Parent and Family Engagement Practices: A Case Study of A Pre-Collegiate Summer Program

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ABSTRACT

The United States’ economic future and ability to compete in the global economy is dependent on increasing the nation’s higher education attainment rates. The U.S. has a persisting and widening educational attainment gap for underserved groups and marginalized populations. Policymakers, industry leaders, educators and social advocates agree that increasing college-going and college completion for underserved groups, particularly, first-generation populations can help secure the nation’s economic future. College access programs that involve parents and families have demonstrated success in helping first-generation college students and marginalized students in navigating the college choice process. While the literature on college choice and college preparation programs identify parent and family involvement as one of the most influential factors in the college-going process; there is an evident lack of research focused on how such programs engage parents and families. Recognizing this gap, this instrumental case study explored a summer college access program that fosters parent and family involvement. This study revealed that the primary engagement practices included a meeting with all program participants and their parents/guardians; an overnight weekend campus visit for the parents/guardians of new program participants; and efforts around creating a relationship with the program participants and their families. A central component of these efforts include funding resources, institutional support, and program alumni involvement. The study also revealed opportunities for leveraging the community cultural wealth found within marginalized communities.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this to Linda Haynes, Dorothy Haynes, Franklin Haynes, Dorothy Hawkins, and Clinton Haynes. To all aunties, uncles, and kinfolk who fill the gaps and make families whole. To Marguerite, Emmanuelle and Imani, keep reaching for the stars, they get closer with each try.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The future of the United States’ national economic well-being and global competitiveness rests on the nation's ability to increase the educational attainment rates, particularly, for historically underrepresented minority, low-income, immigrant and first-generation students. The decline in the rate of postsecondary degrees being earned and the widening gaps in education achievement poses a significant threat to the US economy. Economist estimate that more than 60 percent of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education by 2018 (Autor, 2010). U.S. employers have seen a growing gap between the skills they need and the skills recent high school and college graduates have developed (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2013). With a less educated workforce that is unable to meet labor market demands, productivity stagnates, earning inequality gaps widen and economic growth slows (Autor, 2010; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2012; Matthews, 2014).

The persistence of educational attainment gaps between societal groups also pose substantial economic and social costs. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) annual report identified disparities in higher education achievement for African-Americans and Hispanics between the 25 to 29 years old (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, & Zhang, 2014). The report shows that between 1990-2013 the difference in the percentage of African-Americans earning college degrees compared to whites widened from 13-20 percentage points; and for Hispanics, widened from 18-25 percentage points (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, et al., 2014). In one analysis, researchers found that the
underutilization of human potential in the United States is extremely costly (McKinsey & Company, 2009). The report estimated the potential gains in GDP based on narrowing the educational attainment gaps for marginalized populations. The results show that if the gaps were reduced between the African-American and Latino student outcomes and white student outcomes, the U.S. GDP in 2008 could increase between $310 billion and $525 billion (McKinsey & Company, 2009). Similar estimates were projected for narrowing the gap for low-income students, which represented a $400 billion to $670 billion increase in GDP using 2008 data (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

Globally, a similar threatening economic situation exists with the country’s position among its G20 peers and other emerging countries in producing individuals with earned bachelor degrees. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which consist of 34 member countries, compiles and reports educational attainment trends for the member nations and G20 members from a global perspective (OCED, 2014). For the 24-35 year old age group higher education achievement, the US ranked 14th in the world (OCED, 2014). The report also noted that although the US educational attainment rate (42%) is higher than the OECD average (30%), there is a trend indicating a below average growth for the US compared to other OECD and G20 countries (OCED, 2014). The report also ranks the U.S. among the lowest countries where students whose parents have no college experience have only a 29% chance of being in higher education (OCED, 2014). This slow growth in individuals earning postsecondary degrees translates into a future workforce that will be less competitive based on educational credentials (Autor, 2010). Consequently, this downward trend may
impact where companies choose to locate their business operations (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2013).

To avoid these potential threats, policymakers, industry leaders, educators and social advocates agree that to increase America’s higher education attainment levels broader higher education access and college completion must be achieved for underserved and first-generation college students population (Autor, 2010; D. Matthews, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2009; U.S. Chamber Foundation, 2012; U.S. Chamber Foundation, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The Department of Education’s Strategic Plan 2011-2014 highlighted the need to improve college access for underserved groups, including low income and first generation college students as a strategy for closing the opportunity gap while increasing the US' overall educational attainment level. Similarly, in a position statement on the improving education in the U.S., the Chamber of Commerce advocates for increasing college access and success as a remedy for strengthening tomorrow's labor force to ensure the nation's financial health and economic leadership in the world (U.S. Chamber Foundation, 2012). Additionally, an education advocacy organization established a national campaign to increase the percentage of Americans with high quality post-secondary degrees or certificates to 60% by year 2025 (Matthews, 2014). An essential component of this campaign, "Goal 2025," requires that all gaps in attainment be dramatically reduced, calling for higher education to be more accessible and affordable for historically underrepresented minorities, low-income, first-generation, and underserved students (Matthews, 2014).
College Choice

To address this issue of increasing college enrollment among underserved and first-generation student populations, college choice models provide a framework to understand the high school to college transition process. The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model describes a three-phase process that begins in middle school and ends in high school with key sequential activities that must be accomplished in order for the student to move to the next phase. The model that Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) proposes builds on Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) work, suggesting the significance of parent involvement in motivating and encouraging students to pursue their college aspirations. Additionally, there are several choice models that call attention to the influence that culture, community, and environment may support or hinder a student’s efforts in pursuit of postsecondary opportunities (Perna, 2006; Swail & Perna, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). College choice models are useful for practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and higher education advocates for developing strategies that have proven to be successful in increasing college attendance among this target population - college access programs and summer initiatives; and parent and family engagement.

College Access Programs

Research has shown that college access programs improve college preparation and enrollment for underrepresented students (Gándara & Bial, 2001; Glennie, Dalton, & Knapp, 2014; Macy, 2000; Pell Institute, 2009; Vargas, 2004). Successful outcomes for students participating in college preparation initiatives include improving high school
performance, becoming college ready and transitioning to college. Reported correlation for improvements in high school include better attendance (Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004) and high school grade point average (GPA) (Yampolskaya, Massey, & Greenbaum, 2006). College preparedness findings include: enrolling in advance and rigorous courses (Bausmith & France, 2012; Myers, Olsen, Seftor, Young, & Tuttle, 2004; Olsen, Seftor, Silva, & Myers, 2007; Watt et al., 2004); raising standardized exam scores (Watt et al., 2004); increasing college knowledge (Harvill & Maynard, 2012a; Standing, Judkins, Keller, & Shimshak, 2008); and applying for financial aid (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Rak, 1997; Constantine, Seftor, & Martin, 2006). Furthermore, college transition success findings were: enrolling in college (Chaney et al., 1997; Watt et al., 2004); attending a selective university (Constantine et al., 2006; Olsen et al., 2007; Pell Institute, 2009); persisting and matriculating in a four-year program (Chaney et al., 1997); and earning a four-year degree (Chaney et al., 1997; Olsen et al., 2007).

**Summer residential college access programs**

In addition to these reported accomplishments of college access programs, summer residential initiatives have been shown to be a benefit to first-generation college students and marginalized student populations. Although the research on this subset of college access programs is limited, the findings highlight important ways first-generation college students benefit from the experience such as increasing college readiness; developing college going capital; decoding the college going process; easing the transition to college; and improving first-year retention rates (Bloom, Lang, & The, 2008; Cates & Schaefle, 2011; Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013; D. Hicks, 2012).
Parent Involvement

Parents play an important and influential role for all students in the college going process regardless of their background, ethnicity or financial status. Research shows the significance of parent involvement in the college going process for students from underserved communities as well as first-generation college students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000; Cooper, Cooper, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Smith, 2008). Additionally, college choice researchers have found that parents serve a critical function in transmitting high expectations; reinforcing the value of education; encouraging and motivating students to fulfill their higher aspirations; increasing persistence of first generation college students; and breaking the intergenerational cycle of low postsecondary education participation among underserved populations (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Dyce et al., 2013; Gofen, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strayhorn, 2010; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Westbrook & Scott, 2012). Furthermore, several researchers highlight opportunities for engaging parents and families of aspiring students. Tierney and Auerbach (2005) suggests that parents are an underutilized resource that college preparation programs and higher education can enlist to reinforce program messages and information to students. The researchers also posit that parents can help establish relationship building between the school, university and families as well as advocate for college going within their communities (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Tierney et al., 2005).
Literature on College Access Programs and Parent Engagement

Although several program evaluation and comprehensive program inventory reports on college access programs have been produced (Balz & Esten, 1998; Bausmith & France, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2006; Gándara & Bial, 2001; Harvill & Maynard, 2012b; McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Swail & Perna, 2002; Tillery, 2013), little is known how parent involvement is practiced in relation to the program operations, goals or objectives (Tierney, 2002). Additionally, no collective review exists of summer college access programs that describe parent and family engagement practices.

Given the reported benefits of summer college access programs for first-generation college students, Walker’s (2015) review on pre-college summer programs focused on identifying parent and family engagement practices. From a sample of 28 studies that met the review criteria - non-federally funded program, a residential experience on a college campus, and operating during the summer, the results show parent involvement and parent college awareness activities were reflected in more than 60 percent of the studies reviewed. The review also found that engagement practices occurred throughout various phases of the summer programs. Surprisingly, there were no standard practices for engagement found or reports about how the efforts succeeded in meeting its objectives. Additionally, the review found no studies solely focused on engagement practices for parents and families in the context of a summer program. Although this review found significant evidence of parent engagement, the reports lacked details about the purpose, contexts or outcomes from the efforts (Walker, 2015). This finding is in agreement with Tierney (2002) findings, which showed that program
descriptions of the activities were often generic and vague despite the importance of family engagement.

Statement of the Problem

The United States aims to increase the number of additional college graduates by eight million to meet future workforce demands and to maintain global competitiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The achievement of this goal would require increasing college going and college completion among marginalized groups and potential first-generation college students (Matthews, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Research shows that college access programs have been essential to the college going process for historically underrepresented, low-income, immigrant, and first-generation student populations (Gándara & Bial, 2001; Glennie et al., 2014; Macy, 2000; Pell Institute, 2009; Vargas, 2004). Summer precollege programs have also demonstrated success in assisting, particularly, first-generation student transitions to higher education (Bloom et al., 2008; Cates & Schaeble, 2011; Dyce et al., 2013; T. Hicks, 2005). Furthermore, to increase college going among this population of students, college choice scholars agree that parent and family involvement is an essential component for college access programs (A. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Dyce et al., 2013; L. Perna & Swail, 2001; L. W. Perna & Titus, 2005; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Perna (2006), Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), Hossler and Gallagher (1987), indicate the parent involvement as necessary for assisting students to successfully move through the activities in all phases of the
college choice process. Several researchers make the same assertion and expand the support to family and extended relatives (Tierney, 2002).

Researchers have studied the effectiveness of college access programs and concluded that parent and family engagement can influence the higher education attainment for this population; yet not enough is known about how such programs plan, design and implement these efforts as well as the resources required, the contexts for the engagement, how engagement relates to the mission or how the perceptions of the outcomes (Walker, 2015; Tierney, 2002). Tierney (2002) and Walker (2015) reported that college access programs often provide vague and generic description about parent and family activities Therefore, this study addresses the necessity of understanding how summer college access programs practice parent and family engagement techniques. It will systematically ascertain the components or characteristics involved in engaging parents and families in summer college access programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

While the literature on college choice and college preparation programs identify parent and family involvement as an influential factor in the college going process and is an essential component of college preparation programs, there is an evident lack of research focused on how such programs engage parents and families. Recognizing this gap, the purpose of this instrumental case study will be to explore how a precollege summer residential program at a Southeastern, rural, four-year research institution promotes awareness and involvement of parents and families in the college choice phases of their program participants.
Research Questions

As a qualitative inquiry, this study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. To address the major research question - how does a pre-collegiate summer program engage the parents and families of its program participants - the study seeks to understand the participants views, definitions and practices about the social phenomenon of engagement (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Merriam, 2002). This study is also naturalistic in that it proposes to observe the lived experiences of the participants while as they plan, implement and operate parent and family engagement activities during the course of their program (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

This study will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the values, beliefs and practices of college access programs for engaging parents and families of underserved and first-generation students?
2. What are the working parts for developing and implementing engagement activities for program participants’ parents and families?
3. What is the context and operational structure of the programs and activities used to engage the program participants’ parents and families?
4. What are the program staff’s expectations and perceptions of their engagement practices for program participants’ parents and families?
5. What are the parents and families’ perceptions of the engagement practices of the pre-collegiate program?
Research Design

To understand the phenomenon of family engagement practices within the context of summer college access programs, an instrumental case study design was chosen to learn about and observe the intricacies and components involved. For this single case study, a precollege summer residential program at a four-year, Southeastern, rural, public, land grant, research university was chosen. The summer program’s participants are primarily African American, potential first-generation college students from rural, economically depressed communities in a Southeastern state. Additionally, the college access is a non-federally funded initiative and provides family engagement activities including an overnight Parent Awareness Weekend.

Participants in the study will include the summer program director, staff and supporters involved with developing, implementing, managing or evaluating functions and or activities associated with parent and family engagement. The data collection will include participant and non-participant observations of events and activities; individual interviews with staff and key informants; group interviews with staff and parents; a parent survey; and reviewing related published communications, documents and program artifacts. The data analysis will include transcribing all field notes from observations as well as interview notes and recordings. The transcriptions will be analyzed, coded, arranged into themes and reinterpreted following Creswell’s (2009) six-stage method. Documents and artifacts will be analyzed and organized topically (S. Merriam, 2009) in relation to the research questions and emerging themes.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this inquiry will include elements of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) social reproduction theory and the community cultural wealth theory proposed by Yosso (2005). Social reproduction theory concepts of cultural capital, social capital and habitus form the basis for several models that describe the college transition process. Cultural capital represent a social asset that derives from one’s upbringing, cultural experiences, social interactions and affiliations that shape values, mores, attitudes and personal characteristics such as manners, tastes and style (Bergerson, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986). Similarly, social capital is also connected to one’s affiliations and social networks that provide access to resources, information and opportunities based on the strength and reach of those connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu explains that habitus embodies one’s cultural training that manifests in one’s tastes, styles, speech and manners to name a few.

Community cultural wealth theory posits that communities such as historically underrepresented groups, low-income, first-generation and immigrant populations possess forms of capital that are not apparent when these communities are examined using a social reproduction lens (Yosso, 2005). Countering the notion that these communities are perceived as capital-less and deficient in having the assets that are more associated with middle-class and white communities, Yosso (2005) suggests that at least six forms of capital can be found in marginalized communities. Taken all together, Yosso (2005) argues that these six forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant) create the community cultural wealth.
Conceptual Framework

In looking at the parent engagement practices of a college access program, the use of multiple college choice models can provide a more comprehensive model to explore how a program develops and implement their engagement efforts. This study looks at the parent engagement process through a combination of models from Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Yosso (2005). Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) Three-Phase Model will provide a general understanding of the college going process for initially reviewing the data gathered from the study.

*Figure 1.1 Hossler & Gallagher’s Three-Phase College Choice Model*

_Hossler & Gallagher (1987) Three-Phase College Choice Model_

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<th>Model Dimensions</th>
<th>Influential Factors</th>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
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<td>Individual Factors</td>
<td>Organizational Factors</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Predisposition</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Phase 1)</td>
<td>- Student Characteristics</td>
<td>- School Characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Significant Others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Educational Activities</td>
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<td><strong>Search</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Phase 2)</td>
<td>- Student Preliminary</td>
<td>- College &amp; University Search Activities (search for students)</td>
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<td>- College Values</td>
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<td>- Student Search Activities</td>
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<td><strong>Choice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Phase 3)</td>
<td>- Choice Set</td>
<td>- College &amp; University Courtship Activities</td>
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Source: Recreated from Hossler & Gallagher, 1987
The Hossler & Gallagher (1987) three-phase model describes the process students undergo during their college search (Figure 1.1). The three phases are:

1. developing a predisposition to attend college;
2. searching and gathering general information about college; and
3. making choices that lead to enrollment at a postsecondary institution.

The Community Cultural Wealth framework illustrates six forms of capital that exists within marginalized communities such as low-income, historically underrepresented minorities, first-generation and immigrant populations (Figure 1.2). Combinations of the six types shown combine to form the cultural capital for the community (Yosso, 2005). Villalpando & Solórzano (2005) recommend that it may be more beneficial for researchers, practitioners and policymakers to focus on existing assets within a community versus taking a deficit approach when serving students or developing programs, policies or practices. This framework considers the community’s strengths and assets to identify opportunities as well as reveal barriers or obstacles that may hinder the success of the program participants.
Combining the Three-Phase College Choice model and Community Cultural Wealth model, may be useful for studying the college choice process of a student in a pre-collegiate program. The conceptual model for parent and family engagement in pre-collegiate programs shows a student in the moving from the predisposition to search phase with influence from the parent/guardian on their decision making process (Figure 1.3). The line from the program to student also represents the influence on student as they being go through the phases. Parent engagement efforts are represented by the red dotted line from the program to parents. The parents are also shown with influence lines connecting them to each of six forms of community cultural wealth. Lastly, the line from the program, intersecting each line from the community cultural wealth sources depicts...
potential engagement efforts from the program that may draw upon, leverage or compliment these influences on the parents/guardians.

Figure 1.3 Conceptual Model - Parent and Family Engagement in Pre-Collegiate Programs

Conceptual Model - Parent and Family Engagement in Pre-Collegiate Programs

Limitations

The researcher recognizes that there are potential limitations with this proposed study that exist within the single case study design and proposed data collection methods. This case study’s focus on a single unit and phenomenon within a summer precollege access program at a public, land grant, research university in a Southeastern state with program participants from rural, economically challenged communities. As a result, the
findings may not be generalized to the entire population of college access programs, but the themes that emerge from the research may be similar to other summer precollege programs that assist participants from similar backgrounds (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; S. Merriam, 2009; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). There are several potential limitations with the study’s data collection methods as well as researcher’s role with interacting with the study participants. Limitations with the data collection methods may include interview responses being influenced by the researchers presence; documents may not contain complete, accurate or authentic information (Creswell, 2009).

