 2009	Latino Families	There exists an implicit bias against Latino families based on an incorrect assumption that all Latino caregivers are passive and wish to defer all professional decisions to school personnel These biases impact special educators' relationships with communities that are different from theirs and reinforce a deficit-based approach to collaboration
Rueda et al., 2005	Latino Mothers	Most caregivers felt professionals didn't emphasize their child's strengths while underestimating their abilities and focused only on deficits to guide decision making
Salas, 2004	Mexican American Mothers	Inflexibility with time, coupled with perceived *attitudes* that parents were wasting the school's time, contribute to parental perceptions of disrespect Disrespect as a *view* that "mothers who speak another language are unable or do not want to understand" (p.190).
Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2007	Pre-service teachers in Latino community and Latino parents	Structured engagement leads to the forging of friendships (*amistades)* between stakeholders Communication is enhanced when educators learn to understand and respect how families interpret their role in schooling

Relationship Barriers

Relationship building between Latino families and teachers is the topic of research by Sutterby, Rubin, and Abrego (2007) who argue structured engagement leads to the forging of friendships (*amistades)* between stakeholders. Furthermore, they propose communication is

enhanced when educators learn to understand and respect how families interpret their role in schooling (Sutterby et al., 2007). Based on this premise, relationships are strengthened when teachers value families, show respect through acknowledgement of caregivers' viewpoints and make an effort to learn Latino families' culturally situated beliefs. However, a review of literature demonstrates opposing experiences and incongruous behaviors from special education professionals.

Deficit-based perspectives. Harry and Klingner (2007) deconstruct the notion of deficit and disability from a perspective not dissimilar to Gutiérrez and Rogoff's (2003) rejection of culture as a state of being *within* an individual. Harry and Klingner (2007) argue that once IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, the main eligibility criterion for legally mandated services in schools was "*proof of intrinsic deficit"* (Harry & Klingner, 2007, p. 16). Latino families in this literature review (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Olivos, 2009; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002) describe IEP meetings and conferences that focus solely on their child's deficits without mention of strengths or accomplishments. Rueda et al. (2005), in their examination of Latina mothers of young adults with developmental disabilities, found most caregivers felt professionals didn't emphasize their child's strengths while underestimating their abilities, and focused only on deficits to guide decision making. Similarly, Alvarez McHatton and Correa (2005) in their interviews with Mexican and Puerto Rican single mothers of young children with disabilities, found caregivers generally felt doctors and school professionals viewed their family through a deficit lens, not just their child. A small group of caregivers described situations that went beyond conversations of deficit to outright discrimination against the family from the school and medical community (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al., 1999; Salas, 2004).

Valencia and Black (2002), in their formative piece on debunking myths around Mexican-Americans, argue many professionals believe the myth that Mexican-Americans don't value education and blame students and families for academic failure. Families are considered deficits rather than additions to school teams, and therefore their knowledge is not always valued (Valencia & Black, 2002). The article claims these myths are reinforced through media, scholarly articles, and doctoral theses (Valencia & Black, 2002). Although this piece is fifteen years old, it proves to be apropos in this critical era of immigration rights. I question whether scholarly articles reinforce myths about Latino families, but instead attempt to conduct research to prove just the opposite; Latino families have skills, knowledge, and insight to contribute to school communities and highly value their children's right to education.

One such study by Olivos (2009) takes a critical approach to perceptions of Latino families by exposing preconceived notions held by special education staff and Latino families about one another. Olivos (2009) asserts there exists an implicit bias against Latino families based on an incorrect assumption that all Latino caregivers are passive and wish to defer all professional decisions to school personnel. Subsequently, these biases impact special educators' relationships with communities that are different from theirs and reinforce a deficit-based approach to collaboration (Olivos, 2009). In addition to educators' deficit-based assumptions about Latino families, research indicates many Latino caregivers also feel disrespected (Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004).

Disrespectful school personnel. Comprehension of families' experiences with disrespect requires a contextualized definition that captures and illuminates the depth and breadth of damage caused to family-school relationships. Salas (2004) describes disrespect as a *view* that "mothers who speak another language are unable or do not want to understand" (p.190), an

attitude that "negates and rejects the skills and resources that these parents have or may want to offer" (p. 190), and *behaviors* comprised of "condescending practices" (Salas, 2004, p.190). Inflexibility with time, coupled with perceived *attitudes* that parents were wasting the school's time, contribute to parental perceptions of disrespect (Hardin et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Lastly, the school's *view* that hiring bilingual staff is unnecessary even though more than half the families spoke Spanish was considered a sign of disrespect by some Latino caregivers (Bailey et al., 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2003).

Table 4

Support Barriers: Study Characteristics and Themes Identified within Reported Studies

Author/Year	Participants	Key Findings
Balcazar et al., 2011	Latino Families	Latino families often have a lack of access to relevant information, knowledge about available services, knowledge of American Sign Language, and lack of entitlement to community services
Blacher et al., 1997	Immigrant, Mexican Mothers	Some mothers lost touch with their extended families because they had a child with an intellectual disability causing isolation or "involuntary detachment"
Blanche et al., 2015	Latina Mothers	Latino families had difficulty dealing with the disability diagnosis and struggled with stigma, isolation, and feelings of judgement by others in the community
Cohen et al., 2014	Latino Families	Little is known about how informal and formal supports impact Latino families' quality of life Current supports offered in schools are often not enough to help Latino families feel included, valued and satisfied with services.
Ramirez, 2008	Latino Mothers and Fathers	The move to America has isolated caregivers from their extended families, and thus, their systems of support
Shapiro et al., 2004	Latina Mothers	Many families felt cut off from school events either from a lack of translated documents or omission of any communication from the school
Zuniga, 2011	Latino Families	Within many Latino, immigrant communities in the United States, the extended nuclear family, equipped with collective interdependent systems of support and resources, becomes crucial to survival

Support Barriers

Cohen et al. (2014), in their investigation into types of supports and their relationship to life quality of Latino families, posit little is known about how informal and formal supports impact Latino families' quality of life. They generally define informal supports as family and

friends and formal supports as assistance from institutions such as schools or churches (Cohen et al., 2014). Moreover, although select research on Latino families' experiences with special education presents Latino caregivers' perceptions of support, it often excludes the type and frequency of support. Notwithstanding, research suggests current supports offered in schools are often not enough to help Latino families feel included, valued and satisfied with services.

Lack of special education knowledge. Confusion over special education services was another issue that frequently emerged in the home-school research on immigrant, Latino families. Many caregivers expressed frustration and worry concerning confusion over what services their child was receiving, the nature and purpose of an IEP meeting and IEP document, and the types of therapy administered throughout the school day (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). In the research, these fears and misunderstandings were often attributed to language and the lack of effective interpretation and translation services (Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Balcazar et al. (2011) conducted a case study with Latino, immigrant families who have children with disabilities to determine oppressive conditions and actions towards wellness conditions. They discovered a lack of access to relevant information, knowledge about available services, knowledge of American Sign Language, and lack of entitlement to community services (Balcazar et al., 2011).

Isolation. *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* defines isolation as, "the condition of being isolated" and "stresses detachment from others, often involuntarily" (Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isolation). This definition highlights the notion of isolation as something done *to* someone or as a state of being because of life circumstances. A consistent, emerging issue for many of the Latino caregivers in the home-school research is

isolation as a result of life circumstances (Blacher et al., 1997; Blanche et al., 2015; Carreón et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Isolation resulting from communication and language barriers materialized in both Harry's (1992) and Shapiro et al.'s (2004) studies who discovered many families felt cut off from school events either from a lack of translated documents or omission of any communication from the schools. Mothers who traditionally speak up, ask questions, and visit with teachers, described feeling isolated from conversations and opportunities to form relationships with school professionals because of their limited English language skills (Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004).

The last two manifestations of isolation are associated with the Latino community's cultural construct *familismo*. Harkening back to Gutiérrez and Rogoff's (2003) notion of ethnic cultural communities sharing similar ways of knowing and experiences with cultural phenomenon, many people in the Latino cultural community place family at the center of all life decisions with a deep sense of familial commitment and identity (Hughes et al., 2002; Zuniga, 2011). Within many Latino, immigrant communities in the United States, the extended nuclear family, equipped with collective interdependent systems of support and resources, becomes crucial to survival (Zuniga, 2011). For some families in the home-school research, the move to America has isolated caregivers from their extended families, and thus, their systems of support (Carreón et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2008). Blacher et al.'s (1997) study of Latina mothers and depression revealed how some mothers lost touch with their extended families because they had a child with an intellectual disability thereby causing isolation or "involuntary detachment" (Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/isolation). Blanche et al. (2015) found Latino families with children with autism often had difficulty dealing with the diagnosis and struggled with stigma, isolation, and feelings of judgement by others in the community.

Table 5

Special Education Latino Advocacy: Study Characteristics and Themes Identified within Reported Studies

Author/Year	Participants	Key Findings
Balcazar et al., 2011	Latino Families	Parent to parent advocacy groups can increase Latino caregivers' special education knowledge and empowerment
Burke, 2013	Families of children with disabilities	Author recommends implementation of advocacy programs tailored to culturally situated Latino beliefs
Burke and Goldman, 2018	Latino Families	Informal efforts to advocate through building rapport and relationships with families versus formal advocacy efforts through schools or clinics proved to be more successful and culturally relevant
Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families	Parents want caring teachers, more communication, and school professionals that engage with families Parents want to be involved in conversations about services and key decisions about their children Caregivers did not feel accepted as full partners and described an existing tension between passive compliance and becoming advocates for their children
Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000	Families of children with disabilities	Authors recommend an increase in professional development programs aimed at examining educators' cultural assumptions and biases
Magaña et al., 2017	Latino Mothers	Culturally-based advocacy interventions specifically geared towards Latino communities are feasible and increase parent's knowledge of autism
Mueller et al., 2010	Latina Mothers	Parent to parent advocacy groups have proven successful in creating family-like atmospheres rich in resources and support
Olivos, 2009	Latino Families	Author describes three levels of advocacy, or 'reactions' within Latino communities

		Caregivers either react on a survival level, exploratory level or on an assertiveness knowing level
Sauer & Lalvani, 2017	Families of children with disabilities	Authors recommend shifting special education advocacy away from individually-focused advocacy efforts towards collective, grassroots activism
Shapiro et al., 2004	Latina Mothers	Efforts to advocate are often met with resistance, and Latino caregivers are dismissed or viewed as adversarial

Advocacy Literature

Families and special education advocacy. A fundamental study by Hess, Molina, and Kozleski (2006) features several key concerns of families with special education advocacy and decision making. The researchers discovered parents want caring teachers, more communication, and school professionals that engage in conversations with families about services and key decisions about their children (Hess et al., 2006). Caregivers did not feel accepted as full partners and described an existing tension between passive compliance and becoming advocates for their children (Hess et al., 2006). Families described conflicting accounts of empowerment and advocacy on behalf of their child and moments of defeat with a sense that something had been done to their family (Hess et al., 2006). This study exemplifies general, broad parental concerns with home-school partnerships and advocacy. However, as detailed earlier in this review, research suggests Latino families experience few moments of empowerment despite efforts to advocate to secure appropriate services for their child (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). In a qualitative study of twelve special education advocates who work mainly with families from nondominant cultural and linguistic communities, Burke and Goldman (2018) found advocacy barriers and supports specific to the community. Informal efforts to advocate through building rapport and relationships with families versus formal

advocacy efforts through schools or clinics proved to be more successful and culturally relevant (Burke & Goldman, 2018). As such, a contextualized review of advocacy literature focused on the Latino family experience is warranted. This final body of literature mirrors similar themes to the previous topics with identified cultural, communication, relationship, and support barriers impacting home-school partnerships.

Latino families and advocacy. Alienation and isolation from parents in similar situations, coupled with limited access to culturally competent service providers, impact Latino caregivers' participation in advocacy efforts (Balcazar et al., 2011; Blacher et al., 1997; Blanche et al., 2015; Maganã et al., 2017; Hess et al., 2006). Olivos (2009) describes three levels of advocacy, or 'reactions' within Latino communities. He found caregivers either react on a survival level by responding with *tell me what I need to know and do,* or on an exploratory level asking *what skills and knowledge do I need to learn?,* or on an assertiveness knowing level questioning *what are my rights and what do I need to do to exercise my rights and get results?* (Olivos, 2009). However, efforts to advocate are often met with resistance, and Latino caregivers are dismissed or viewed as adversarial (Harry, 1992; Harry, 2008; Shapiro et al., 2004).

Recommendations for future advocacy in Latino communities. In response to the realities described above, recent research has delved into best practices to increase successful outcomes for Latino families (Balcazar et al., 2011; Burke, 2013; Burke et al., 2016; Cohen, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Magaña et al., 2017). Current studies recommend implementation of advocacy programs tailored to Latino family culturally situated beliefs (Burke, 2013; Burke et al., 2016; Burke & Goldman, 2018; Cohen, 2013; Magaña et al., 2018). Other studies endorse professional development programs aimed at examining educators' cultural assumptions and biases (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000) while others posit the necessity to shift special

education advocacy away from individually-focused advocacy efforts towards a collective, grassroots activism (Sauer & Lavani, 2017). Research has found parent to parent advocacy groups have proven successful in creating family-like atmospheres rich in resources and support (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Mueller et al., 2010) that increase Latino caregivers' special education knowledge and empowerment (Balcazar et al., 2011; Burke et al., 2016; Magaña et al., 2017). Such moves towards collective, collaborative, informal supports and resources within the Latino community exemplify possible paths towards culturally relevant and supportive methods of advocacy for Latino caregivers of children with disabilities.

Summary

Home-school relationships influence participation with school events and advocacy for services. Research shows barriers to forming collaborative relationships between Latino caregivers and school personnel are common (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al, 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004) Specifically, Latino family research outlines challenges to collaboration, such as the presence of communication and language barriers (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al, 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004); relationship barriers (Bailey et al., 1999; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Salas, 2004); and barriers to advocacy (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Carreón et al., 2005; Harry, 1992; Hardin et al., 2009; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). Furthermore, many studies identify problems with the lack of proper interpreters, lack of awareness of cultural norms and customs, and a lack of respect as contributing factors to poor relationship building and. miscommunications between families and schools (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Bailey et al, 1999; Carreón et al., 2005; Hardin et al., 2009; Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Orozco,

2008; Ramirez, 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2004). These research findings support the necessity for increased studies that explore the relationships among barriers to collaboration between Latino caregivers and school personnel, family engagement, and advocacy.

Notwithstanding evidence of positive school outcomes resulting from parental engagement, the rise of Latino cultural communities in America, the increased representation of Latino children in special education, failing collaborative partnerships between Latino caregivers and school professionals, and the fundamental role of culture in shaping one's beliefs on educational-related issues, disparities remain in home-school literature. There is a dearth of investigative studies that compare Latino families' and school professionals' distinct interpretations and expectations with collaboration, partnerships, and family engagement. Furthermore, little research compares how both Latino caregivers and teachers operationalize these constructs and how their actions impact satisfaction with services and their relationship. This study provides specific, culturally situated experiences with, and perceptions of, collaboration, partnerships, family engagement and advocacy to help refine our understanding of the constructs, address discrepancies, and move towards empowered approaches to collaboration.

III: METHODS

This study implemented a qualitative research design to compare Latino parents of children with disabilities and teachers' expectations and experiences with family engagement in schools. Furthermore, the study examined differences and similarities between caregivers and teachers' definitions and participation in collaboration and decision-making with an emphasis on the role of advocacy efforts by Latino caregivers and how those efforts are understood by professionals in schools. Throughout the comparative analysis, culture, language, and knowledge of disability were factored into interpretation of caregivers' experiences as first and second-generation Latino parents working with the special education system.

Research Design

Qualitative method. Qualitative research is the process of meaning making. Using the researcher as the key instrument, studies address the meaning of various problems specific to people through inductive and deductive reasoning, the collection of data in a naturalistic setting that is familiar and sensitive to individuals studied, and include multiple perspectives, thus reflecting participants' voices in the final analysis (Creswell, 2013). We employ qualitative research to understand participants' interpretations of events, the contexts within which they act, and how that context influences their actions (Maxwell, 2013). The intent of qualitative research is to generate results that improve existing practices by addressing overlooked problems in formats that are easily understood by the people being studied as well as others in the academic or educational world (Maxwell, 2013).

With a constructivist, grounded theory approach to analysis (Charmaz, 2014), using initial focus groups, two rounds of semi-structured, individual interviews, and observations with detailed field notes, this study identified emerging themes regarding teachers and Latino

caregivers' expectations, experiences and engagement with school partnerships, decision-making, and services (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). During fall semester 2018, I conducted interviews with both caregivers and school professionals to gain a unique, individualized understanding of home-school partnerships and satisfaction levels, to compare how both groups define and engage in collaboration and decision-making, and to shed light on the diverse and varied types of interactions that shape perceptions of collaboration (Trainor & Graue, 2014). I chose a grounded theory approach to situate the voices and experiences of participants at the core of the research with their stories driving and guiding emerging themes and theories.

Researcher as Instrument

Researcher positionality and reflexivity. In qualitative research, researcher reflexivity refers to the reflective, critical writing that occurs before, during, and after a study's completion. Reflexive practices are dynamic and meant to inform and influence research methods throughout a study. Researcher positionality is defined as the scholar's predetermined set of beliefs and perspectives born from personal and professional life experiences (Trainor & Graue, 2014). The experiences inform and guide epistemologies, theoretical frameworks, choice of methodology, and implementation of the research design (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

There are several, varied and crucial reasons to include researcher positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research. First, critical, cultural reflection and self-evaluation of personal beliefs, norms, and constructs of knowledge helps researchers discover how *self* and one's life experiences influence and contribute to their positions in research and vantage points in society (Milner, 2007; Trainor & Graue, 2014). Next, without a clear description of positionality and reflexive practices, consumers of qualitative research are unable to discern the

researcher bias on discussions of findings and results. Furthermore, detailed accounts of a reflexivity give readers a richer understanding of the thought processes that led to decision making (Pugach, Mukhopadhyay, & Gomez-Najarro, 2014). Finally, to increase the validity of a study, from the onset, researchers should provide a thorough analysis of their position, stance, past experiences, and the interconnectedness between their identity markers and the research design.

Role of the researcher. Twenty-first century researchers have a responsibility to redefine education research by emphasizing the importance of eradicating color-blind and culture-blind beliefs and practices. Research in education must embrace an agenda for change that encompasses a broader understanding of the purpose of research. Today's researchers must question, define, and articulate why their research is necessary and the role of researcher.

I conducted face-to-face interviews to listen, interpret, and make meaning of Latino caregivers and teachers' experiences with American special education systems and the relationships inherent within those systems. As a mother and former special education teacher, I understand the context of many stories regarding special education services and the complexities of membership in a school community. However, my identity as a White, European American native, English-only speaker, scholar and mother of a child without a disability, creates the need for sensitivity and consideration of cross-cultural differences during data collection and subsequent interpretation of the data. I established trust and rapport with the participants by relying on gatekeepers to vouch for my character, the purpose of my research, and act as liaisons on my behalf (Ojeda et al., 2011). Culturally competent research in Latino communities relies on bicultural, bilingual gatekeepers to recruit and conduct research with respect and sensitivity (Ojeda et al., 2011).

Researcher limitations. As a White, European American, middle class former special education teacher in public schools, I approach this research project with a host of biases and assumptions. I hold biases concerning what constitutes a successful IEP meeting, what families deserve from schools, what they typically don't receive, and the barriers to collaboration I've seen repeatedly throughout many years in the field. My experience as a special education teacher and seasoned participant in years of IEP meetings and parent conferences needs to be recognized and addressed before the study begins. I am conducting this research because I want to see change and I want ALL families to have equal opportunities so ALL kids can reach their maximum potential.

My motivations for designing this study are laden with assumptions. I assume non-White families don't have equal access to services or opportunities for advocacy in schools as White families. I assume change needs to occur for equity and shared decision-making between families from Latino cultural backgrounds and schools. I assume students are not reaching their potential. These assumptions have the potential to cloud my judgement and influence my *reading* of the data. I may interpret a lack of shared decision-making or deficit-based perceptions of families and students based off my own, negative experiences and familiarity with common themes prevalent in research on underrepresented families' negative experiences with special education personnel. I reveal my pre-conceived biases to recognize their existence and the possible impact they may have on my interpretation of the data.

To conduct a grounded theory study, I recognized and set aside these assumptions before I began data collection with Latino caregivers and special education teachers. Charmaz (2014) explains the participatory nature of constructivist grounded theory approach as a process of continual confirmation of participant meaning while simultaneously influencing such meaning

through relationships and interactions. To address this issue, I used constant memoing to reflect on my biases and document my assumptions throughout the study. Additionally, I utilized independent researchers to assist in the coding and interpretation of data and themes while simultaneously checking for interference from any identified pre-conceived notions about emerging themes.

Finally, through dissemination of the findings beyond the pages of a journal, I will 'give back' to the Latino community and the school by starting a diverse learners parent group and conducting workshops about special education rights and law for parents. Recognition of my privilege and power as a White person, awareness of my assumptions and biases as a former teacher, recognition of my past experiences, and reciprocity with the community where I conducted research, outline how I explored and addressed the role of my relationships with participants and the limitations of this research project.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the 1960s, and reimagined within a constructivist, educational context by Charmaz (2014), is a popular and common approach to qualitative research. In grounded theory research, theories are generated from the data using an inductive, bottom-up approach. The theory is derived from, and 'grounded' in, the data. In grounded theory, theory is constantly emerging, verified, and re-examined. Charmaz (2000) explains, "throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses" (p. 509). Therefore, the very nature of grounded theory is an interpretive process rooted in the concept of constructionism and

the idea that all knowledge is constructed through human interactions with each other, and the world, within a social context (Crotty, 1998).

Grounded theory data is typically collected through interviews and field notes that are used to constantly compare against an emerging theory (Creswell, 2013). The researcher goes back and forth between interviews and notes to look for theories, collect more data. The constant-comparative process continues throughout data collection until emergent theories begin to solidify and data becomes saturated. Many of the studies in the immigrant, Latino family research review used grounded theory for the research design or in data analysis (Alvarez McHatton & Correa, 2005; Carreón et al, 2005; Harry, 1992; Orozco, 2008; Rueda et al., 2005). Grounded theory searches for concepts, categories, and eventually- theories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) outlined the process by explaining, "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 23). Through implementation of a grounded theory design, research teams captured the experiences and perceptions of Latino families beginning with a *tabula rasa,* blank slate, to be filled by narrative accounts with voices of a minority group.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Traditional grounded theorists analyze and interpret data to focus further data collections which then informs and refines a developing theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2014). Conducting a study without a theoretical framework did not provide an opportunity to craft the story I wished to tell. Therefore, I used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, I gathered new, emerging data and themes and compared with Ishimaru et al's (2016) equitable collaborative framework. By adding *constructivism* to the grounded theory method, Charmaz (2000) provides a justification for

inclusion of deductive codes and pre-existing theory. She argues, "Constructivist grounded theory celebrates firsthand knowledge of empirical worlds, takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism, and offers accessible methods for taking qualitative research into the 21st century" (Charmaz, 2000, p.510). Charmaz's (2000) evolved, constructivist approach to grounded theory allows for multiple creations of knowledge and social realities with the goal of interpreting participants' experiences with a variety of tools (Charmaz, 2000). She explains, "We can reclaim these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Constructivist grounded theory approach is flexible with built in opportunities to search for meaning through primary sources such as participants' stories while concurrent comparisons to established theories further contribute to analysis.

Recruitment

Sample. This study used homogeneous, purposive sampling to select participants groups of Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and the children's teachers. Homogeneous, purposive sampling refers to a type of sample chosen intentionally with individuals from a select population who meet specific criteria (Patton, 2015; Terrell, 2016). The participants and sites were chosen because they can 'purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem' (Creswell, 2013, p.156). Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory research relies on purposive sampling strategies that focus narrowly on a small (3-10) sample that meets a specific criterion (Creswell, 2013). Examination of Latino caregivers' experiences with home-school relationships requires homogeneous sampling to ensure participants are Latino caregivers with full-time responsibility for a child with disabilities. Using homogeneous, purposive sampling, five Latino caregivers of a child with a disability, and five of the children's teachers were

identified and contacted for participation in this study. All participants either taught or sent their children to the same school. Some interested mothers were not included in the study as resources only allowed for a maximum of five teacher and five parent participants.

To prepare for the design of this study, I spent time researching, reading, and examining studies that illuminate the specific experiences of underrepresented caregivers with children with disabilities. Each study tells a unique story with common themes of language, culture, and knowledge barriers woven across and within the research. Constructivist grounded theory aims to keep analysis specific and situated to capture a *slice of life* in a *moment of time* (Charmaz, 2014; Terrell, 2016).