In addition to the limitation of the proposed data collection methods, the researcher may exhibit bias in the role. This bias can manifest in the researcher intervening on an issue, advocating for a cause, or through the relationships with potential participants. As someone with a passion for seeking social justice for underserved groups, there is a risk of the researcher assuming an Intervener/Reformer or an Advocate role. Glesne (2011) explains that when a researcher becomes an intervener/reformer, they may attempt to correct what they may view as wrong or injustice. Similarly, the researcher may also champion a cause, advocating for an issue that emerges during the study (Glesne, 2011). Lastly, the researcher and potential study participants are students in programs within the same college. This relationship can pose a bias referred to as friendships in the field that can influence the behavior of the participant or researcher, thus impacting the data collection and analysis (Glesne, 2011 and Maxwell, 2013).
Delimitations

This study will be confined to observations, interviewing and collecting documents and artifacts over a two to three-month period that encompasses the planning, implementation and evaluation of the parent and family activities for the Tomorrow’s Hope program. Observations will occur during planning meetings, a parent meeting, and during events of the Parent Awareness Weekend. Interviews with program staff will be scheduled over the period between the planning of activities and after the parent weekend. Finally, documents and artifacts will be collected throughout the period of the study (April - July).

Significance of the Study

This case study exploring how a summer college access program engages families of their participants is important because of the potential contributions that can be made for practitioners, researchers and policymakers concerned with increasing college going and college completion for underserved and first-generation student populations. The findings may be useful to those who direct college access programs that are closely structured and resourced with students and families from similar backgrounds. The findings may inform other practitioners on strategies that will help them succeed in increasing college access for underserved and first generations students. For college choice and social justice scholars the findings from this study can help advance the discussion of parent and family engagement practices of summer college access program with marginalized and first-generation population participants by detailing the contexts and working parts involved with engaging parents and families. The findings may also
provide more insight about the college choice models that consider community, culture and environmental factors that influence both students and family. Furthermore, the findings may add to the discussion on parents and families being a resource for the college access programs as Tierney and Auerbach (2005) described as an underutilized source for increasing college going in underserved communities. Finally, the findings may bring awareness to key issues for policymakers to address that will support the efforts of college access programs assisting students and families from similar demographic characteristics.

**Summary and Organization of Study**

This chapter provided an introduction of the study and research topic. The chapter included: a brief review of the literature; overview of the theories and conceptual framework; the problem statement; purpose of the study; research questions and research design; limitations; delimitations; and the study’s significance. Chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth review of the relevant research and the study’s connection to theory on college choice, college access programs, and the significance of parent and family involvement in the college choice process. In Chapter 3, the methodology is described for this study. This chapter will include the selection of the participants, the role of the researcher, sources for collecting data, the data analysis procedures, and validation of the findings, ethics and potential limitations of the study. Several observations of preparation activities and events during the parent visit weekend are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will report the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 will discuss the findings and conclude the study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Increasing higher educational attainment among underserved groups and first-generation college students is essential for the U.S. to maintain and meet the future national workforce demands as well as remain competitive in the global economy (Autor, 2010; Matthews, 2014; The National Chamber Foundation, 2012). Essential components for assisting this population of students navigate the college choice process and increasing college-going include college preparation initiatives and the support of parents and families. Understanding how these two elements work together can provide valuable insight that informs program planning and implementation; identifies structural barriers; and calls for policy development.

In the following section, a description of concepts and models are provided about the college transition process. In particular, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model and related models are explained. The theoretical concepts - cultural capital, social capital, habitus and community cultural wealth - that undergird the various college choice models are detailed. This section also includes an overview of college preparation programs and summer initiatives, which is followed by literature on parent and family involvement literature. The section concludes with findings from a review of parent and family engagement practices in precollege summer residential programs and a summary of the section.
College Choice Models

There are many models and frameworks to describe the process of how students transition from high school to college (L. W. Perna, 2006; W. Swail & Perna, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; William G. Tierney & Kristan M. Venegas, 2009). The widely cited three-stage model proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) offers a comprehensive explanation of the decision making process of students pursuing postsecondary education. In this model, students undergo three phases that include: developing a predisposition to attend college; searching and gathering general information about college; and making choices that lead to enrollment at a postsecondary institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Although not perfect, this model has served as a foundation and influenced many college-choice studies (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Freeman, 2005; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Perna & Titus, 2005; Perna, 2002; Smith, 2008). Some studies have expanded on the model (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), while others have focused on additional factors that may influence students’ decision-making (Perna, 2006), and alternative perspectives that explore the influence of family, community and culture (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Tierney & Venegas, 2009).

The research of Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) builds on Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-stage model. At each stage in the model, Cabrera and La Nasa added more complexity to understanding the various factors that directly or indirectly influence students’ decisions. Their study reviewed literature associated with each model stage, identifying connections between actions and circumstances that can influence how a student progresses through each stage (Bergerson, 2009; A. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).
Cabrera & La Nasa (2000) found six factors that had the most influence on the final college choice decisions, which included: student’s academic ability; student’s perceptions about the institutions; parental encouragement; financial variables; the high school academic resources; and student’s education and career aspirations. Furthermore, the researchers also found that an early start, by seventh grade, during the predisposition stage was an important college going predictor for marginalized populations (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Similarly, Perna’s (2006) proposed model highlights numerous elements that may have an effect on students as they encounter all options while navigating the college choice process. This model posits that there are four layers of influence that contain each of the various elements that can shape if and how a student pursues post-secondary education. These layers include habitus; school and community context; higher education context; and social, economic and policy contexts (Perna, 2006). Drawing on Bourdieu's Social Reproduction theory, habitus considers an individual's demographics such as gender, ethnicity, social class level and home environment (Perna, 2006). The next layer, school and community contexts reflect the available resources, types of resources and support for education (Perna, 2006). Perna (2006) describes the higher education context layer as including the proximity to higher education institutions and the cultural norms or values the community may have about higher education. The final layer proposed by Perna considers the demographic, economic and public policy characteristic in a community that may promote or create barriers to pursuing higher education (Perna, 2006). This model offers additional details of what may account for the decisions that
students make about pursuing post-secondary education that does not emerge when applied to the Hossler and Gallagher's model.

Tierney & Venegas (2009) offers an alternative model to Hossler and Gallagher’s model, which suggests a cultural framework approach is more appropriate to understand how underserved students and first-generation students manage the college going process. The cultural framework model, like Perna (2006), posits that there are multiple influences that affect the decisions that students make, which may include parents, families, peers, school officials and community members (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Information is gathered and shared through an iterative process involving many social actors connected to the student (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The authors present an alternative way of seeing what may influence a student's decision in contrast to linear thinking implied by the three-stage model (Bergerson, 2009; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The cultural framework model offers an alternative viewpoint of how different environments may produce different behavior (Tierney & Venegas, 2009).

Related to Tierney & Venegas’ (2009) model, Villalpando & Solórzano (2005) contends that the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model assumes a deficit approach that can limit the potential for developing more effective strategies to assist students from underserved groups in their college pursuit. In the three-stage model, a parent’s education level is viewed as a significant predictor for instilling college aspirations and assisting with higher education pursuits (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987). Therefore, the three-stage model views a family with parents lacking college experience would not have the same capacity to motivate and encourage their children. Villalpando & Solórzano (2005) argue
that the three-stage model does not recognize the various forms capital in marginalized communities that can also contribute to students moving through the college choice process. Their cultural wealth model is based on the Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, which posits that communities have at least six forms of capital. Villalpando & Solórzano (2005) recommend that practitioners and policymakers focus less on what students appear to be lacking and more on what assets and strengths they possess to identify potential barriers to success.

**College Choice Theories**

*Social Reproduction Theory*

A significant number of the college choice scholars use Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) social reproduction theory. Their models incorporate concepts such as cultural capital, social capital and habitus that were introduced in the theory. Cultural capital represents the values, mores, attitudes that one develops based on home life, cultural experiences, social interactions and group membership (Bergerson, 2009; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986). In the college choice process, cultural capital can represent parent educational levels and income, which would benefit or limit the cultural exposure and resources available to their children. The next concept, social capital, Bourdieu (1986) defined as the access to resources, information and opportunities one has based on their social networks and relationships. Social capital can reflect a student’s access information or opportunities to interact with College and University agents based on the relationships and associations of a parent who went to college (Bourdieu &
Passeron, 1977). The last concept is habitus which refers to one’s tastes, style, manners, social characteristics and preferences: habitus is how one behaves externally (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus reflects and embodies one’s cultural inheritance, and it can influence a parent’s perception of academic fit when evaluating college options during the college choice process (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002).

Community Cultural Wealth

Community wealth represent an alternative to Bourdieu’s theories, that take into account additional forms of capital and community assets. Many scholars have found that cultural capital, social capital and habitus concepts often create a deficit perspective of low-income, first-generation and minority communities where no forms of useful capital exists (Dyce et al., 2013; McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Áerez, 1998; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Yosso (2005) suggests that using a critical race theory lens that at least six forms of capital emerge that represent the cultural wealth within these communities and tend to go unrecognized by the Bourdieu’s theory. The six forms of community cultural wealth capital include: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant (Yosso, 2005). Proponents cultural wealth theory suggest that practitioners and researchers that acknowledge these forms of capital can leverage these assets when assisting underserved students (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005).

College Access Programs Development

College preparation programs have been operating for nearly 50 years. These programs were an outgrowth of programs that were a part of the War on Poverty
initiatives in the 1960s and were created to help promote higher education access and enrollment of historically underrepresented minority and low-income students (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997). Fenske et al. (1997) identified six types of college preparation programs based on how the programs were sponsored: Federal government; State government; State and Federal supported; higher education institutional; higher education and public school collaborative; and private and public foundations.

From 1999-2000, the National Survey of Outreach Programs (2000) was conducted by the College Board in partnership with The Education Resource Institute and the Council for Opportunity in Education to better understand the scope of college preparation and access programs (Swail, 2000). The survey yielded responses from over 1,100 programs, representing all fifty states including Washington, DC, and the U.S. external territories - Puerto Rico, Guam and Micronesia (Swail, 2000).

The priority goals of college access programs reported in a national survey conducted by each program were as follows: approximately 90% stated that college awareness and attendance; 80% included exposure to college, improve academic skills, student self-esteem, and role models; and 70% reported college completion and parent involvement as priority program services (College Board, 2000; Swail, 2000). The most common services offered by the responding programs include: college awareness; social skill development; campus visits; cultural activities; critical thinking skills; study-skills training; career counseling; meeting with faculty and students; and leadership development (Swail, 2000).
The 2000 National Survey of Outreach Programs found 1,100 programs received program funds from the following distribution of funding sources: 42% were Federal programs; 20% foundations; 15% State initiatives; other Federal (by agency grants - ESF, etc.); 9% university; 2% community (College Board, 2000). The Federal programs consisted of the TRIO initiatives and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) represented 42% of the programs in the survey (Bergerson, 2009; Perna, 2002; Swail, 2000). There are four programs in the TRIO initiatives that serve high school youth: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, and the McNair Scholars program (Bergerson, 2009). GEAR UP differs from the TRIO programs in that it is implemented at a school district level, using a cohort approach that involves establishing collaborative partnerships between schools, universities and community organizations to provide support and enhance students’ educational advancement (Bergerson, 2009; Swail, 2000).

Foundation sponsored initiatives, representing 20% of all programs in the national survey (Bergerson, 2009; Swail, 2000). A few examples of programs in this category are the Advancement of Individual Determination (AVID), Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA), and I Have a Dream (IHAD). Students in these programs received similar services to students participating in the TRIO and GEAR UP programs (Swail, 2000). The major difference between the federal funded programs and the foundation programs was the national reach of the federally funded outreach initiatives (Swail, 2000).
College Access Programs Impact

In 2013, the combined number of participants served in TRIO initiatives represented more than 550,000 youth nationwide (US Department of Education, 2013). Overall, the research has shown that precollege outreach programs improve college access for underrepresented students (Gándara & Bial, 2001; Glennie et al., 2014; Macy, 2000; Pell Institute, 2009; Vargas, 2004). According to the Pell Institute (2009), the TRIO programs have been credited for their effectiveness in increasing college enrollment and graduation. Participants in the Student Support Services demonstrated greater rates of persistence and matriculation in college (Chaney et al., 1997); Talent Search students were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education and apply for financial aid compared to non-program participants (Olsen et al., 2007); Upward Bound graduates showed a greater propensity to enroll in college, earn a college degree and seek financial assistance (Chaney et al., 1997); and Upward Bound Math Science participants had a greater tendency to take advance courses in science and math, enroll in a selective university; complete a four-year degree in math or science (Olsen et al., 2007).

The US Department of Education reported on 128 GEAR UP program sites that reach nearly 566,000 students across the country. Evaluation of the GEAR UP also produced positive outcomes for the participants such as an increased GPA (Yampolskaya et al., 2006); an increase in parent college knowledge, parent higher education expectations, parent involvement and student knowledge of college options (US Department of Education, 2008); an increase in college readiness (Harvill & Maynard,
2012b); and an increase in rigorous course taking for African American students (Bausmith & France, 2012).

**Foundation and Privately Funded Initiatives**

There were a limited number of studies that provided a comprehensive view of AVID program outcomes. In one study, researchers reported a positive relationship between participation and high school attendance, standardized test scores, advanced placement course taking and college enrollment (Watt et al., 2004). For the other major private and foundation supported precollege programs, MESA and IHAD, there were no published evaluative reports accessible to be included in this review.

**Summer College Access Programs**

In the 2000 National Survey of outreach programs, 82% of the initiatives offered a summer program component. This included programs that provided during the academic year and summer 67% and programs that solely operated during the summer 15% (Swail, 2000). The summer programs ranged from weekly weekend workshops to summer day camps to on-campus residential experiences of varying lengths (Swail, 2000). Upward Bound represented the majority of programs reporting summer experiences, which was a mandatory feature of the Upward Bound service contract. Each Upward Bound site was required to operate a summer residential program that was at minimum six weeks in length (Moore, Fasciano, & Jacobson, 1997). Despite the small amount of research on this issue, several studies have concluded that the precollege summer residential programs can increase college preparation of first-generation college...
students; develop college going capital; help decode the college going process; help ease
the transition to college; and improve freshman retention rates for first-generation
students (Bloom et al., 2008; Cates & Schaefle, 2011; Dyce et al., 2013; Hicks, 2005).

Parent and Family Engagement

Significance of Parent Involvement

Parents play an important and influential role for all students regardless of their background, ethnicity or financial status. Research shows the significance of parent involvement in the college going process for students from underserved communities as well as first-generation college students. Several researchers have found that parent involvement led to students performing better in school; being on track with their college preparation planning; and realizing their college aspirations (Choy et al., 2000; Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Smith, 2008). In addition, decisions on which college a student chooses to attend are influenced by parent involvement (Roderick et al., 2009).

Roles for Parents

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) used Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage model to describe the important roles parents play during the college going process. These roles include providing motivational and active support. During the predisposition phase when students begin to develop an interest in college, Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) suggested that parents encourage their child’s interest and take preparatory action. The researchers stressed the need for active support by parents during the search phase that
included visiting colleges (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Finally, in the third phase - college choice – Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) advised parents to support their child’s higher education endeavor by ensuring all college enrollment processes are completed.

Using data from the National Survey of Outreach Programs (2000) and empirical research on the predictors of college enrollment for underserved student populations, Perna (2002) identified key characteristics of precollege programs. Three of these characteristics involved parent engagement, which included parent involvement, parent college awareness, and offering parent FAFSA assistance. Perna and Titus (2005) reported how parent involvement is vital in assisting aspiring students with navigating the stages of the college choice process.

Similarly, Tierney, Corwin and Colyar (2005) recommended parent and family engagement among their list of nine required components for college preparation programs. They stressed how parents can be empowered to support their child’s educational aspirations; reinforce program messages and information; and advocate college going within their communities (Tierney et al., 2005). The researchers viewed parent and family engagement as the same, emphasizing how support can extend beyond parents and include older siblings and extended family (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Tierney et al., 2005). Essential program activities include providing information to families early in the process; promote networking and relationship building between schools, universities and families; and enlist families as program allies and supporters (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Tierney et al., 2005).
Additionally, numerous studies have reported similar findings that illustrate how parent and family involvement transmit high expectations, and reinforce the value of education, thus motivating the student to fulfill their aspirations (Dyce et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2010; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Furthermore, the benefits of family engagement also include increasing persistence of first generation college students and breaking the intergenerational cycle of low postsecondary education participation among underserved populations (Gofen, 2009; Westbrook & Scott, 2012).

**Engagement Practices in Summer College Access Programs**

Many scholars have concluded that parents and families play a significant role in the college choice process (Choy et al., 2000; Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Smith, 2008). Additionally, scholars have outlined and suggested roles and ways that families can support students in navigating the path to higher education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Dyce et al., 2013; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strayhorn, 2010; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). However, within the number of published program evaluations, comprehensive reports, and long-term studies of college access programs, little is known about nature of the engagement practices for parents and families (Balz & Esten, 1998; Bausmith & France, 2012; A. F. Cabrera et al., 2006; Gándara & Bial, 2001; Harvill & Maynard, 2012a; McElroy & Armesto, 1998b; L. Perna, 2002; Tillery, 2013). Furthermore, no research has been found that surveyed non-government funded summer college access programs.

Walker’s (2015) review aimed to fill the knowledge gap on summer precollage initiatives by systematically gathering, reviewing and synthesizing the findings on
initiatives that involved citing parent and family engagement practices. The review identified 28 empirical studies that reported on college access programs that met the following criteria: were non-federally funded programs, operated during the summer months; offered a residential experience; and took place on the campus of a four-year college or university (Walker, 2015). A few of the program characteristics that Walker (2015) identified included the program types and the predominant theories that shaped the program design. Walker (2015) cited two general types of programs within the summer initiatives, which included pipeline programs and academic enrichment. The majority of the programs studied (21) were pipeline initiatives, which were created primarily to increase awareness and interests in specific academic disciplines or career fields. There were seven academic enrichment programs in the review whose primary focus was promoting higher education and increasing college readiness (Walker, 2015).

The theories Walker (2015) found included: social capital; cultural capital; anti-deficit; self-efficacy; critical; womanist; and agency theories. Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory appeared in 19 reports. Self-efficacy is defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1977, p.171)

Following self-efficacy, Walker (2015) identified 16 reports that discussed Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of cultural and social capital. In the context of higher education, cultural capital reflects the knowledge and information that is transferred within close network ties, such as families, that provides an individual with the ability to navigate circumstances such as the stages involved in college enrollment (Pierre
Social capital refers to the value and strength of relationships and networks that one uses to access information, opportunities and resources (Bourdieu, 1986).

**Motivational and Active Support**

To capture the parent engagement approaches, Walker (2015) applied definitions of engagement efforts proposed by college choice scholars Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) and Perna (2002). Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) found that parent involvement is a critical element in the college choice process for students. The authors identified motivation and active support as two important ways that parents help their children fulfill their aspiration for college education. (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001).

Motivational support according to Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) includes parents learning about the college preparation and application process, attending college fairs, and visiting colleges. Walker (2015) found examples of motivational support in seventeen articles. Reported examples of motivational support included parent participation in welcome picnics, informational sessions, and access to college admission information (Walker, 2015).

In regards to active support, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) describe parents’ actions that can contribute to their child's college aspirations. This support may include creating a college fund or completing the FAFSA form. Efforts such as these will help to remove potential financial barriers that can prevent the student from achieving their educational goals. Walker (2015) reported finding evidence of parent active involvement in only four studies.
Involvement and College Awareness

Using Perna's (2002) ideal program characteristics as a lens for identifying and categorizing parent and family engagement practices, Walker (2015) found nineteen studies that reported parent involvement, eighteen studies that highlighted parent college awareness, and, as previously stated, only four programs that described providing parent FAFSA assistance. For parent involvement activities, Walker (2015) identified ten general activities that these studies discussed. Additionally, the most frequent activities Walker (2015) found among the parent involvement activities were closing ceremonies and completing post-program surveys. For the eighteen studies that described efforts to increase parents' college awareness, Walker (2015) identified eight strategies that were used. The approaches that were most commonly cited included welcome events, orientations and parent meetings.

Based on these findings of parent involvement and college awareness activities, Walker (2015) presented a model of parent engagement opportunities, which aligned the engagement methods with the various reported time periods that the activity was implemented (Figure 2.1). This model summarizes all of the reported types of engagement activities Walker’s (2015) review identified.
Although Walker's (2015) review is based on a small sample of summer college access programs, his findings illustrate the many ways summer programs engage parents in the college going process. These efforts include parent involvement, college awareness as well as enabling parents to play a motivational and active role. However, much less is known about how programs plan, design and implement engagement efforts; what resources are involved; what are the contexts of the activities; how do the program's mission align; and how do parents, students and program staff perceive the engagement methods (Walker, 2015; Tierney, 2002). Walker (2015) and Tierney (2002) found that college access programs often provide vague and generic description about parent and family activities.

To develop a full picture of parent and family engagement in summer college access programs, additional studies will be needed that explore the outreach and
communication to parents and families; the full nature of the engagement practices; the
engagement theoretical basis and connections to the program's mission; and the
perceptions of the engagement efforts and outcomes of parents, students and program
personnel.

Chapter Summary

Researchers have studied the effectiveness of college access programs and
concluded that parent and family engagement can influence the higher education
attainment for this population; yet not enough is known about how parent and family
engagement fit into the overall picture of summer college access programs and the
perceived outcomes (Walker, 2015; Tierney, 2002). However, at this time, there has been
little discussion about the specific details involved with parent and family engagement
that would inform practitioners, researchers and policymakers who aim to increase the
educational attainment rates of marginalized groups and first-generation college students
(Walker, 2015; Tierney, 2002).

The next chapter will introduce the proposed methods to explore how a precollege
summer residential program plans and practices parent and family engagement. It
includes an overview of the study design, including selecting the site and participants for
the case study. Chapter 3 includes a description of the multiple data collection procedures
as well as the data analysis techniques. The chapter ends with an explanation of the
credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the study and includes a description of the
ethical considerations of the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

While the literature on college choice and college preparation programs identify parent and family involvement as an influential factor in the college choice process and is an essential component of college preparation programs, there is a lack of research focused on how such programs engage parents and families. Recognizing this gap, the purpose of this instrumental case study will be to explore how a precollege summer residential program based at a Southeastern, rural, four-year research institution promotes awareness and involvement of parents and families in the college choice phases of their program participants.

The study’s focus is on understanding how a precollege summer residential program engages parents and families in the college going process for first-generation college students. The major research questions guiding this study are: how do programs define parent and family engagement and how do programs conduct parent and family engagement? This study will also seek to answer the following sub-questions: what is the origin and basis of the program’s engagement definition; what are the procedures for developing and implementing engagement activities; how do the program staff perceive their efforts and results of their engagement activities; and what are the perceptions of parents and families about the program’s engagement strategies? This chapter explores the methodology of this study, which includes describing the purpose, study design, sites and participants, data collection and analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethics will
also be addressed.

To answer the research questions posed, a qualitative approach is best suited for capturing meaning and perceptions of the program staff to understand the phenomena of parent and family engagement (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research is about exploring an issue, such as parent and family engagement by primarily understanding the individuals connected to the issue and relying on viewpoints (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 2010). Merriam (2009) asserts that qualitative research aims to understand meaning comprised of various individual experiences. This definition aligns with the study’s intent to understand a program’s meaning of engagement through learning the perceptions of the program staff.

As this study aims to understand what Stake (2010) calls "what is going on", gathering multiple perspectives, experiences and views are essential to success. Creswell (2012) also contends that a complex and detailed understanding of issues can be achieved through qualitative research because the process would involve collecting information from multiple sources and individuals.

*Research Design*

An instrumental case study research design was chosen. This design allows the researcher the ability to gain insight and understanding of how program staff views the summer residential initiative efforts to engage parents and families (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, this study design allows the researcher to understand the intricacies and various components of the unit being studied and all of the components involved (S. Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). The case study method is also appropriate for addressing
the research questions, that allows the researcher to study the contexts of parent and family engagement, Stake (2010) describes contexts as the search for the social, cultural, political, economic and historical understanding and meaning. Although this study was focused on the phenomena of parent and family engagement activities, it is not a phenomenological study. Whereas phenomenology research is concerned with the “essence of the human experiences related to a phenomenon, this study aims to understand the phenomenon in itself (Moustakas, 1994; Stake, 2010).

Stake (2010) and Creswell (2012), describe a key condition for a case study is that the central phenomenon occurs in a bounded system, which will allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the issue. Several features related to the characteristics of the pre-collegiate summer program bounds this study. These boundaries included: the phenomena occurring within a defined program; occurring in a particular setting; and taking place over a period of time. These boundaries satisfied all criteria described by Stake (1995) and Creswell (2012) as key conditions for a case study.

**Research Questions**

As a qualitative inquiry, this study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. To answer the major research question guiding this study – how does a pre-collegiate summer program engage parents and families of its participants – involves exploring how participants make meaning of the complexity of the social interactions involved in the operating a pre-collegiate summer program (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Merriam, 2002). Observing the social phenomenon and lived experiences will also contribute to addressing the main question and meet the naturalistic requirements for qualitative
This study will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

1) What are the values, beliefs and practices of college access programs for engaging parents and families of underserved and first-generation students?
2) What are the working parts for developing and implementing engagement activities? Resources, personnel, experience?
3) What is the context and operational structure of the programs and activities used to engage parents and families?
4) What are the program staff’s expectations and perceptions of their engagement practices?

**Selection of Participants**

*Site*

The site for this study was a precollege summer residential program hosted at Reach University (RU), a Southwestern, 4-year, public, land grant, research institution. The site was chosen based on recommendations provided to the researcher by the Director and Assistant Director of the Pre-Collegiate Programs Office (PCPO) at RU. The PCPO staff estimated over 200 youth from underserved communities participate in one of the following four programs:

1. Tomorrow’s Hope;
2. Occupation Dream;
3. Leaders of the New School; and
4. Emerging Scientists

From these recommended programs, the Tomorrow’s Hope program was selected for the case study using criterion sampling (Creswell, 2003; S. Merriam, 2009) that
considered: the participant population, program duration and programming for parents and families. Below is a brief overview of the Tomorrow’s Hope.

Tomorrow’s Hope Program

The Tomorrow’s Hope (T-Hope) program was created to assist youth from economically disadvantaged communities with low rates of college attendance. T-Hope’s program is a unit of Reach University’s Office of Student Affairs. The program is funded with grant support from Trust 1 Bank (http://www.reachtomorrowshope.org/). T-Hope is designed to motivate, inform and help prepare participants in their pursuit of higher education.

Service Communities

The program participants are recruited from five high schools that are located over 150 miles east of Reach University in the lower region of the Southeastern state. The schools are in three counties that have predominately African American populations, high poverty rates and low college attendance (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Tomorrow’s Hope Participants’ Community Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Data</th>
<th>Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allendale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>9,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American %</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA degree or higher %</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$25,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below poverty level %</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census (2013)
The region has become referred to as the "Corridor of Shame" after a documentary and a series of articles attracted national attention to the poor conditions of the rural public schools that suffered decades of neglect and inadequate funding by the state (Click & Hinshaw, 2014; Ferillo, Rainey, Wehunt, Sibert, & Conroy, 2006). Nearly 30 school districts in this region have pursued legal remedies to end the school funding disparities between rural/poor public schools and their counterparts in affluent communities (Click & Hinshaw, 2014).

This fight, spanning over twenty years, has been fiercely contested by the state; going through dismissals and refiling over the years (Click & Hinshaw, 2014). In one ruling, the state's Supreme Court found that the State General Assembly was required by the state's Constitution to provide the opportunity for each child to receive a "minimally adequate" public education (Click & Hinshaw, 2014).

Program

The program participants are admitted in cohorts of 30-40 students the summer before their sophomore year (rising 10th grade). Students are expected to continue in the program throughout high school until graduation. They return each summer for an additional week of preparation. Throughout the year, college preparation workshops and campus tours are offered. The program also hosts a Parent Awareness Weekend (PAW), developed to encourage more involvement with the child’s higher education pursuits. College preparations, admissions and financial aid workshops are provided daily during their visit.
Summer program session durations:

- 1 week - 10th grade
- 2 weeks - 11th grade
- 3 weeks - 12th grade
- 2.5 days - Parents

Campus Community

As of the fall semester of 2013, the Reach University consisted of five colleges with a student population of nearly 17,000 undergraduates and slightly more than 4,300 graduate students (Reach.edu, 2012). The school is located in a small rural community that identifies itself as a college town where the local population’s estimate for 2012 was 14,089 (US Census Bureau, 2012). On the city’s website, the school is credited with enhancing the quality of life for the city’s residents with its student population as well as school events and activities (US Census Bureau, 2012). The city residents also benefit from the school’s partnership with the city and neighboring towns in providing free public transportation, which includes buses that bare the school’s colors and symbols (Reach Area Transit, wwwcat.org, 2013). The city’s demographics by ethnicity consists of 79% White, 10.3% Black/African American, 8.1% Asian, 5.1% Hispanic, and .1% American Indian/Native Alaskan (US Census Bureau, 2012a). The median household income for the city was reported as $29,025 (US Census Bureau, 2012a).

The Carnegie Foundation classifies Reach University as an “engaged university” for the Advancement of Teaching. The engaged designation affirms “…that a university or college has institutionalized engagement with the community in its identity, culture and commitments” ((Driscoll, 2010, p.5).” According to Driscoll (2010), engagement
activities fall into two major categories: (a) curricular engagement and (b) outreach and partnership engagement. Moreover, the university study site’s community connections satisfy both categories given the land grant extension efforts and programmatic functions carried out by various colleges and departments.

Participant Selection

The primary focus of this study was the parent and guardian engagement efforts of Tomorrow’s Hope, which included two major events – the parent meeting and the parent weekend visit. To study these activities, the participants included Tomorrow’s Hope leadership team, program staff members, program partners and affiliates and the program participants’ parents/guardians. Tomorrow’s Hope’s Program Director worked with the researcher as a gatekeeper, helping with identifying the key informants and participants as well as advising and providing information scheduling and reaching the participants (Glesne, 2011).

Program Leaders

Tomorrow’s Hope leadership team consists of the Program Director, an Assistant Director and an Executive Director. The Program Director, Linda, has served in this role with Tomorrow’s Hope for eight years. Linda oversees the daily operations of the program which includes the planning, implementing and monitoring all aspects of the program activities. Ronald, the Assistant Director, was a new hire at the time of the study and primarily provides support to the Director. The Executive Director, Carl, has been with Tomorrow’s Hope since its inception providing sustainability and development support. Tomorrow’s Hope Parent Awareness Weekend is a co-sponsored event with the
Educators First initiative. Frank is the Program Manager for Educators First and shares equal responsibility for the planning and implementation of the parent weekend event.

Program Staff

There were six program staff members involved with this study. The criteria for selecting the staff participants was that they had a role with Tomorrow’s Hope parent and family engagement activities. All Tomorrow’s Hope staff participants were current undergraduate students enrolled in a four-year college. Four of the staff were Program Advisors (PA); one was a Hall Manager; and one was a Spokesperson for the organization. The PAs were Leslie, Kim, Brandon and Tony. Fern was the Hall Manager and Clint was the spokesperson.

Program Affiliates/Volunteers

For its parent/guardian engagement efforts, Tomorrow’s Hope involves several organizational affiliates and volunteers to implement their activities. One affiliate group are the guidance counselors at each of the five high schools of the program participants. T-Hope’s Program Director connected the researcher with Geneva, the guidance counselor at School Site 2. Other affiliates included a financial aid officer, Brenda, and an admissions officer, Pierre from Reach University who both assisted with the Parent Awareness Weekend. Additionally, a community volunteer, Del, who also presented during the Parent Awareness Weekend was included in the study.

Parents and Families

Parents/guardians of the program participants were involved in the study during the parent meeting and during the weekend visit event. Over 100 parents completed and
returned a survey distributed at the parent meeting. Additionally, all of the attendees were a part of small group discussions during the Parent Awareness Weekend.

**Role of the Researcher**

This doctoral research project was conducted during a research assistantship with the Office of Summer School at Reach University, a literature review was conducted on the topic of Precollege Summer Residential Programs. This research led to an interest in investigating of how such programs engaged the participant’s parents to enhance their understanding of the college going process.

In addition to this knowledge from the literature, experiences were gained working in higher education admissions as well as with college preparation programs. As an admissions officer for a public four-year institution, knowledge of the college going process required for students to gain college admission is necessary. The researcher also served as the project coordinator responsible for outreach and recruitment of underserved and first-generation student populations. Additionally, the researcher was a Residential Assistant for two summer residential programs during his undergraduate years of college.

As a result of the practical nature of the data collection procedures previously described, the researcher acquired extensive experience in conducting fieldwork, interviewing, observing and documentation analysis. As community development consultant with an urban planning and architecture firm for four years, this researcher has worked in urban, suburban and rural communities for several periods of time. These periods range from three to twenty-four months throughout the United States. Additionally, fieldwork was routinely conducted to determine their history, issues and
concerns. This work involved conducting many one on one interviews with key informants representing six different community domains (economic, social, cultural, environmental, organizational, and physical). Using a snowball sampling approach, we received suggestions for additional key informants. Our work also entailed gathering a wide array of documents from various community segments that included reports, studies and articles about the town of Reach to analyze along with our interview data. We compiled community profile documents based on our interpretation of the information gathered. The profile document was reviewed by the interview participants and shared with the general public to confirm or correct our assessment.

Many of the key informant interviews required a great deal of confidentiality and discretion in order to share critical and sensitive information without divulging the source. Confidentiality practices were also critical in my role as a Student Affairs Services Professional when assisting students and families with college admission applications and providing retention support services to undergraduate students. Therefore, this task was an integral and ongoing expectation of the research process.

However, it is recognized that there are some limitations that are personally brought to this role that may make it difficult to establish trust and rapport among the program staff and parent participants. These potential barriers include the researcher’s status as a current student, prior relationships with potential study participants, and being from a different geographic region of the United States. Some of the program staff may be reluctant to participate in this study because the researcher has not earned his Ph.D. This may cause a lack of confidence in the ability to conduct the research (Glesne, 2011).
Conversely, the researcher’s status as a student and prior relationships with potential study participant, who are also students studying in the same college, may threaten the validity of the research by influencing the behavior of the participant or researcher and impacting the data collection and analysis (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, the speech or Southern California accent of the researcher may hinder the ability to build a rapport with participants, they may develop the perception that an outsider without the contextual experiences or knowledge of their issues, concerns or conditions (Glesne, 2011).

To mitigate these potential barriers to trust and rapport, the researcher has met with the programs gatekeeper to identify opportunities to meet the staff and participants before the onset of the study. The Program Director has extended an invitation to attend several planning meetings and parent orientation meetings being held in May before the summer program begins. In addition, there are several strategies that are a part of the research design that will prevent the potential of bias based on prior relationships between the researcher and potential participants. The strategies include informed consent procedures, reciprocity, and peer review of findings. In obtaining informed consent from all participants, the researcher will clearly explain the intent and purpose of the study and the participant’s role to establish a clear definition of the relationship for the study (Maxwell, 2013). Another strategy to ensure that there is a balanced power dynamic between the researcher and participants is through reciprocity (Maxwell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). During one of the observation activities, the researcher will be a participant observer, assisting the Program Director and staff with conducting a large
meeting with participants’ parents and families. Finally, the peer review process for this study will determine the plausibility of the findings based on the data provided (Merriam, 2009).