To stay true to the essence of constructivist grounded theory research, I situated my study in an urban, Catholic school in a large Midwest city. This site was chosen for many reasons. First, the school is 90-95% Latino with a population of 440 students. 54 of the students have a diagnosed disability and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Service Plan (ISP). The ISP is a document commonly used in Catholic schools that outlines annual goals and benchmarks with a description of the child's disability. Second, the school has a reputation for having a strong, innovative special education program, with inclusion of all students at the core of the school's mission. Third, throughout the city, enrollment in Catholic schools is down; however, enrollment continues to increase at the research site school with families of children with disabilities being turned away due to lack of resources and manpower. Finally, to increase the probability of obtaining enough participants that meet inclusion criteria, I chose a school with a large Latino population. According to a poll by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (2013), approximately 30.4 million people in the United States self-identify as Catholic and Latino (Retrieved from https://cara.georgetown.edu). As such, the school has over

11% students with disabilities, a large Latino population, a positive reputation for inclusive education, and high enrollment rates in a time of declining enrollments in Catholic schools.

Exploration into why this school is desirable to families can bring fresh insights into what facilitates successful inclusion programs and home-school partnerships. For the past 13 years, Principal Marley has led St. Joe's School. She is committed to Catholic education and creating an inclusive school for all students- with and without disabilities. She brings in grant money, outside agencies, and funds from the government to provide a comprehensive special education program. All the students are included in regular classrooms with pull out services for applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy, counseling, or Title 1 tutoring. At St. Joe's, every student with disabilities gets an IEP and an ISP. Catholic schools are not required to provide an IEP; however, Principal Marley believes all students with disabilities should have an IEP in case they transfer schools. The school has Title 1 services, ABA therapy, sensory rooms, cool down spaces, and flexible seating. Although St. Joe's has limited funding, they receive grants from the Big Shoulders Fund and work collaboratively with outside agencies such as United Stand and Aspire to provide one on one ABA therapy for students with autism, counseling, and speech. Additionally, St. Joe's has an inclusion director who coordinates delivery of ABA, speech and occupational therapy services. The inclusion director works with the public-school system to set up IEP meetings, complete proper paperwork, and inform the parents of the purpose and time of the meeting.

Circling back to research, as discussed in chapter one, a limited body of literature exists that identifies positive school practices and policies leading to increased collaboration and satisfaction amongst families of students with disabilities and their teachers (Bailey et al., 1999; Hardin et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008). I purposefully selected a school

with a reputation for successful inclusion practices to attempt to fill this substantial gap in the research.

Setting and Participants. The setting for this research study is a pre-K through 8th, Catholic elementary school in a large, Midwest city. St. Joe's is the pseudonym for the research site school. The school is located in a predominantly Mexican and Mexican-American, working class neighborhood. The majority of residents are first and second generation Mexican-Americans. According to the Archdiocese, there are 176 Catholic Elementary Schools. Within the city's Catholic schools, there are 13,798 Latino students out of a total 55,342 students citywide (Retrieved from https://vencuentro.org). With 440 students in Pre-K through 8th grade, 90% are Latino with a total of 98% non-White students; significantly above the state average of 30% (Retrieved from https://www.privateschoolreview.com).

A total of 11 participants were recruited to participate in this study. Participants included four elementary school teachers and one inclusion director across four classrooms at one Catholic, elementary school. The study included five mothers of children with disabilities who have children at the research site school and five teachers who work directly with those children. The study compared the caregiver group to the teacher group utilizing a mix of questions targeting individual relationships between stakeholders and general, overall impressions of the school community, partnerships, and the role of advocacy. In addition, the principal of the school was recruited to participate in one face to face interview to provide the history and vision of the school's inclusion program and the philosophy behind parent engagement initiatives. All participants were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

All caregiver participants identified as Latina, and four out of the five described their ethnicity as Mexican or Mexican and Chinese. The participants ranged in age from 38 – 50 years

old. Although all family members were invited to participate in the study, all five caregivers were mothers. Three out of five mothers were married with two mothers either separated or divorcing from their husbands. All mothers worked and four out of the five families received either free or reduced lunch at the school. All mothers spoke English fluently and expressed a preference for English during the focus groups and interviews. Table 6 provides demographic information collected on caregiver participants and Table 7 lists demographic information on the students with disabilities.

Three of the five teachers were White and two were Latina. They all held Bachelor's degrees in education with endorsements in language arts, reading, social studies, and secondary education. One teacher and the inclusion director held special education Learning Behavior Specialist (LBS) 1 certifications. The participants taught in Kindergarten through 6th grade classrooms. Years of teaching experience ranged from one to seven years in the profession. Each school professional participant worked with one or more children from the caregiver participant's families. Table 8 provides demographic information collected on teacher participants.

Table 6

Caregiver Demographics

Participant *Pseudonym*	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Married	Education	Employment
Beatriz	50	Latina	Yes	Masters	Social Worker
Alanna	39	Latina	Yes	Post-grad	Mortgage Closer
Serena	43	Latina	Separated	11th grade	Hotel Worker
Lily	39	Latina	Divorced	Bachelors	Data Analyst
Melissa	38	Latina	Yes	High School	Retail Store Manager

Table 7

Student Demographics

Mother	Gender	Grade	Disability Diagnosis
Beatriz	Female	6th	Autism
Alanna	Male	4th	Autism
Serena	Male	K	ADHD
Lily	Male	4th	Autism/ ADHD
Melissa	Female	1st	Learning Disabilities

Table 8

Teacher Demographics

Participant *(Pseudonym)*	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Grade Taught	Years Teaching	Education	LBS I/II
Sol	24	F	Latina	5th/6th	1 year	Bachelors	None
Parker	23	F	White	3rd/ 4th	1 year	Bachelors	LBS I
Tina	30	F	Latina	1st	7 years	Bachelors	None
Maureen	25	F	White	K	3 years	Bachelors	None
Allie	28	F	White	Inclusion Director	4 years+ 1 year Director	Bachelors	LBS I

Inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for participation in the study was different for caregivers and teachers. Caregivers (biological, foster, sibling, adoptive, or other family member) had to be Latino, have full-time caregiving responsibilities of a child in the school with a documented disability of any kind with an IEP or ISP, and send the child to the research site school. Fluency in English was not an inclusion nor exclusion criteria. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in the language preferred by participants. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in English. Due to limited interactions between caregivers and teachers and minimal extra services provided to children with 504 plans, caregivers of Latino children with 504 plans were excluded from the study. Teachers included in the study taught the Latino child with a disability at least one period of the school day. Teachers who did not work with Latino children with disabilities during the school day were excluded from the study.

Procedures

After securing permission from the school district and Institutional Review Board at UIC and the site, I met with the principal to discuss the study goals, procedures, recruitment forms

and protocol for consent. The Institutional Review Board approval letter, parent and teacher consent form, and principal consent form are located in appendices E, F, and G. Next, the school hosted an informal meet and greet with all parents of children with disabilities and the recruitment flyer, in Spanish and English, was posted at the school with the date of the meet and greet. Five mothers showed up to the meet and greet and all five agreed to participate in the study. A contact sheet was circulated, and I followed up with a phone call or email to answer further questions, confirm participation, and explain the purpose of the research project and participation requirements. Once any questions were sufficiently answered, the date, time and location of the focus group was determined. To recruit teachers, I was invited to pitch the study at the weekly, all school teacher meeting. Afterwards, I sent a recruitment email with the attached flyer to all teachers in the school. If interested, teachers contacted me and a series of follow up emails ensued to answer questions, explain the consent form, reiterate the purpose of the study, and set a date and time for the focus group.

As per participants' request, all focus groups were held at the research site school. The focus groups were conducted in a private classroom without interruption from administration or school staff. Consent forms were explained, in detail, at the beginning of the focus group session. All recruitment flyers and consent forms were available in both English and Spanish, although all participants spoke English and chose English as the language of preference during data collection. Questions regarding consent were answered and forms signed before the beginning of the focus group discussions.

Data Collection

To gather rich, thick data and conduct a rigorous study, I collected a variety of data sources that provided multiple perspectives of how things are currently done and how both

groups experience home-school relationships. Specifically, I gathered the focus group, interview and observational data to inform the development of conclusions. These instruments and procedures are described below.

Focus groups. I implemented focus groups to gather information on Latino caregivers and teachers' expectations and experiences with family engagement, definitions and perceptions on how they enact collaboration, and the role of advocacy in their relationships with one another. Both focus groups took place at the research site. Participants in both stakeholder groups chose the school for the focus group. I held two, separate focus groups lasting an average 66 minutes with a. standard deviation of 3. The member check focus groups conducted at the conclusion of the research study were also held separately. To establish rapport, trust, and a safe space to open up and discuss relationships with other stakeholders, all focus groups were held independent of one another. See figure 2 below.

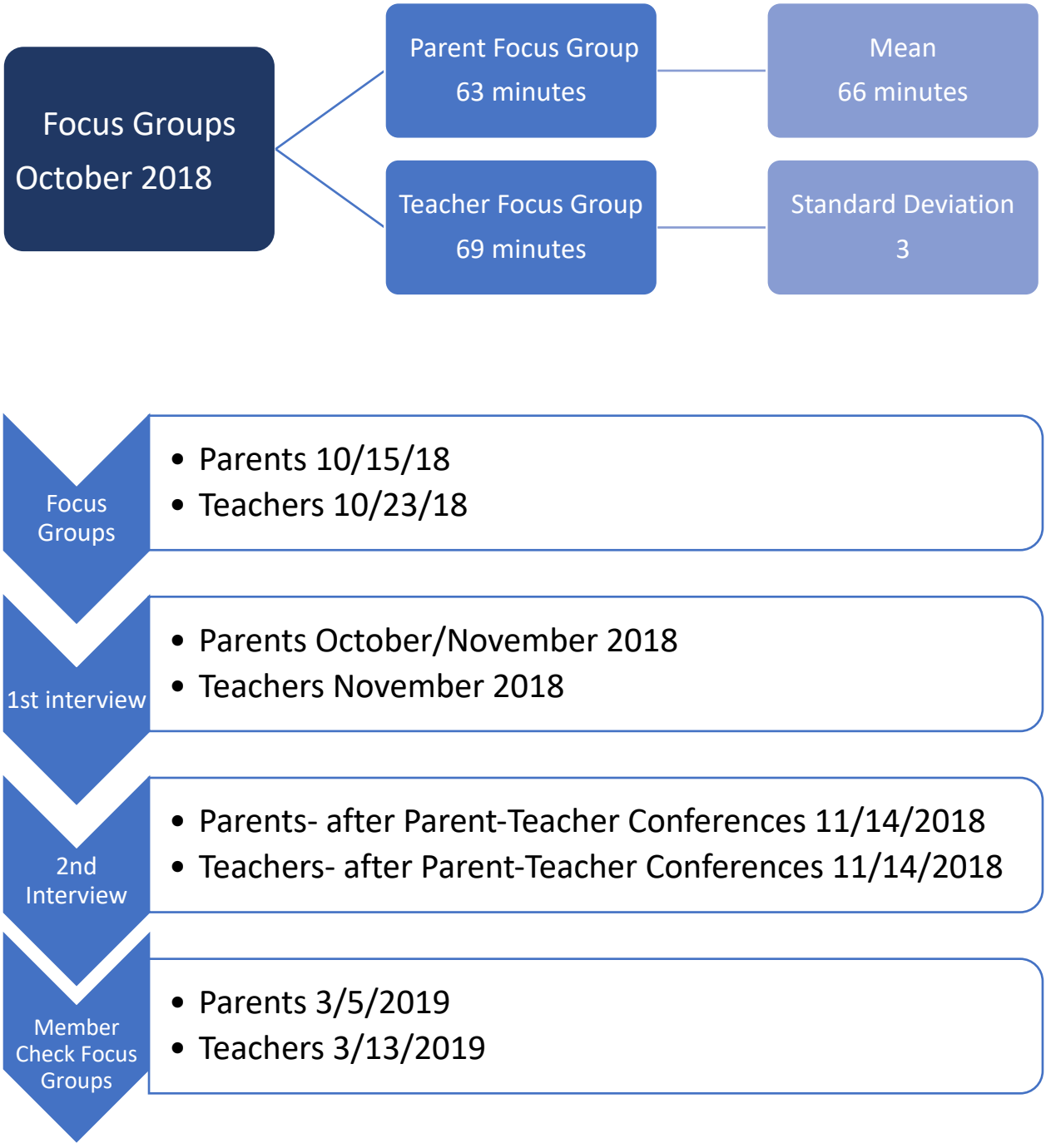

Figure 2. Flow chart of focus groups and interviews.

Focus groups help facilitate discussion when used with Latino participants because they can create a sense of community with a focus on the collective experience, rather than the individual experience (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Some Latino families with children with disabilities struggle with feelings of isolation and stigma associated with having children seen as different within the community (Blanche et al., 2015) which then leads to a reliance on informal supports such as family members and close friends (Cohen et al., 2014; Olivos et al., 2010). By providing an open and non-judgmental space for caregivers from Latino communities to come together, share their experiences, and socialize, I was able to gather information to create the subsequent interview protocols.

The focus group questions were based on the three research questions, review of literature, and Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) equitable collaboration framework. The focus group was audio recorded. Both focus groups lasted approximately 60-90 minutes with a break in the middle. The break was intentional. Inserting an opportunity to relax and small talk helps advance a comfortable and informal atmosphere. Before both focus groups, teachers and parents enjoyed fruit, cookies, coffee, water and informal conversation. We chatted about our children, teaching jobs, and the research study. Allowing time to establish rapport before the focus group is key to building trust with participants (Carreón et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2003). After the focus group, I asked participants to complete a nine-question demographic survey to gather background information. All members of the caregivers' immediate and extended family were invited to join the interviews. Informal supports play a pivotal role in the Latino community (Cohen et al., 2014). *Familism*, or the belief in the importance and seriousness of family relationships and total commitment to one another, (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Cohen, 2013) cannot be overlooked

in gathering information on what might be expected in terms of formal supports from people such as teachers (Cohen et al., 2014).

To dig deeper into the first research question, expectations and experiences around family engagement for school professionals, I held a teacher focus group intended to elicit conversation around similarities and differences, shared stories, and common concerns. Similar to the caregivers' focus group, the experience was meant to explore interpretations of collaboration, advocacy efforts, family engagement, and home-school relationships. An interview protocol for the subsequent two rounds of interviews was created using the data generated in the teacher and caregiver focus groups. Similar interview protocols, for the first one on one interview. were created based on information gleaned during the two focus groups and the conceptual framework. Data gathered in the first interview informed creation of the second interview protocol. See figure below. Comparably, interview protocols for the second round mirrored one another with slight changes to reflect the unique experiences of teaching and parenting. The focus group protocol, first interview protocol, and second interview protocol were submitted and approved by UIC's Institutional Review Board. See figure 3 below.

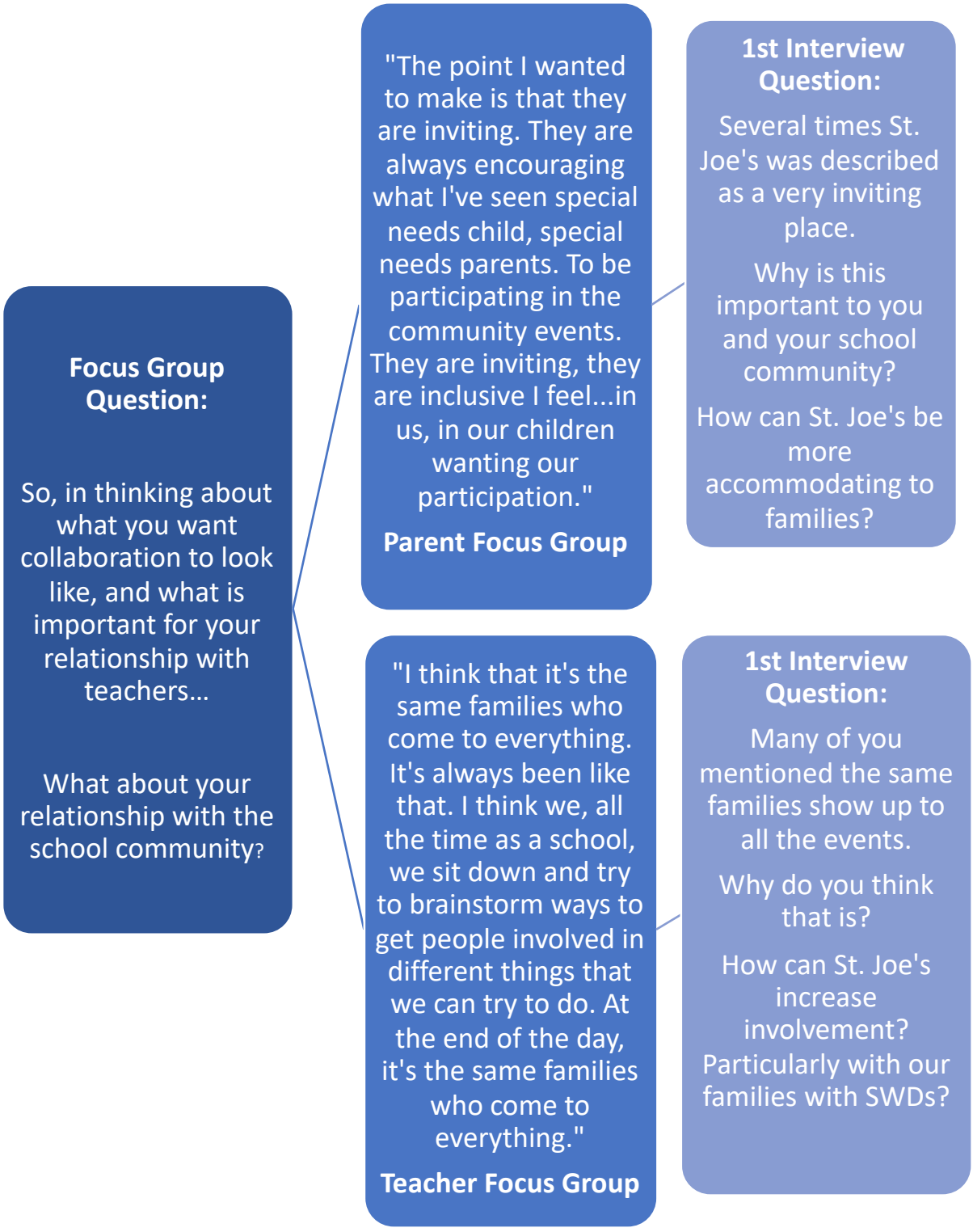

Figure 3. Model of iterative data collection and design of interview protocols.

Interviews. Interviews open a window into the perceptions of others and provide opportunities to learn about a group's common beliefs, perceptions, and core values (Maxwell, 2013; Trainor & Graue, 2014; Zionts et al., 2003). Interviews have multiple purposes that include inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or for comparison of multiple responses to a central concept (Trainor, 2013). Narratives in special education research provide insight into participants' experiences and present a platform for families' stories to inform practice (Valle, 2011). Instead of limiting discourse about special education to professional communities, narrative studies expand the conversation to include the crucial, missing emic perspective (Hess et al., 2006). Rogoff (2003) defines the emic approach as, "attempts to represent cultural insiders' perspective on a community, usually by means of extensive observation and participation in the activities of the community" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 30). The emic approach forms the basis for the methods used for data collection.

This study attempted to *represent* the perspectives of Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and their teachers. By conducting two focus groups, two rounds of open-ended and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and observations with extensive field notes, the study compares and contextualizes the relationships between Latino caregivers and teachers. Using Charmaz's (2014) constructivist, grounded theory approach and Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method for analysis, information gathered from the interviews was interpreted, deconstructed, coded, compared, and re-assembled. Inductively, the research team searched for commonalities, areas of divergence, and emerging categories to capture the meaning and variety of caregivers' experiences with school schools.

Interview protocols. An interview protocol was created using two sources of data. First, the central concerns, expectations, and experiences of the Latino caregivers and teachers

revealed in the focus groups formed the core of the interview protocol. Second, the three principles of Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) conceptual framework was incorporated into the protocol to examine how the concepts are interpreted and enacted among the relationships at the research site. To check for cultural responsiveness and effectiveness, and accuracy, the protocol was pilot tested with four of my colleagues- two Latina mothers of children with disabilities and two special education teachers. All one on one interviews were audio recorded. Interviews took place at local coffee shops, over the telephone, or at the research site school. The first round of individual interviews lasted an average of 42 minutes with parents with a standard deviation of 5.65, and 47 minutes with teachers with a standard deviation of 15.29. The second round of individual interviews took less time as each interview protocol probed deeper into the three topics; family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy. The second set of interview questions revisited some of the original themes discovered in the focus groups and first round of interviews with limited new topics as the data set reached saturation. The second round of individual interviews lasted an average of 32 minutes with parents with a standard deviation of 6.85, and 38 minutes with teachers with a standard deviation of 10.72. See figure 4 below.

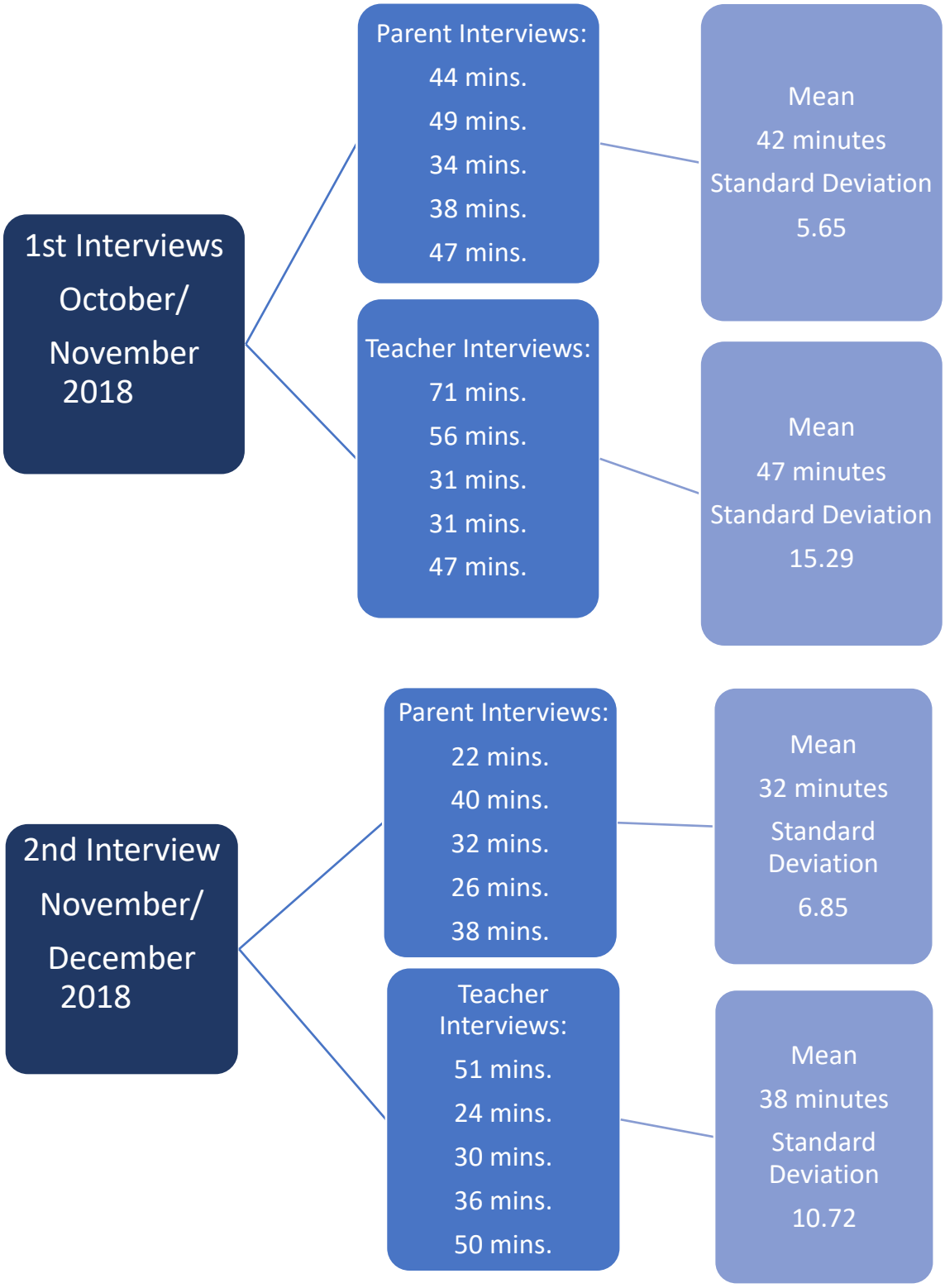

Figure 4. Flow chart of interview length, mean, and standard deviation.

Demographic survey. Collection of demographic data provides necessary background information on participants. This type of data creates opportunities for comparisons, identification of patterns, and supplements findings derived from the interviews. By delineating identity markers such as age, gender, language preference, race/ethnicity, relation to the child, child's disability, age and grade of the child, marital status, education and employment status, and socio-economic status, I could further contextualize my interpretations of individual caregiver and teacher's experiences.

Observations and field notes. Field notes enrich the reflective and analytic process through documentation of an experience that assists in focusing interpretations of data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Charmaz (2014) encourages collection of rich data to generate copious data through observations, field notes, conversations, journaling, and recorded reflections. During the interviews, I took extensive field notes to remember salient points, write down follow up prompts and questions, and document strengths and weaknesses of the interview format to guide future interview sessions. Field notes serve as a tool to observe and interpret the social world by describing social interactions and to contextualize the researcher's theories about the environment, culture, and relationships occurring within the research site (Emerson et al., 2011). In order to create a richer, more detailed portrait of the school community, I observed several events and took generous field notes to document the experience. Using DeWalt and DeWalt's (2011) field guide for participant observations, I created a notes template and conducted non-participatory observations using jot notes, expanded notes, and diaries. Jot notes are words, phrases, or sentences recorded during an event as aids to memory. Expanded field notes are more detailed and include, "description of the physical context, the people involved, behavior and nonverbal communication and words that are as close

as possible to the words used by the participants" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 165). Diaries move beyond description and include the researcher's interpretations, reactions, and concerns during fieldwork (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Utilization of three field note formats provided a multi-dimensional, detailed account of events observed.

During the study, I observed the Dia de Los Muertos 5K run fundraiser, Breakfast with Santa family event, 8th grade High School night, and annual Christmas concert. The rationale behind observations of family and school events was a desire to capture and interpret informal social, familial, and community interactions to add texture and color to my descriptions and understanding of the school community and relationships among stakeholders. By focusing on the face to face interactions between people within the community, I could document and define the situation with increased knowledge and insight (Emerson et al., 2011).

Data Analysis

Data in this study was analyzed in multiple steps with different procedures to ensure accurate conclusions. Using a constructivist, grounded theory approach originated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and reimagined by Charmaz (2014), I summarized and reorganized field notes, read and listened to interview data, drafted memos on field notes and interview data, graphed the demographic survey data into a table, code data by hand, developed organizational and theoretical categories from codes, assigned codes, compared and contrasted codes, and created a matrix of the identified emergent categories and themes (Charmaz, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

To begin, interviews were transcribed into written text. I read through each interview and companion field notes while simultaneously taking margin notes on tentative relationships and categories. Next, I listened to the interview files to take additional notes and create memos

tracking initial thoughts, impressions, and relevant concepts. Writing memos during data analysis serves a dual purpose. Memos help document analytic thinking while concurrently facilitating and stimulating analytic insights (Maxwell, 2013). Initial organization and examination of data concluded with rewriting and reorganization of field notes and graphing of the demographic survey results. Throughout the final, preparatory step, I continued to memo and take notes to search for contextual relationships and possible categories for analysis. I read, listened, took notes, and graphed data to get a sense of the database as a whole, complete unit before breaking it into smaller pieces (Creswell, 2013).

Coding

First iteration. Description, classification, and interpretation of the data were the initial steps in the analysis process. The first iteration of data analysis involved reading interviews and field notes, assigning codes, comparing and grouping codes, and refining codes according to emerging themes. In the initial stage of coding, I utilized Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) process coding to examine the concept of collaboration by naming actions in the data. Naming actions helps the researcher identify recurring themes through analysis of "observable and conceptual action in the data" (Miles et al., 2014, p.75). Next, I implemented Charmaz's (2014) open-coding approach and coded small segments of the interviews. I uncovered possible processes underlying the experiences described in the data. Beginning with open-coding allows the researcher to search for fresh understandings or possible salient concepts that inform the research and research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

Thereafter, I used a constant comparison approach to analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), to search for commonalities and differences between codes to form focused codes. I looked for possible antecedents and consequences as well as unexpected surprises in the data (Maxwell,

2013). For initial coding, I kept the codes simple and short using action codes (process) to describe the data and moved quickly through the first iteration. I used four questions to guide interpretation of data and creation of codes. I asked, (1) what is this study about? (2) what is this an example of? (3) what can be drawn from this? and (4) what does this speak to me? (Charmaz, 2014).

Second iteration. To prepare for the second iteration of data analysis, focused coding, I went back and forth between interviews and field notes to compare and contrast findings. Charmaz (2014) describes preparation for focused coding as the sifting and sorting process that looks at the frequency and significance of the codes to begin to determine how the codes represent the data and how the codes can be synthesized in a way that make analytic sense (Charmaz, 2014). To create focused codes, I included the most frequent five to eight codes from each individual interview. Next, I looked at all the interviews, as a whole, to see if codes overlapped or reoccurred in the data set. I collapsed these codes and added them to the focused codes set. Using Glaser's (1978) theoretical codes *properties, strategies, conditions, and consequences,* I identified and categorized recurring codes and sub-codes. Finally, I created a chart with the significant meta-codes as column headings with sub-codes in appropriate, matching columns. Additionally, I created a spreadsheet with the focus group and interview questions as headings and placed subsequent, matching codes in each question column. In both charts, I moved codes around from column to column, placing them where I thought they were most suitable, while concurrently cancelling and collapsing categories into other categories to streamline analysis. Through this process of moving and adding sub-codes, I began to notice themes and gaps in codes. Finally, with the assistance of a second coder, we used the focused codes to independently code a sample of interviews, collapse codes, and compare results.

Reliability and Validity

To check for reliability and the validity of my codes, I used a second coder for data analysis. Reliability was established using intercoder agreement and utilizing multiple coders. The purpose of multiple coders is to analyze transcripts and field note data to attain agreement on code names and coded passages of "highly interpretive" data (Creswell, 2013, p. 253). I used one other coder to analyze the focus group and interview data. A PhD student was trained to use the codebook created for the research study. The second coder was not Latino nor Spanish-speaking, but familiar with qualitative data analysis and teaching in urban, special education settings. The goal of the intercoder agreement check is to reach 90% agreement on all codes used on initial code (open coding), meta-codes (focused coding) and code themes (Miles et al., 2014).

To begin coding training, I met with the second coder to provide research questions, the purpose of the study, and the interview guide. Training included a discussion of the codes, transcripts, and field notes with an explanation on initial/open coding and the coding scheme. A focus group and interview coding protocol were implemented to keep coding procedures consistent. Next, we independently listened and read through the parent focus group transcript and practiced assigning codes. We then met and debriefed after the first coding attempt to discuss any possible issues or necessary clarifications. We discussed our differences in coding until we arrived at 100% agreement. Next, we open coded the teacher focus group transcripts and met to discuss initial codes. We compared results and discussed any discrepancies to reach 100% agreement on the use and meaning of codes. To measure and ensure reliability, I divided the amount of agreements by the sum of the agreements plus the disagreements (Miles et al., 2014). The coders reached consensus with 95% intercoder agreement.

After consensus was reached, we collapsed codes and created focused codes for the focus groups. We independently coded a sample of transcripts using the focused codes. Next, we independently open coded two parent and two teacher interviews along with the principal interview. We met once again to compare and discuss codes, come to agreement on code use and meaning, and to collapse codes into a final, focused set. Finally, we met to discuss and determine consensus on focus codes for the focus groups and interviews. We also discussed and determined thematic codes, categories, and sub-categories that signify common themes within and across the interviews. Once we agreed upon a select set of codes and categories, I went back and coded the remaining interviews with the final set of meta-codes. During both iterations of coding, I continuously kept memos to track thinking and assign meanings to codes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study was addressed using triangulation, member checks, peer review, and intercoder agreement (see above). Establishment of overall trustworthiness in qualitative research is accomplished through eradication of validity threats using evidence to demonstrate the lack of bias or error (Maxwell, 2013). Validity relies on the "relationship of your conclusions to reality" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121), and that relationship must be confirmed through multiple processes that verify the credibility of your findings, analysis, and interpretations (Maxwell, 2013; Mertens, 2015; Terrell, 2016). The term *credibility* refers to the process of confirming the results are credible from the participants' point of view and this process is comparable to internal validity checks in quantitative studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015; Terrell, 2016). Credibility checks provide necessary criteria to judge the quality of qualitative work (Mertens, 2015) and the consistency and correctness of interpretations (Maxwell, 2013). There are numerous processes to confirm credibility such as prolonged and

persistent engagement, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015; Terrell, 2016). In this study, credibility will be tested using three of the five aforementioned processes; triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the process of checking for consistent, corroborating evidence across data collected from multiple individuals and settings (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015; Terrell, 2016). To achieve triangulation in this study, focus groups, individual interviews, and observations with fieldnotes were collected and interpreted from several places and sources. Focus groups and individual interviews with caregivers and teachers provided the participants' experiences and perceptions of collaboration in both group and individual settings. Data was then compared with field notes from observations. Observations were meant to corroborate with any evidence of engagement, collaboration, or advocacy described in the focus groups and interviews. However, triangulation of data does not provide sufficient evidence to guarantee credibility (Maxwell, 2013), therefore employment of additional processes was required.

Member checking. Member checking is a systematic process for obtaining feedback and verification from participants regarding the accuracy and credibility of your interpretive analysis (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) maintains member checking is an ethical practice that improves your data by correcting errors and inaccuracies. Following analysis of the interview transcripts coding for themes, participants reviewed interpretations to verify accuracy of the findings. First, at the conclusion of the second round of interviews, I requested volunteers to participate in an informal focus group to review, give feedback, and correct the final analysis. Next, I held two separate focus groups- one for the

mothers and one for the teachers. All participants were invited to attend the member check focus groups. Adjustments to analysis were made based on input from participants.

Peer review and debriefing. To further strengthen the credibility of the study, peer review with a *critical friend* (Patton, 2015) to review, critique, question, and analyze the findings was utilized. Peer review is the process of inviting an outside colleague familiar with the research and methods to question and discuss the research findings, analysis, conclusions, and possible claims (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) argues the responsibility of a peer reviewer is to 'keep the researcher honest' (p. 251). A former PhD graduate, with a research focus on CLD families and transition, with expertise in qualitative methodology, consulted and provided critical feedback at three crucial points in the study. First, a peer review occurred after the initial focus groups to check the subsequent interview protocols and check for clarity, bias, and accurate interpretations of data. Next, feedback was solicited at the end of the study, before the member check focus groups, to search for accurate representations of participants' voice. Last, the peer reviewer provided a final round of feedback after the focus group member check to provide an additional analysis of the overall trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

IV. RESULTS

This study explored three components of collaborative partnerships between teachers and Latino parents of students with disabilities; family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy. In this comparative analysis, results are organized by the three, principal research questions. To compare perspectives between participant groups and delineate between areas of alignment and divergence, each research question is organized according to the data findings. Research questions one and three produced diverse perspectives between stakeholders. Results are organized by participant group to exemplify differing expectations and experiences. However, in research question two, many themes across participant groups aligned. Therefore, results were collapsed and organized around common perspectives of participants as a whole. Core themes are woven throughout the chapter, along with illustrative quotes, to connect data to the research questions and emphasize the voices and experiences of participants.

Research Question One: What are the Expectations and Experiences around Family Engagement for Latina Mothers of Children with Disabilities and Teachers in an Urban, Catholic Elementary School?

Teachers' Definition of Engagement

Teachers' definitions of engagement were broad and all encompassing. During the individual interviews, when asked what family engagement meant to them, participants provided a myriad of answers. Teachers felt engagement extended beyond attending school events to include communicating through Class Dojo (online website and texting platform), collaborating with teachers, sharing strategies that work with the student at home, and helping with homework. When asked about engagement, Parker, a first-year teacher and long-time teacher's aide exclaimed, "Family engagement actually takes many different forms. It can be showing up to a

lunch at school, or it could be something like just looking at our Class Dojo page, seeing what going on in your child's classroom." Allie, the inclusion director and only licensed special educator, expanded on the definition of engagement to include parent collaboration by explaining, "It's when all of the families at St. Joe's are working together with the teachers and making sure that they're feeling welcome at the school." Sol, Maureen, and Tina, three teacher participants, placed some of the responsibility for getting families engaged on the teacher. They felt teachers should "get them excited to come into the building, get them excited to participate in activities with us" (Tina) or take the initiative to reach out and ask for strategies, or make themselves available to parents at all times, "Family engagement for me, the biggest part is like being there, or at least being available for communication purposes" (Sol). Mutual responsibility is a common theme throughout the research. Teachers and parents often shared responsibility for strengthening the partnership instead of placing the onus on any one group or person. A collective sense of duty and accountability undergirded responses from both participant groups.

Parents' Definition of Engagement

Parent's definitions of engagement centered around collaboration and the impact of school culture on family participation. Lily, a mother of a 4th grade son with autism, explained, "Family engagement is where the school cultivates an environment where the family can come in and feel a part of the education process" and Beatriz, a mother of a 6th grade daughter with autism, concurred "the school's actively seeking out family participation in their child's education and involvement." Two mothers applied the term *family* to include the school community and family engagement as participation in the school family. Family, in this study, includes the nuclear family, school classroom family, and school community family. Teachers and mothers repeatedly compared the school culture and community to a family Melissa, a mother of a 1st

grade daughter with learning disabilities, defined family and engagement as, “engaging together and the way I see it, they are family because they help as much as I am so I would say it's more like both of us helping each other out for my daughter.” Serena, a mother of a Kindergarten boy with ADHD, expanded on the notion of a school family to include people protecting and caring for each other like family members. Serena explained:

> I feel like I'm in the family. I feel like this is the place they know my son. This is the place that he won't be looked at or criticized the wrong way or talked too much about the wrong way. They all know him, and they know how much he's been doing. They've known his levels. If he lashes out or if he cries, he won't be criticized by a teacher or by principal or, I don't know, maybe by a parent because maybe they don't know him. I feel like it's more like a family.

Thus, family engagement meant participating, like a family, in a collective support system on behalf of the student with disabilities.

Teachers’ Expectations around Engagement

Numerous themes emerged in both participant groups concerning expectations for family engagement. When asked about types of engagement expected from parents, teachers expressed sharing information and face to face meetings are essential to establish rapport, build relationships and reciprocity, and to provide quality services and academic opportunities for the student.

Sharing information. Sharing information served multiple purposes at St. Joe’s with diverse forms of information requested of parents.

Documentation. To secure services, parents were expected to share IEP documentation from other schools and self-disclose their child’s disability. Without the necessary paperwork or

knowledge of an existing disability, the school had no means to determine services or classroom accommodations and modifications. Sol, the 6th grade teacher, described how a lack of self-disclosure presents real issues:

> A student in my homeroom expressed… he wrote on a sheet, he said, "Do you know I have an IEP?" We didn't know, and we were like, "What?" He was probably struggling on the test, and he wrote that for the teacher, so we go to find out that mom has the documentation and the school doesn't have it, never has. He's been here since second grade.

In response to how a student can go for years without the school knowing about the IEP or providing services, Allie described the parent's hesitation:

> I don't know if she was like afraid to share it, but I really think once they saw the report card and the grades, they realized that they needed to provide that with us, so we can we can help support her, because she wasn't getting any extra support.

The expectation for parents to disclose their child's disability and share IEP documentation suggests the teachers wish to continue learning and accumulating knowledge to best serve the students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Special education knowledge. Coupled with sharing documentation, sharing strategies and insights about what works with their child at home was requested often by teacher participants. The majority of teachers at St. Joe's do not have specific, special education training and hold elementary education university degrees. However, St. Joe's has 10-12% students with disabilities in full inclusion programs. As such, several teachers expressed anxiety over their ability to support students with disabilities in their classrooms and looked to parent's expertise for guidance. Sol expounded:

> I'm not a Special Ed. teacher, but I have students in my class who need that support, so it feels like I'm at a deficit when I'm coming to the table. That's why I feel like parents are the knowledgeable ones in the situation. You know your student. You know what they need. Please tell me so I can support them.

When asked how the school fills this disability knowledge gap, the principal explained "A lot of our professional development, the past two years has been strictly focused on meeting the needs of the students and differentiation and teacher training and acceptance of the other and social-emotional learning and understanding behavior and triggers." Notwithstanding workshops and trainings, teachers still felt parents provided the most valuable information to use in the classroom, "being open to sitting down with the teacher and be like, "This works with my child." We've seen this in the past work. Or, "XYZ didn't work in the past with my child," and "with J, I feel I've learned the most from her mom. She was really open, super friendly." Throughout the study, teachers demonstrated respect for parent's expertise and knowledge with an expectation of consistent communication and collaboration.

Attendance at school events. Teacher participants expressed an expectation for parent involvement in school events, "I would love for all my parents to show up to everything but it's not a perfect world," together with an understanding of the complexities of family life sometimes preventing attendance at school events. Allie empathized with families' realities, stating:

> Managing everyone's schedules can be difficult. I also know that sometimes if the parents work that late-night shift, then the kids are at home with their grandparents or aunt and uncle and often then the aunt and uncle or their grandparents cannot bring the kids back to school either.

However, all teacher participant voiced an expectation of attendance at parent-teacher conferences as the bare minimum required involvement with school.

Attendance at parent-teacher conferences. For teachers at St. Joe's, parent-teacher conferences were an opportunity to a) build relationships by meeting face to face, b) learn from each through sharing resources and strategies, and c) make time for collaboration. During the teacher focus group, when asked about Latino families' participation in school events, some teachers responded with comments like, "I definitely expect them to come to conferences. That's one thing" and "I love parent-teacher conferences. I always thought I would hate them because it's such a long day, but honestly, I learn so much about the kids from them. I just feel like so much gets done in those meetings." Teachers welcomed parent input, advice, and communication and expected attendance at meetings like parent-teacher conferences to focus on meeting the student's needs. In the focus group, Sol clarified the expectation:

> I would expect families especially students that do have IEPs to come to parent-teacher conferences. That's a big one especially the first one of the year just to meet with them, talk about those things. I feel like sometimes we can Dojo them but, face-to-face conversations are more meaningful at least to me to make sure we're both meeting the goal of meeting the student's needs in a classroom and at home.

Although attendance at parent-teacher conferences was presented as a non-negotiable by teachers, further expectations for attendance to other types of events emerged at various times in the data.

Attendance at educational events. In the beginning of the school year, St. Joe's hosts several informational nights to educate and begin building relationships with families. In response to a question asking which school events are important for parents to attend, three

teachers mentioned inclusion night and back to school night as critical for introductions and initial relationship building. Back to school night provided an opportunity for families to meet the staff and teachers and to begin building trust and community. Parker emphasized this sentiment, “I would say the nights like meet the teacher night…Some of these parents don't know the teachers and it's crazy that they're going to wait to meet the teachers until parent-teacher conferences in November.” Tina echoed the expectation and its importance:

> Those short instances when I do get to see parents…they know that I have limited amount of time to build trust, or to build community with them, so 'back to school night' and 'meet the teacher night'…they're really important for them to see who I am…I think that builds the trust and community too.”

In tandem with back to school night is inclusion night, an information meet and greet tailored specifically for families of children with disabilities. Teachers describe inclusion night as “something that would be of great value to them” and “important to go to”. Teachers viewed inclusion night as an additional opportunity to connect with parents and explain how services are provided through presentations and introductions to the team. Maureen explained, “Normally, the parents they come to conferences, but then they've never met the therapists who works with them, they've never met the lady who's in charge of Title 1, or they've never met any of those people.” Attendance at beginning of the year events was presented as important but more as a resource and opportunity for parents to connect and network with staff and each other, not as an expectation for family engagement.

Parents’ Expectations around Engagement

Parent expectations around engagement fell into two, main categories: a) inclusive school practices, and b) diverse school events. Inclusive, in this study, is used frequently by participants

encompassing any school practices that invite parent or student participation, communication with families, inclusion in the classroom and in school events, and opportunities to provide input and influence decisions about their child. Results demonstrated an overarching expectation for a school community that is open to parent input and integrates parents in decision-making through communication and availability.

Inclusive school practices. Throughout the study, expectations of inclusive school practices such as shared decision making and consistent communication with open and honest dialogue about behaviors, were described as important tenets of engagement. Parents attributed openness, communication, and comfort as essential contributing factors to relationships with teachers. Lily clarified, "communication is how we're going to build those relationships. That's where comfort is at the core of it" and Alanna expanded on the importance of comfort, "If the parent doesn't feel comfortable, they're less likely to engage with the teachers, be an advocate, be involved." Comfort within the parent-teacher relationship appeared contingent upon openness, honesty, and communication.

Open and honest approach. Parents described an expectation of reciprocal information sharing and decision-making with a focus on teachers being open to suggestions and honest with information concerning behaviors or issues at school. Melissa explained, "We were always brought up if something is going on, you talk about it. You bring it to the open and it gets fixed and that's that. I feel like, yes, that's how I am with her teachers." Simultaneously, many teachers expressed similar beliefs concerning honesty around problem behaviors stating, "I always want to be honest so that I can serve the student in my classroom" and "I would want to tell the parent what is going on because we want to make sure she's successful in the classroom." Both

stakeholder groups repeatedly described a commitment to the success of the child as the driving force behind their actions and beliefs within collaborative partnerships.

Seeking parental input. Coupled with open and honest approaches, parents stressed the importance of having multiple opportunities to work with teachers, and at home with their children, on behaviors or academic strategies. Several mothers agreed teachers were, "very open and they tell me everything" with an expectation of full disclosure at all times. Alanna explained:

> They often communicate with me to let me know if they've noticed something, more of a pattern… I want to be the first to know if there are some pattern of behavior so that I can help intervene and change that.

Early in the year, parents approached the teachers to make their availability, willingness, and expectations for communication known. Alanna explained her technique to ensuring parental input becomes an integral part of the parent-teacher relationship:

> The way that I personally built trust is at the beginning of the year making sure that when we have that meet the teacher night to go to the teachers and introduce myself and make them aware of what my son- what are his difficulties and his strengths and weaknesses and let them know that we're here also to help them.

This example illuminates an expectation of reciprocal engagement between parents and teachers with an understanding that parents have valuable information to share and are willing to work at home to help the teachers. Concurrently, teachers articulated a comparable understanding of engagement by sharing, "I think the parent really explaining to me what I can do to support her student is something that I welcome" and " I think that it starts with open conversations about, 'This is what I am noticing in the classroom. What are you noticing at home…How do you think your child would benefit in school if we did x, y, z?" Teachers and parents are united behind a

belief in the importance of reciprocal engagement on behalf of student success in school. Communication was fundamental to the establishment of reciprocity between stakeholder groups.

Quick and frequent communication. As outlined in the parents' definition of engagement, participants expected family engagement to include collaboration with a heavy emphasis on communication. Lily explained, "They let me know what's happening with him and if he's had a good day or a bad day, and that's the information I need to know." Including parents in the educational and behavioral decision-making surfaced in the data repeatedly. Alanna's expectations mirrored Lily's when she stated:

> If there's an issue going on with my son, whether it be socially, behaviorally or academic, that as soon as it happens, I want to be informed of it…that way, whatever issue it is that we can talk about it.

Some parents expected constant feedback on everything happening during the day to stay connected, "I get regular feedback and communication from the teachers or the school" while others expected regular updates to avoid surprises, "by time it gets to where we have a parent-teacher conference, I don't want it to be like, 'By the way, he's behind on this.' And I'm like, "Okay, why didn't anybody tell us about this?" Other parents kept expectations for communication low explaining:

> It doesn't really matter what the method of communication as long as there's frequent contact or there is a response when I'm communicating with them...Whatever is comfortable for them has been fine with me and I just want that they respond back in a timely manner is the most important thing to me.

Data revealed an interconnectedness between open and honest approaches, quick and frequent communication, reciprocity, and engagement in teacher-parent partnerships and the school community.

Teachers' Experiences with Family Engagement

Teachers and parents at St. Joe's faced multiple barriers preventing the level of desired engagement deemed necessary to build collaborative relationships. Barriers such as language differences, scheduling conflicts, and transportation issues inhibited engagement between stakeholder groups. As such, teachers worked around these obstacles by reinforcing the positive culture of the school with understanding and acceptance of any, and all, forms of engagement.

Same families. In the teacher focus group, when questioned about family engagement at St. Joe's, Maureen immediately exclaimed, "I think it's the same families who come to everything. It's always been like that." Allie reiterated by explaining, "We've changed times. We made things later to accommodate those families that are working…We've tried so many different things…but it's still the same families." Without prompting about the families who do attend school events and are heavily engaged, Tina interrupted Allie with a disclaimer on behalf of the parents. She specifically defended Spanish-speaking parents stating:

> Things that I can say about the families that do come though-- Even if they are parents who are learning English or don't really speak English, they'll come and bring their kids and have the kid translate for them or to show me what you're doing. We have English classes in the evening, so they'll come in and learn English in the evening. It's not just English-speaking parents that are coming, but it's a combination. Yes, it's the same ones, but you have a good mix from all different backgrounds.

Apart from frustration over the lack of diverse family representation at school events, teachers expressed understanding and compassion towards families' home and financial situations. Every time a participant aired a complaint concerning parent lack of engagement, they followed up with empathy, concern, or an explanation. For example, when asked about how they build home-school partnerships with parents, Maureen expressed frustration about a parent who is never at pick up, family events, or conferences:

> I don't have a relationship with that parent because I don't see them, they don't show up, they're not on Dojo…There's so many issues that you need to talk about and it's really hard to catch them and also remember all those things you need to talk about without it being really overwhelming.