**Data Collection**

An important feature of conducting qualitative research is to understand and describe the complexities of a central phenomenon. This process involves gathering multiple forms of information and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2003; Flick, 2009; Stake, 2010). To understand the various components and perspectives related to parent and family engagement, data collection for this case study included: observations; interviews; group discussions; a survey; and key documents.

*Observations*

The researcher attended several Tomorrow’s Hope meetings and events associated with their parent and family engagement work (Table 3.2). The aim was to observe the program’s implementation, the staff’s roles, and the parents/guardians response, witnessing the phenomenon in its natural occurrence without arrangement or staging (Stake, 2010; Merriam, 2009).
Table 3.2 Events and Activities Observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, May 11</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Paperwork - Consent Mtg./ Parent Survey</td>
<td>Participant Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, June 11</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope Staff Planning</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, June 13</td>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Financial Aid 101</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 2 A</td>
<td>Continuing Ed &amp; Adult Learning</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 2 B</td>
<td>College Admissions</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch with Parents</td>
<td>Participant Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 3 A</td>
<td>T-Hope Info. / Group Disc. A</td>
<td>Participant Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 3 B</td>
<td>T-Hope Info. / Group Disc. B</td>
<td>Participant Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 3 C</td>
<td>T-Hope Info. / Group Disc. C</td>
<td>Participant Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banquet</td>
<td>Parents with Students &amp; Staff</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, June 14</td>
<td>Brunch</td>
<td>Student Panel Discussion</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Departure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher conducted participant and nonparticipant observations. At the Program Director’s suggestion, the researcher participated in and observed the large parent meeting as well as during portions of the Parent Awareness Weekend.

Nonparticipant observations occurred during the staff planning meeting and most events over the parent weekend.

Using an observation protocol, the researcher took field notes for each observation that included capturing information or descriptions about: the context/setting; interactions between the program staff and participants; roles of the staff; communication and key messaging (see Appendix G and H). The researcher’s reflection notes were added to the description notes. Chapter 4 of this manuscript includes several observation summaries for events the researcher attended.
Interviews

Individual

The researcher conducted (10) one-on-one interviews to obtain more in depth information from the program’s leadership, staff members and program affiliates involved with the planning or implementation of the parent and family engagement activities (Table 3.3). Obtaining multiple understanding and meaning of individual experiences is essential for qualitative research (Stake, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Table 3.3 Participants – Individual Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Program Dir.</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>Program Director (8 yrs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Assoc. Program Dir.</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope Alumni, Program Advisor and Reach Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Program Advisor</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope Alumni, Program Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Clint</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Program Advisor/Spokesperson</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope Alumni and Former Program Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Program Mgr. for Educators First</td>
<td>Educators First</td>
<td>Educators First (10 yrs.), created Parent Awareness Weekend with E.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Exec. Dir. for the Office of Student Affairs</td>
<td>Reach University</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope, since inception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Site 2 High School</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pierre</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
<td>Coord. for Access</td>
<td>Reach University</td>
<td>Reach Admissions Officer for SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
<td>Sr. Assoc. Dir. of Student Financial Aid</td>
<td>Reach University</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher developed a written protocol that was consistent with IRB requirements (see Appendix I - K). This included an introduction and a description of the research study and the participants’ role. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with open-ended questions. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder.

Group Discussions

The researcher led several group discussions to obtain perceptions about the engagement efforts from the program staff and parents/guardians who attended the Parent Awareness Weekend. The program staff’s consisted of four staff members who were directly involved with the program’s engagement activities (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Participants – Staff Group Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Program Alumni</th>
<th>From Region</th>
<th>Reach Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program Advisor</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fern</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hall Manager</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Program Advisor</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope/ Educators First</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Program Advisor</td>
<td>Tomorrow’s Hope/ Educators First</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the Parent Awareness Weekend, the researcher was a participant observer while conducting a series of focus groups with the adult attendees. There were three discussion sessions with a range of 11 – 20 participants at approximately forty-five minutes each (Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5 Participants – Parent/Guardians Group Discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each group discussion followed a written protocol in accordance with IRB requirements (see Appendix L and M). All group discussions began with an introduction that included a description of the study and the participants’ role. The researcher used a semi-structured format to conduct the sessions with open-ended questions. All sessions were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The researcher made descriptive notes that included details and reflections of the meeting.

**Survey**

The researcher distributed a survey in paper form to the parents/guardians attending the parent meeting (Table 3.6). The survey was designed in accordance with the guidelines provided by IRB and in consultation with the Tomorrow’s Hope Program Director. The survey included multiple choice, Likert rating scale and open ended questions.
Table 3.6 Survey – Parent Paperwork Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Site</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>129</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Documents

The researcher collected over 20 program documents that included: outreach letters, information packets, consent forms, program announcements, program evaluations, websites, social media and other materials as they become available from the program personnel (Table 3.7). Each item was reviewed and analyzed using a thematic coding approach, corresponding to the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

Table 3.7 Relevant Documents and Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Research Question #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Student Information &amp; Application Packet</td>
<td>Value - Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Student Acceptance Letter</td>
<td>Value - Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Paperwork Meeting Packet</td>
<td>Belief - Meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Tomorrow's Hope Presentation</td>
<td>Value - Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Tomorrow's Hope website - Program Advisor</td>
<td>Practice - Family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Parent Awareness Weekend Evaluations</td>
<td>Perceptions - Inspired Working Parts -</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional/Ext. Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Reach University Digital Newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Creswell (2010) documents can provide important information about the central phenomenon and unlike interviews and observations do not require
transcribing before analysis. Furthermore, documents and artifacts can provide rich historical and contextual information of events or activities that the researcher could not observe directly (Stake, 2010). This information was gathered throughout the study, cataloged, digitized (if possible) and stored within the study database.

Data Storage and Management

The data generated and collected in the study was managed and analyzed using Dedoose, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) program. CAQDAS programs are tools to assist researchers with planning and organizing to analyze data more closely (Creswell, 2009). Using the Dedoose database in this case study also enhanced reliability by enabling the researcher to track and organize multiple data sources (notes, documents, transcripts, photographs, etc.) for easy retrieval (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) suggest that qualitative data analysis for case study research design should include varying types of analysis that will allow the researcher to delve “deeper and deeper into understanding the data…” and “… representing the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell 2009, p.138).” In this section is a brief description of how the different types of data: focus group and interview data and study artifacts were analyzed.
Observations and Interviews

After the interview and discussion recordings were transcribed and the field notes were developed, the researcher employed a six stage process to consolidate, reduce and interpret the information (Creswell, 2009). The process is as follows:

1. Organize data and transcribe the recordings of the interviews.
2. Read through all the data - transcribed interviews, discussions, and field notes as well as researchers notes and memos.
3. Analyze the data using an open coding process.
4. Use coding process to create descriptions about the setting, participants or themes that emerge.
5. Develop a narrative about the themes that may include a chronology of the study.
6. Make interpretation and meaning of the data.

Documents and Artifacts

The researcher collected documents related to the college access program. The items collected during the study will be catalogued and organized by type and subject of the content. The researcher will use a thematic analysis of the documents and artifacts collected that corresponds to the research questions that either provides insight into how the parent and family engagement defined or how it is accomplished (Merriam, 2009).

Issues of Validity

Researchers using qualitative methods must ensure that their work is appropriate and credible. Qualitative research can be enhanced using various strategies to ensure validity of the study design, research methods, results, interpretation and applicability. Construct validity refers to the appropriateness or practicality of the research design with
the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008; Riege, 2003; Yin, 2003). This study meets the criteria for the case study design, which includes the stated research questions; phenomena resides in a bounded system; employs purposeful sampling; and outlined procedures for data collection, management and analysis (Baxter & Jacks, 2008).

Internal validity refers to how the researcher can be certain that the finding has value and best reflect the efforts of the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). This study used several data collection methods - observations, interviews and documents - from several sources of data - program staff, affiliates and the researcher, thus creating the triangulation of both methods and sources. This triangulation of data methods as well as sources represents a strategy to ensure validity (Long & Johnson, 2000; S. Merriam, 2009; Riege, 2003). Member checks was another strategy the researcher employed to increase the study’s validity (Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Riege, 2003). Drafts of interview transcripts and report findings were shared with key informants to ensure the accuracy of the notes and to avoid potential misinterpretation of data.

Reliability represents the dependability and consistency of the findings of the data collected during the study (Merriam, 2009). Strategies within the design of this study helped to ensure the reliability of the findings include triangulation, involving the use of multiple collection methods and data sources as well as having peers reviewed draft reports and findings (Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, the researcher maintained memos and notes, creating an audit trail for the study, thus, enabling others to trace the research process (Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam, 2009).
External validity is determined by generalizability, which addresses whether the findings from this study could be applied to other settings. In qualitative research, generalization can be accomplished through extrapolation of information by a “reader or user” of the study (Merriam, 1995). Therefore, the researcher provided thick, rich descriptions of the contexts, process and results as recommended for increasing the study’s generalizability (Whittemore et al., 2001). Additionally, Merriam (2009) describes maximum variation as a strategy to enhance the transferability of the findings or observations from the study. The selected study site, participants, phenomena and other identified characteristics of the study may enable a broader range of application to programs of similar size, resources and population served (Le Compte & Goetz, 1982; Whitmore et al, 2001).

**Ethical Consideration**

The researcher conducted the study in compliance with the regulations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), gaining permission to engage study participants in in-depth interviews, group discussion, surveys and to conduct participant and nonparticipant observations (Creswell, 2003). The researcher provided informed consent forms to study participants that state they agree to be in the study and an acknowledgement that their rights were protected (Creswell, 2003). Pseudonyms were created to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Finally, all materials, including notes, interview tapes, and transcripts are kept in a secure location and will be destroyed in accordance with IRB requirements (Creswell, 2003).
Limitations

The researcher recognizes that there are potential limitations with this proposed study that exist within the single case study design and proposed data collection methods. This case study’s focus on a single unit and phenomenon within a summer precollege access program at a public, land grant, research university in a Southeastern state with program participants from rural, economically challenged communities. As a result, the findings may not be generalized to the entire population of college access programs, but the themes that emerge from the research may be similar to other summer precollege programs that assist participants from similar backgrounds (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; S. Merriam, 2009; Whittemore et al., 2001). There are several potential limitations with the study’s data collection methods as well as researcher’s role with interacting with the study participants. Limitations with the data collection methods may include interview responses being influenced by the researcher’s presence, documents may not contain complete, accurate or authentic information (Creswell, 2009).

In addition to the limitations of the proposed data collection methods, the researcher may exhibit bias in the role. This bias can manifest in the researcher intervening on an issue or advocating for a cause. As someone with a passion for seeking social justice for underserved groups, there is a risk of the researcher assuming an Intervener/Reformer or an Advocate role. Glesne (2011) explains that when a researcher becomes an intervener/reformer, they may attempt to correct what they may view as wrong or injustice. Similarly, the researcher may also champion a cause, advocating for an issue that emerges during the study (Glesne, 2011).
Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study’s design, including research questions; research design; participant selection; data collection procedures; data analysis; validity issues, and ethical considerations. In examining the parent and family engagement practices of summer college access programs, the use of a qualitative instrumental single case study design was used because of the exploratory nature of the study. The single case study included participant and nonparticipant observations; individual in-depth interviews and group discussions, a survey; and document review. Dedoose, CAQDAS program, was used to assist with managing, coding, analyzing and presenting the study results.
CHAPTER 4
CASE OBSERVATIONS

This chapter includes descriptive accounts of several events observed by the researcher during the case study. These observations include two events that happened before the launch of Tomorrow’s Hope 2015 Summer programs – “pre-program” events. The other four observations occurred during the parent engagement weekend. The pre-program events were the Paperwork Meeting and a staff planning meeting. The observations from the weekend visit includes two information sessions and two social activities with featured participants. The events are organized in chronological order by the date and time of the event as they appear below.

Pre-Summer Program Events

- Paperwork Meeting
- Tomorrow’s Hope Staff Meeting

Parent Awareness Weekend Events

- Financial Aid Session
- Continuing Education Session
- Banquet with Students
- Closing Brunch
Pre-Summer Program Events

Paperwork Meeting

May 11, 2015

Time: 6:30 pm - 7:28 pm

The “Paperwork Meeting” is a mandatory meeting for the Tomorrow’s Hope Program student participants must attend with a parent/guardian or adult family member. The meeting is called the paperwork meeting because this is the time all of the required consent forms and program documents are completed for the students to enroll in the program and summer program at Reach University. The meeting also provides information, logistics and program updates to the new and returning students. New parents and students learned more about the program and what to expect. Returning parents were made reminded and made aware of the rules and policy changes.

Students in all three grade levels and students from each of the five high schools served by the program attended the meeting with a parent/guardian. The meeting was held at USC campus facility in the Allendale community. This location was central and convenient for all of the participants to attend.

The Tomorrow’s Hope staff included the Program Director, the new Assistant Program Director and three current and former Program Advisors. Three of the staff traveled over 4 hours from Reach University to host this meeting. The other program team members lived in one of the local communities and was available to participate.

The meeting took place in a large multipurpose space that appeared to serve business, social and recreational functions. The facility was bright and open like an
auditorium or dance hall. There were rows of chairs set-up for attendees that filled the space. I counted about 300 chairs set up. In the front of the room, there was a single microphone stand for the speaker. In the back of the room there were three tables setup for receiving paperwork. Each table was designated for one of the three cohort group - L, M and N.

Students with their parents or family member begin to flow into the room about 6:15 pm. T-Hope’s program staff were all near the entrance, greeting everyone as they arrived. They asked if the students were new or returning students and they were directed to the appropriate cohort table to sign-in and receive their forms packet. Each registration table was operated by one of the Program Advisors. At approximately, 6:25 pm, a large flood of people arrives. The conversation volume in the room escalates. There is lots of hugging between students and other students, students and staff, and parents and staff. From overhearing the greetings and exchanges, there appear to be some program alumni who have come with their siblings and parents.

At 6:27 pm all 300 seats were full. The two Program Advisors and I quickly get additional chairs to set for the constant flow of people still arriving. We put up about fifty more seats, which quickly fill just before the meeting starts.

Promptly, at 6:30 pm the program begins with the Program Director (AL) introduces herself and welcomes everyone to the meeting. She introduces the staff and her new Assistant Director who was from the community and was also a former student in the program. Everyone applauds his appointment. The Director also recognizes other program alumni that were in the audience, citing what college they were attending,
causing more applause and lots of smiling faces. Additionally, the Director shared achievements of other alumni who were not present but were from one those communities.

After those introductions and announcements, the Director provided an overview of the meeting, explaining the purpose of the paperwork meeting. She described each document within the forms packet that each family received when they entered the meeting. These forms included consent documents, emergency contact information, medical history information, etc. There were about ten different forms to be completed.

Following the review of the documents, the Director described the rules of the summer program and expectations throughout the year as well as the need to be committed for the duration of the program. She emphasized that the program is a three-year commitment and that all students were required to attend the summer program for all three summers while in high school.

The Director went on to describe what the parents could expect from their child being away at the program, including being homesickness. She stressed the need for parent support with complying and enforcement of the rules and policies. There were lots of nods in agreement among the adults when she discussed the rules about the dress code; how much to pack; cell phone usage; money needs; and TV watching. However, there seemed to be a collective groan when she announced that parents were responsible for picking up their student from Reach if they get dismissed from the program.

Given the student’s busy schedule while they are at Reach, the Director encourage parents to check out the program’s Facebook and Instagram sites to keep up with what
students and the program are doing. At about 6:45 pm, the Director announces that this concludes all that they needed to review and that she wanted to respect their time. She brings me up to introduce the survey and reminds everyone to submit their forms at the appropriate table in the back.

After completing the forms packet and the survey, parents and families lined up to speak with Director about their individual questions or concerns. There is a small crowd that encircled her. The program staff were busy receiving the paper packets from each family. There was a lot of interaction between the meeting attendees: students talking and greeting each other; parent’s/family members speaking to one another; students and staff members hugging and catching up; parents and family members hugging and talking to the staff; and the Director was also hugging and greeting the parents and family members and as they asked their questions.

It was 7:28 pm when the last student and parent said good bye. Everyone seemed amazed by the large turnout and the amount adults who came with a student. With over 350 participants, this was Tomorrow’s Hope best attended Paperwork Meeting.

Staff Meeting – Preparation for Parent Awareness Weekend

June 11, 2015

Time: 6:30 pm - 6:53 pm

This staff meeting was the meeting that included all of the Program Advisors in preparation for the Tomorrow’s Hope Parent Awareness Weekend (PAW) event and current events for the new cohort of student attending the summer program.
The meeting took place in a classroom in Brackett Hall at Reach’s University. The tables and chairs were organized in a circle allowing all the staff members to see one another. Ronald Comb, the new Assistant Director sat in a chair almost dead center of the table circle near the door. I stood in the far end of the room in a corner observe as a nonparticipant.

The participants were the Program Advisors and the Assistant Program Director for T-Hope. The AD is a former T-Hope student and recent Reach graduate. He also worked as a T-Hope PA for several years while he was as an undergraduate student. He was recently hired as the AD and this was his first summer as AD.

There are 11 PAs in attendance. There are (4) males and (7) females. The PAs are all current college undergraduate students. Some attend Reach University and others are enrolled in other colleges in SC.

The meeting begins with Ronald asking the staff members to share any “Roses or Thorns”. The Roses represented something good to report or celebrate and the Thorns were issues of concern or a problem that needed to be addressed. After about twelve minutes of different PAs reporting Roses and Thorns, Ronald introduced me to the staff and allowed me to share my research study and my purpose for attending the meeting. I received their consent to observe with no objections.

Ronald moved on to discuss the PAW, stating that the event makes the weekend the busiest during the summer and that the time schedule was very tight. He asked for staff volunteers to assist with preparing for the parents and family’s arrival on Friday
night. He also assigned staff who to work as host and guides over the weekend solely with PAW.