She then proceeded to qualify her statement with, "These parents, they have to work and they to work very, very hard to have the money to send their kids to this school. I think we have to understand that." Throughout the focus group and individual interviews, teacher participants described dual experiences with parents; part frustration, part compassion and understanding. This empathy towards families' unique situations was illustrated by Maureen who shared a story about engagement:

> One of my students, the mom will come with the kids all the time to those type of things, but the dad is always working. I still can feel his engagement because every time I post on Dojo, he's commenting, 'There's my daughter.' You know what I mean? Like, 'Oh, how cute.' Like, 'You guys are working so hard.' Or like, 'What a nice teamwork.' Just like all the time liking everything, commenting on stuff and it's like even though I don't see him, I feel like I have a relationship with him.

Underlying both positive and negative experiences was a fundamental duty to build relationships with parents. To increase engagement and thereby increase student success, teachers believed strengthening home-school partnerships, by meeting the needs of students and families, was key.

Availability. Being available during all hours of the day is one example of teachers' attempts to cater to the needs of families, and to increase engagement. For instance, Sol explained how she is always available to Beatriz's family through text, "She will text me in the morning too like if something is a little off. That's an extra communication that we have each other's numbers, because I want to make sure her students has the best day possible." Maureen confirmed this commitment to availability:

> If a parent was working late at night, they could call me at eight at night if we needed to because I think we're both really trying hard to make it work. Everyone's got to be willing on both sides to do whatever it takes, especially for those working families.

A willingness to bend over backwards for parents, even during off hours, stemmed from teachers' underlying commitment to student success. Tina exemplified this commitment by emphasizing collaboration, "We're both trying to get your child to meet goals this year. Whatever they need from me, I'm more than willing to give it and same thing if I'm asking of them." Despite flexible scheduling of events, compassion for parents' work situations, and ample availability, language barriers between teachers and Spanish-speaking parents remained a challenging roadblock to engagement.

Language barriers. Building relationships is difficult when teachers and parents don't speak the same language and come from different cultural and racial backgrounds. At St. Joe's, a limited number of teachers, aides, and school staff members speak fluent Spanish and a sizeable percent of the parent population do not speak English. The language disconnect between

stakeholder groups made building relationships difficult as parents and teachers struggled to communicate; however, teachers found creative ways to work around the barrier.

Issues. Teachers discussed two, central issues stemming from the lack of shared language; a) a dearth of bilingual staff and interpreters, and b) a fear of misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

Lack of bilingual teachers and staff. Out of the five teacher participants, four did not speak Spanish and depended on others to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents. To bridge the language divide, often school staff, classroom aides, and students interpreted conversations and translated text into Spanish. Allie described how she utilized staff in the building to communicate with Spanish-speakers:

> I would always just go to our secretary and have her translate. Either she would write a note and she would translate and call and explain it to the parent, or we would have the parent come in and then we would sit down all together, and she would translate for me.

Conversely, some teachers shared stories about access to interpreters and the lack of available people during crucial events such as parent-teacher conferences. Sol explained, "I did have an instance where it was the student translating for the mom because we didn't have enough translators at the time." Parker elaborated:

> I had two parents who spoke no English and there were no translators available. One of the parents was very open about not speaking English, was like 'Would you like me to get you a translator?' We sit there awkwardly just waiting for the translator to get there.

Additionally, Tina expressed concern on behalf of the parents when she shared:

> I know that's a big thing for parents, is trying to make sure that we have bilingual teachers if we can on staff because that helps them as well. I know we do have a handful

> of people, but I've heard parents making comments about when we do have teacher turnover, especially this past year, we lost a lot of Spanish speaking teachers.

When asked about family engagement, Principal Marley explained how she committed to serving a Latino community and her strategy to meet the needs of families, "I had to be intentional and hire more bilingual aides, secretaries, office staff, teachers. Everything we do is bilingually." There was a discrepancy between the intentions of the principal and the reality of teachers and parents struggling to communicate. With a scarcity of bilingual teachers and staff, concerns over misinterpretations and misunderstanding were abundant amongst teachers.

Misinterpretations. Teachers worried about the language barrier impacting their ability to form relationships with parents exclaiming, "It's hard to break that barrier, especially at our school because it is so Hispanic-based. They're all speaking Spanish," or "I've been really trying to learn Spanish…to communicate better with those families." Teachers were concerned misunderstandings and having their intentions and body language misinterpreted because of tricky translations. Allie shared some of her concerns at IEP meetings when special education jargon and language pose obstacles to understanding, "Sometimes in my position the translating gets tricky because there's things that I'll say that the translators don't necessarily know how to say in Spanish." Sol repeatedly circled back to concerns about misinterpretation with examples of strategies she has implemented to convey her message correctly. She explained:

> I change my voice when I'm talking. You just can't help it. It's so hard. I just want to make sure I'm being clear, and they understand what's going on…Making sure that communication with those parents is accurate and that they understand it. That was a challenge for me with the translating.

Solutions. One teacher, Maureen, had a bilingual classroom aide and one teacher, Tina, spoke fluent Spanish. The remaining three participants did not have quick and accessible language translation supports. As such, teachers had to rely on other resources for communication.

Class Dojo. Class Dojo is an online web platform equipped with an application for the phone. Parents and teachers communicate through Class Dojo with computers or by texting on phones. All homerooms in the school use Class Dojo and more than 90% of the families are signed up with the program. Continually, teachers mentioned Class Dojo as the most frequently used tool for translations and communication. Sol highlighted the app's convenience:

> The Class Dojo app translates for you. That's why I feel like I can now talk to parents who I know only speak Spanish, through that app, instead of having to go grab an aide at the end of the day to talk to a parent for us.

Class Dojo provides autonomy to teachers, which in turn emboldened them to communicate without worry, "The translation part of it is amazing., especially because I'm not bilingual. It's really important to communicate with parents even if I know they can't speak English fluently." Teachers reported using Class Dojo to gauge parents' comfort levels with speaking English by examining which parents translated their messages into Spanish. Maureen explained:

> If I post something, it can tell me which parents translated my message… There might be some parent who I think, maybe they're learning English, so they'll speak to me in English, but then they still are translating things. So, it's like, now I know maybe they're not as comfortable with English as maybe I thought they were and I should be more aware.

Although teachers described limited Spanish language skills, a scarcity of bilingual staff, and a fear of misinterpretation as barriers to communication and relationship building; unanimously, every teacher relayed an experience where Class Dojo successfully broke through such obstacles.

Parents' Experiences with Family Engagement

The mothers' experiences with family engagement mirrored their expectations of an inclusive school culture with ample opportunities for participation. Essentially, parents described three facets of engagement that characterized their experiences; a) an inclusive and accepting school environment, b) school is like a family, and c) participation is fundamental for parents of diverse learners.

Moving from inclusion to belonging. Mothers and teachers alike attributed the culture of St. Joe's School to the tone set by the principal. Principal Marley embraced inclusivity, acceptance, and belonging. Two mothers described the principal as intentionally *welcoming* with a commitment to children with disabilities never seen before. Alanna explained, "What stands out to me is the principal, she's very welcoming, and especially their interest in having kids with different learning abilities and they are included…they want those kids to succeed and be happy." Beatriz reiterated the sentiment, "Dr. Marley is so welcoming…I think that carries down throughout her staff, like that the image for St. Joe's, that's what she encourages." When asked why the school prioritizes inclusive education, the principal explained:

> We try to instill as part of our mission of our school acceptance of others and diversity…We're practicing what we preach and working together, there's full acceptance. It's called in our Catholic social teachings to accept the other, welcome the other, the stranger into our building. It's part of the culture, inclusion, is just part of the

> culture and just working to get to belonging and how do we get out students to belong. It's moving from inclusion to belonging.

During my first visit to St. Joe's, Principal Marley gave a tour of the school. Immediately, I observed evidence of the accepting environment and noted:

> She set the tone of the school and school community. When she took me around the building for a tour, many, many kids said hello or hugged her. She is well liked. She's warm, open, soft-spoken, visible, not dressed up fancy (wearing a school hoodie over her work clothes) and accessible to all. (researcher notes, 9/26/18)

Principal Marley used collaboration and availability to foster acceptance of all students with the goal of helping everyone feel like they belong. Creating a sense of togetherness, Principal Marley encouraged inclusion with reciprocity and communication between families, teachers, and administration. One mother aptly explained, "They're inclusive. Their school motto even is 'We All Soar Together' and the principal. That doesn't mean everybody advances to grade level, but we all advance, we all work together." To encourage collective ownership of student success, St. Joe's staff and teachers have created a culture of availability with open door policies and 24-7 invitations for participation in the school community.

Availability. Several parents commented on the availability of teachers and open-door policy at St. Joe's as central to their experiences with school engagement. As such, teachers' attempts to make themselves available, as described in the previous section, was noted and appreciated by families at the school. The mothers described two types of availability offered by teachers and staff; physical and online or phone.

Physical availability. The school prides itself on maintaining an open-door policy whereby parents are welcome to visit a classroom, meet with a teacher, or drop by to speak with the principal during the day. When asked about school policies, the principal emphasized:

> They're always welcomed into our classroom. I actually have an open-door policy. On some days, I don't know if that's always wise with all the work, but they can just come to the office and I'll make every effort to see them.

The inclusive philosophy described by the principal carried down to the staff and teachers as reflected in statements by mothers explaining, "Teachers are like, 'If you want to drop in and see me, these are the times that you can see me" and "you basically go around and speak to the teachers" or "if they need to see me, they'll let me know." These sentiments are echoed by the teachers when asked how they support families, "Really just showing them everything that we're doing and letting them come into the classroom and explaining all of the things" and "I've let them know they're more than welcome to come talk to me after school or before school, whenever works best…just make them feel like I'm there." The mothers attributed availability of staff, teachers and the school as a key element to family engagement. By creating a welcoming environment geared towards meeting the unique needs of families and students, parents felt they could engage with the school community. Beatriz appropriately posited, "As long as the environment is open for the parents to be a part of, that I think, that's where the family engagement comes in." The culture of availability, not unlike the culture of inclusion and belonging, originated from the principal who modeled and upheld a commitment to families, explaining:

> We meet families and students where they are. Even from enrolling here at St. Joe, if you tell us that to you can only be here at three o'clock on a Saturday, well, the arrangements are made for somebody to be there and to meet you on that Saturday.

Online and phone availability. Mothers frequently discussed the necessity to reach teachers through alternative means. Often face to face meetings were impossible, due to work or family commitments. To further accommodate parents' scheduling needs, St. Joe's adopted the online communication platform, Class Dojo. One mother described her experiences engaging with Class Dojo, "I communicate through there a lot…I can communicate with her on what's going on with him" and "we use Class Dojo to keep in touch with each other…I've always had great responses" or "They right away let you know exactly what's happening." The mothers expressed appreciation for teacher commitment to availability and their quick responses throughout the day. Lily switched her son to St. Joe's in second grade and was surprised when, "teachers are like 'Here's my number and we can talk and if you need anything let me know' it was eye opening." Serena's experience exemplifies constant engagement, "She does respond to my text messages, if she gets a chance, as soon as she can because she does have 20 kids in the classroom." However, helping parents feel supported and stay engaged with the school community is woven into the fabric of St. Joe's philosophy and practices. Teachers explained, "I think just always making sure they know you are available to talk when they need it, having that open line of communication" and "It's always been very clear that you can call me, email me stuff like that. I just try to make myself really available to them." At St. Joe's school, parents experience engagement through communication with teachers, staff and administration in a variety of forms. In addition to availability, Principal Marley helped Latino families experience a

sense of belonging and encouraged family engagement by creating a family-oriented school community.

Family oriented school culture. Everyone involved in the study, teachers, parents, and administration, described St. Joe's as *like a family*.

Feels like a family. Parents compared the school community to home and attributed their desire to participate in school events to a deep sense of comfort, family, and belonging. Melissa, a mother who struggled with acceptance and support at the local public school, compared St. Joe's to the former school, "I have never felt more comfortable anywhere than there…. It's really the fact that everyone knows you and knows your child." Another mother credited family-oriented school events to nurturing a sense of comfort and familiarity, "To me, it's more family-oriented, like let's come together we'll have breakfast…you get to actually meet other parents…and it's just everyone having fun."

Creating a family-oriented school community was intentional and geared towards meeting the needs of the school and Latino community. Principal Marley explained, "the school has to be like the hub of the community…we put Our Lady of Guadalupe outside of the office. That's huge, families need to see that when they walk in." In addition to creating a sense of home by reflecting Latino family values and religious traditions, Principal Marley extended that sense of family to include teachers and staff. Several teachers described the school as "a big community where we look out for each other" and "there is a big sense of family" and "it's more like a family atmosphere than a work atmosphere which I think makes everyone more happy" and "it's just that sense of family, we want everyone to feel like they have a say." Thus, parents, teachers, and administration experienced engagement with the school community as members of a family. To reinforce this sense of family, St. Joe's hosted a plethora of family and Latino-

centered school events. During the individual interviews, several parents described these events when discussing how they experienced engagement with the school community.

Family-centered school events. Engagement opportunities at St. Joe's were abundant and diverse, ranging from educational and informative opportunities like monthly parent focus groups and English language classes, to family fun activities like spaghetti dinners, breakfast with Santa, and father-daughter dances. Building a family within a school community requires opportunities for staff and students to come together and engage with one another. Unique to St. Joe's is the Saturday family field trip. Parents, teachers, and staff bring their families and visit places together, like Lincoln Park Zoo, on Saturday afternoons. Mothers enjoyed these opportunities to engage with school personnel exclaiming, "I love the family field trips" and "It was amazing. Teachers attend. They bring their kids. It's like, 'Here's my family and now my work knows my family too." Central to St. Joe's mission is meeting parents' needs by providing flexibility to increase participation in the school community. Principal Marley clarified, "it's a community builder to get parents involved…. they are working on a Sunday breakfast or a father-daughter dance or a Halloween dance or spaghetti dinner, something so that there's a parental presence within our building." The school's commitment to flexibility was reflected in the mothers' comments when asked about satisfaction with engagement. Comments such as "I think they have a variety of events" and "I'm quite satisfied" and "They really do bring a lot of events that give good opportunities for the family to interact" recurred throughout the individual interviews.

Latino-centered cultural and religious events. During the fall, St. Joe's hosted many family/school events with Latino themes. In October, they hosted a Dia de Los Muertos 5K run with a traditional Mexican, Folklórico dance performance. The dancers were all mothers at St.

Joe's School. The event included traditional Mexican food, a mural to honor lost loved ones, and face painting to represent *calaveras,* or skulls, typically found during the Day of the Dead holiday. On the day of the 5K fundraiser, I observed:

> It wasn't just a 5 K run. They really embraced the Day of the Dead cultural traditions. Many parents had their faces painted. People who were running, some had pictures of loved ones on their hats. The runners were a combination of teachers, families with dads, mothers, children, all ages…grade school age, babies in strollers, there was little ones, toddlers in strollers. Everybody seemed to stick around after the event. It's not exactly warm but people stayed. The playground filled up with kids, there was stands with tacos and horchata and coffee being sold. There was just a lot of laughter and joy. (researcher notes 10/27/18)

In addition, during October, the school creates *ofrendas,* or alters, to honor the dead. In December, religious traditions steeped in Latino culture are honored and celebrated. Parker explained, "Next week we're going to church on Wednesday for Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is huge for Hispanic culture. We're helping them to celebrate that as well as on the last day of school…We always have the Posada." At the conclusion of the Christmas concert, students performed a Mexican Folklórico dance. Students worked with mothers to learn the dances and create costumes. Before the dance, a mother gave the historical background of the dance, in Spanish, without and English translation. Parents were included and engaged through cultural and linguistic reflections of their lived experiences and familial traditions. Lastly, at the annual Breakfast with Santa event, I observed a moment that captured the spirit of family engagement at St. Joe's:

> Children ran all over the room visiting with one another, eating, and playing with toys together. I noticed a lot of laughter, parents chatting with each other, and smiles. I cannot describe the feeling in the room. Warm, cozy, happy, loving…community. The way families interacted with each other and the comfort with having kids run around, away from their families, demonstrated how comfortable the parents felt at St. Joe's…like being at home. (researcher notes, 12/8/18)

Despite ample opportunities to participate in school events and a welcoming, open door school community, some mothers expressed concerns about staying informed and the need to participate.

Participation is essential. Select parent participants linked family engagement to the ability to stay informed and advocate for your child with disabilities. Mothers participated in parent groups, committees, Facebook groups, and outside organizations to stay informed about school issues and increase awareness of disability.

Staying informed about school and disability. Mothers expressed different opinions concerning the necessity to engage with school. Some mothers placed heavy emphasis on participation:

> I feel like unless you force yourself and try to be active in school, then you really don't get any notification. I want to start a parent group to start to get more feedback because I feel like if you don't even participate in anything, you're never going to know anything.

Some of the mothers wanted more information than they felt was provided concerning behaviors, services, and supports in school. One mother asserted, "parents need to know it's okay to ask questions because sometimes if you don't ask, you're not told anything." Juxtaposed to the mothers' desire for more information, is an appreciation for teachers and administration's ability

to handle situations in school with limited communication. Lily explained, “I feel like I have to request the bad information. [laughs] A lot of times they’ll keep it to themselves and they will try to resolve any issues on their own.” Unlike the other mothers, Lily wasn’t seeking more information and did not express a need to engage at St. Joe’s to ensure her son received the necessary services and supports.

Participation in parent groups. Mothers described numerous ways they prioritized and engaged in parent groups at St. Joe’s. Two mothers, Alanna and Melissa, were members of the inclusion committee and work alongside teachers and students to implement positive behavior supports throughout the school. All five participants emphasized participation as a method for gaining more knowledge through listening to others and sharing their own personal experiences. When asked why they wanted to participate, mothers explained, “I think participating in studies are helpful to not only for my benefit, for hearing other people going through the same thing”, and “I'm just here learning. Learning as we go”, or “Me participating more I feel is going to teach me a lot” and “I want to share my experience and learn possibly from other people's experiences.” Parent focus groups were held monthly in addition to workshops about disability topics hosted by United Stand, a partner organization that provides ABA therapy at St. Joe’s.

When asked why they engaged in parent groups, Alanna reinforced the value of learning from each other, explaining, “If it’s something that I know is going to maybe benefit me, I’ll go…because it helps getting the tips and hear from other people’s experiences.” This quote exemplified the underlying motivation of many mothers of children with disabilities to constantly strive to learn more and share like experiences. Serena expounded on some of the emotional benefits gained from participation in parent groups when she shared, “Now that we have open groups like this, it helps me understand even other parents, what they’re going

through, that I'm not alone." Mothers' experiences with family engagement seesawed back and forth between feeling included and welcomed, with instant access to school administrators and teachers, and wanting more information and access to other parents of diverse learners and feeling like engagement with parent groups is the only way to stay connected.

Research Question Two: How do the Latina Mothers of Children with Disabilities and Teachers Define and Engage in Collaboration?

Teachers and Parents' Definition of Collaboration

Both teachers and parents defined collaboration in similar terms. Collaboration meant working together towards the same goal; the success of the student with disabilities. Mothers spoke of collaboration as, "everyone working together for the same goal" and "school as well as parents both work together towards helping the child." Concurrently, teachers complemented the mothers' interpretations of collaboration adding, "we're both trying to get your child to meet goals this year" and "really working with them to try to find how their child works best and what we can do to best support them." Sol illustrated how collaboration should work between stakeholders by providing a more detailed, specific approach to the process. She defined collaboration as, "being open to feedback..I find, especially, me, as a second-year teacher, I need that constant advice or suggestions…I think openness, feedback, constant communication for collaboration, are the three most important things." This definition of collaboration reflects the data by emphasizing collaborative efforts such as sharing strategies and feedback, reciprocity through constant communication, and working together on behalf of the student with disabilities. Lastly, Principal Marley presented a comparable definition of collaboration, explaining, "The effort that everyone puts together, not just one person but everyone, from the administration to the teachers, the classroom, to the parents, the students to make this all work."

Unlike the divergent findings around family engagement, data demonstrated agreement between teachers and parents when discussing experiences with collaboration. Teachers and parents collaborate by aligning home and school supports, engaging in teamwork with colleagues, and with reciprocity, or the equal and mutual give and take of time, information, and respect. As such, results for research question two do not delineate between stakeholder groups; rather, the data is combined to present complementary examples from teachers and parents to support the findings.

Teachers and Parents' Perceptions of Engagement in Collaboration

Reciprocity. According to Ishimaru et al. (2016), the directionality of a reciprocal relationship is characterized by information flowing back and forth between both parties in the relationship. Unlike a unidirectional relationship where experts (teachers) are considered the keepers of all valuable knowledge, a reciprocal relationship upholds the belief that parents possess skills and resources equal to those of the experts (Ishimaru et al., 2016). In this study, teachers and parents alike provided numerous anecdotes and examples of the myriad of ways they engage reciprocal relationships. When asked how they use relationships with parents to guide practice, Parker exclaimed, "they are those other ears and eyes when kids get home to hear how the day and things like that to put on your radar. That helps to inform your practice." Moving information back and forth between home and school, and between teacher and parent, is the cornerstone of reciprocal engagement. Maureen agreed, "When I'm at school, I'm going to make sure to really support him. I know that mom's doing the same thing at home." Establishment of reciprocity began with parents initiating an open line of communication at the start of every school year.

Opening lines of communication. Data revealed mothers took the lead in opening up communication with teachers using face to face introductions to build trust and initiate reciprocity. Lily explained:

> I send out emails. I them know right away. The email is really more of an open communication of, 'Hi, I'm C's mom. If you need anything that you have questions on, let me know that.' Very simple, nothing big but at least it's an opening.

Mothers' efforts did not go unnoticed by teachers. Sol described her surprise and appreciation of parent introductions, stating:

> The parents say, 'You contact me for anything you need.' They look me right in the eye. I think they are the ones that kind of set that tone... Especially the students with IEPs, they are so present. They are so willing to say, 'My student has this but we're working at home or doing this. This is what you can do.'...'You contact me for anything you need.' That just gives the teacher so much good feelings towards them in the first place, first meeting them.

As mentioned previously, mothers expressed a belief in the importance and necessity of opening up communication with teachers to support teachers and begin the reciprocal process of sharing information. One mother summarized the purpose of early and abundant communication:

> I over-communicate because if I tell you every little thing, they know what to do. They feel better and they feel more empowered to do what needs to be done. I think that's how we build the trust. Then from the other end, they let me know what's happening with home and if he's had a good day or a bad day, and that's the information I need to know.

This quote exemplifies reciprocity by highlighting the give and take nature of communication between stakeholder groups. The mother "over-communicates" with an expectation of

reciprocity on the part of the teacher. Mothers and teachers described the next phase of their reciprocal relationships, home-school updates, as a common and prolific experience.

Home-school updates. Using home-school binders, text messaging, email, and Class Dojo, teachers and parents practiced reciprocity by sharing updates about the student's day at school, and evening at home. Updates were sometimes academic and other times behavioral. For example, Tina outlined her system of communicating academic updates with a parent:

> We'll jot down little notes to each other in his assignment notebook and she'll be like, 'Oh, he really struggled on this homework assignment.' I'll respond and say, 'Don't worry about it. I'll sit down with him and we'll look at it a little bit more.'

Similar to Tina's system of reciprocation is Melissa's experience communicating with teachers. She explained how the teacher would "send me a binder home of what she did throughout the day" and:

> We were basically collaborating together say, 'Hey, if we switch this at home, this might be able to help her at school, and if we do this at school, maybe this will change at home…basically just looking for the main goal for her to succeed.'

Other parent-teacher partners used binders and texts to update one another about behavior, medications, and meals. Lily explained, "if he's even acting any different, they know instantly if he has taken his medication or not and they will me a quick text." Furthermore, sometimes teacher-parent teams used text to communicate information from home. Sol described how, "let's say she (student's mother) is running late and the student didn't get breakfast that morning, she'll text, 'Hey, my child needs breakfast. Can you make sure she gets it?' Parker also used texts through Class Dojo for daily updates, explaining, "They get home, they're supportive of what we do in school…I know I can message these parents…they follow through, I really appreciate that

support at home." Born from these bi-directional, reciprocal relationships is a heightened appreciation of one other. Specifically, mothers repeatedly expressed appreciation for the extra time given by teachers on behalf of their child and teachers appreciated the mutual respect between themselves and parents.

Time. Maintaining daily home-school updates takes time and requires teachers to be available after and before work hours. Teachers' extra efforts to stay connected did not go unnoticed by the mothers, as illustrated by their comments about teacher updates and supports. Mothers appreciated how teachers, "take their time if there's anything going on in your child's life" and "took the time out and made sure that she had that type of communication with them and me" and "Here, I feel like they're actually taking the time to give him tools that he needs to be successful in the next grade level." Mothers praised teachers' commitment to the success of their child through additional time and two-way communication. Reciprocal exchanges, such as home-school updates, reinforce both teachers and parents' understandings of collaboration as working together towards a mutual goal- student success.

Mutual respect. Another outcome of the reciprocal relationships at St. Joe's was mutual respect between stakeholders. Akin to parents' appreciation of the extra time given by teachers, teachers frequently described a deep appreciation for the level of respect and trust given them by parents. Respect for one another proved to be another fundamental tenet of the philosophy at St. Joe's School. When asked about the culture of the school community, Principal Marley elucidated how, "we all have value and we all have worth and we all have gifts and talents to share with one another." The underlying assumption of everyone's worth undergirding relationships in the school is made apparent when Tina described parents, stating, "they respect me and my profession, and then that mutual respect, like I respect them as a parent of their child

and they know what their child needs." Maureen supported Tina's sentiment by adding, "I love the families and it may be that again, comes down to the respect that I feel given from them." When asked about how teachers build trust, Beatriz, one of the mothers, credited it to "the way they've responded and have always been respectful." Related to appreciation of parental respect is appreciation of the unwavering trust placed in teachers, particularly young teachers new to the profession. Maureen's appreciation of parental trust is epitomized in the following quote:

> When I first started, and I was like, 'I'm this little 22-year-old and how are these parents supposed to trust me and trust my word, and what I have to say?' And they just, they have. It's been so welcoming and so trusting.

Reciprocal relationships nurtured through open communication, home-school updates, extra time, and mutual respect laid the foundation for collaboration between teachers and mothers in the study.

Aligning home and school supports. Teachers and parents presented innumerable methods to provide cohesive and consistent supports between home and school. The next section delves into tangible methods concerning how teachers and parents practiced reciprocity with collaboration. Stakeholders collaborated by sharing strategies, resources, feedback, triggers, cues, and common academic and behavioral language.

Strategies and resources. Finding ways to increase the academic and social success of the students with disabilities remained the central concern of both teachers and mothers during the study. Collaboration and the sharing of strategies and resources came up repeatedly as a way to help students achieve. Tina explained the motivation behind sharing and learning from parents:

> I really want to find the avenue to help her and resources to help her, and that my goal is to help her in whatever she is dealing with this year. When parents see that, they feel that it's more of a team effort.

Teachers provided ample examples of parents sharing strategies, mostly behavioral, to help the student succeed in school. A student in Maureen's class struggled with anger issues and harmful behaviors. To address the behaviors, Maureen turned to the father for guidance and got helpful advice. Maureen shared:

> His dad had told me something like, 'What works with us is reminding him when he gets in that place of rage or whatever is going on with him, reminding him of those safe places he has to go calm himself down'…At the end of the year, he bit another student, and that situation would have escalated very quickly had I not taken the parents' suggestion.

Maureen created a cool down corner in her Kindergarten room based off the father's strategy and used the corner for other children struggling to regulate emotions. Sol told a similar story about a young student who carried loose markers around all day and her concern the child would lose them and get upset. Input from the mother enlightened Sol. She explained:

> I was like, 'You're going to lose your markers. What's going on?...B, you've got to put them back in the box.' That's what my first thought is. Mom is like, 'No, that's his security blanket. That's his comfort. He has autism. This is what he knows, and this is what he feels safe with.' I think the parent really explaining to me what I can do to support her student is something that I welcome.

The sharing of strategies and resources flows back and forth between stakeholders to maintain alignment of home and school approaches to teaching, learning and behavior. This can be seen when Maureen described her approach to sharing resources. "Whatever I use, I print out a copy

and give it to them. I know that they're using it at home…the parents communicate...about how they are using it and how it's working and not working." Other teachers followed up with, "I try to give a flashcard that she can do with her sister or she can do at home by herself" and "I think a lot of parents are open to doing it and open to receiving resources." Simultaneously, parents provided tips on strategies for behavior while teachers shared resources and academic methods for use at home.

Two specific behavioral insights shared by mothers involved triggers and cues for working with their autistic children. When discussing her relationship with the teacher, Beatriz explained, "I'll give them my suggestions so that they cue her…then they can give me feedback." Teachers and parents' collaborative relationships relied on feedback to check if the strategies and resources implemented at school and home were effective in both settings. Lily's determination to enlighten teachers about her son's behavioral triggers was exemplified when she described meeting the homeroom teacher for the first time:

> She's like 'Please tell me what it is that you need from me and how am I going to help you.' I told her, 'Okay, these are his triggers,' and his triggers were, at that time, music and then crowds and everything was overstimulating because he was five and he couldn't regulate and I said 'You're going to figure it out because he's going to clue you in, you're going to see a look come over his face, or he's going to stand up right away.'

Mothers demonstrated a duty to pass on expert knowledge about their children with an expectation of constant feedback. Maureen reiterated the importance of feedback explaining, "We keep in contact about it and then it's like the next time we talk they tell me, 'I've tried this and now we're seeing this problem, what else can we do now?' We kind of continue that conversation." The interplay between suggested strategies, resources, and feedback about

effectiveness emerged repeatedly and characterized collaborative efforts between stakeholder groups. Additionally, teacher-parent teams aligned home and school supports by utilizing a common academic and behavioral language.

Sharing a common language. One final system to ensure consistency between home and school was the use of common language. When asked what teachers want from parents to increase collaboration, they spoke of "using the same language of a red choice and a green choice" and "here's what we're doing at school and the language that I use so that you can use that same language and work on and reinforce those skills at home." Principal Marley summed up the use of multiple methods to collaborate when she stated, "I think we've built a lot of collaborative structures within our school." Sharing resources, strategies, feedback, and common language are one of many collaborative structures evident at St. Joe's School. Collaboration amongst teachers is another structure in place with the goal of increased student success.

Collaborating with colleagues. Teachers at St. Joe's work in fully inclusive settings but most lack special education training and certification. Many of the participants in the study (*n=4)* were young, new teachers with minimal years of experience in the classroom. As a result, teachers described collaboration amongst colleagues as a valuable and important resource. Parents offered teachers strategies that worked at home, but fellow teachers provided insights into best practices in the classroom. At St. Joe's, there are both formal and informal structures to encourage collaboration amongst teachers. One formal event, the step-up meeting, occurs at the end of the school year. Allie, the inclusion director, arranges this meeting and described the process and philosophy driving the event:

> At the end of last year, too, we did share all of the service plans with the teachers and they updated it in a different color, then this year they could see like, "These were the

> accommodations and modifications that the child is supposed to have, but this is also what the teacher did last year to help support the student…The teachers have that opportunity to talk with the grade below and just not with the grade above and fill them in.

Sol expressed appreciation for the step-up meetings explaining, "It did really help…because I didn't know the kids very well…those previous years' teachers brought along different things that they were doing with that student, show the next year's teachers, just so they felt a little more prepared." Teachers coveted opportunities to collaborate and placed heavy emphasis on the value of learning from one another. Maureen elaborated, "I know there is collaboration a lot of different ways…but my first though tis thinking about how the teachers work together to support a student." In moments of frustration, teachers looked to each other for answers. When asked about types of collaboration, one teacher described a situation where she sought out a colleague and posited, "I've been doing this intervention for four weeks and it's not working. What can I try because I don't have a degree in Special Ed and I don't know what to do." Teachers utilized before and after school times to collaborate; including commutes to and from work. One teacher shared, "I ask the teacher, who's been teaching 40 years, we talk every single day. We used to drive together too... Just being able to bounce ideas off each other, ask Miss K for strategies…being able to collaborate with everyone."

Veteran teachers' experience, coupled with parents' expertise, helped supplement teachers' special education knowledge and practice. Some teachers described isolation from their colleagues and frustration with the lack of opportunities to collaborate more:

> I feel people are generally supportive, communicate with each other, bounce off ideas. I think that's also a struggle too is because I don't see the people on the first floor a lot

> because I'm up here in my little room. When we are at a faculty meeting, it's structured, so there's not like a time to collaborate as much.

Throughout the data, teachers expressed a desire to learn more, work with one another, reciprocate with parents, and generally improve their ability to work successfully with students with disabilities. In addition to daily collaboration with parents and colleagues, teachers devoted themselves to advocacy and securing the best services for students with IEPs.

Research Question Three: How do Parents Advocate and How are their Efforts Understood by Teachers?

Teachers' Efforts to Advocate

Initially, this third research question investigated how parents advocated for their children by examining the extent to which teachers were receptive to parents' advocacy efforts. Upon conducting the research with iterative, recursive data analysis, the interview protocols changed and evolved to reflect the actual situation at St. Joe's School. Thus, the research question correspondingly changed to reflect the reality discovered in the data. In this study, teachers played a central role in securing services for students with disabilities and took the lead in connecting families to outside agencies and support systems. When teachers felt advocacy was necessary, they went through the inclusion director who acted as a liaison between the families, teachers, school, and outside agencies. Using established relational power dynamics (Ishimaru et al., 2016), parents and teachers worked together to advocate on behalf of the students. When asked what advocacy meant to them, some teachers responded, "It's seeing those teachers that are really helping support those struggling students" and "going above and beyond what their normal day would look like to meet the needs of all these kids."

Empowering parents. Teachers advocated by empowering parents, securing services with outside agencies, and meeting the needs of all students. Fundamental to the empowerment of parents was the establishment of trusting relationships with a positive, accepting school culture. Circling back to Principal Marley, who set the tone and priorities of the school, the mission of the school, "starts with the relationship, build that relationship so every day we're building that relationship." Building relationships led to increased parent engagement in the form of advocacy. Allie observed, "Parent advocacy increased throughout my time here…Compared to my first year being here…there was such an increase of parents wanting to help their kids and felt comfortable asking for that help, too." To create a comfortable, accepting environment for parents to feel empowered, informed, and willing to engage, teachers used positivity and love.

Positivity and acceptance. Wielding positivity and inclusion as tools to advocate on behalf of children with disabilities, was unconventional yet effective at St. Joe's School. The mission was to move students from inclusion to true belonging by building relationships and teams with parents. Accepting parents' attempts to engage in school, and inviting them in with positivity and love, increased parent advocacy with the goal of increasing student success. Tina coined a popular phrase to describe the school mission claiming, "I think it's like you catch more flies with honey than vinegar…that's just the culture of the school." Teachers expressed many sentiments of love and commitment to the students, stating, "I feel I try to make that very clear to the kids and to the families that I love your kids and I would do anything for them" and "I'm there for their child more than anything. That's my goal. When I come in, the first thing is to be there for their child."

Teachers described using open communication and acceptance of families' situations as methods to empower parents on behalf of the student. Parker clarified the purpose of a positive,

accepting school culture, “Through making the parents feel comfortable, making them feel welcome, we just help to create that open communication.” Maureen supported that statement with, “if you have that communication wall open, it is a little bit easier to talk about some of the more difficult conversations.” She followed up with a key strategy used to embolden teachers to begin difficult discussions by explaining, “Principal Marley has even explicitly told us about that positive sandwich…It’s like one positive thing, on thing that you need to address that’s not positive and then another positive.” Teachers addressed difficult issues with parents, like the need for counseling, behavior issues in class, or academic struggles, by first building relationships using positivity, love, and open communication. In essence, teachers used collaborative relationships to broach many topics with parents, both positive and negative, with the goal of informing and empowering parents.

Keeping parents informed. Data revealed teachers tasked themselves with the responsibility of keeping parents informed both on a micro (classroom/school) and macro (society) level concerning their rights as parents of children with disabilities. Ensuring parents are aware of how supports and services were delivered in the classroom was one example of how teachers kept mothers informed on a micro level. Parker described this duty as:

> Making sure that the parents are up to date on what is being done in the classroom...that they are in full support of what we are doing, of what the child is doing and making sure that their child is getting all of the possible services they need.

Inherent to her role as inclusion director, Allie had the ability to reach a wider audience of parents and a responsibility to keep them informed and involved in decision making. She increased parent participation by holding meetings at the end of each school year:

> We just started more last year, coming in and having those parent meetings. We have the teachers, the parents, any support staff that they've worked with to just help the teachers get a better understanding of the students and to give the parents a better understanding, too. I think we can do more of it, but I think it's a good baby step that we started.

In the above example, collaborative teams of adults gathered to discuss, reflect, and advocate on behalf of the student with disabilities. Creating an open school culture that included parent voice and opinions directly reflected parents' expectations for family engagement explored in the previous section. The school and teachers filled a need by living up to parents' expectations. Furthermore, Tina expanded on school-wide, inclusive efforts to inform parents by branching out to describe a more macro approach to empowerment. When asked how to motivate parents to advocate, Tina explicated:

> Let them know that these are their rights regardless of their culture, regardless of what they speak at home, regardless of where the child may have come from. They do have a right to have goals and make progress and be educated and be serviced in the school.

Beyond ensuring parents know their rights, Tina continued to include the responsibility to empower:

> I think just empowering them to know that they have these rights, and they should be fighting for their kids, and their kids can be successful in whatever sense that may mean for each child. That's a big one, empowering them to know that they can, and they should, be fighting for their kids in that way.

Empowerment of parents remained a consistent theme throughout the teacher focus group and individual interviews, with an emphasis on creating positive environments, maintaining open communication, and keeping families informed. Teachers' efforts to advocate for students with

disabilities also included tangible actions to impact institutional or individual changes and meet students' needs.

Meeting individual student needs. Meeting with students daily, advocating for services, and collaboration amongst colleagues are examples of how teachers at St. Joe's School advocated for students with disabilities. As a case in point, teachers mentioned securing services for children with disabilities several times when asked about advocacy or supporting families.

Securing services. Counseling services came up frequently as a common, recommended support targeting troubled students. Teachers explained how they looked into services, "For those kids who do need a little bit extra support like whether it's counseling, I noticed that last year I tried so hard to get so many of my kids in counseling." Teachers described how they fought for services:

> Last year I couldn't get everyone in, so, I was, "Okay, that's now is going to have to be something you do next year when you're in first grade." I remember at the beginning of the year I went to the first-grade teachers, and I went to the counselor, and I said, "There are people I tried to get in last year who got on a waiting list or whatever it is, who didn't have a counselor, but I still believe need one.

Additionally, teachers described how they accommodated student's needs when they lost the fight for services:

> It's like, you're trying to get these kids to counseling and you're trying to get these kids the things that they need and when it doesn't happen you have to do it because there's-- I'm not just going to not let them have it, so then it kind of turned into, "Okay well, I'll sit with you at lunch every day and I'll just try to talk and be a friend," but then it's that guilt of, I'm not a therapist, am I doing the right thing?

Teachers advocated for other types of supplementary services to continue improving the academic and social experiences of the students with disabilities in their classrooms. Parker shared how she observed a need and acted on it:

> At the beginning of the year, I advocated for one of my kids where I'm like, 'Something is not right here. I think we need to take a look deeper into his diagnosis'...It opened up that door to start looking into that. I'm like, "At least with this child," I was like, "I think he would benefit from the ABA services we have," because of different behaviors he's exhibited.

Revisiting the role of collaboration in school culture, teachers detailed efforts to advocate through collaboration between colleagues. Parker, as a former aide in the classrooms, described how she applied her specific, unique insights to advocate for students:

> I have the background on him where I'm able to say, 'Hey, I think he needs this,' or, 'Hey, this is something that works with him.' I know he has a chart as well. With the other teachers, I've advocated for him like, 'Hey, this is what you're supposed to be doing with it.' I'm like, 'If you're not doing it with him, then it's not going to work.'

Empowering parents to engage through advocacy, arming parents with information, and meeting the needs of students are three, essential ways teachers advocated for students with disabilities and their families.

Parents' Perceptions of Advocacy

"They gave me what I didn't know I wanted" Lily exclaimed when asked about satisfaction and efforts to advocate at St. Joe's. This sentence captures the overall experience of the five parent participants who continually described feelings of satisfaction with supports and services. Melissa confirmed those feelings exclaiming, "from the get-go, for me, this has been

the best decision I've ever made." Concerning a need for advocacy, mothers reported, "I've never had a bad situation, so I don't feel that I would change it. At this point, I wouldn't change anything" and "I honestly really have never had to advocate because [of] everything that they've done". Data revealed mothers' general satisfaction with school supports, coupled with a minimal need for advocacy, attributed to feeling highly supported by administration and teachers.

Highly supported. Many participants credited the principal's immediate problem-solving efforts, ability to listen to parents, and quick replies as key components to their satisfaction and lack of necessary advocacy. Her support was tantamount to families' sense of belonging as illustrated in this story from Melissa:

> I had an issue where we ran into some money situations and I was like, 'I might have to pull her'…but Dr. Marley was like, 'We'll work something out.' To me, like I said, I can never be as grateful as I am because they really do work with you.

Principal Marley's commitment to inclusion and belonging emerged as a key variable to mothers' happiness with the school and levels of satisfaction. However, none of the mothers recognized the role teachers played in securing services, like ABA and counseling, nor seemed to realize the efforts teachers' put forth during the school day to meet the needs of their children. In most examples, participants referred to Principal Marley and her ability to create an open environment, where parents feel heard, as the main reason their children are getting what they need, and families are supported.

Administrative support. Principal Marley explained her approach to problem solving with parents, "If they have an issue, I invite them to bring it right to me and I will address it…we try to take care of that right away." She maintained an open-door policy where parents can come to her before, during, and after school without an appointment. Several mothers described feeling

comfortable approaching Principal Marley, “I feel like if I have anything, I go to them and they help me, and they answer whatever the question I have” and “I do feel that they do listen to us. I am very comfortable there. If I have an issue, I have no problem going and talking to someone.” Beatriz attributed the lack of advocacy to the Principal’s mission of inclusion, “The being included, that’s everything St. Joe’s purports themselves to be about, an inclusive setting. I haven’t had to fight them. They’ve been wonderful.” Combined with experiences of comfort and inclusion at St. Joe’s, the mothers described Principal Marley’s commitment to immediate problem solving as yet another way she made them feel supported.

Immediate problem solving. When families feel comfortable bringing issues to administration and teachers right away and a problem is addressed immediately, the need for advocacy decreases. Alanna explained how this particular principal stands out from others, “Dr. Marley, I can go email her…She gave me an answer right away where previously I would have to probably remind and remind and bug until I got an answer.” Parents didn’t feel the need to advocate at St. Joe’s due to immediate problem solving, consistent support, and quick action on the part of administration. Lily’s story highlights the necessity for quick action and the supports provided students and families:

> I had a very, very hard day on Halloween. I don't know what I would have done without St. Joe’s. My child goes into school and he's got his costume on. He's some new character, has a bow tie and a black outfit and he wanted to go out for recess…Some teacher told him no..and she said sit down. My son's very hyper impulsive and he looked at the table and it was a bunch of kindergarteners. She told him to sit down. He said if anybody would have seen him sit down next to a kindergartener, they were all going to make fun out of him, hate him and he would no longer have friends. He took that bow tie

> and tried to wrap it, choke himself as hard as he could. One of the therapists saw him and said stop that. She took it away. She told Carrie [therapist}and Dr. Marley and they went across the street and got Dr. S from United Stand and talked to the teacher. All of this happened within a minute. It had to happen so quickly because they got a hold of me by noon. All the therapists, all the teachers, a session was already had with him by the time they brought me in. These are the things that we need.

This example of an emergency with quick, immediate action illustrates the administration and school staff's approach to problem solving.

Teachers and Parents' Advocacy Expectations

Teachers. Teachers' expectations for advocacy focused on two areas of improvement; attendance at IEP meetings and completion of paperwork. Parker outlined teachers' expectations, "I think the biggest part of sharing the advocacy is being sure that they're doing their part…making sure they're showing up for meetings and making sure they're filling out paperwork." Both expectations concerned parents following through with tasks to ensure students received the necessary supports and services. None of the teachers provided expectations for themselves concerning advocacy. The discussion focused solely on changes in parents' behavior.

Attendance at meetings. Teachers expressed frustration with parents not attending IEP meetings after putting in considerable time and effort to get a student tested and set up for services. Allie described her frustration with a family:

> We get to the meeting and then they don't show up and now we have to go through that whole process over again…it's taking the time not only away from the teachers that show

> up to advocate for the students, but the whole team that the public school is letting them use as well.

As discussed earlier in this section, teachers spent ample time, in a variety of ways, advocating on behalf of their students. Teachers demonstrated a commitment to securing services but could not deliver the supports without parental consent. Parker explained the conundrum:

> I have a student in my classroom who 110% needs services but we can't offer them to her because her parents didn't show up for the IEP meeting and so, then it's backtracking like, 'I really want you to advocate for your child but you need to show up for these things.'

A lack of mutual advocacy emerged numerous times in the teacher focus group. Again, Parker commented, "I just feel like sometimes, in some certain situations, I'm the only one advocating for the child and there's not necessarily that collaboration there." Comparable to the frustration felt from lack of attendance at meetings was teachers' frustration with some parents' inability to complete necessary paperwork. Both paperwork and attendance are key to securing services for students with disabilities.

Completion of paperwork. Throughout the study, teachers regularly shifted the topic of conversations back to discussions about the importance of collaboration with parents and how to serve students better. Teachers' motivation to help students succeed and frustration with failed attempts was illuminated when discussing a lack of parent follow through with paperwork and thwarted attempts to advocate and secure supports. To initiate counseling services, teachers have to contact the outside agency that provides therapy, obtain the necessary forms, and get parents to sign the forms. If the parent doesn't sign the form, the process is halted. Parker detailed her frustration with this process, "We were trying to collaborate, figure out what we could do. I was like, 'I could try and get him into counselling, and I can talk to him. 'That was definitely a

productive conversation, except now, it's gone nowhere." Tina reiterated this frustration describing her thoughts on failure to receive initial paperwork at the beginning of the year, "When you don't get that back, it's like, that's the least that I expect so I can get to know your child and serve them better whether they have an IEP or not." Thus, teachers expressed an expectation for parental follow through with paperwork to ensure students are getting what they need both academically and emotionally. Parents' expectations for advocacy shifted focus to an emphasis on personal, group, and system-wide efforts to advocate.

Parents. Mothers' expectations for advocacy included a mix of opinions, suggestions, and experiences. Three central themes emerged concerning advocacy; educate oneself and share knowledge with others, model acceptance in the school, and keep parents, teachers, and service staff informed.

Educate and share. The mothers described a myriad of ways they both educated themselves about disability, and educated others, as a form of advocacy. By participating in focus groups and research studies, mothers hoped to share strategies with one another, learn, and possibly educate other parents beyond the walls of St. Joe's School. When asked why they joined the study, mothers replied, "Hopefully, with us being here, it's the way you said that our research can help other kids in other schools with kids that have disabilities" or "I want to share my experience and learn possibly from other people's experiences" and "for research's sake to help other schools expand on what I think is a good program going on here at St. Joseph." Educating oneself as a form of advocacy was demonstrated with comments such as, "The way I've been trying to advocate through him is trying to look and trying to join Facebook groups that are geared towards my son's condition" and "I advocate to try to educate myself for him, because

without education, I can't educate him." Lily, when asked what advocacy meant to her, took a personal approach to educating others:

> It's not only up to the teacher. It's up to us as well as parents. They need to be able to advocate for their child. If there's going to be a conversation, the parent needs to lead the conversation. The parent needs to know that they're taking on a role of more of a coaching role.

From educating self, participating in research, coaching teachers, to joining groups, mothers stressed the importance and expectation of life-long learning as a form of advocacy.

Model acceptance. Despite an abundance of comments regarding St. Joe's inclusive school environment and commitment to students with disabilities, some parents mentioned an expectation for teachers to model acceptance of disability. Beatriz explained, when asked how teachers should advocate, "Maybe advocate is not the best word, but maybe just model acceptance of J and for whether it be other teachers, or for the students as well." Modeling of disability acceptance took many forms. Principal Marley described how the school celebrated inclusion, "It was a month-long and each grade level did different things from books to different activities. Then we shared them throughout the building the last week." Modeling acceptance of disability is exemplified with a story told by Lily about her son and his teacher, Parker. Lily shared:

> This Saturday, C had his first Holy Communion and I took him downstairs to where all the kids were. Parker had to stop me because she felt like she needed to share with me. She's like, 'Just so you know, we've all practicing First Communion, we're bowing.' And she's like, 'C doesn't get the quick bow and move…he needs to do a full-on bow, deeply." She said, "Because he's not doing it like we're teaching like all the other kids.'

> But then Parker said, 'But it's these little differences that make me love your son so much more.' I was like, 'Thank you.' She wasn't complaining that he wasn't following the rules. She was just appreciating his difference.

Advocacy takes many forms with diverse interpretations. Advocating for administration and teachers to model acceptance of difference is one of many expectations voiced during the interviews.

Inform. Keeping everyone on the same page, with the same information, was a fundamental expectation of mothers in the study. Many parents voiced an expectation of school administration and staff to advocate on behalf of their children by keeping everyone informed about therapy schedules, collaborative work with ABA therapists, and annual IEP progress.

Schedules. When speaking of Title 1 and ABA services, Alanna requested, "I would like to maybe have at the beginning a schedule so we can keep track too with the teacher in case he misses anything," Incidentally, one teacher participant echoed Alanna's request:

> We did have a struggle this year because the therapists under United Stand, their schedules are very flexible. One day, my student could be seen in social studies, and the next time that week they could be seen in science by that same person, or if a therapist student in seventh grade is not here that day, they'll come to me and make up hours.

As such, teachers and parents are not always aware of what service, and when, the student receives during the school day which sometimes resulted in confusion and missed work. Beatriz clarified the situation, explaining, "she gets emotional support coming from the ABA people and then she gets other services. It's just so many different people providing services." However, Beatriz followed up with a sense of understanding, "I think they're collaborating behind the scenes with ABA, that's fine with me too, as long as I am in the loop some way." A majority of

the mothers agreed that an annual meeting, at the beginning of the school year, with all the support staff and teachers is a reasonable expectation to advocate for their children.