He reviewed PAW schedule and where help was needed.

- Friday, Parents arrive between 9 pm - 10 pm
  - Need help with room preparation Friday afternoon
  - Need (2) volunteers for parent arrival to assist with Check-in and assist with baggage

- Saturday - 8:00 am Parents Breakfast (Malcom) - Tour Guides
- Saturday - 5:00 pm Banquet (ready by 4pm) - Hosts
- Sunday - 7:45 am Brunch (Reach House) - Guides and Hosts
- Ronald reminds the staff to wear business attire for the banquet.

The PAs are very collegial with each other. There is a family atmosphere, like brothers and sisters. Most were sitting very close together. They were whispering and joking with one another. They all showed great respect for Ronald and his role as AD.

I left the meeting when they moved on to another agenda item related to the current group of students in the summer program.

Parent Awareness Weekend

**Financial Aid Session**

June 13, 2015

9:00 a.m. - 9:50 a.m.
The presentation was entitled “Understanding Financial Aid 101” and was designed to provide the attendees an overview of applying for financial aid and the types of funding available. This was the first official session of the awareness weekend.

This session took place in a lecture hall in Brackett Hall at Reach University. The room seats about 60 to 75 people and there were approximately 45 parents and family members present. The tables were set up in rows that allowed for it to accommodate 10 people per row. I sat in the back of the room where I could observe the session.

The session started with an official welcome from the Program Director Linda Lange. She recognized the program sponsor, Trust 1 Bank for their support. The Director informed the parents that they would not see their child during this time and that their child would be in sessions of their own. She also reminded the parents that they were on a tight schedule and that it was important to stay on task. She introduced the Program Advisors, Fern and Brandon, who will be their guides for the day. She then introduced the presenter from the Office of Financial Aid - Brenda Sure.

The financial aid representatives used a PowerPoint presentation to provide information to the parents, which contained a lot of details on the types of aid available for students and families. The presenter noted that the presentation was designed for high school seniors but should be helpful for this group. She recommended families to start a home file for gathering information related to financial aid. She described the process that she used to help her son in his preparation for college.
At the 45-minute mark of the presentation parents were asking a lot of questions regarding financial aid and resources for their student. They were particularly interested in funded scholarships by the lottery and the importance or impact of SATs scores.

Near the end of the presentation, the financial aid representative used several case studies of families with different financial profiles for the participants to discuss the financial aid options that were available for the students. The parents/guardians were very engaged in this conversation.

The presentation closes with T-Hope’s Director making an announcement about the potential for additional financial support from Reach that will be available to the new Cohort N. At that moment, University Officials were looking at offering these students $7,000 per academic year when they graduate and attend Reach.

At the end of the session, there were many parents/guardians who approached the presenter to shake her hand and get her business card.

**Continuing Ed & Adult Learning Session**

June 13, 2015

10:05 am - 10:55 am

At the end of the previous session on financial aid, the parent group was split into two smaller groups - Group A and Group B. Each group would attend different sessions for the next hour and switch rooms to hear the other presentation during the following hour. The session were College Admissions and Adult Education/Continuing Education. I followed the group that went to the Adult Education/Continuing Education session.
The session was called Continuing Education and Adult Education where the presenter discussed various educational paths available and the career options one can have based on their education. The presenter highlighted the cost benefits of the education choices that people can make.

As the group walked into the another campus building where this next session was offered, each person was greeted with a handshake and a smile by Frank Holston who was the Field Director for the Educators First Program and co-planners of the PAW.

There were about 20 people in our group. We all were directed to go into a classroom that was bright with all the lights on and the walls were very lightly colored. Everyone took a seat at the desks, which all faced toward the white board in the front of the room.

Del Master was the presenter who began the session by asking all the participants where they're from. He then followed up with his story about how he came to South Carolina from the Midwest and his experiences going to school in the South and how it differed from the place where he was from. He shared the challenges he had transitioning from the Midwest to the South primarily focusing on the lower educational expectations that he encountered when he moved to South Carolina. The audience was moved by his stories, which were peppered with humorous and self-deprecating anecdotes.

The presenter continued sharing his personal experiences about his path and the evolution that he went through with the various job positions he held. This included experiences working for a community college, educational training organizations and
positions in several other industries where he received new and challenging opportunities that he would not have considered.

In reviewing his career path and educational choices, he outlines his brother’s experiences and makes a comparison on the whiteboard listing each of their career and educational accomplishments. He also added their respective incomes. The comparison showed how his brother who had less formal education, had a higher personal income than he did. The point that he illustrated was that it was important to consider one’s career when making decisions about educational pursuits. Del also shared his entrepreneurial interests and how his mother owning a healthcare service company influenced him.

Near the end of the presentation, Del encouraged the participants to pursue higher education and continued education but also the pursuit of being owners and entrepreneurs while understanding the education game.

Mr. Master closed with a statement about the focus of education. He emphasized a need to be more career focused about the pursuit of higher education, so that students would be more intentional when they enroll in college. His point was to not to linger too long in school or getting lost in the process.

The parenting group appeared to be highly engaged with this presentation. They laughed, smiled and were calling and responding as if the session was a Baptist sermon. There was a lot of passion and care from the presenter. Practically, everyone thanked him, shaking his hand while they left the room for the next session.
Banquet with Students

Saturday, June 13, 2015

5:00 pm – 7:20 pm

Saturday evening banquet was the only event that brought the parents/families and their children together.

The event was held at the Hendrix Center one of the new student services building that houses the many Student Affairs offices, the Bookstore, Theater, Career Services and where many conferences and social events take place. All of the students in Cohort N were nicely dressed - girls in dresses and boys in suits or collared shirts and ties. All of the adults - parents/guardians and program staff are dressed nicely as well. The young men from Educators First acted as hosts, greeting everyone as they arrived, had a noticeable presence. They were dressed very professionally and wearing bow-ties and suits.

Round tables with white tablecloths and colorful centerpieces filled the room. The families, parents/guardians and students were seated together with Tomorrow’s Hope Staff or Educators First students interspersed within the families. Everyone seemed to blend together and it was hard to tell who was staff, student and family.

For this banquet, there was no head table only a podium at the front of the hall. The program leadership team sat near the front interspersed with the other guests. The room has an uplifting vibe with all the smiles, laughter, and closeness between the program participants, their families, program staff and Educators First students.
Program begins with the Educators First Program Manager, Frank welcoming everyone. Frank introduces and invites Carl Knight to lead a prayer before the meal and program. Knight delivers a heartfelt and emotional prayer that resonates with the participants and parents and there is a collective “Amen” when the prayer ends.

The buffet opened after the prayer and each table was invited one at a time to enter the buffet line. While tables awaited their turns, there was a lot of visiting and conversations happening. It looked like connects were being made between the parents/guardians with program staff and Educators First students who were from their communities.

While tables were still waiting to be called up for the buffet, Frank went up to the podium and reflected on the day and key points and themes made in the presentations. He recited a phrase stated in an earlier presentation, "Teamwork to make the Dream Work". The parents/guardians loudly respond, repeating the phrase and applauding, smiling and nodding their heads in agreement.

After everyone made it through the buffet line and were finished with their meals, Frank went to introduce the evening's keynote speaker, David Foster, who is an alum of Educators First, a Reach Grad and former teacher in the SC public school systems. David delivers an inspiring speech called “Where I Came From". He read and referenced Langston Hughes’ "Mother to Son" in his speech.

After the keynote address Frank introduced Linda, acknowledging her commitment, dedication, and leadership, which received great applause from students,
parents and staff. Linda introduced her team and described their hard work. She
introduced Ronald, the new AD and former T-Hope student to great applause as well.

The banquet ends. There was free time for the parents/guardians to visit their
students in their dorms. People were lingering in the banquet hall and outside the facility.
I saw some parents chatting with Program Advisers and Educators First students that they
knew from their home-town.

**Closing Brunch with Student Panel**

June 14, 2015

8:50 am – 10:15 am

This event was the closing event for the parent awareness weekend. The event
featured a student panel for the parents/guardians to hear their experiences and answer
their questions.

Parents were guided from their dorms by program advisors to the Reach House, an iconic
building on the campus. Frank Holston was standing at the door and greeted everyone as
they walked into the banquet hall. There was a large breakfast buffet with a wide
selection of food arranged for the guest to enjoy. We gathered at circular tables that
seated six people.

After everyone is seated, the Director, standing at the podium welcomed
everyone, commenting on the weekend. She provided an overview of the brunch session.
Before everyone is directed to proceed to the buffet line, Linda invited one of the parents
to come forward and pray and bless the meal. Before he began with his prayer, he
commented on how pleased he was with the weekend. After finishing his prayer, he was inspired to sing a verse to a song that he said he sings to his family for encouragement, “...I feel like going on...” He sung this several times and everyone joined in repeating the verse, “...I feel like going on...”. Everyone applauded at the conclusion. This impromptu short sing along exuded a communal feeling.

After everyone was seated with their meals, the student panelist was invited to take their seats on the panel. There were four students that included three males and one female who were either in Educators First or a Program Advisor. The panel introduced themselves and provided information about their college, class level, major, how they chose their major, and their hometown. As each panelist shared where they were from, the parent’s/family members who were from the same community applauded loudly and cheered for their native son or daughter.

Frank opened the discussion by asking the panel “What can and should parents do to help prepare their student for pursuing higher education? Each panelist had something to share such as the benefits to helping your child to get to places and showing them that you care about their educational dreams despite your educational level.

The parents/guardians were fully engaged with the panel discussion as it continued with many questions posed. The panelist was very candid and open, sharing personal experiences and some tragic events in their past that involved their process in preparing for college.

The session ended with the parents/guardians giving the panel a standing ovation. There was a lot of hugging, small group conversations with parents and PAs, panelist and
parents from the same communities. I also received several hugs along with words of encouragement and congratulations for my academic progress.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided several reports of participant and nonparticipant observations. These events occurred before and during the parent awareness weekend. These observations only represent a portion of the data collected for the study. In the next chapter, the findings from all data collected – interviews, discussions, surveys, documents and observations will be presented by themes associated with each research question.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of an instrumental case study in which the researcher explored how a pre-collegiate summer program promoted college preparation awareness and involvement of their participants’ parents and families. Data collected from individual staff interviews; individual program partner interviews; group discussions with staff members and parents/guardians; parent/guardian surveys and evaluations; and researcher's observations were interpreted using Creswell (2009) six-stage procedure. Documents and artifacts collected were analyzed based on “fit” with the research questions and themes (Merriam, 2009). The overarching research questions were used to analyze the data collected and the findings are presented using the following themes derived from the research questions:

- Values, Beliefs and Practices
- Development and Implementation Working Parts
- Context and Operational Structure
- Staff Expectations and Perceptions
- Parent and Family Perceptions
Research Findings

Values, Beliefs and Practices

In this section, the responses are provided for the first research question: “What are the values, beliefs and practices of a pre-collegiate program for engaging parents and families?” These responses represent the views and opinions of the Tomorrow’s Hope leadership team, staff and partner groups who assist with their engagement efforts. A summary of their comments appears under the headings: Values, Beliefs and Practices.

Values

The comments and remarks from the interviewees provided insight about the importance of engaging parents and families of their participants that ties to the organization's mission. Three themes emerged from the data analysis of the interviews related the values about parent/guardian engagement (Figure 5.1). Responses suggest that the organization’s intents include making a positive impact on the family and their communities; there is a desire to raise awareness and empower the families that are being served; and a need for thoughtfulness and respecting in working with the participants and their families.

Values - Family & Community Change

At the heart of the organization’s parent and family engagement efforts, there appears to be a desire to make a positive impact on the whole family as well as the
overall community. This interest in creating change in families was a notion commonly expressed by the program leadership and staff members.

In discussing the meaning of engagement, the Program Director’s comments connects the benefits of a college degree for a student and their family, improving their future opportunities.

“…we are not just changing a student’s life, when a student accesses education and accesses the opportunities they have, it changes that family…once a student’s life is changed, it affects the income, it affects knowledge, it affects future opportunities for that family. I don’t think I realized that before I got into this work. You think you’re helping this student, you’re showing the student the opportunities they have, but then when you get to know that student, then you understand, this will completely change their family. I think the work we do with the student, is instrumental to the family.” (Linda)

Similar comments were made by the Associate Director about creating change in the families, explicitly stating the potential outcomes from engaging the parents/guardians.

“So then with having the parent’s weekend and having the parents engaged in general, it just helps the future generation. And that’s what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to create a college going culture among all of these families and these generations of student to come.” (Ronald)

These ideas of changing families and future generations are consistent with the program founder’s vision for creating this college preparation initiative. The founder wanted to improve the conditions for rural communities faced with many socio-economic challenges and barriers according to one of the organizations leaders.
“I know Mr. Wiley often talked about changing, I think he used this terminology, changing “tax liability” to “tax assets”, that was kind of his premise why we’re going into this area, why we’re trying to change families.” (Carl)

This embedded value for creating community change is also evident in the remarks of one of the program organizer and workshop presenter who describes how parents/guardians are charged with sharing the information they received during the awareness weekend with others in their communities.

“…When you understand your role in the community, you understand your responsibility is more than just your child. We literally would challenge parents to make sure that they are responsible for one of those other parents…that didn’t come (to the parent awareness weekend) …If each one of you would make sure that one of them comes next year, then this experience would be even more powerful and valuable.” (Frank)

Values - Awareness & Empowerment

Another aspect of the program’s values with engagement efforts involves a commitment to raising awareness and empowering the program participant’s parents and families. Program leadership, staff members and affiliates alike expressed the importance of: addressing fears or concerns; changing historical views and perceptions; providing a big picture view of education; and offering strategies to support their student’s pursuit of higher education.

Helping parents and guardians unfamiliar with the college going process overcome their apprehensions and reservations was a common interest study participants described. In discussing her presentation during the Parent Awareness Weekend, the
financial aid representative explained how she was focused on eliminating fears associated with completing applications for financial aid.

“…just trying to take out the fear factor, trying to make it that you don’t need to pay someone to do the FAFSA form; you can do this. Maybe you’re not computer savvy, but your student sure is. So, maybe let them actually the application and you be there as a resource for them.” (Brenda)

In addition to removing parent and families’ fears from the process, the financial aid officer suggested how parents and students could collaborate together to accomplish this critical task. The Admissions Officer also expressed a similar interest for working with this population of parents and families.

“Because, many of the ‘program students’ that visit here are first time, first generation students and some of the parents may not have gone through this process, or may have a lot of question or hesitations about the process, I just think it’s very important that we get all of their questions and answers for them.” (Pierre)

Related to addressing the fears and concerns of the parents and guardians, the need to challenge the perceptions and negative views about predominantly white institutions was stated as an important component of the program’s effort in working with the parents and guardians.

This issue was best described by one of the lead organizers of the Parent Awareness Weekend.

“…one of the goals we have in the program is really, we understand the sentiment that exist there less, of the less than positive sentiment that exist in other parts of the state, specifically the quote unquote “low country” as it relates to Reach University. So when we bring them here, we want them to know that Reach
University, the Reach family, the Reach Community, wants them here…and it’s about slaying so many imaginary dragons that still exist in the mind of so many people, which may present them from enjoying the benefits that a Reach University offers…So, if we can change that mentality as it relates to Reach University, it may be one of the largest imaginary dragons, then we know that they’re more likely to avail themselves to other opportunities that may present themselves in other aspects of their lives.” (Frank)

Equally as important as changing perceptions is the need to provide parents and families with a broader perspective of the education process was a shared value among the program team. This sentiment was directly stated by one of the volunteer participant in the PAW event.

“My whole purpose was to prepare these parents or get the parents on a thinking process of, ‘What are we doing, process’ bringing my child to Tomorrow’s Hope and what do I expect when they finish. Or what to expect from society? As a whole when they finish, so I talk some of the traditional of education, something we don’t think about until education is over, you realize I have a 4-year degree I don’t have a job.” (Del)

Finally, providing practical methods and strategies for active involvement in their students’ overall education process was also rooted in the parent and family engagement effort. Commenting on the purpose of the “Policies and Practices of Education” workshop session during the PAW event, Frank Holton explained the intent of the session.

“…giving the parents the tools necessary so they can build relationships with their students’ teachers and helping them to understand why that’s important…Because the thing about relationships is it takes two people to have an effective relationship and in many cases, one of those two people can create circumstances where a positive relationship develops. So, it’s the parent and the teacher and it really take one of them to really extend themselves to make sure that the relationship happens. And, you do it because your role is bigger than just that how
you feel about this person. It’s understanding, the role that this person’s playing in your child’s success, so that’s why you do it.” (Frank)

Value – Consideration & Respect

The third theme that emerged to define values that underlined the program’s engagement efforts was the spirit and attitude of the staff needed to be effective in working with parents and families. The program organizers and leadership team discussed their mindset and considerations when interacting with their program participant’s families. Key terms that were used to describe their approach included being flexible, intentional, and good listening skills.

“And, I know like I said from that particular experience personally, that some of these parents, they haven’t had those experiences and they haven’t been through those things, like filling out the FAFSA form, or filling out a scholarship application, or even filling out general college application. So, sometimes that put fear into parents. And, I think one of the things that we…as Staff of this program have to realize is that sometimes, we know more than the parents, and some of the parents do not know how to deal with that…(while) some of them welcome it with open arms. So, you just have to be flexible, how you interact with those parents, because different parents react to different things differently.” (Ronald)

The program director describes the need for being intentional and deliberate given the time demands, resources and individual challenges of the families in the program.

“I think you have to be intentional with what you do, no matter if it’s small or large until you’re intentional about working with the parents it’s not going to happen. These parents are working parents, like I said, some of these parents may be back in school and a lot of them working more than one job. If you’re not intentional in how you’re interacting with them and planning things, they have a lot going on just to survive, to keep food on the table, and so you have to be very intentional with that.” (Linda)
In addition to being aware of their circumstances, being open to hearing directly from the parents is equally important as shared in the following comments by Frank.