Annual meetings. Unlike public schools, Catholic schools are not legally required to hold an annual IEP meeting. Parents get a three-year annual review with the local public-school team and inclusion director, but St. Joe's is exempt from mandatory annual reviews. To clear up confusion concerning supports and to help parents better understand their child's progress, mothers expected an annual meeting with the team. Beatriz voiced her expectation clearly:

> They create a service plan but there's never been a time where we've sat down with everybody at the table at once. There's that beginning of the year meeting for special needs students where they give you, and I do appreciate that they give you the folder and like, "This is your service plan. There are the different providers that you could sit individually and talk with them, but nobody sits down at a table together like a once a year collaborative effort. I have not seen that here. Maybe that's something they can do differently.

Alanna supported Beatriz's suggestion with a focus on introductions and establishing reciprocity:

> I think I would want them to include us and to have either a meeting, maybe at the beginning of the year to say, 'Okay. We're going to be your child's team here at school.' That way we get to know the see if in that way we can establish that line of communication.

Lastly, Serena contributed to the expectation adding, "All those people at one table once a year would be great. I think they do stuff behind the scenes but with us at a table to all talk together at one time." Requesting information through annual meetings, schedules, and opportunities to stay

in the loop, are some of the ways that mothers advocated and represented their expectations of administration and special education staff.

Teachers, parents, and administration at St. Joe's School portrayed the school as home with elements of communication, collaboration, and support woven throughout every relationship in the building. Definitions and experiences with family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy were described interchangeably with an emphasis on working together towards student success. Fundamentally, both stakeholder groups valued openness, frequent communication, a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and strategies, and a mutual commitment to advocacy.

V. DISCUSSION

Understanding how to facilitate successful home-school partnerships within Latino communities is critical in today's political and social climate. Schools around the country are witnessing a record increase in Latino student populations with a projected 115% rise in Latinos in the United States by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Likewise, there exists a disproportionate representation of Latino students in special education programs comprising 23%, or almost one quarter of the total number of students receiving services (Office of Special Education Programs, 2016). Coupled with the increase in Latino students in special education programs, is legally mandated parental involvement in the IEP process, as outlined in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Engaging families in school activities such as homework help, parent groups, and volunteering is shown to improve student outcomes and increase academic achievement (Geenen et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2007). However, previous studies depict communication, relationship, and support barriers as commonplace experiences of Latino caregivers thus preventing them from meaningful and equitable engagement with school professionals (Balcazar, 2011; Burke, 2016; Cohen, 2013; Olivos, 2009). There is a dearth of research on Latino parents' experiences with school engagement, with even fewer studies focused on key facilitators to successful partnerships in Latino communities.

Equitable and reciprocal partnerships between Latino parents and school professionals work when there is two-way communication, caring relationships with teachers, and opportunities for positive advocacy (Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002, Hughes et al., 2008). Through comparison of findings with previous research, this study builds on the notion of Latino parents as educational partners by contributing to the repertoire of effective collaborative

strategies. The purpose of this study was to identify possible barriers to equitable partnerships, discover ways to increase parental satisfaction with services, and to create an empowerment approach to collaboration for all stakeholders. To gain a deeper understanding of the variables influencing stakeholders' perspectives of home-school partnerships, this study examined Latina mothers and teachers' definitions, expectations, and experiences with family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy. Data from two focus groups, twenty-one individual interviews, and twelve weeks of observations with field notes were triangulated and analyzed, using recursive, data analysis, to present a detailed account of stakeholders' experiences, while addressing the three research questions.

The research questions addressed in this study were: 1) What are the expectations and experiences around family engagement for Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers in an urban, Catholic elementary school?, 2) How do the Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers define and engage in collaboration?, and 3) How do teachers advocate and how are these efforts understood by the Latina mothers? This study made headway in advancing our understanding of what makes home-school partnerships equitable and reciprocal within Latino-serving schools. *Expectations* across teacher and parent groups were consistent with previous research; however, *experiences* across teacher and parent groups contrasted most findings in the extant literature. As such, teachers and mothers at St. Joe's School participated in reciprocal and equitable partnerships. Communication, collaboration, and mutual support were embedded throughout all relationships in the school, mothers were highly satisfied with supports and special education services, and the school community operated like a family built on a collective responsibility and approach to increasing students and families' sense of belonging. This study addresses some of the gaps in Latino family literature by reinforcing the

necessity of caring relationships, openness, availability, and family-centered approaches to collaboration and engagement in cultivating positive partnerships with Latino families.

The Impact of Familism and a Collective Approach to Family Engagement

To contextualize how teacher-parent partners experienced family engagement and their expectations regarding participation and responsibilities, a cursory discussion of familism at St. Joe's is essential. In this study, the school community was like a family built on a collective responsibility and approach to increasing students and families' sense of belonging. Prior research suggests collective efforts to engage families in schools is a more culturally responsive and effective method to increasing participation within Latino communities (Burke et al., 2016; Cohen, 2013; Warren et al., 2009). Furthermore, studies have identified a link between informal, community connections amongst families of children with disabilities and establishment of trust and rapport with families (Burke & Goldman, 2015; Burke & Goldman, 2018). Because Latino culture often focuses on *collective* not *individual* experience, data must be interpreted within that context (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). To further promote a family-like, school environment, St. Joe's honored and upheld Latino religious and cultural traditions. For example, the school erected the Virgin of Guadalupe statue outside the main office, celebrated Día de Los Muertos with ofrendas honoring dead loved ones and re-enacted the posada during the Christmas holiday. Cardoso and Thompson (2010), in their study of resilience amongst Latino, immigrant families, noted how cultural rituals and spiritual systems served to reinforce and often increase family connectedness. In addition, research found practitioners forging partnerships with Latino families must recognize cultural identities to work effectively together (Salas, Chinn, & Menchaca-Lopez, 2005).

On many separate occasions, mothers and teachers mentioned a sense of family established at St. Joe's, using terms such as *welcoming*, *supportive,* and *comfortable* to describe St. Joe's being *like a family.* Latino family values lie at the core of all decisions, all work, all efforts, and all obligations of family life in many Latino communities (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Cohen, 2013). Thus, there is a likelihood that engagement in a school culture that feels like family and aligns to Latino family values, like *familismo, cariño, respeto, personalismo,* and *confianza,* impacts parents' satisfaction and engagement in the school community. See Table 9 below

Table 9

Latino Family Values: Examples of Familismo at St. Joe's School

Term	Definition	Example
Attitudinal Familism (Cohen, 2013)	A belief in the commitment of family members to family relationships	"I think we've built a lot of collaborative structures within our school community to build relationships. On the teacher meetings the first day that the teachers comeback, the reminders are always given. It starts with the relationship, build that relationship so every day where we're building that relationship. Some days we're rock stars and we rock it. Other days, we could have done better and that goes with a reflection." **(Principal Marley)**
Personalismo (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010)	Personal relationships and engagement	"Parents can really appreciate when you spend the time to communicate with them in their language that they prefer, sending things home, projects in English and in Spanish and showing your value for their culture and their tradition." **(Tina- teacher)**
Respeto (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010)	Respect	"The way they've responded and have always been respectful. Today I text the teacher like, 'You forgot the novel could you please send it?' She's like, 'Oh, I'm not at school today but I will text somebody to make sure she goes home with it.' They never seem to be bothered." **(Beatriz- mother)** "I do feel like I'm a good teacher based on just how they've made me feel and the respect that they've given me." **(Maureen-teacher)**

Confianza (Colón, James, Chowdhury, Rector-Aranda, & Burgess, 2019)	Trust	"I know one family in particular where I was open to what they had to tell me in strategies and stuff like that. I think because I was so open and listening to what they had to say instead of being closed minded and being like, 'I know everything.' Because of that they were able to trust me a little bit more and trust my opinion, what's working and what's not working, because I was so open to those suggestions." **(Parker-teacher)**
Cariño (Harry, 1992)	Caring Relationships	"Parents do need to understand that I'm going to be doing whatever I can to help their student. It's also nice to know the parents are feeling supported in some ways." **(Sol-teacher)**

Familismo. The abundance of caring relationships with parents, open door and open classroom policies, and the collective focus on the child at St. Joe's reflected traditional Latino family values such as *familismo (*family as top priority*)* and *cariño* (caring relationships). Cohen (2013) introduced the notion of *attitudinal familism*, or "the belief in the commitment of family members to their family relationships" with "family member responsibility for the well-being of the entire family" (Cohen, 2013, p. 73). Attitudinal familism is defined by the belief that family comes before the individual with an emphasis on communal support of one another (Cohen, 2013); and family connectedness is meant to serve and promote the entire family system (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010).

Attitudinal familism. Analogous to family members, teachers and mothers engaged in attitudinal familism by supporting one another and working collectively towards promotion of students' academic and social successes. The findings suggest an interconnectedness between

teachers and mothers, similar to attitudinal familism, characterized their experiences with family engagement.

Teachers and mothers' expectations and experiences complemented one another by corresponding in four, key areas; communication, sharing input and expertise, availability, and school responsibility to increase engagement. First, teachers believed family engagement must include active communication with parents either online, in person, or through texting. Mothers repeated that belief with an expectation of quick and frequent communication with teachers as integral to family engagement. Second, teachers defined family engagement as an opportunity for parents to share strategies and techniques with parents while mothers echoed that belief with an expectation that teachers welcome parental input. Third, teachers emphasized how being readily available to parents, all hours of the day, is fundamental to increasing family engagement. Simultaneously, mothers praised teachers' constant availability with ample opportunities to engage with each other. Lastly, the teachers placed heavy emphasis on the importance of attendance at school events meant to inform parents about their child, services, or disability. Mothers reiterated teachers' expectations when they described how they prioritized attendance at events and groups concerning disability.

The mothers' sense of familismo at St. Joe's, in addition to a strong, cultural representation and collective commitment to their children, may have accounted for their positive perspectives on family engagement. Previous research noted how Latino caregivers self-report higher quality teacher-parent relationships when there is frequent teacher-parent contact (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Hughes et al., 2002) and a strong desire to be involved with their children's schooling (Orozco, 2008; Sutterby et al., 2007).

Contrary to the mothers' stories of positive experiences with family engagement, teachers focused primarily on issues such as language barriers and how the same families always show up to school events. These findings differ from previous research where concerns with language barriers, misinterpretations, and limited bilingual staff were voiced chiefly by caregivers from nondominant cultural groups, like Latino mothers, not teachers (Alvarez, McHatton & Correa, 2005; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Salas, 2004). Concurrently, teachers expressed a commitment to collaborate with parents to work together towards the same goal; student academic and social growth. There is a likelihood that teachers perceived language barriers and limited language supports as significant obstacles to their collaborative efforts. Teachers and mothers engaged, collaborated, and advocated interchangeably, albeit in nuanced and diverse ways, to meet the academic and social needs of the students in their care. Certainly, there were differences amongst the findings that specifically addressed each research question; however, the data implied similarities in experiences with family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy characterized most participants' narratives resulting in equitable, reciprocal home-school partnerships. As such, overlap between stakeholders' experiences and expectations within the three topic areas occurred frequently.

The Role of Inclusive School Communities in Fostering Reciprocal Partnerships

Prior research noted Latino families' experiences with barriers to collaboration causing alienation from school partnerships (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Colón et al., 2019). However, the data strongly suggests teachers and mothers in this study participated in reciprocal and equitable partnerships and those relationships were fostered by an inclusive school community. St. Joe's school created a family within the school community by building relationships between families and teachers. Successful home-school partnerships with Latino families thrive when

there is frequent and quality communication (Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008), caring relationships (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Hess et al., 2006; Rueda et al., 2005), and a key person to advocate and assist the family with medical and school systems (Burke & Goldman, 2015; Hardin et al., 2009). In this study, partnerships were built on constant availability and communication with openness and honesty. As a result, stakeholders felt more comfortable and likely to trust the partnership, reciprocate with strategies, and participate in collaborative teams. Trustworthiness, as a critical component of home-school relationships, is central to the establishment of a partnership and must be developed to create a bond between stakeholders (Salas et al., 2005). First, to gain a comprehensive understanding of collaborative structures at St. Joe's School, with the necessary context to situate the findings, a discussion of the inclusive school culture is warranted. As defined and contextualized in previous sections, inclusive, in this study, refers to school practices that encourage parent or student participation, communication with families, inclusion in the classroom, and opportunities for parental input.

Inclusion. Fundamental to this study was an effort to target and explore the various challenges to collaborative partnerships between Latino parents of children with disabilities and teachers. Previous research has shown elements such as deficit-based thinking (Olivos, 2009; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004), a lack of communication (Blanche et al., 2015; Shapiro et al., 2004) and isolation (Blacher et al., 1997; Blanche et al., 2015; Olivos et al., 2010) epitomize such partnerships. Specifically, research centered around Latina mothers, similar to this study, attributed feelings of isolation to geographic circumstances (Olivos et al., 2010), separation from extended family (Blanche et al., 2015; Olivos et al., 2010) or stigma attached to having a child with a significant disability (Blanche et al., 2015). This study's results are not consistent with these findings.

Membership in an inclusive school community, as described by the mothers in this study, presents a very different experience than one of isolation with limited support. *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* defines inclusion as "the state of being included" and "to take in or comprise as a part of a whole or group" (Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/included). Principal Marley set the stage for collaborative partnerships with her commitment to inclusion. The findings suggest inclusion was her calling and an integral part of the school culture. Principal Marley mentioned the connection between inclusion and the mission of the Catholic Church to never turn your back on anyone; including children with disabilities. She practiced inclusion by helping every student, every family, every teacher feel like they belonged. This began with establishment of a culture where everyone could speak their peace, voice an opinion, and participate in decision making. Findings from prior research diverge from the results of this study.

Studies noted Latino parents felt excluded from opportunities to express their opinions (Shapiro et al., 2004; Salas, 2004), excluded from decision-making concerning their child with disabilities (Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004), or alienated from important knowledge and information (Balcazar, 2011). In a study exploring supports and barriers to successful advocacy within CLD, disability communities, Burke and Goldman (2018) found when schools don't listen to families' concerns, parents experience a sense of disempowerment. Likewise, parents experienced a lack of access to resources and information resulting in exclusion from the school community and special education process (Burke & Goldman, 2018). Quite the opposite, the mothers in this study described ample opportunities to open lines of communication with teachers and share concerns, as well as opportunities to participate in parent groups and studies about disability. With respect to collaboration, partnerships thrived in the inclusive environment at St. Joe's as

exemplified by teacher-parent teams' efforts to align supports, share resources and strategies, and willingness to devote time to the students and each other.

The importance of shared goals and common understanding. Dissimilar to previous research where Latino families felt like outsiders (Ramirez, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2004) whose opinions and expertise didn't matter (Salas, 2004; Rueda et al., 2005), or was ignored (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2004), at St. Joe's they were treated as partners, like in a marriage, and the two people worked together on behalf of the child. The findings indicated teachers and mothers were united with indistinguishable ideas on how to engage in collaboration with identical goals for the partnership. Both mothers and teachers expressed a commitment to supporting the student with disabilities by fulfilling a duty to give home and school updates, align supports, stay in constant contact, and share strategies for positive learning and behavior outcomes. Bryan and Henry (2012) support this practice and argue, "creating a shared vision and plan is critical to the success and sustenance of partnerships" (p. 415). Using communication, collaboration, and mutual support, partnerships worked collectively to increase the student's sense of belonging, academic achievements, and pro-social behaviors.

Communication. Communication undergirded every aspect of family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy. Communication was utilized to establish trust, build relationships and to collaborate; everyone expected and appreciated communication as the key to student's success. During the individual interviews, all 10 participants mentioned communication as an expectation and common practice in their collaborative partnerships. These findings directly contradict a study of recent, Salvadoran immigrants and their experiences with United States' school systems. Cólon et al. (2019) found parents wanted improvements in collaboration by increasing communication with monthly teacher meetings. As such, parents described an absence

of close connections with teachers and attributed a lack of communication to the problem (Cólon et al., 2019). Additional, prior research differs significantly from this study. Past studies found deficit-based perspectives (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Rueda et al., 2005) infrequent communication (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Colón et al., 2019) and limited parental input (Olivos et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2005) illustrated existing barriers to reciprocal and equitable collaboration.

Deficit-based perspectives. Teachers described a multitude of ways they went beyond their teaching responsibilities to meet the needs of their students and the mothers. By spending extra time working with students, securing counseling and ABA services for students, progress monitoring, consulting colleagues, and collaborating with parents before, during, and after school, teachers demonstrated a deep commitment to the families. To be committed to a student, a teacher must place importance on the needs and progress of the student as well as create space for collaboration with the parents. This commitment, and the accompanying behaviors illustrated in the findings, contrast the behaviors of school professionals who view children and families from a deficit-based perspective. For example, Rueda et al. (2005) found mothers felt school professionals emphasized their children's disability, not strengths, in meetings. Similarly, Alvarez McHatton and Correa (2005) described experiences of discrimination and bias against Latina mothers based on outward deficits such as disability and race. In this study's findings, teachers never mentioned disability, race, academic challenges, nor culture as obstacles to student growth or collaboration. Olivos (2009) noted:

> How educators and school staff inherently view Latino families, either through an *additive lens* (as an asset) or a *deficit lens* (as an obstacle or burden), greatly affects the relationship between the two parties and ultimately the level of collaboration

that can be expected (p. 112).

Seemingly, going above and beyond to meet the needs of students and their families could be viewed as a burden (deficit) and teachers may cast impressions of families in a negative light. Teachers at St. Joe's restated, repeatedly, a commitment to securing services for the student without mention of burden, frustration, or bitterness towards the families or students. However, teachers in the study did express frustration when parents failed to return proper paperwork or attend meetings. Teachers described working hard on the child's behalf only to start all over again when parents didn't follow through with necessary steps to secure services. The data suggests these frustrations stem from the teachers' commitment to the students and desire to secure appropriate services, not from a deficit-based perspective. One teacher described providing counseling services during her lunch break when therapy couldn't be scheduled. This teacher's actions could be interpreted as a result of deficit-based opinions of the family as a burden who can't advocate on their own. Yet, the data strongly suggests teachers wanted to help the students and looked to parents as assets and experts on disability, not burdens or *less than*. Three teachers mentioned reliance on parents to learn more about disability and best practices with their child. The three youngest teachers, not formally trained special educators, described heavy reliance on parents for triggers, cues, and strategies with daily, home-school updates and frequent communication. In these instances, parents were viewed as assets, not deficits; partners with valuable insights and information.

Limited parental input. In their study of CLD families and advocacy efforts, Hess et al. (2006) found CLD families want increased opportunities to be involved in their child's educational programming and decisions regarding special education services. They want improved engagement with teachers with increased communication (Hess et al., 2006). Olivos et

al. (2010) contended that families from CLD communities' opportunities to provide input and collaborate with professionals are governed by normative power dynamics reinforced in schools (Olivos et al., 2010). They argue, "These coercive power relationships are played out through interpersonal relationships that place low-income CLD families in a subordinate position, denying them a voice in decisions that affect their children's education" (Olivos et al., 2010, p. 32). However, at St. Joe's School, parents were not subordinate nor dominant. Instead, they engaged in reciprocity with their children's teachers sharing behavioral triggers and cues, academic strategies, and daily updates from home. Teachers responded by sharing pedagogical resources, effective academic and behavioral language to use at home, and updates from the school day. Salas et al. (2005) explains the effectiveness of such approach in empowering parents:

> If we want parents as empowered individuals and decision makers, they need to comprehend what special education teachers are asking them to do. In order for that to occur, parents must be aware of their children's learning environment, be able to interpret information about academic programs, and be able to evaluate in understandable terms the achievement of their children and the school (p. 52).

According to Salas et al. (2005), the data suggests mothers in this study are empowered as equal partners with the teachers. The findings exemplified how teachers and mothers defined and experienced collaboration similarly, with agreement as to why collaboration is important, and best practices for engagement.

The Significance of Unrecognized Advocacy

Despite discussions of the importance of shared advocacy, the data showed teachers and ABA therapists advocated most frequently at St. Joe's. Teachers secured counseling, ABA

therapy, and initial IEPs for students with disabilities. Teachers observed, monitored progress, kept binders of student work, and pursued services when students experienced emotional and academic challenges. These findings differ from advocacy literature. Cohen (2013) found Latino parents of children with disabilities are more likely to advocate because their children are less likely to receive the necessary services. The study emphasized several, possible barriers to advocacy facing Latino families, such as language barriers, lack of familiarity with special education systems, and discrimination (Cohen, 2013). Latino families reported limited or no access to advocacy (Blanche et al., 2015) and schools that do not advocate on behalf of their children with disabilities (Burke & Goldman, 2015). Reiterating Cohen's (2013) findings, Blanche et al. (2015) discovered, "Participants often reported unique difficulties in accessing services for their children because of lack of knowledge and language barriers" (p. 6). A mother in the Blanche et al. (2015) study summarized the situation, "If you don't know how to write or advocate for your child . . . if you don't have those tools, you don't have that capacity, you're not gonna have a chance [to get the services]" (p.7). None of the mothers mentioned teachers' efforts to advocate, although teachers worked non-stop, behind the scenes, to ensure students received appropriate supports and services.

Notwithstanding alignment between teachers' efforts to advocate and parents' expectations for advocacy, the mothers often failed to acknowledge the work done by teachers during school hours. For instance, teachers advocated by establishing positive and accepting classroom environments and keeping parents informed of their rights. Simultaneously, parents expected teachers to model acceptance of disability in the classroom and keep them informed of their child's progress with IEP goals. This data intimates that mothers focused on other factors,

aside from teachers' advocacy efforts, to explain and understand why their children received appropriate services and supports.

Diverging from past research emphasizing parental dissatisfaction with school supports (Cólon et al., 2019), parents reported high levels of satisfaction with services and support. However, mothers credited Principal Marley and her efforts to advocate, problem solve, and take immediate action to meet their child's needs, for their contentment. This finding is significant because, by focusing solely on administration, mothers failed to recognize the importance of the collective efforts of teachers, thereby ignoring the role of shared advocacy in their collaborative relationships. Moreover, teachers expressed an expectation of shared advocacy with parents; wishing for an increase in follow through to secure services together. Sauer and Lalvani (2017) support the notion of shared advocacy calling for a shift from individual advocacy [parents or teachers acting independently] to a collective approach embracing all stakeholder groups. The mothers did not discuss advocacy as a shared responsibility with teachers; rather, they described personal efforts to advocate such as sharing information with teachers and attending parent groups.

Three of the mothers in the study claimed they do not need to advocate at St. Joe's school because their child's needs are always taken into consideration and they feel highly supported by the administration. These findings align with prior research that found when parents have strong relationships with the school, they express less urgency to advocate (Burke et al., 2017). When schools don't communicate with families and refuse services, parents are forced to advocate to secure necessary supports (Burke et al., 2016). Conversely, at St. Joe's School, parents are encouraged to meet with the principal any time an issue arises, and problems are addressed immediately. Students received ABA services, therapy, occupational therapy (OT) and physical

therapy (PT) services, as well as sensory rooms and cool-down corners. Due to ample supports and opportunities to voice concerns, and an ability to take an active role in their child's education, mothers in this study participated in advocacy through engagement with the school, teachers, and administration.

Engagement as a Form of Advocacy

The mothers advocated through engagement. They engaged in school groups, collaborative relationships, and committees to ensure their children received necessary supports. Four out of five mothers discussed, in detail, efforts to advocate through engagement with the principal, teachers, each other, and outside agencies. They described expectations to increase engagement and advocacy by participating in events such as this research study, inclusion committees, and annual meetings. They often prioritized engagement and participation in their child's schooling as methods to stay informed and guarantee their child gets the services they need. These findings support prior research. Burke et al. (2017) posit that parents advocate with self-education, learning their rights, bringing in experts, and communicating with the school. Specifically, the mothers stressed participation in groups with other mothers of children with disabilities as critical to their personal growth, education and ability to advocate (Burke et al., 2017).

Previous research on the impact of parent to parent advocacy groups confirmed when Latino parents participate in these types of support groups, their knowledge about special education and feelings of empowerment are enhanced (Balcazar et al., 2011; Burke, 2013; Mueller et al., 2010). Mueller et al. (2010) studied Latina mothers of children with disabilities who engaged in a Spanish-speaking, parent support group. Mothers compared the group to a family, similar to participants in this study, and gained information and much emotional support

from the other parents (Mueller et al., 2010). Contrary to the findings in this study, Mueller et al. (2010) noted, "the most support and information the mothers' received was through the support group rather than through school districts or relations with teachers" (p. 118). Aforementioned earlier in this chapter, the mothers praised administration and teachers' efforts to support their families with collaborative relationships and open-door policies. Baquedano-López et al. (2013) built on the proven effectiveness of parent to parent groups within Latino communities, arguing for an improved empowerment approach that regards "Latino parents as producers (and not just consumers) of critical knowledge" (p. 165). Mothers at St. Joe's exemplified this role as producers of knowledge when they advocated through collaborative engagement with teachers, took on leadership roles in school committees, and participated in focus groups and research studies. To continue learning and building an arsenal of special education knowledge and advocacy practices, four of the five mothers committed to starting a diverse learners support group for parents.

Revisiting the Equitable Collaboration Framework

The equitable collaboration framework, developed by Ishimaru et al. (2016), questions how educational institutions utilize the cultural and social resources of families from nondominant cultural communities. Ishimaru et al. (2016) examined what happens when schools ignore families' resources and the resulting boundaries between parents and teachers that can influence parental disengagement from the school community (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The equitable collaboration framework belongs to a burgeoning area of study; critical engagement literature. I utilized the equitable collaboration framework as a lens to view interactions between stakeholders, to explore relationships between Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers, and to contribute to critical engagement research. Perspectives and experiences of

families of children with disabilities is deficient in critical engagement literature; specifically the perspectives of Latino caregivers of children with disabilities. Some critical engagement research posits that by examining the levels of intervention, power dynamics, and directionality of interactions in relationships (Ishimaru et al., 2016), we avoid reinforcing middle class, White, normative standards of practice (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005). The goal of the equitable collaboration framework is to dissolve boundaries between families and schools and increase equitable partnerships. This study made progress towards addressing the gap by underscoring key facilitators to reciprocal, equitable home-school partnerships.

To review, I used the three, main principles of the equitable collaboration framework to analyze teacher-parent relationships in this study. With deductive coding, I analyzed the levels of intervention, power dynamics, and directionality of the relationships. I found parent-teacher pairs engaged in collective and individual levels of intervention with relational power dynamics in reciprocal partnerships. In this thematic analysis, I will address each of the three principles of the equitable collaboration framework with examples from the study to support my claims. Lastly, efforts to expand on the theory will be discussed.

Levels of intervention. Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) framework dissects engagement, advocacy, and collaboration by looking at how families are situated with the school community, how parents are involved in decision-making and institutional changes, and how parents' assets are utilized. To begin, Ishimaru et al. (2016) argue underrepresented families provide valuable information and support to one another by collectively sharing resources. The theory claims, by shifting the focus from individual advocacy to collective advocacy, these collaborative interactions facilitate increased family engagement. At St. Joe's school, teachers and parents'

levels of interventions differed. Teachers engaged in collective levels of intervention by sharing advocacy efforts with colleagues, administration, and therapists. They expressed an expectation of shared advocacy with the mothers with appeals for increased collaboration and follow through. However, the mothers described a more individual level of intervention with a focus on increasing one's knowledge about disability through engagement in parent groups and committees. Although their process for advocating centered around participation in collective groups, the motivation behind the choice reflected an individual approach. This finding aligns with prior research on advocacy within Latino communities by illustrating a preference for parent to parent forms of collective advocacy (Balcazar, 2011; Burke, 2013; Mueller et al., 2010). Mothers in this study engaged in collective levels of intervention with other parents and individual levels of interventions with teachers. Linking Baquedano-López et al.'s (2013), argument for acceptance of alternative forms of engagement and advocacy as facilitators of equity within school communities, and the findings in this study, there is a clear need to increase parental support groups and committees for families of diverse learners in Latino communities with an opportunity to redefine norms for engagement and intervention.

Power dynamics. The power dynamics principle frames two types of power; unilateral power, or power *over* someone else, and relational power, or power held *with* someone else (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Relational power, when parent and teachers engage together towards a common goal, increases access to resources and lowers families' dependence on outside agencies (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Mueller, Milian & Lopez, 2010; Olivos, 2009; Sauer & Lavani, 2017). Previous research has shown instances of unidirectional power dynamics between Latino families and teachers, specifically in IEP meetings and discussions concerning special education rights and services (Balcazar et al., 2011; Harry, 1992; Salas, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2005). Yet, in

this study, parents and teachers' partnerships exemplified relational power dynamics with numerous examples of shared power and effective, collaborative structures. Ishimaru et al. (2016) frame power dynamics as tools to facilitate institutional change; however, at St. Joe's maintaining current practices is the goal, not change. Teachers and parents applied relational power to determine best practices for students with disabilities, at home and school, as well as appropriate supports and services. Application of relational power dynamics was one means of supporting the directionality of teachers and parents' reciprocal relationships.

Directionality. The directionality of relationships principle measures the reciprocity of home-school relationships. Ishimaru et al. (2016) categorize relationships two ways; unidirectional (one way) or reciprocal (back and forth). The authors argue the direction of a relationship provides a framework to gauge whether the relationship values parents' specific skills and resources which can potentially inform and transform institutional practices (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Unlike a unidirectional relationship where school professionals are deemed to hold all the knowledge and expertise, the reciprocal relationships in this study presented a different situation. The mothers at St. Joe's played an active role in their partnerships with teachers providing multiple insights about academic and behavioral strategies proven to be effective with their child. Likewise, teachers reciprocated with resources and insights of their own. Teachers expressed an understanding of the mothers' skills and worth by welcoming frequent parental input. Indeed, some teachers relied on the mothers' experience with disability for guidance in the classroom. The data illustrated relationships with clear, reciprocal directionality, further supporting the claim that teacher-parent partnerships in this study were reciprocal and equitable.

Contributions to critical engagement literature. To expand on Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) theoretical framework, it is necessary to refer back to the findings. There were numerous

intersections between the mothers' expectations and experiences with family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy. As such, mothers described positive perceptions of the school and their relationships with teachers and administration. This study posits that parents of children with disabilities from Latino backgrounds experience elevated feelings of support and satisfaction when their expectations and experiences align, and their culture and expertise are welcomed and celebrated. With collaborative structures such as collective levels of intervention and advocacy, relational power dynamics and reciprocal partnerships with teachers, Latino parents transform into genuine educational partners.

Limitations

The limitations of the present study are characteristic of qualitative studies aimed at understanding the perspectives and experiences of a small group of participants. This study took place in one, medium-sized Catholic school in an urban setting. Five Latina mothers of children with disabilities, five teachers, and one administrator contributed critical insights regarding collaborative partnerships and advocacy at their school; however, generalization of these findings to other Catholic schools is not feasible. Qualitative research employs in-depth interviews and observations with rich, detailed field notes to examine the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon, not *how many* (Small, 2009). The unique properties of the setting, and individual's narratives, limit applicability across settings. While themes and findings may differ drastically in diverse contexts, methods used to "access and identify" the findings could be similar and generalizable across settings (Compton-Lilly, 2013, p.61). To address this limitation, the present study utilized a multiple-layered approach to analyses to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under examination. Accordingly, this study pushes theory on collaboration

with Latino families in special education programs and stimulates additional questions for future research and approaches.

A small sample size comprised of mothers who self-disclosed heavy involvement in school events, committees, and parent groups presented an additional limitation. During the recruitment process, enlisting more than five mothers willing to participate in the study was difficult. Initially, only four mothers consented to participate, with the fifth mother joining the study a month later. A lack of inclusive representation of multiple, parental viewpoints and experiences with collaboration, advocacy, and family engagement was absent from the study. Fundamentally, it is difficult to surmise what alternative themes and insights could have emerged with additional participants. The lack of such data challenges whether the study reached theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014) with enough data to support the categories and themes presented in the discussion with confidence that, "no new properties emerge" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192). Thus, to minimize this limitation, future research should extend the recruitment period, and intensify recruitment efforts, to increase and diversify the participant pool.

The short length of the study presented a final limitation to the interpretation of the research findings. The study was conducted over the course of four months, encompassing the fall semester of the school year. Adding more time to the research design would allow for additional opportunities to collect observational data with detailed field notes. With more time and in-depth field notes, thick descriptions of the researcher's engagement with the school, and interpretations of those experiences, would provide a more detailed representation of collaborative structures at play (Poulos, 2013). Indeed, according to Emerson (2011), time is a critical element that, "enables the ethnographer to inscribe the detailed, context-sensitive, and locally informed fieldnotes that Geertz (1973) terms 'thick description" (Emerson, 2011, p. 14).

Furthermore, a longer study presents opportunities for additional types of data collections to enhance the validity of the research findings. Triangulation of more extensive focus groups, interviews, and field notes could provide additional evidence to establish validity. As mentioned previously, a lack of diversity in the participant pool questions theoretical saturation and the strength of the results. Increasing time for data collection could address possible questions, or gaps in understanding, presented with the addition of participants and supply further processes to confirm the credibility of the results. Thus, to augment theoretical saturation and validity, future research should extend the period of data collection to promote thick descriptions of findings and implementation of additional, qualitative data collection methods.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research and Practice

The results of this study yielded exceptional findings that pinpoint specific, positive strategies to help facilitate successful teacher-parent partnerships within Latino communities. Given the nature of these findings, numerous implications for future research and practice have been identified.

Implications for research. This comparative analysis of teachers and parents' perspectives regarding the role of family engagement and advocacy in collaborative relationships discovered a connection between Latina mothers' expectations for collaborative practices and actual experiences with teacher partnerships. These findings provide insight into potential facilitators to successful collaborative structures that are integral to parent satisfaction. Despite identification of specific, critical facets to equitable and supportive partnerships, further research should examine the presence of facilitators across Catholic special education programs in the same metropolitan area; paying attention to additional, collaborative practices. Comparing teachers and parents' expectations and experiences across Catholic schools will offer new insight

to support or refute the findings of this study. Correspondingly, future research that explores and compares the presence of facilitators and collaborative structures across public schools to those identified in this study and other Catholic schools will add additional layers to the discussion around how to define and enact equitable, reciprocal teacher-parent partnerships in the Latino, special education community.

Bryan and Henry (2012), developed a partnership process model for school counselors with the goal of "creating school-family-community partnerships that foster student success" (p. 413). There are seven stages to the process which mirror many of the collaboration strategies discovered in this study. Working together on a shared vision and plan, providing feedback, and assessing student needs and strengths are some of the stages in Bryan and Henry's (2012) process model that match findings from this study. However, Bryan and Henry (2012) do not situate the model within the context, or unique experiences, of families from marginalized communities like the Latino or disability community. Therefore, utilizing the data from this study and follow up, subsequent studies, future research should develop a partnership process model, similar to Bryan and Henry's (2012) model, that is specific to the needs of Latino families of children with disabilities. Synthesis of data from this study, with prior and future research, to develop a process model for school professionals could provide necessary insight and guidance for teachers working with Latino families. This type of culturally-specific partnership process model could increase Latino parents of children with disabilities' opportunities for shared decision-making and equity.

Implications for practice. Given the expectation for teacher and parent collaboration outlined and mandated by IDEA (2004), and the need to respond to the growing diversity of families of children with disabilities, implications for practice have been identified. One of the

most effective approaches to bridge some of the gaps in understanding between today's mostly White, female teacher force and the diverse students populating their classrooms is culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive approaches to teaching and relationship building emphasize the recognition of multiple ways people from various cultures make meaning and use cultural knowledge to connect to new knowledge (Hammond, 2015). The present study illustrates an all school integration of cultural values and meaning making, like *familismo* and *cariño*, in an effort to build strong relationships between parents and teachers in a culturally specific community. Effectively, this study offers culturally responsive strategies for relationship and community building targeted to parents, teachers, and administrators interested in improving Latino students with disabilities' academic and behavioral outcomes. Implementation of Class Dojo applications to increase communication and provide translations services, sharing a common academic language, or participating in daily home-school updates to help address negative behaviors are some of the many strategies potentially discussed and developed for pre- and in-service teachers. Accordingly, findings from this study could assist Latino parents of children with disabilities by providing insight on ways to improve existing relationships with teachers. Lastly, exploration into the practices exemplified at St. Joe's, and the resulting partnerships forged between teachers and parents, could assist administrators wishing to create more inclusive, culturally responsive, and equitable school communities.

Conclusion. Limited research presents positive findings and successful strategies concerning collaboration with Latino families of children with disabilities (Burke et al., 2017; Burke & Goldman, 2015; Hughes et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 2008). Select research focuses on elements of effective collaboration in relation to advocacy (Burke et al., 2017; Burke & Goldman, 2018), while others present a mix of barriers and positive strategies (Hughes et al.,

2002; Hughes et al., 2008). A few studies discuss means to empower Latino caregivers with an emphasis on changing how we define engagement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Yosso, 2005), or increase opportunities for parents to advocate collectively and support one another in groups (Cohen, 2013; Balcazar et al., 2011). While these studies shed light on distinct aspects of Latino parents' experiences with special education systems and collaborative relationships with teachers, little is known about the similarities and differences between all stakeholders involved in home-school partnerships. This comparative analysis of teachers and Latino parents' perspectives, examining and synthesizing expectations concerning family engagement, collaboration, and advocacy, addresses a gap in critical, family engagement literature by providing multiple perspectives around three key facets of collaboration. The results of this study discovered a plethora of intersections between mothers' expectations and teachers' efforts to collaborate, advocate and engage in home-school partnerships. Findings revealed reciprocal relationships and a family-like, inclusive school community that reflects traditional Latino family values influence parents' perceptions of the school's special education program and contribute to feelings of satisfaction and belonging. Continuation of research comparing the perspectives of Latino caregivers of children with disabilities and teachers around topics such as collaboration and advocacy, coupled with training and implementation of key strategies outlined in this study, is recommended. This type of critical engagement research has the potential to enhance caregiver empowerment by balancing power dynamics and increasing equitable, collaborative partnerships.

Appendices

Appendix A. Research Question and Data Chart

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:	**DATA:**
1. What are the expectations and experiences around family engagement for Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers in an urban, Catholic elementary school?	Initial focus groups- one with mothers, one with teachers 1st individual interview with teachers and mothers after focus groups Observations with field notes at family school events
2. How do the Latina mothers of children with disabilities and teachers define and engage in collaboration?	Initial focus groups- one with mothers, one with teachers 2nd individual interview with teachers and mothers after Parent Teacher Conferences Observations with field notes at family school events
3. How do teachers advocate and how are these efforts understood by Latina mothers of children with disabilities?	Initial focus groups- one with mothers, one with teachers 1st and 2nd individual interviews with teachers and mothers Observations with field notes at family school events

Appendix B. Focus Group Protocols

Parent Focus Group Protocol
Date
Time

Participants:
XXX

TIME	SECTION	SCRIPT/DIRECTIONS
20 min	Arrival	Participants will arrive. Molly will say hello, welcome, please get food, take a seat, etc. Molly will get X's signature on top of parent consent form.
5 min	Introduction	*Hello everyone. Welcome! Thank you so much for participating in my research study! I am really looking forward to hearing everyone's opinions today.* **PURPOSE:** *The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Latino families of children with disabilities concerning collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy. I'm interested in discovering ways to increase collaboration and partnerships with schools.* *By talking to you and your children's teachers, I will be able to compare perspectives to better understand the similarities and differences in expectations of collaboration, services, and advocacy. My ultimate hope is that by having research that includes your perspectives about collaboration and partnerships, we can begin to create better school partnerships and increase your satisfaction with services for your children.* **MY BACKGROUND:** *I am a special educator and have worked with students and families for over 15 years. I have worked hard to support students and families in Chicago public schools. While doing this, I had certain ideals and expectations of how collaboration with families and students should work. I have always been fascinated by how my ideals and expectations may have been different than my students and their parents. So that's just a little bit on my background and how this study was born.*
10 min	Group Introductions	*That's a little about me – now let's go around and you can introduce yourselves. Tell us your name and your child's name and why you want to participate in the study.*

5-10 min	Roles/ Ground Rules	**ROLES:** *My role is to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has had a chance to share. I am very interested to hear from each of you, so if someone is talking a lot, I may ask to give others a chance. I may also call on you if we haven't heard from you as much. I will be very conscience of time, and getting through all of the questions today. So if the group is talking a lot about one question – that's great(!), but I may stop the conversation to move us to the next question.* **A couple things about our discussion today:** *There are no right or wrong answers. I expect there will be differing points of view. Please share your opinion regardless of if it is the same or different from someone else who has shared. Also, you will see that I am recording our discussion today because, of course, I can't memorize everything that was discussed! Feel free to use names when you are speaking today – all names and any other identifying information will be deleted from the transcript, and numbers will be assigned for all participants in my study. This discussion today is completely confidential.* *Feel free to have an open dialogue with each other – respond to what others are saying, follow up on something you heard, and share examples.* *Also, please silence your phones during the interview.* *We are going to talk for over an hour today, and then I am going to ask you, at the end, to fill out a survey about yourself and a slip with a couple best dates and times to do the individual follow up interview with me. I can meet you anyplace, on the weekend, evenings – whenever – I will come to you. The only thing I request is it is a somewhat private spot because I will record our interview. The follow up interview will last for 1 hour and will allow us to talk in private regarding what was discussed today. I would like to meet with each of you in the next two weeks, so the information is fresh.* *I have provided you with two handouts. One has the questions I am going to ask during our group today. You can look at them as a guide while we are talking if you want to. The other handout is for note taking. Those of you who like to write your thoughts down may want to jot down notes, questions, or thoughts of anything you want to discuss now, at the end of our discussion today, or during the individual interview. I will collect any notes that you take at the end of our discussion today and give them back during the individual interview so we can make sure to cover any points that you want to discuss.*

		Does anyone have any questions? *Ok! Let's get started with our first question!*
10 min	Collaboration	So – to begin – Tell me about your experiences with teachers and collaboration in the school. • What are some of your expectations for collaboration with teachers?
10 min	Collaboration	What are your central concerns? • When people talk about collaboration, what do they say? • What do you find helpful?
10 min	Family Engagement	So, in thinking about what you want collaboration to look like, and what is important for your relationship with teachers… What about your relationship with the school community? Tell me about your experiences with school events.
10 min	Family Engagement	What are your central concerns? • How would you change things? • What works? Why?

10 min	Advocacy	Now we are going to switch topics and focus on your child's specific needs in school… What do you do when your child doesn't get what they need or you disagree with decisions made for services?
10 min	Advocacy	How do the teachers respond to your efforts to protest or change decisions made about services? How do you feel about the experiences? • What are your greatest concerns or fears about your child's services? • What are your greatest hopes for future services or collaboration?
5 min	Ending	Is there anything that we missed? Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with collaboration with the teachers and school? Or the help that you need, or your child needs, to form relationships with teachers or get appropriate services in school?
5 min	Exit Forms	Hand out demographic survey and exit slips. Collect surveys and exit slips. Hand out gift cards and thank yous.

Teacher Focus Group Protocol
Date:
Time:

Participants:

TIME	SECTION	SCRIPT/DIRECTIONS
20 min	Arrival	Participants will arrive. Molly will get X's signature on top of parent consent form.
5 min	Introduction	*Hello everyone. Welcome! Thank you so much for participating in my research study! I am really looking forward to hearing everyone's opinions today.* **PURPOSE:** *The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Latino families of children with disabilities concerning collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy. I'm interested in discovering ways to increase collaboration and partnerships with schools.* *By talking to you and the parents, I will be able to compare perspectives to better understand the similarities and differences in expectations of collaboration, services, and advocacy.* **MY BACKGROUND:** *I am a special educator and have worked with students and families for over 15 years. I have worked hard to support students and families in Chicago public schools. While doing this, I had certain ideals and expectations of how collaboration with families and students should work. I have always been fascinated by how my ideals and expectations may have been different than my students and their parents. So that's just a little bit on my background and how this study was born.*
10 min	Group Introductions	*That's a little about me – now let's go around and you can introduce yourselves. Tell us your name, the child or children you teach, and why you chose to participate in the study.*

5-10 min	Roles/ Ground Rules	**ROLES:** *My role is to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has had a chance to share.* *I will be very conscience of time and getting through all of the questions today.* **A couple things about our discussion today:** *There are no right or wrong answers. I expect there will be differing points of view. Please share your opinion regardless of if it is the same or different from someone else who has shared.* *Also, you will see that I am recording our discussion today because, of course, I can't memorize everything that was discussed! Feel free to use names when you are speaking today – all names and any other identifying information will be deleted from the transcript, and numbers will be assigned for all participants in my study.* *This discussion today is completely confidential.* *Feel free to have an open dialogue with each other – respond to what others are saying, follow up on something you heard, and share examples.* *Also, please silence your phones during the interview.* *We are going to talk for a little over an hour today, and then I am going to ask you, at the end, to fill out one survey about yourself and one survey with a couple best dates and times to do the individual follow up interview with me.* *We can do the interview over the phone or I can meet you anyplace, on the weekend, evenings – whenever – I will come to you. The only thing I request is it is a somewhat private spot because I will record our interview. The follow up interview will last for 1 hour and will allow us to talk in private regarding what was discussed today. I would like to meet with each of you in the next two weeks, so the information is fresh.* *I have provided you a handout with the questions I am going to ask during our group today. You can look at them as a guide while we are talking if you want to. There is room for note taking. I will collect any notes that you take at the end of our discussion today and give them back during the individual interview so we can make sure to cover any points that you want to discuss.*

		Does anyone have any questions? *Remember, this focus group discussion will be audio recorded.* *Ok! Let's get started with our first question!*
10 min	Collaboration	So – to begin – Tell me about your experiences with families of children with disabilities and collaboration in the school..after school….outside of school?? • What are some of your expectations for collaboration with the families? • What are some of your expectations of families during IEP meetings?
10 min	Collaboration	• When teachers discuss collaboration, what do they say? • What is working well? What do you find helpful? • What are your central concerns?
10 min	Family Engagement	So, in thinking about what you want collaboration to look like, and what is important for your relationship with Latino families… What about families and their engagement with the school community? Tell me about your experiences with families of children with disabilities and participation in school events.
10 min	Family Engagement	What are your central concerns? • How would you change things? • What works? Why?

10 min	Advocacy	Now we are going to switch topics and focus on the child's specific needs in school… Describe the types of advocacy efforts made by families concerning special education services.
10 min	Advocacy	How do you respond to such efforts? How do you feel about the experiences? • What are your greatest concerns about decision making? • What are your greatest hopes for future decision making?
5 min	Ending	Is there anything that we missed? Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with collaboration?
5 min	Exit Forms	Hand out demographic survey and exit slips. Collect surveys and exit slips. Hand out gift cards and thank yous.

Appendix C. 1st Interview Protocols

Buren Home-School Partnership Interview Guide 1: Parents

Participant ID _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The information you share will be used to better understand your experiences with collaboration and relationships with teachers at St Joe's. I will focus on areas of strengths and areas for improvement to provide additional supports in the future that benefit everyone. I will ask you a series of questions about your personal experiences with St Joe's. The information in this interview will remain confidential. I expect the interview to last about an hour.

As a reminder, I will audio-record this conversation so that I can be sure to accurately understand your responses. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Collaboration:

1. What does collaboration mean to you?

2. In what ways do you collaborate with your children's teachers?

3. What types of communication are important for you to have a good relationship with the teachers?
    What types of communication help you feel the most supported by staff?

4. In the focus group, someone mentioned teachers and staff probably work behind the scenes on behalf of your child.
    How would you like to be more included in what happens at school? In decision making?

5. In the focus group, someone mentioned teachers can be hesitant to tell you what's going on.
    How would it work better for your relationship?
    How could communication improve?

6. Someone also mentioned teachers take time to learn about your child so they can support them best in school.
    What does this mean to you?
    Can you describe a time this happened for your child and family?

7. In the focus group, someone mentioned St Joe's is unique and different from other schools. What do they offer your family and child that you don't get anywhere else?
    What stands out?

8. Everyone mentioned being happy with St Joe's at some point during the focus group.
    Why are you all so happy with St Joe's?

Family Engagement:

9. In the focus group, someone mentioned work-life balance is a priority but there are many obstacles to attending family events and being more involved in school….
    What changes in the school events might increase your chances of attending?
    Are there other supports that might help?

10. Someone also mentioned starting a parent group.
    What would you love to see at St Joe's?
    What are important topics to discuss?
    What types of supports/knowledge can you bring to the group?
    What would you like to get from the group?

11. In the focus group, someone mentioned a yearly meeting with all the teachers where you discuss about your child or maybe a meeting similar to report card pick up day but just focused on your child's progress.
    What do you think about these ideas for improvements?
    Do you have any other suggestions?

12. Several times St Joe's was described as a very inviting place.
    Why is this important to you and your school community?
    How can St Joe's be more accommodating to families?

Advocacy:

13. When have you had to advocate for your child? What did you do?
    Can you compare the experience to St Joe's?

14.What services are available for your child at St Joe's, what services do he/she receive?

15. In the focus group, someone mentioned you need more information to be a better advocate.
    What types of supports would you like to help you learn to be a better advocate?

16. In the focus group, someone also mentioned many teachers act as advocates for your kids.
    Can you explain more what that means to you?

17. What do teachers do that make you feel supported?
    What about during the IEP meetings?
    What else do you need to feel supported by the teachers and staff?

18. At St Joe's, do you feel your views and opinions are heard?
    If yes, in what ways? Please explain.
    If no, why not? Please tell me more.

19. Unique at St Joe's, you have an inclusion director, and they put you in touch with outside agencies like United Stand, Aspire, and Tuesdays.

Can you tell me more about that process?

What supports do you get with outside agencies you don't receive at St Joe's?

20. If you could change or improve anything concerning how St Joe's works with your family and child, what would you change? Why? Explain.

Any last comments or concerns you would like to address?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview. I will see you at parent teacher conferences and then send you an email to set up our second interview. Thank you!