“Being very strategic in listening to parents as they tell us about what their challenges are, in terms of involvement and being very specific in letting them, during various workshops, tell us about (not to pretend like we know) what those barriers are. I want the parents to know that we are listening to them. That we are not speaking from some mount of knowledge of awareness. That we’re listening to them and together we try to create some strategies that will allow them to be more supportive.” (Frank)

**Beliefs**

When asked about their beliefs on parent and family engagement, participants’ responses generated several themes that illustrate program’s overall views (Figure 5.2) These themes describe the definition of engagement, the purpose of engagement and the outcomes associated with parent and family engagement activities.

**Beliefs - Engagement Meaning**

Responses related to beliefs about engaging parents and families included many comments about expectations regarding a parent/guardian’s role in their student’s education process which include being knowledgeable, supportive and actively involved. Several staff and program volunteers discussed the importance of parents understanding the education process in order to be effective in their student’s development.
“…to me parent and family involved in this education process, is the parent knowing the value of education and all the components involved…” (Del)

In addition to being aware of the education process, having supportive parents/guardians was a frequently stated belief for engagement by many program team members. One staff commented on the having a support team was critical to a student’s success.

“I would say a person can only go as far as they’re support team, and the number one support team is your parent or your guardian.” (Clint)

Support was also stated as parents/guardians being genuinely interested in their student’s college aspirations.

“I would define that as, a parent taking genuine interest in their son or daughter’s college process.” (Pierre)

Furthermore, many comments were made about a belief in active involvement as a meaning for engagement. This view was expressed by one of the high school guidance counselors affiliated with program.

“Well, it means that the parents are actually involved, in their children's lives, and they’re taking an active role in their parenting about building relationships.” (Geneva)

This view is also held by the admissions’ representative.

“I think it’s very important for the parent to be there, it’s a collective effort. They have to be there for that guidance the students’ need.” (Pierre)
Beliefs - Purpose of Engagement

Participants also discussed their beliefs about parent/guardian engagement in terms of the purpose. Many interviewees shared their beliefs that engagement involved raising awareness about the college going process.

“I think that’s one of the biggest thing for me, making sure the parent first knows what we’re doing, and why we’re doing it. And, once the parent starts to realize that then they’re able to help their student a lot more, and that’s what these parent engagements are for so we can them to be able to help their student, or help their next child coming here.” (Ronald)

In describing the program efforts in working with first-generation college student population, the financial aid representative acknowledged the need to work with the whole family.

“…it is an outreach to the family, not just the students, and I think, particularly to first generation students that is critical…So getting them engaged at an early age, getting the whole family engaged, so that they can just sort of wrap their heads around college. (Brenda)

Additionally, one program organizer discussed being very deliberate about forming a partnership with parents.

“So we want to make sure that parent understood, what’s happening with financial aid and college applications. We want to make sure that once we got the child on track and the child is excited about having college intentions; we wanted to make sure the parents were then together in this partnership, doing the things they needed to do to help the child dream come to fruition, and that involves getting them comfortable about what does it mean to go to college…” (Frank)
Beliefs - Outcome of Engagement

Beliefs about parent and family engagement were also defined as outcomes. The outcomes that were most frequently described included parents being able to help their student; increasing the program’s retention rate; and promoting a college going culture within their family.

When parents are involved, many believe that it can increase student success.

“You, know I think that it makes things much better when we have parents involved here. Usually we have a higher success rate with our students with parental involvement.” (Geneva)

“So over time I definitely learned that parent engagement is a necessity in this program and the success of the student. As parents assist one child, their knowledge and experience make it easier to assist other children they may have.” (Ronald)

Increasing the program’s retention rate was another outcome that the program team discussed in reference to their beliefs about engagement. The program director describes how she believes that parents, who understand the program contribute to students returning each summer by encouraging them to attend the program.

“I really feel like the parents are stepping in saying, ‘We know it’s really hard work, we know it’s your summer and you want to go to football camp, but this is just as important, get on that bus’, and we end up with a higher retention.” (Linda)

This sentiment is echoed by two other staff members.

“But also, have the family to get the engaged in the process, get them excited about it, so they help keep the kids excited to go through and finish.” (Leslie)

“So having the parents, see this importance of the program, I think it definitely has helped our retention rates.” (Ronald)
The final outcome that underscores the program team’s beliefs about engagement is the idea that engagement will result in creating a college going culture within the families.

As previously stated, the program founder’s intent was to impact families and communities by inspiring them to pursue higher education.

“…so his thing is ‘this is how we’re going to change the families, we’re going to change the perception about college because many of them are first going or first generation going to college. Now that they are going to college, their younger brothers and sisters are going to start going to college, and then their kids will start going to college, we’re going to change the whole perception of college in many of these families who didn’t feel that college was in their future.’” (Carl)

**Practices**

In answering the question about what practices are used for engaging parents and families, the responses produced themes that described methods to facilitate relationship building with the families and two events that were designed specifically to engage the parents/guardians (Figure 5.3). Comments on these practices based on the researcher’s observations will follow the participant’s responses.

*Practice - Relationship Building*

The program’s engagement practices were frequently described as efforts to build a relationship with the students and their families. Establishing trust with the parents and
families was expressed by many staff members as essential for creating a relationship with the families and a foundation for engagement.

The Assistant Program Director shared how the relationship with the families are built over the course of the 3 years that the students are in the program and that the Program Advisors often maintain those relationships beyond the program because they try to instill a sense of family.

“During the school year, we keep the parents informed of what we’re doing and also letting them know we still have a relationship with their students. I think because, that’s one of the biggest thing about our program is that we are a family and that’s how we train our Program Advisors. That’s what we’re trying to instill in their minds. This isn’t just a program you come for the summer to make such and such amount of dollars and leave. This is a program where you get to know their families and you get to know these students, and you carry their relationship way past their graduation. I graduated from the program in 2005 and I’m still in contact with my Program Advisor and that’s wonderful - seven years ago and I’m still in contact with them.” (Ronald)

One staff member discussed how being from the same community as the families and knowing some of the participants contributes to the relationship building and helps to ease parents’ concerns.

“I have given them that reassurance to know that, it’s not just this woman I just met for a short time who will watch over my child. So, I think parents feel better sending their student away knowing that that the student will be up there in the same group of other people from our town.” (Leslie)

Researcher’s Observation - Practices - (Relationship Building)

Whether intended or a coincidence, a number of the Program Advisors were Tomorrow’s Hope alumni and members from the communities served by the program. Their involvement may have contributed toward building relationships with parents of the new student cohort. During the Paperwork Meeting, the
The researcher observed the close interactions between parents/guardians and the staff from the area. This was also observed at the banquet event during the Parent Awareness Weekend. At the close of the banquet, there was a lot of parents hugging and speaking with the Educators First students and Program Advisors. Additionally, the parents/guardians gave the banquet keynote speaker and the student panelist laud applause when it was announced that they were from the same communities.

The researcher also observed a deliberate and constant welcoming presence established by the hosts of the Parent Awareness Weekend. One of the event’s co-planner was often seen greeting, welcoming and speaking with the parents/guardians throughout the weekend. In addition to being hosts and guides, the Program Advisors and Educators First students were highly visible and accessible for conversations with the parents/guardians during their visit.

**Practices – Paperwork Meeting and Parent Awareness Weekend**

The events for engaging parents/guardians reported by the program staff and partners include the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend. These two events were specifically created for the purpose of involving the parents and families of the program participants.

The Paperwork Meeting occurs the one month prior to launching the summer program. All students attending the summer program are required to bring at least one parent or guardian to the meeting. During this meeting, the parents and students complete and submit the forms required for the summer program.

One staff member reported the significance of the paperwork meeting and how it provides the opportunity for the parents to meet key staff members.

“…for the most part, the parent paperwork meeting is so the parents, especially freshman students, can actually come and meet the Director and a couple of Staff for the first time. So, it’s just giving them a way to meet the people who will have their kids, during the summer far away from them.” (Clint)
The Assistant Director shared his interest in getting parents to attend the meeting and the success of their efforts.

“…the parent needs to know where they’re sending their student and why I wanted every parent to be there, because there are parents who will send students to a college program and without having the full background about the program. So you’re just sending a student away for 1-2 weeks blindly, you don’t know what’s going on… this was one of biggest turnouts. I think there was over 350 students and parents there jointly and that was one our biggest events.” (Ronald)

The Parent Awareness Weekend was started to get the parents/guardians involved with the program. Each summer, the parents/guardians of the new cohort of rising sophomores who will be attending the summer program for the first time are invited to visit the university campus for a weekend long program. The program consists of workshops, lectures, tours and activities to share information about the program, college admissions, financial aid and experience being on campus like their student.

One of the program organizers shares the motivation for creating the parent awareness event was to gain the support of the parents/guardians.

“We started the parent’s weekend to get parents more engaged in what their children were doing…we decided we would allow them (parents) the opportunity to see the campus and what their students were involved in. The idea was to get them on campus during the same time that their kids were on campus, so they would have some time to interact with them, but also being on a totally separate track of events from their kids.” (Carl)

The comments from the program Director and Assistant Director describe how the event has become the most involved engagement practice for the program.
“…the biggest interaction I have with them is our “Parent Awareness Weekend”. We invite all our new parents, so parents of all our new students can come to Reach’s for a weekend. We do different activities with them, and it’s all paid for…I get to know them and really have the opportunity to explain important points about the program. I also give them a lot of college information that their students’ are getting but sometimes don’t make it home. So, we’re giving a lot of information to these parents directly. “(Linda)

“…Parent Awareness Weekend (is) when we have our biggest parental engagement…Just having them up here is a wonder within itself because a lot of them have never been to the upstate or never have been on a college campus. And it’s just amazing to see the parents’ faces and seeing their interactions with the teachers, the Program Advisor and their students. It is a great thing to see, it’s a great thing to witness.” (Ronald)

Researcher’s Observation Practice - Events

Paperwork Meeting

The Paperwork Meeting is an event to engage parents/guardians appeared to illustrate what the Director described as being intentional when working with this parent population. What reflected this notion was the planning and operation this meeting for parents/guardian. The meeting was held in location and at a time that was convenient for people to participate. How the Director ran the meeting also reflected the way in which this effort was intentional and considerate of the attendees. The meeting started on time and ended well within the time schedule. When calling the meeting to a close, the Director stated that she was honoring the participants time by not keeping them long. Additionally, the Director took time to review and explain each and every form in their packets that they needed to complete. The Director also made herself available at the end of the meeting to answer individual questions.

Parent Awareness Weekend

The Parent Awareness Weekend events as a whole offered a motivational experience to inspire and uplift the attendees. The program activities included sessions that went beyond providing college planning information. There were a number of sessions that provided information for adult educational opportunities; understanding the politics of public education; and understanding the poverty index and graduation rates across their counties. Additionally, the banquet keynote speaker and Continuing Education session presenter both gave passionate, motivational and uplifting messages.
Development and Implementation Working Parts

The working parts of an organization considers the essential components required for an organization to provide a service or program. The working parts which were commonly mentioned by the program leadership, staff and affiliates for developing and implementing the parent/guardian engagement efforts were financial resources; the program partnerships and relationships; the program personnel; and institutional support.

Development - Working Parts

The working parts for developing engagement initiatives consists of the planning and preparation that is necessary for implementing engagement activities. The most cited working parts for development activities include support from the University’s Board of Trustees; a major bank, the partnership with Educators First; relationships with high school guidance counselors; and the program participants.

The program would not exist without initial funding provided by the University’s Board of Trustees and their on-going support. One of the program’s organizers recounted how the program’s founder presented the college preparation program concept.

“...he pitched that idea to the Board of Trustee and President, and they bought into it, so therefore they put money into it, so ‘we can get you started’...we have a board member that just loved (the founder) from the time he first made the pitch
to the Board, from that time on he (would say) ‘anything you need, that I can help
you with’. So, he kind of stayed with the program, even after (the founder) had
passed away.” (Carl)

The program received additional financial support from Trust 1 Bank to
collaborate with the Educators First program to do more outreach in the communities
being served by the pre-collegiate program. This relationship was the catalyst for creating
the parent awareness weekend.

“...It was Bryon who went to Trust 1 Bank, along with Roy Jones, Roy was seeking
funding for the Educators First program and both he and Bryon made separate
presentations to Trust 1 Bank to talk about their programs and the need for
funding their program. Folks at Trust 1 Bank, when they heard the presentation
they saw some synergy between the two programs and proposed that they would
fund both programs, but wanted to see them engage in some collaborative
activities. So that’s when we decided we would create the parent component of
the program.” (Carl)

The guidance counselors from the high schools of the program participants were
often mentioned by program staff and by parents/guardians for their role in the initial
outreach and communication that they provide to the students and families about the
summer program. The program director describes how the guidance counselors assist in
with disseminating program information.

“...the guidance counselors are the ones giving information to the families and
students... They’re directly hand delivering these applications to students and they
answer a lot of questions from parents.” (Linda)

Lastly, the success of program alumni and the program’s reputation was
frequently referenced for getting parents interested in the Tomorrow’s Hope Program.
According to one staff member, the program alumni want their siblings, relatives and friends to have this experience so they tell people that they know about it.

“...it’s just people that graduated from this program come back and talk about it and tell how much the program has done for them and their success. They want to make sure their younger siblings, cousins and family to come and be in the program now.” (Clint)

The program’s reputation as noted by a guidance counselor and Assistant Director also fuels the interest of parents and families in getting their student involved in the program.

“When you say “Tomorrow’s Hope” at Shiloh, it's like everybody knows exactly what it is. I have parent already asking me for next year when they arrive.” (Geneva)

“Also, with these Parent Weekends, we have these parent involved in these programs that spreads the awareness itself...Because, when your student goes home and their mother is like, ‘Oh, my child was at Reach’s Tomorrow’s Hope for 1 week, 2 weeks or 3 weeks.’ And when they spread that awareness to their friends. Then, when their friends’ kids get to that age, they say, ‘why don’t you try and join the Tomorrow’s Hope Program?’ So, the parent’s awareness for the program spreads as well.” (Ronald)

Researcher’s Observation

Parents attending the paperwork meeting indicated in a survey that the school guidance counselor was a primary source where they learned about the program. Additionally, during the parent/guardian group discussions, facilitated by the researcher, a majority of the participants indicated that they learned about the program from the guidance counselor.
Implementation - Working Parts

The primary events for parent/guardian engagement include the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend. For these events, the working parts that emerged for implementing these efforts include: grant funding, the program staff and Educators First students, and University support.

The Trust 1 Bank grant funding also represent an important resource for implementing the parent awareness weekend event. The grant pays for the expenses associated with hosting the event which include providing transportation, housing, meals and staffing. The program Director comments on the resources required for the event.

“...we invite all our new parents of all our new students to come to Reach’s for a weekend. We do different activities with them, and it’s all paid for…and bringing the parents up here is not easy. It is very time consuming. It takes a lot people and a lot of money to do what we do...” (Linda)

The Tomorrow’s Hope Program staff and the Educators First students also represent a crucial working part for implementing parent and family engagement efforts. These students assist as hosts, tour guides and participate on a student panel answering parent’s questions. The following comments, illustrate the purpose of the student host and the intent of the student panel.
“The role that the “Mister’s” would play in that, is they would serve as host, so the Mister’s are the host to the parents, and they could talk to them about a lot of different things, in terms of what their students are being exposed to, what they’re doing while they’re here on campus, and [that] type of thing.” (Carl)

“The student panel, one of the questions I always make sure that the students address is, “What did my parent do, that was very effective in preparing me for college and what do I wish my parent had done?” Because, they’re talking to parents arriving sophomores in high school, so they have 3 years to get their child on track. And now you’re talking to college students, actual college students, who are African Americans, who are from South Carolina, who are being successful in school, who can literally say, “This is what my parents did that was good, this is something that they did that was not very good was not very effective and this is where I wish they would have done…” (Frank)

In addition to their roles as hosts and guides for the parent weekend experience, many of the program staff and Educators First students are alumni of the Tomorrow’s Hope program, which enables them to offer parents/guardians a unique perspective about the program. Furthermore, a number the program staff are also from the same communities as the parents/guardians. As several staff members pointed out, this contributes to the relationship building and establishing trust with the parents/guardians.

Given that this finding was previously highlighted, this is an important point to reiterate. One program advisor discusses how parents see her in a caretaker role given their previous relationship.

“I know a lot of parent[s]. I guess they know me from living in Estill. They respond like, ‘Oh, you’re a PA (Program Advisor). Oh, that’s good. I know somebody I can trust up there now. I know somebody watching and if I want to know what’s going on, I know somebody up there to keep my daughter in check.’” (Leslie)
Lastly, institutional support was also a major working part for implementing the parent awareness weekend. University staff from the Admissions and the Office of Financial Aid made presentations to the parents/guardians during the Saturday schedule. The Admissions and Financial Aid Officers each made detailed presentations, sharing information to increase the parent’s/guardians awareness and knowledge about college admission requirements and an overview of the types of financial aid available for students. The staff members’ participation also connects the parents with a professional resource for questions or assistance with college planning. One of the event organizers, shared how these presentations are an effort to begin immersing the parents and family members into the language and terms often used during college admissions process and applying for financial aid.

“...the different classes they (parents/guardians) were taking, you witness them, it was like teaching parents about financial aid, teaching them about the admissions process, using the language that so many admissions counselors or financial aid representative throw out like it’s common knowledge or lay terms. But they’re not lay terms for people who have not had that experience before. So, we take them through that language and take them through those conversations to demystify the process for them. And when they actually go through it for real, they’re not intimidated.” (Frank)

Researcher’s Observation - Implementation Working Parts

Paperwork Meeting

The working parts for implementing the paperwork meeting included: the resources for hosting the meeting; T-Hope staff; and T-Hope alumni. The researcher personally drove to the location of the Paperwork Meeting, experiencing the four-hour driving time required for the Program Director and her staff to attend the meeting. This time represents a required resource needed for the event to happen. Staffing was another essential component for hosting the meeting. The benefit of having some staff from the local area as well as Program
Alumni provided additional support, which appeared to have help engage and parents/guardians in attendance.

Parent Awareness Weekend

For the parent visit weekend, the most significant observed working part was the event leadership team, staff and presenters. In addition to leading workshops, overseeing the logistics of the event, the Program Director and co-planner were highly visible and often seen playing host or having an in-depth conversation with the participants. The student staff were also noticeable and their presence seemed to add to the welcoming feel. Lastly, the presenters that I observed for the financial aid session and the continuing education session presenters brought a wealth of information and passion to their presentations.

The researcher facilitated several group discussions with the participants at the parent weekend event. During the discussion they frequently mentioned how they were excited and proud to see students from their communities working as Program Advisors.

Context and Operational Structure

To understand the context of the engagement efforts, the researcher asked questions about the event’s purpose and the setting for the program. The discussions on the program’s purpose included conversations about the rationale and objective for the activity. The probe into the event’s context examined the event’s setting, which included the location, physical space and time of the program or activity. The two events discussed the most for parents and family engagement were the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend.

Paperwork Meeting - Purpose

For the Paperwork Meeting, which occurred in May every year, just one month before the summer program begins, the purpose was to have the program participants’ parents/guardians to complete and submit all of the required forms and documents needed
for the student to attend the summer program. The meeting is referred to as the paperwork meeting because the forms package contains over 10 different documents that must be filled out and submitted for each student. The meeting also provided first time parents/guardian of the new sophomore cohort an overview of what they can expect during the program. Returning parents received schedule information and program updates.

“Every single student, that comes to Reach have to bring a parent or guardian to this meeting to sign paperwork…So, in our parent meeting, that’s when I get the most questions… we don’t go over any college access information at that meeting. It is strictly paperwork and program logistics.” (Linda)

An additional purpose of the Paperwork Meeting was to establish the initial face-to-face contact between the program staff and parents/guardians. A program staff describes the encounter with the participants at the Paperwork Meeting as follows:

“...my role at all the parent meeting was collecting the paperwork; introducing myself to the parents, letting them know who will be with their kids over the summer most of the time; and my qualifications for working with the program.” (Clint)

Paperwork Meeting - Setting

The Paperwork Meeting was on Monday, May 11, 2015 at 6:00 pm. The meeting took place in a building located on the USC campus, which was central to all of the communities that are served by the program. The program staff had to drive four hours to host this meeting.
The facility was a large multipurpose space that appeared to function for social gatherings as well as athletic events. The seats were arranged in two sections with each section having ten rows of chairs and each row consisting of fifteen seats. This arrangement was arranged to accommodate 300 people. The two sections were divided by an aisle and all seats were facing in the same direction toward a single microphone stand and PA system. Located in the back of the room and on one side-wall, there were three tables designated for one of the three cohorts of students that are in the pre-collegiate program. The meeting was well attended with participation exceeding the 300 capacity that was initially planned. In addition to the program participants, parents/guardians, and program staff in attendance, there were several program alumni who came to the meeting.

One of the challenges for hosting parent meetings is the issue of time, which is described below.

“Time, it’s one of the biggest challenges that’s why we try to coordinate these meeting…One issue a lot of schools have in these areas is that some of their parents are single parents, so you can’t take off work at specific times or you can’t take off work at all…So, we do try to make it after school, and after normal work. So just catching them at a convenient time for the parent, that’s one of the of the biggest issues, we have is time issue. We've been getting better with making it later and more convenient.” (Ronald)

The Assistant Director also expressed his excitement about the high attendance.

“...this was one of biggest turnouts. I think there was over 350 students and parents there jointly. And, that was one our biggest event, so it was great turnout. I think that’s one of the things I really focused on a lot was attendance, because this is the biggest cohort we have accepted. For our new Cohort N, we accepted
67 students, so that’s the biggest we’ve had since we’ve been here at Reach...I think only five didn’t show, so that was pretty good too.” (Ronald)

One Program Advisor describes how she saw excitement in the students and parents/guardians attending the meeting.

“...well of course it’s a lot of paperwork, but to see other parents, other students from your child’s school as well as some other school is exciting. Watching parent interactions with the staff and other students...seeing how your child meets some friends and how they’re making friends in different places. ...I guess it’s confusing, they (students) see each other over the summer, then they may not see each other again until they get to that meeting...I believe seeing how excited your child is about the program helps keep parents engaged.” (Leslie)

Researcher’s Observations - Paperwork - Setting

The paperwork meeting was well organized and demonstrated that the program team was prepared and capable of operating a summer residential program. Adding to the setting was the presence of program alumni and staff who are from the local community.

Parent Awareness Weekend - Purpose

The Parent Awareness Weekend event is the major engagement effort for the pre-collegiate program. The purpose of Parent Awareness Weekend is to orient the parents/guardian of the new cohort of students to the program through a weekend long program on the University campus. The program provided transportation, housing and meals for the weekend experience. The attendees receive a detailed orientation about the Tomorrow’s Hope program. Additionally, the experience includes workshops on college admissions, financial aid, education policies and practices, and continuing education opportunities. The parents and guardians also experience living on campus, eating in the dining commons, touring the campus and speaking to current college students.
“I was saying, we shoot ourselves in the foot by dealing with only one part of the challenge and that is the students we also got to be very attentive and specific about empowering the parents as well and educating the parents, so that they are not unwittingly undoing some of the hard work that’s being done with their students... We want to make sure that once we got the child on track and the child is excited about college intention we wanted to make sure the parent was then together in this partnership doing the things they needed to do to help the child dream come to fruition.” (Frank)

Parent Awareness Weekend - Setting

The parents/guardians are picked up by chartered bus from two pick-up points near their communities on Friday evening starting at 5:00 pm and arrive at Reach about four hours later at 10:00 pm that evening. They are greeted by the program Director and several program staff, who assisted with unloading their luggage and escorting them to their room. They are being housed in one of the on-campus dorms.

The weekend schedule is planned with great detail consisting of workshops and meetings occurring throughout the Saturday. In addition to the information sessions, the parents/guardians’ weekend experience includes a campus tour and meals in the dining commons. During their visit, the parents/guardians are on a different schedule than their student and will only have one scheduled activity with them - the Saturday Banquet. On Sunday, the visitors will attend a morning brunch while listening to a student panel share their experiences. Following the brunch, the parents/guardians will board the bus to return home.

One of the organizers reflects on the start of the program that discusses the experience outlined for the families.
“...And, when we started the program, it was just sending them (students) off three successive summers to do something at Reach, and what they (parents/guardians) were saying is, when the students came back, ‘we don’t know what you guys did, but they’re different, they’re not the same as they were initially when they went into the program’...So, we decided that we would do more than just letting them hear about it from their kids coming back, but allow them to actually come on campus, see the campus, stay in the dorms, see the dorms their students were living in, eat in the dining halls.” (Carl)

Researcher’s Observations - Parent Awareness Weekend - Setting

During the PAW, the events and activities occurred in several different locations on Reach University campus. The parents/guardians were able to experience several settings during their stay. They were housed in the dormitory, had sessions in lecture halls and classrooms, ate meals in the dining commons and attended social gatherings in banquet rooms and student facilities. The guests were also able to see the campus by foot as they walked from one location to another.

All the presentations and information sessions were held in a lecture hall and classrooms. The first session on financial aid involved all of the parents/guardians in the presentation together. Following this session, the group was divided into two groups, which allowed for the next set of presentations to be more intimate. These presentations included College Admissions and Adult Education. During the last series of activities, the parents were placed in three smaller groups. These groups would rotate between the taking a campus tour and two information sessions.

All of the groups that I observed the participants appeared to be very engaged with the presenters. However, there was one session where the parents did not seem as engaged in the presentation. There were not many questions asked or discussion with the presenter. I had some difficulty seeing the presenter’s face due to the lights being dim for the PowerPoint presentation. I am uncertain if anyone else shared this experience.

For the meals and social gatherings, the parents/guardians were able to eat in the dining commons, attend a semi-formal banquet and brunch at different campus venues. The parents and Guardians appeared very pleased with the dining experience at Malcom Hall, where there were many food options and it was busy with students. The banquet was held in one of Reach's newer student facilities. The atmosphere was festive and felt energetic, seeing all the students with their parents/guardians mingling with program staff and the Educators First students and everyone nicely dressed.
The closing event occurred in another venue, the Reach House, giving the parents another experience on campus. This meal was without their students. Educators First and Frank were on-hand greeting each guest and having small conversations with them. This final meal was an impressive breakfast buffet with many choices.

Operational Structure

The operational structure refers to roles and responsibilities within the organization that enables it to accomplish its goals and objectives. There are two separate operational structures for the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend. The Paperwork Meeting was solely operated by the Tomorrow’s Hope Program, whereas the Parent Awareness Weekend is a joint initiative of the Tomorrow’s Hope Program and Educators First.

Paperwork Meeting

Researchers Observation

The key roles involved with the Paperwork Meeting include the Program Director, Assistant Director, Program Advisors, Guidance Counselors and Program Alumni (Figure 5.4) The Program Director and Assistant Director are in charge of the planning the meeting. The High School Guidance Counselors at each of the (5) schools assist with getting the meeting information out to students and parents.
At the meeting, the staff includes: the Program Director, Associate Director, Program Advisors and Program Alumni. Before the meeting begins, all staff welcome and greet the participants as they enter the building. When the meeting begins, the Program Director is in charge of running the meeting. She begins by welcoming everyone, introducing the program team, recognizes the Program Alumni present and shares success stories of other program graduates. The Director proceeds to explain all the documents contained in the paperwork packet which the parents/guardians must complete. The Director also describes the schedule for the new parents/guardians and reviews program changes and updates for the returning parents. The Director addresses questions from the whole group and meets individually with students and families for additional questions while everyone is completing the paperwork forms.

The Assistant Director and the Program Advisors are responsible for collecting the completed documents and answer questions as well. Each grade level of student represents a cohort: the rising seniors are Cohort L; rising juniors are Cohort M; and the rising sophomores, the new class are Cohort N. Each Program Advisor is stationed at a table designated for one of the cohorts to collect their forms. For the new cohort, N, the Assistant Director is charged with collecting their paperwork and help answer questions from parents who are new to the program.

Parent Awareness Weekend

The parent visit experience is a collaborative effort planned and implemented by both the Tomorrow’s Hope and Educators First program. The event takes place over three-days that begins Friday evening and concludes the following Sunday afternoon. The planning responsibilities for the weekend activities are divided between the two organizations. The Tomorrow’s Hope program is in charge of the transportation, housing and meal arrangements; Financial Aid and the Tomorrow’s Hope Program presentations; and the Sunday Brunch. Educators First organizes the College Admissions, Continuing Education and the Education Policies and Practices workshops; Saturday Banquet and keynote speaker; and Sunday Brunch student panel participants. Both organizations involve their student participants as host and tour guides for the parents/guardians.
“...we have very clear roles... (Tomorrow’s Hope) have all the logistics of the group; handles breakfast and lunch; Financial Aid and the Tomorrow’s Hope’ session... (Educators First) typically does the Adult Ed session with Del Simmons, Admissions, the planning of the banquet and the keynote speaker for the banquet, and the we do the, we get representatives for the student panel on Sunday.”

(Frank)

Researcher’ Observations - PAW - Operating Structure

Operationally, it appears that the responsibilities are nearly evenly divided between the two organizations. Each organization leverages their strength and capabilities for implementing the parent aware this weekend. For instance, the Tomorrow’s Hope Program, given its relationships with campus services departments - Student Housing, Dining Services and Facilities - from operating its summer program assumes the responsibility for making the logistical arrangement for the parent weekend. Conversely, the Educators First program has a vast network community connections and resources that assists finding presenters, speakers from the community or has an expertise in education to fulfill the various programmatic components. However, both groups share in making parents/guardians feel welcome with the presence of the Program Advisors and Educators First serving as hosts and guides throughout the weekend.

Staff Expectations and Perceptions

Staff Expectations

The findings presented below include the staff’s expectations and perceptions for the two primary parent/guardian engagement efforts - the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend. The findings of the staff’s expectations for the two events are presented first and then followed by the staff’s perceptions of these events.

Paperwork Meeting

The program staff expressed mixed expectations for the Paperwork meeting. Two Program Advisors had some expectations based on previous experience where they
experienced low attendance, while the other staff expressed having higher expectations, desiring a strong turnout.

“So, compared to when I went, it used to be a problem to get students and parents to come to a meeting like that and I guess that I wasn’t thinking as many would come out” (Leslie)

“I didn’t expect to see so many parents to show up. It usually is a large crowd, mostly, old students - the upper class students, who come to see their friend because they don’t see each other that much. It’s like a reunion for them.” (Clint)

“One of my expectations was, definitely, to have all the students present with a parent. Not just a student there; not a parent with no student. One of the biggest expectation I had was that each student came with a parent. I know that was far reaching, but that is what I wanted to happen.” (Ronald)

Parent Awareness Weekend

Expectations for the Parent Awareness Weekend included parents/guardians being excited about visiting a college campus, learning about what their students were doing as well as eager to get information to help their student’s college preparation.

“I was expecting them to be ready to learn and ready to know what their kids were getting into. A lot of times I know parents send their kids away for the summer, but they don’t know what they’re really getting into. They just kind of hear the summary when they get home. So, I felt they would come here to learn: 1) what was college; 2) what was Tomorrow’s Hope; and what really happens when they send their kids away?” (Staff Group Discussion)

“A lot of our students are first generation students, so I wanted their parents to be eager to learn about college process.” (Staff Group Discussion)

“I’m expecting the parents to be excited about being on a college campus, interacting with the teachers, the program staff and seeing their students.” (Ronald)
Perceptions

The following results represent general perceptions of the program team and affiliates about the Paperwork Meeting and Parent Awareness Weekend parent/guardian engagement initiatives. For the Paperwork meeting, the staff shared being impressed with the meeting attendance, engaging parents, and relating improved retention rates to engaging parents/guardians. Comments about the meeting turnout express the staff’s delight with the outcome of program’s efforts.

“This past meeting it just showed, how much the program has grown, from when I actually in it to starting as a PA... I haven’t seen that many parents come to meeting like that. You know they say parents don’t attend PTA meetings and things like that. It just shows this program actually means something for that community down there.” (Clint)

“For one, that amount of parents if you were at a meeting with me about three years ago or four years ago and you saw the amount of parents that come out and you compare that to what happened this past Monday, you would be just as amazed as I was. (Ronald)

As a result of parents/guardians attending the meeting, staff members also discussed how they perceived the program building trust with parents/guardians and revealing parent concern about who has charge of their children as well as who will be in the company of their children.

“…I know that’s assurance for my mother who was really worried when I went to Reach and that was the first time I left home. So, I know my mother was really, remember that. I think she feels better sending my sister for her freshmen year now knowing that I’m going to be up there in the same group of other people from Estille.” (Leslie)

“(When) parents actually engaged with me, it showed me that parents really care who keeps their kids, and who they’ll be with for the summer.” (Clint)
The Assistant Director believes that the engagement efforts contribute to greater support for the program.

“We think the more we engage parents, the more support we have support for the programs.” (Ronald)

Parent Awareness Weekend

There were several themes that emerged from program staff’s impressions about the Parent Awareness Weekend. The themes include seeing inspiration, well planned event and the staff being impressed with the parents.

Many of the program staff remarked about the level of inspiration and excitement they saw in the parents over the weekend.

“I learned that inspiration works both ways. So just as well that student may be inspired by what their parents have done or what their parents talk about. I see that when their children are up here and they’re taking step to bettering their future and lives, it also kind of inspires the parents to want to do more for themselves and their children.” (Staff Discussion Group)

“And, sitting at the breakfast at the end, when the parents are about to go home and listening to them (parents) discuss how they not only want to help their kids, but they wanted to take information they learned to their community and help those other parents who weren’t able to come, or the kids that weren’t able to participate in this kind of program.” (Staff Discussion Group)

“So, I saw a level of excitement, just like the thrill of being here as well as knowing their children are getting a great opportunity.” (Staff Discussion Group)

The staff also discussed how the parents/guardians enjoyed weekend events and how the weekend went well overall.
“I really feel like the activities that we had and session and everything really exceeded our goals.” (Staff Discussion Group)

“I think everything went smoothly. I feel that every session started on time, it ended on time. That goes to show the planning, and getting them from one room to another went well, even down to the banquet…Everything was planned very well and we didn’t have any run-ins or mishaps.” (Staff Discussion Group)

There were additional comments about how pleased the staff were with the attendance and being impressed by their commitment to participate.

“Ultimately, I learned that parents really do care a lot about what their child is doing, on an academic level.” (Staff Discussion Group)

“I really was happy to see so many parents were here and ready to support what their kids were really trying to do. And they’re really behind pushing their kids to go to college.” (Staff Discussion Group)

The program affiliates, which included the presenters on college admissions, financial aid and adult education opportunities, found that the program participants were fully engaged and responsive to their sessions.

“They had great questions. They engaged the whole time. I felt like based on the handshakes, at the end of the day if they had questions, they wouldn’t hesitate to reach out to me.” (Brenda)

“…both groups thanked me for the information I was giving them. The first group had a little more dialogue was back and forth, the first kind of ran itself. The dialogue wasn’t as high in the second group.” (Pierre)

“They receive me well and I receive them well. Every year you just never know what group you’re going to have. But every year they seem really interested in knowing that something beyond with admissions will beyond their financial aid or their admission process. They’re always surprised to know what this process tastes, feels, and smells like.” (Del)
Parent and Family Perceptions

Parent Perceptions

During the Parent Awareness Weekend, the researcher conducted three group discussions with the parents/guardians in attendance. The participants were asked several questions about how they perceived the engagement efforts of the Tomorrow’s Hope Program. From these discussions, the majority of the thoughts and ideas shared from the parents/guardians were about the program and the staff. The researcher also reviewed the program surveys issued and collected by the Tomorrow’s Hope staff to capture other perspectives that were not expressed in the group discussions.