Buren Home-School Partnership Interview Guide 1: Teachers

Participant ID _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The information you share will be used to better understand your experiences with collaboration and relationships with parents at St. Joe's. I will focus on areas of strengths and areas for improvement to provide additional supports in the future that hopefully benefit everyone. I will ask you a series of questions about your personal experiences at St. St. Joe's. The information in this interview will remain confidential. I expect the interview to last 45-1 hour.

As a reminder, I will audio-record this conversation so that I can be sure to accurately understand your responses. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Collaboration:

1. What does collaboration mean to you?

2. In what ways do you collaborate with your children's parents?

3. What types of communication are important for you to build relationships with the parents?

4. In the focus group, many of you mentioned the use of Class Dojo for communicating.
   About what percentage of families use the app?
   What about parents who don't use it to communicate?
   What are some other ways you connect with families?

5. In the parent focus group, some of the parents mentioned they felt teachers are sometimes hesitant to tell them what's going on for fear of upsetting them.
   What do you think about this statement?
   What have you experienced in the past?
   What suggestions do you have to help build confidence or rapport?

6. At some point during the focus groups, both parents and teachers mentioned being happy at St. Joe's.
   Why do you think the parents are happy with St. Joe's?
   What about you?
   Is there anything you would you like to see improved?

Family Engagement:

7. During the focus group, many of you mentioned the difference between the amount of communication and collaboration that occurs when getting a student their first IEP or getting a student's IEP reevaluated and when a student already has an IEP. Many teachers said they don't have a lot of communication with families when a student already has an IEP.

Why do you think this is the case?
How can the school and staff improve this situation?
What would make it easier for you to know the students and their needs better?

8. In the focus group, some of you mentioned knowing very little about a student except for what is on their documents (IEP, ISP).
Do you have suggestions to improve this situation?
How can parents help improve the situation?

9. In the focus group, parents suggested having an individual, yearly meeting with all the teachers and service providers to discuss their child's progress.
What do you think about this idea?
Do you have any other suggestions?

10. In the focus group, many people praised how St. Joe's incorporates culture into school events and explained how those events tend to increase family engagement.
What are some ways to incorporate the neighborhood and family culture into your relationships with parents?
What about in the classroom?
During the IEP meeting?

11. Many of you mentioned the same families show up to all the events.
Why do you think that is?
Do you see families with students with disabilities at these events?
How can St. Joe's increase involvement? Particularly with our families with SWDs?

Advocacy:

12. In both focus groups, people mentioned how teachers at St. Joe's act as advocates for their kids.
Do you agree?
Can you explain what that means to you?
Can you give an example?

13. How do you make parents feel supported?
What about during the IEP meetings?
How can you improve your relationships with parents?

14. At St. Joe's, do you feel your views and opinions are heard?
If yes, in what ways? Please explain.
If no, why not? Please tell me more.

15. Language and a limited understanding of Spanish came up frequently during the focus group as a barrier to advocacy and relationship building.

What types of interpretation services would you like to have at St. Joe's to improve communication? What about translated documents? Do you have them?
How do you know when you can trust someone helping you understand and communicate with your parents?
How would this change in communication opportunities impact your ability to advocate on behalf of the students?

16. If you could change or improve anything concerning how St. Joe's works with families and families work with you, what would you change? Why? Explain.

17. Any last comments or concerns you would like to address?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview. I will see you at parent teacher conferences and then send you an email to set up our second interview. Thank you!

Appendix D. 2nd Interview Protocol

Buren Home-School Partnership Interview Guide 2

Participant ID _____ Date_____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, the information you share will be used to better understand your experiences at St. Joe's. The information in this interview will remain confidential. I expect the interview to last 45-60 minutes.

As a reminder, I will audio-record this conversation so that I can be sure to accurately understand your responses. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Family Engagement:

1. When I talk about family engagement, what does that mean to you?
   - What types of activities do you consider engagement?
   - What ways do you engage?
   - What are your expectations concerning engagement?

2. One parent said they've never felt more comfortable than at St. Joe's. Several of you mentioned feeling comfortable and making others feel comfortable as important.
   - Why is establishing comfort and feeling comfortable important to your relationships?
   - What makes you feel comfortable in your relationships with parents/teachers? Specific

3. In many schools, parents complain how communication with teachers is always negative concerning bad behaviors in school. Is this a concern or issue at St. Joe's?
   - Why or why not?
   - How do the types of communication between teachers and parents impact your relationships? Specific

4. **P:** What school events are most important for you to attend? Why?
   T: What school events are most important for parents to attend? Why?

5. Does daily communication with each other concerning tips, strategies, daily updates count as engagement? Why or why not?

6. In what ways do the teaching practices, school policies, events and relationships at St. Joe's reflect the values and beliefs of the Latino community it serves?

Collaboration:

1. Can you talk about your experiences at parent-teacher conferences? Specific
   - How was the communication between you two?
   - Did you feel heard? Why or why not?
   - How satisfied were you with the meeting? Collaboration?
   - Anything you want to improve on next time?

2. **P:** How satisfied are you with…
   Special education services
   Advocacy efforts
   School events
   Relationship with teachers

3. **T:** How do you build relationships when you get a parent who is unwilling to work with you, thinks they know best, or sees the situation very differently from you? **Specific**

4. Can you describe specific ways you collaborate with families/teachers of students with disabilities?

5. Trust came up as an important piece of home-school partnerships.
   How do you build trust with each other?
   What role does trust have in your relationship with the parents of SWD? Teachers?
   Do you feel you have trust? Are you still building trust? How do you know?

6. **T:** Throughout the interviews, I came across several examples of moments where teachers expressed appreciation for parents who shared insights and successful strategies. As a teacher without specific special education training, in what ways do you utilize your relationships with parents to inform your practice with students with disabilities?

Advocacy:

1. **T:** Several teachers mentioned they want to give parents motivation to advocate.
   What does that mean to you?
   What does that look like to you?

2. **P:** In the interviews, some families described a need to advocate within their families and a need to educate family members who are "old school Mexican/Hispanic" about disability and services.
   Do you experience anything similar? If so, can you tell me a little more about how your culture influences family members' understanding of disability?
   Does culture play a role in your relationships with teachers? With collaboration? **How?**

3. **Both:** In the focus group and interviews, several teachers described an expectation of mutual involvement and advocacy efforts on behalf of the families.
   What does that mean to you? What does it look like?
   What would be ideal?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview. I will hold a voluntary focus group in late January/early February to make sure I'm representing your experiences accurately and to collect input. It's completely up to you if you'd like to attend. I will send out an email after the holidays.

Appendix E. UIC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

Approval Notice
Initial Review (Response To Modifications)

May 22, 2018

Molly Buren, MS
Special Education
Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

RE: Protocol # 2018-0309
"A Comparative Study of Latino Immigrant Caregivers and Special Educators' Perceptions and Experiences with Home-School Partnerships"

Dear Ms. Buren:

Your Initial Review (Response To Modifications) was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on May 18, 2018. You may now begin your research

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Please remember to submit the IRB/RRB approval letter from XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXand a letter of support from XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX when available. Please note that no recruitment or enrollment can take place until approval letters are obtained, submitted and approved by the IRB via an Amendment.

Please remember to submit the new interview guides that will be used for the second and third interviews, via an Amendment, prior to use.

Protocol Approval Period: May 18, 2018 - May 17, 2021
Approved Subject Enrollment #: 10
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: The Board determined that this research satisfies 45CFR46.404, research not involving greater than minimal risk. Therefore, in accordance with 45CFR46.408, the IRB determined that only one parent's/legal guardian's permission/signature is needed. Wards of the State may not be enrolled unless the IRB grants specific approval and assures inclusion of additional protections in the research required under 45CFR46.409. If you wish to enroll Wards of the State contact OPRS and refer to the tip sheet.
Performance Sites: UIC
Sponsor: None
Research Protocol(s):

a) A Comparative Study of Latino Immigrant Caregivers and Special Educators' Perceptions and Experiences with Home-School Partnerships; 05/22/2018

Recruitment Material(s):

a) Recruitment Script (English); Version 3; 05/04/2018
b) Recruitment Script (Spanish); Version 3; 05/04/2018
c) Recruitment Email; Version 3; 05/04/2018

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201 AOB (MC 672)
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612
Phone (312) 996-1711

d) Eligibility Script (Spanish); Version 2; 05/22/2018
e) Eligibility Script (English); Version 2; 05/22/2018
f) Recruitment Flyer (English); Version 4; 05/22/2018
g) Recruitment Flyer (Spanish); Version 4; 05/22/2018

Informed Consent(s):

a) Consent Form (English); Version 4; 05/22/2018
b) Consent Form (Spanish); Version 4; 05/22/2018
c) A waiver of informed consent has been granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d), respectively, for recruitment (eligibility screening); minimal risk.

Assent(s):

a) A waiver of child assent has been granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d) for children as secondary subjects (minimal risk; parent consent will be obtained).

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific category(ies):

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., **(7)** Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
03/12/2018	Initial Review	Expedited	03/16/2018	Modifications Required
04/09/2018	Response To Modifications	Expedited	04/29/2018	Modifications Required
05/04/2018	Response To Modifications	Expedited	05/18/2018	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2018-0309) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the guidance:
"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
(http://research.uic.edu/irb/investigators-research-staff/investigator-responsibilities)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your

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research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 996-9299. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Allison A. Brown, PhD
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Please note that OPRS/IRB no longer issues paper documents. Stamped approved recruitment and consent documents have been uploaded to OPRSLive, and you must access and use only those approved documents to recruit and enroll subjects for this research.

1. **UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects**
2. **Informed Consent Document(s):**
   a) Consent Form (Spanish); Version 4; 05/22/2018
   b) Consent Form (English); Version 4; 05/22/2018
3. **Recruiting Material(s):**
   a) Recruitment Script (English); Version 3; 05/04/2018
   b) Recruitment Script (Spanish); Version 3; 05/04/2018
   c) Recruitment Email; Version 3; 05/04/2018
   d) Eligibility Script (Spanish); Version 2; 05/22/2018
   e) Eligibility Script (English); Version 2; 05/22/2018
   f) Recruitment Flyer (English); Version 4; 05/22/2018
   g) Recruitment Flyer (Spanish); Version 4; 05/22/2018

cc: Norma Lopez-Reyna, Special Education, M/C 147
Daniel Maggin (Faculty Sponsor), Special Education, M/C 147

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Appendix F. Teacher and Parent Informed Consent Form

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
Comparative Study Home-School Partnerships

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Molly Buren, M.A.T. and PhD student
Department and Institution: University of Illinois at Chicago Public Schools
Address and Contact Information: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about teachers and Latino families with children with disabilities' expectations and experiences with collaboration and family engagement because you are a teacher or caregiver. We are interested in finding out your perspectives, expectations and experiences with collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy. I wish to gather this information to learn more about ways to improve special education partnerships between schools and families and increase family engagement.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago. A decision to participate in this study will not impact your relationship with the school or the services your child receives at the school. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.**

A maximum of 10 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?

Researchers are trying to learn more about the real experiences of Latino families with children with disabilities and their teachers to discover areas for improvement, create an approach that meets everyone's expectations, and to give families and teachers an opportunity to have their voices heard.

What procedures are involved?

This research will be performed at several locations. The focus groups will take place in xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

The interviews will take place at a location that is convenient for you.

The observations will take place at the school.

The focus group is 90 minutes and all 3 interviews will take 60 minutes each to complete. There is an optional 30 minute focus group at the end for a possible total time commitment of 5 hours.

The study procedures are as follows:

1. You will participate in a focus group with other teachers and/or Latino family members to discuss your expectations, definitions and experiences with collaboration, engagement, and advocacy. You will be asked to fill out a demographic survey at the end of the focus group.

2. The focus group will be tape recorded for accuracy. You cannot participate in this research study unless you agree to be audio recorded.

3. You will participate in 3 one on one interviews to discuss your expectations, definitions and experiences with collaboration, engagement, and advocacy. One interview will take place after the focus group, one after the IEP meeting, and one after parent teacher conferences or curriculum night.

4. All interviews will be tape recorded for accuracy.

5. With your permission, the researcher will observe and take notes during the IEP meeting, curriculum night, and parent teacher conferences.

6. After the focus group and the three interviews, I will ask for volunteers to participate in an additional focus group to read the findings and check for accuracy. This focus group will last 30 minutes.

7. You have the right to change any answers that are incorrect or add to some of your answers.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. A risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to see this information)

Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please

remember that other participants in the group may disclose what was said.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

There are no direct benefits from participation in this research.

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about teacher and parent perspectives and experiences. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team, teachers, and school administrators. Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by: State of Illinois auditors. University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board may also monitor the research.

A possible risk of the research is that your participation in the research or information about you might become known to individuals outside the research. All identifiers will be destroyed after data analysis. All audio taped interviews will be given a confidential identification number, securely locked in a file, and destroyed after all data is transcribed. Transcriptions of interviews will be destroyed after data analysis. All identifying data and transcripts will be destroyed after data analysis.

When the results of the research are published, or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. You have the right to review and edit your responses during the voluntary focus group and your identity will be concealed using participant ID numbers in the published research.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will be given a $25.00 gift card for participation in the focus group and a $75.00 gift card for participation in the interviews. You must complete all three interviews to receive the $75.00 gift card. You will receive the gift card at the third interview.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher,Molly Buren, M.A.T. at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxor mburen2@uic.edu or faculty advisor, Daniel Maggin, PhD at dmaggin@uic.edu

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. However, you cannot participate in the research study unless you agree to be audio recorded during the focus group and three interviews. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

- o I AGREE to be audiotaped during the focus group and three interviews.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date (must be same as subject's)

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix G. Principal Informed Consent Form

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
Comparative Study Home-School Partnerships

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Molly Buren, M.A.T. and PhD student
Department and Institution: University of Illinois at Chicago Public Schools
Address and Contact Information: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about teachers and Latino families with children with disabilities' expectations and experiences with collaboration and family engagement because you are a principal, teacher or caregiver. You are the only principal subject in this study. We are interested in finding out your perspectives and experiences with special education services in your school as they relate to collaboration, family engagement, and advocacy. I wish to gather this information to learn more about ways to improve special education partnerships between schools and families and increase family engagement.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.**

A maximum of 1 subject may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?

Researchers are trying to learn more about the real experiences of Latino families with children with disabilities and their teachers to discover areas for improvement, create an approach that meets everyone's expectations, and to give families and teachers an opportunity to have their voices heard.

What procedures are involved?

The interview will take place at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

The interview will take a maximum of 60 minutes to complete. There is a total time commitment of 1 hour.

The study procedures are as follows:

1. You will participate in one 60 minute one on one interview.

2. The interview will be tape recorded for accuracy. You cannot participate in this research study unless you agree to be audio recorded.

3. All interviews will be tape recorded for accuracy.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. A risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to see this information)

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

There are no direct benefits from participation in this research.

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about your perspectives and experiences. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team. Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by: State of Illinois auditors. University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board may also monitor the research.

A possible risk of the research is that your participation in the research or information about you might become known to individuals outside the research. Direct quotes may be used in the publications/presentations. All identifiers will be destroyed after data analysis. All audio taped interviews will be given a confidential identification number, securely locked in a file, and

destroyed after all data is transcribed. Transcriptions of interviews will be destroyed after data analysis. All identifying data and transcripts will be destroyed after data analysis.

When the results of the research are published, or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. Your identity will be concealed using participant ID numbers in the published research.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

There is no reimbursement for participation in the study.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher, Molly Buren, M.A.T. at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxor mburen2@uic.edu or faculty advisor, Daniel Maggin, PhD at dmaggin@uic.edu

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. However, you cannot participate in the research study unless you agree to be audio recorded during your one interview. There will only be one interview. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

- o I AGREE to be audiotaped during the one interview.

Signature_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date (must be same as subject's)

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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VITA

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education
College of Education
University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL (expected graduation Spring, 2019)

Master of Arts in Teaching in Special Education
National-Louis University, Chicago, IL, 2002

Bachelor of Science in Sociology
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1997
Dean's List, 1997

CERTIFICATIONS

Illinois LBS 1 Professional Educator License, 2002- Present
Endorsements:
- Learning Disabilities, pre-K- 21
- Social/Emotional Disorders, pre-K-21
- Social Science/Middle School, grades 5-8

TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Latino families and teachers' engagement, collaboration, and advocacy; Inclusion in urban settings; Mentoring teachers through teacher preparation programs; Social model of disability; Universal Design for Learning; issues of disproportionality in special and gifted education

PROFESSIONAL TEACHING POSITIONS

Adjunct Instructor, Elmhurst College
Fall 2018
SPE 434 "Curriculum/Assessments/ Instructional Strategies for Learners with High Incidence Disabilities"

Adjunct Instructor, Elmhurst College
Summer 2018
MTL 514 "Characteristics of Learners with Disabilities."

Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago
Fall 2017
SPED 416 "Methods of Instruction for Exceptional Learners."

Adjunct Instructor, University of Illinois at Chicago
Summer 2016
SPED 482 "Collaborating with Families, Communities, and Professionals."

Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago
Fall 2015
SPED 592 "Student Teacher Seminar."

Field Supervisor, Governor's State University, 2015
Observed, mentored, and graded English teachers instructing in their student teaching placements.

Special Education Learning Strategies Teacher, Albany Park Multicultural Academy, 2008-2014

Special Education/AVID Teacher- English and Film, Michele Clark High School, 2002-2008

Transition Coordinator, P.A.C.E. Program, National-Louis University, 2000-2002

Adjunct Instructor/Life Skills Coach, **Curriculum Writer,** P.A.C.E. Program, National-Louis University, 1999-2002

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Urban Educators Scholarship. University of Illinois at Chicago. Supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. 2014-present.

Albin and Young Doctoral Fellowship Award, 2018.

Graduate Student Council Award, Fall 2018.

FUNDING

UIC Special Education Department Travel Award. Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Spring 2018.

President's Research in Diversity Travel Award, Spring 2018.

UIC College of Education Office of Research for the Dissertation Grant, Spring 2018.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

University of California-Riverside and University of Illinois at Chicago
Project QUISP, Chicago, IL and Riverside, CA
Research Internship, Fall 2017- Spring 2019

Conducting qualitative research with current special education teachers concerning use of research to inform and guide practice. Conducting interviews, creating qualitative code book, collaborating on data analysis, interpretation, and written manuscript.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL
Research Internship, Summer 2017

Analyzed qualitative and quantitative research with Dr. Meghan Burke concerning Latino family advocacy efforts post advocacy training. Collaborated with analysis and production of submitted manuscript.

Midwest PBIS Network, Chicago, IL
Research Internship, Fall 2015

Conducted research on Restorative Justice Practices utilized in schools as an integral part of PBIS. Interviewed District Administrators, Assistant Principals, PBIS Coaches from schools across the United States.

University of Illinois at Chicago,
Project PULSSE (Preparing Urban Leaders in Secondary Special Education), Chicago, IL
Project Coordinator, 2015-2017

Chicago Park District and University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
Researcher, Summer 2015

Created and implemented an inclusive arts summer program. Researched impact of inclusion on camper self-confidence and friendships.

University of Illinois at Chicago
Transition Model Implementation Project, Department of Disability and Human Development, Chicago, IL, Graduate Assistant, 2015

Created and delivered workshops for families and youth concerning post-secondary options for young adults with disabilities. Collaborated on creation of transition handbook for schools.

University of Illinois at Chicago
Project SET (Seamless, Effective, Transition), Chicago, IL
Graduate Assistant, 2015

PUBLICATIONS

Buren, M. (2019). Culturally responsive teaching. In *Disability in American Life: An Encyclopedia of Concepts, Policies, and Controversies.* (Vol.1, pp. 157-160.) Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Buren, M.K., Maggin, D.M. & Brown, C. (2018). Meta-synthesis on the experiences of families from nondominant communities and special education collaboration. *Exceptionality*. 1-20. DOI:10.1080/09362835.2018.1480953

Burke, M.M., **Buren, M.K.**, Rios, K., Garcia, M., & Magaña, S. (2018). Examining the short-term follow-up advocacy activities among Latino families of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, DOI:10.1080/23297018.2018.1439767.

Brown, C., Maggin, D.M., & **Buren, M.** (2018). Systematic review of cultural adaptations of school-based social, emotional, and behavioral interventions for students of color. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 41 (4), 425-450.

Midwest PBIS Network. (2015, December). *PBIS Forum in Brief: Integration of RJP within SWPBIS* (Issue Brief No. 13). Chicago, IL: Swain-Bradway, J., Maggin, D., & **Buren, M.**

PRESENTATIONS

Johnson, A. H., Ledoux, M., Bains, B., Maggin, D. M., **Buren, M.**, & Couch, L. (2019, February). Special educator research utilization: Bridging the gap. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Atlanta, GA.

Buren, M. (November 2018). *Immigrant Families and Advocacy: A Study of Immigrant Families' Experiences with Special Education and Home-School Partnerships.* Poster presented at Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. Las Vegas, NV.

Buren, M. & Gonzales, W. (July 2018). *Analysis of an inclusive summer arts program and the role of adults on social interactions.* Presented at Division of Special Education and Services (DISES) Annual Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.

Buren, M. & Maggin, D. (February 2018). *Meta-synthesis on families from nondominant cultural backgrounds and their experiences with special education collaboration.* Presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. Tampa, FL.

Buren, M. (February 2018). *Education Equity Scholarship: A study of immigrant families' experiences with home-school partnerships.* Poster presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. Tampa, FL.

Buren, M., Fowler, D., Gonzalez, W., & Van Acker, E. (2017, April). *Color outside the lines*. Poster presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. Boston, MA.

Buren, M., Maggin, D., and Brown, C. (January 2017). *Why are families shut out?: Meta-synthesis of CLD family research.* Poster presented at University of Illinois at Chicago College Research Day. Chicago, IL.

Buren, M., and Maggin, D.M. (October 2016). *Forging partnerships with all families: A Review of CLD families' perspectives and barriers to collaboration in schools.* Poster presented at Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) Conference. Myrtle Beach, SC.

Buren, M., and Maggin, D. (April 2016). *Why are families shut out?: Bridging the divide between families and schools.* Poster presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. St. Louis, MO.

Nunez, G., **Buren, M.**, & Fowler, D. (April 2016). *Zero tolerance policy and charter schools: Who's in, who's out?* Presented at Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Annual Conference. St. Louis, MO.

Buren, M., Fowler, D., Gonzalez, W., & Van Acker, E. (2016, January). *Color outside the lines*. Poster presented at University of Illinois at Chicago College Research Day. Chicago, IL.

Cushing, L., Parker-Katz, M., Balcazar, F., Keel, J., Awsumb, J., Hovland, J., & **Buren, M.** (2015, November) *Multi-level urban-based transition education research: Studies addressing students, parents, and agencies in one urban setting.* Presented at Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) Conference. Portland, OR.

Hovland, J. & **Buren, M.** (2015, March). *Navigating the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process*. Presented at Speducators Workshop. Chicago, IL.

Buren, M. & Keel, J. (2015, March). *Deciding your future: Working with community agencies.* Presented at Olive Harvey College- YCCS Charter School. Chicago, IL.

Hovland, J., **Buren, M.** & Keel, J. (2015, February). *Deciding your future: Working with community agencies.* Presented at Truman College- YCCS Charter School. Chicago, IL.

Buren, M. & Baum, C. (2015, January). *Special education seminar: Overview of inclusion, co- teaching, and differentiation strategies for reaching high school students with learning disabilities*. Presented at Governor's State University. University Park, IL.

Buren, M. (2014, January). *Special education seminar: Overview of inclusion, co- teaching, and strategies for reaching high school students with learning disabilities.* Presented at Governor's State University. University Park, IL.

Buren, M. & Czerwionka, M. (2008, October). *Celebrating diversity one square at a time: Using art to celebrate culture and difference in inclusion classrooms.* Presented at Chicago Foundation for Education Teachers as Leaders Conference. Chicago, IL.

Buren, M. & Salas, E. (2005, January). *Seedfolks: Integrating art into the special education classroom.* Presented at Northeastern Illinois University GEARUp Teacher Leader Conference. Chicago, IL.

Buren, M., Peters, K., Riordan, B. (2002, May). *Diversity curriculum for students with multiple disabilities: Why students need critical thinking.* Presented at National-Louis University Education Conference. Chicago, IL.

Burns, C., & Kite, B., **Buren, M.** (1999, April). *P.A.C.E. Program.* Presented at the Learning Disabilities of America Conference. New York, New York.

SERVICE

Conference Proposal Reviewer (Summer 2018)- Council for Exceptional Children- Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference

Editorial Review Board (student member); Wiley Handbook of Research on Diversity in Special Education. (2017). Editors: Marie Tejero Hughes and Elizabeth Talbott. Publisher: Wiley.
Conference Proposal Reviewer (Summer 2017)- Council for Exceptional Children- Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference

Conference Proposal Reviewer (Spring 2016)- Council for Exceptional Children Conference- Division for Diverse Exceptional Learners Student Poster Session

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Educational Research Association

- Disability Studies SIG
- Special Education Research SIG

Australasian Society for Intellectual Disabilities

Council for Exceptional Children

- Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners
- Teacher Education Division