From the three group discussions, the parents and families shared how pleased they were with the program and the information that was being provided. There were many comments made about the overall program and the program staff. A common theme expressed by the parents about the awareness weekend was that they were inspired and well informed by the experience.

The comments below reflect thoughts expressed about the program.

“I think it’s a very good program. And as adults, those of us who do care about kids, we should inspire other kids in our surroundings, telling them that they all could be successful college kids...and other kids from Atwood can be inspired seeing our kids succeed. They will see that it’s not where you come from, it’s where you’re going. I’ve seen successful people who have come out of nothing.” (Discussion Group B)

“My nephew came here a while back in 2011 for the same program and from that point on I was enthused about it. My daughter had the opportunity to come and I am very happy that she did. It is good to know that somebody is doing something. Reach is doing something and I applaud them for what they what they’ve done. And, because of my nephew and daughter, I always trusted them and comfortable with my family being here.” (Discussion Group A)
“I’m enjoying this program it is very positive.” (Discussion Group A)

“So, when our son came to campus, which was a big thing, it was nice to see lot of schools together, so he was around kids that come up from different areas. Just his exposure and being inspired gets me excited.” (Discussion Group C)

“My niece inspired me to come, she’s here. She inspires me because I see a lot [of] kids who feel like they can’t be successful or they can’t have things. She is showing that you can be successful.” (Discussion Group B)

The parents also expressed how pleased they were with the program staff especially the program director, commenting on how they felt comfortable with their children being in the program knowing that the staff and director were passionate and truly cared about student success.

“...when Linda was explaining why the program even exist, I would really, really like to say how emotional I was when she was talking about that because she doesn’t even know my children and she is there for them. There are people who know them, who are working in school with them and they don’t take out the time, nor the initiative to do anything with the kids. And they feel they can’t make it, when they can. She (Linda) shows them they can. So I’m really grateful for that.” (Discussion Group A)

“My impression of her (Director) and this program is it’s Awesome! If you call her personally, she'll get back to you. She cares for kids....” (Discussion Group A)

“She is going to maintain communication with you...if anything changes like she said, she going to mail you, email you, call you or however she chooses to reach you.” (Discussion Group C)

“She’s very passionate and she really cares.” (Discussion Group C)

“...the year my sister came in 2005, my boys were all young. Since that time, she remembered them and knew them by name. She just cares about people. So you can see, every time she talks to you, she will remember you.” (Discussion Group B)
“...she’s serious about what she’s doing. She says, ‘You might not like me that I’m a teacher. My job is to make you better and if I haven’t made you better at all, I haven’t done my job. I want you to like me and I want you to come back. However, even if you hate me, as you grow up, you’re going to say,’ That lady, she made me sick, but she taught me something.’ And that’s what matters to me, and I see that in her, so I love her for that.” (Discussion Group B)

Program Evaluations

The Tomorrow’s Hope Program issued a program evaluation form to the parents/guardians during the closing event for the Parent Awareness Weekend. There were 40 completed surveys submitted. The survey asked the participants to rate “how valuable the sessions were” using a Likert scale from “5” to “1” with 5 being “very valuable” and 1 being “not very valuable”. All of the information sessions, which included the Admissions, Financial Aid, Tomorrow’s Hope, Adult Education, and Politics and Practices of Schooling presentations were all rated a “5” - Very Valuable - 5 by more than 60% of the participants.

There were three sessions where 70% or more of the participants found the sessions to be Very Valuable. These included the College Admission, Financial Aid and the Tomorrow’s Hope sessions. When asked which session did you find the most valuable overall, the participants ranked the Financial Aid session as the most valuable. The Adult Ed./Continuing Education session was ranked as the second most valuable session by the parents/guardian.

Suggested Improvements

When asked what areas the program could improve, the most common response was about the accommodations. This was also a disappointment expressed during the group discussions. Some parents had issues with the room setup - having to climb into bunk beds - and they were not fully appreciative of staying in dorm rooms lacking comforts of home. A few participants also indicated a desire to have more time with their student should be added to the program schedule.

Chapter Summary

This study focused on exploring the parent/families engagement practices of a pre-collegiate summer program using an instrumental case study methodology. Data collected from interviews, group discussions, observations and document analysis were interpreted using Creswell (2009) six-stage procedure and Merriam (2009) theme
analysis. Using the research questions to analyze the data produced the several themes for each research questions. These themes provided data to answer the research questions. The next chapter provides an overview of the study, answers to the research questions identified in Chapter 1, provides implication for theory and practice, discusses the limitations and future research and future research, and summarizes the whole study.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore a pre-collegiate summer program at a four-year research institution engagement practices for their program participants’ parents/guardians. Chapter 1 provided the background for this study and stated the research questions. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature and provided a conceptual framework for college choice. Chapter 3 detailed the qualitative research methods and the instrumental case study design used for the study. Chapter 4 included detailed accounts of key observations of events and activities attended by the researcher. In Chapter 5, the study’s findings were presented from the data collected - interviews, observations, survey and documents. This final chapter provides a discussion of the findings in connection to the research questions and the previous literature, a discussion of the implications for theory and practice, limitation of the study, future research, and conclusion.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the values, beliefs and practices of college access programs for engaging parents and families of underserved and first-generation students?
Values

This study revealed several important values held by the program for parent/guardian engagement. These values include: understanding and respecting the families being served; increasing education awareness and empowerment; and promoting family and community change.

Understanding and Respect - Previous research observed the challenges of working with low-income populations due to intervening family and social stresses (Swail & Perna, 2001). Fann et al (2009) reported the importance of engagement programs and parent outreach efforts attending to the needs of underrepresented groups. The study revealed that one of the values for engagement is to understand the families and to treat them with dignity and respect which supports these findings from the literature. The staff spoke about being flexible and intentional in dealing with the families as well as listening to their views.

Awareness and Empowerment - Auerbach (2004) found that parents could become committed allies of their students when they are knowledgeable of the college going process. Fann et al (2009) also reported how receiving college information empowered parents and led them to seek additional information to help their student college planning. The second important value for parent/guardian engagement the study found was increasing awareness about college and the system of education to empower parents for active participation in their student’s education.

Family and Community Change - Chapter 2 identified the impact of parent engagement can have on families and communities. Gofen (2009) and Westbrook and
Swail (2012) found that family engagement improved inter-generational participation in postsecondary education. Tierney and Auerbach (2005) concluded that engaging parents and families of marginalized groups will cause a “ripple effect” within communities, cultivating a growing base of college ready youth. The third engagement value this study revealed is consistent with these results, which is to create a college going culture within the families and ultimately within their communities. This was also stated as one of the organization’s founding objectives to transition families from being “tax liability” into “tax assets”.

Beliefs

The results for understanding the program’s belief about parents and family engagement include: what engagement means; the purpose of engagement; and the outcomes from engagement activities.

Meaning of Engagement - Both Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) and Perna (2002) provide a widely accepted description of parent involvement representing the moral and active support during the college going process. The moral support represent the encouragement parents can offer students to pursue the college interest (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). Active assistance can take the form of parents attending college fairs, visiting college campuses or taking their students to other college preparation events, such as a SAT course. This type of assistance is essential for increasing college going among underserved student populations (Perna, 2002). The beliefs revealed in this study supports this interpretation. The study revealed that the program belief about engagement
was consistent with this literature, commenting on the need for parents to be actively involved.

Purpose of Engagement - Many college choice scholars have identified the purpose of engagement as the need for raising parental awareness and college knowledge (Fann et al, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2008). The study revealed that another belief about engagement, which is consistent with the literature, is that parent and family engagement requires providing parents/guardians with information about the college going process.

Outcomes of Engagement - Jun and Tierney (1999) study found that parent involvement led to improved outcomes for school attendance. Similarly, other scholars found that retention and improved school performance was a result from involving parents/guardians in schools (Dyce, 2013; Strayhorn, 2010). Consistent with these findings, the final program belief about engagement was that it improved attendance and retention. Many participants remarked how parents encouraged students to return for the summer program after the parents attended the Parent Awareness Weekend.

Practices

The program reported three practices for parent engagement: relationship building efforts; the Paperwork Meeting; and that Parent Awareness Weekend.

Relationship Building - Several researchers have highlighted the importance and need for building trusting relationships with parents and guardians (Auerbach, 2004; Fann et al, 2009). Parents reported being more receptive to the college programs when there was a personal connection made between the parent and program (Fann et al, 2009).
The first engagement practice revealed, relationship building, is consistent with the literature findings.

The Paperwork Meeting - Chapter 2 identifies the relationship with increasing parents’ awareness of the college going process and increased support and parent involvement (Perna & Titus 2005; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). The second engagement practice - Paperwork Meeting - this study revealed is consistent with the literature. The purpose of the event is to formally inform the parents about the program in a face-to-face meeting. During this meeting, each student participant’s parent/guardian signs and submits consent and approval forms. One of the forms is an agreement indicating that the parent will support their student to the best of their abilities. This agreement is also consistent with literature on parent involvement. Tierney, Colyar and Corwin (2005) found that contracts and parent agreements encourage greater involvement and advocacy for the program, which contributes to increasing the college going among unreserved student groups.

Parent Awareness Weekend - Parents visiting college campuses as stated above is a form of active parent involvement (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2005; Perna, 2005). The program’s Parent Awareness Weekend as reported in the study, is consistent with college choice scholars. The parent visit weekend also incorporates other activities that support the finding of other researchers focused on this issue. Smith (2008) reported how parents were inspired upon receiving college preparation information and motivated to seek additional information. The parent information sessions on financial aid, admissions, etc. supported Smith (2008) findings.
Additionally, Auerbach (2002) found that parents hearing the personal stories of college students helped their understanding of the college experience and eased their reservations about higher education. The study also revealed, in support of this finding, that the parent weekend included a student panel where students shared their experiences and stories.

Research Question 2
What are the working parts for developing and implementing engagement activities?

The study found that the working parts that were essential to the program’s engagement efforts included: financial resources; relationships and partnerships; and institutional support. Hosting the Paperwork Meeting as well as the Parent Awareness Weekend required considerable financial support, which was provided by the program’s home University and grant funding. This financial support is contrary to previous studies that found the common experience for college access programs was being “underfunded” with little or no resources to support parent engagement efforts (Tierney, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002).

Another essential component for the program’s events include its relationships with high school, community ties and partnership with Educators First. This finding is consistent with Fann et al, (2009) who reported in the successful collaborations between universities and local communities in engaging parents and families.

Institutional support was the final factor the program reported as a working part for their engagement activities. This support included the participation of the office of
financial aid and admissions involvement with the parent visit weekend. This involvement of these university units enabled the parents to make connections with key university staff that can provide needed assistance and information about admissions and financial aid. As Smith (2002) and Auerbach (2004) found, parents develop social capital with making these connections and expand their networks of support.

Research Questions 3

What is the context and operational structure of the programs and activities used to engage parents and families?

The contexts for engaging parents and families centered around two events, the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend. The study found that the characteristics of the settings were both welcoming environments and were each held on college campuses. Parents/guardians attending the Paperwork Meeting and the Parent Awareness Weekend were made to feel welcomed by the efforts of Tomorrow’s Hope Staff and the program organizers. They were friendly, approachable, and in some cases familiar to the meeting attendees and visiting parents/guardians. Fann et al (2009) findings are consistent with this effort, noting the effectiveness of programs when there is an effort to make the parents feel welcome and there is a personal or cultural connection made. Researchers report that this created ease and comfort for parents (McDonough, et al, 1999). For the Parent Awareness Weekend, the ease and comfort was more evident with the involvement of students, staff and community representatives.
The program’s use of college campuses for the engagement efforts is also consistent with Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) results, indicating the influence of proximity and the perceptions of school option possibilities. The Paperwork Meeting, being the initial contact meeting with new parents, was held at a convenient location at a college in the local area. As Rowan-Kenyon et al (2008) points out, this provides parents with comfort by bringing them to a familiar place while reinforcing the message of higher education at the same time. Additionally, inviting the parents to experience being on a flagship type campus such as Reach, promotes the feeling of it being a “possibility” for parents who may not have viewed the school as an accessible option for their student (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008).

The operational structure for the Tomorrow’s Hope program that the study revealed consisted of a modest staff with two full-time professional staff - the Program Director and Assistant Director. The paraprofessional staff are seasonal hires. Contrary to the appearance of being understaffed, having two full-time professional staff is not the norm.

However, this study revealed that finding is consistent with Barnett et al. (2012) contention that effective college going programs have institutional support. This support takes the form of support for a full-time staff for program stability (Barnett et al, 2012). Tomorrow’s Hope has been fortunate to have stable leadership for the past eight years with Linda. The program has also benefited from her leadership, which was mentioned several times during the study. The literature refers to this as being a champion for the
program to advance its mission, which was another success factor identified in the study of program effectiveness (Barnett et al, 2012).

To implement the program’s engagement efforts, the program relies on its relationships with high school guidance counselors and a college located near the communities where their program participants live. The Parent Awareness Weekend is also implemented with support. The event is a joint effort with the Educators First program, where the two organizations share the responsibilities for the event. The event also receives institutional support through the participation of the admissions and financial aid offices as well as support from community members for its implementation.

The collaborative relationships of the Tomorrow’s Hope program as the study revealed to be a contributing factor to its operating structure for its engagement efforts is consistent with the findings of Swail and Perna (2001) and Gandara and Bilal (2001) who concluded that college access programs focused on parent involvement experience greater success from collaborating.

**Research Question 4**

What are the program staff’s expectations and perceptions of their engagement practices?

The study revealed that the staff had high expectations and hope for the success of the engagement activities. There was expressed delight and excitement about the parent’s/guardian’s experiences for both events. The staff’s feelings of hope and excitement represents a form of community wealth, aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital places a focus on possibilities of a positive outcome despite the
historical low turnout for previous parent meetings the staff experienced in the past. This form of capital as a part of community wealth that critical race theorists have found to exist within underserved communities (Yosso, 2005; Villapando & Solórzano, 2006). Additional discussion on aspirational capital and community cultural wealth will follow in the discussion on theory.

Research Question 5
What are the parents and families’ perceptions in regards to the engagement efforts of the pre-collegiate summer program?

The study revealed that parent participants were highly pleased with the programs engagement efforts, particularly the awareness weekend. They reported being very informed, inspired and appreciative of the staff. This finding supports the outcomes reported by Auerbach (2004) and Smith (2008), and Tierney and Auerbach (2005) who found that parents were receptive and enjoyed learning about the college process. Parents feeling of inspiration and empowerment were consistent with findings reported by Fann et al (2009), McDonough, Perez, et al (2002), Tierney and Auerbach (2005), and Auerbach (2002).

The study also found that the parents/guardians gave high marks to the staff, commenting on how passionate the staff appeared, their sense of care they felt came from the staff and the trust and confidence they said they had when leaving their child in the program underlines the findings of McDonough Perez et al., (2002); Cooper (1995), and Fann et al., (2009).
Implications for Theory

Social Reproduction Theory

The study revealed that the parent engagement effort events created the conditions that fostered opportunities for the participants to increase their cultural and social capital as well as form habitus.

Cultural Capital

The experiences and activities that relate to cultural capital that were provided to the parents include the admissions, financial aid, and the adult/continuing education information sessions. Additionally, the campus visit may have been a novel experience.

Social Capital

The opportunity for the participants to increase the social capital as revealed by the study include meeting university agents and networking with other program participants during the visit weekend. After the financial aid, admission and continuing educations presentations, the presenters distributed their business cards to the parents/guardians. These connections have the potential to develop into valued resources for college preparation information.

The networking with the other program presenters as well as the parents/guardians on the trip represent a social relationship that may evolve into sources for information that could benefit their student.
Meeting and connecting with university agents in admissions and financial aid as well as other staff, including student staff, may have expanded their social network with individuals with access and information about college preparation.

_Habitus_

This final form of capital in the social reproduction theory is habitus, which the campus visit, tour and whole experience may influence the parent/guardian perception about the school. As Frank described the need to “…slay the imaginary dragons that schools like Reach may represent in the minds of the parents about white institutions…” (Frank) that prevents them from taking part in the opportunities available.

Furthermore, the conversations that the parents/guardians may have had with the Program Advisors or the Educators First students about their experiences and transitions contribute to the rethinking about Reach and other institution being a possibility. The concern about “fit” as McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) describes may have changed because of the visit experience. For instance, during the student panel discussion, the parents asked the student describe their adjustments to college. Additionally, seeing their student in the program on campus and managing themselves in the Reach University environment may allow them to see the institution as a future possibility for their student.

Community Cultural Wealth

Alternately, cultural wealth theory views capital existing several forms within marginalized communities that are perceived to be deficient in cultural capital (Yosso,
Cultural wealth consists of six forms of capital, which include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. This study revealed that the program’s engagement practices promoted, encouraged, or leveraged the cultural wealth capital possessed by the participants. In some instances, the connections are deliberate and some may be coincidental.

**Aspirational**

Aspirational capital as discussed above, represents the hope, dream of the possibilities (Yosso, 2005) was evident in both sessions - Adult/Continuing Education and Politics and Practice of Education. Particularly, the latter session where the phrase “It takes Teamwork to make the Dream Work!” was introduced. The call and response of this phrase with great enthusiasm was evident that the session tapped into the aspirational feeling of the parents/guardians. Additionally, in the parent group discussions and program evaluations, the expressions of hope for their student as well as the program’s success was stated several times.

**Navigational**

In response a parent’s question about transitioning to college life and feeling safe, the student panel shared their experiences. Their stories of survival, overcoming obstacles and challenges also reflect navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).

**Social**

Social capital that exist within groups with a shared culture, lived experience (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital appeared to be developing based on the weekend trip
experience and the families who were from the school site community, spending more
time with each other.

*Linguistic*

This form of capital is more apparent in communities that may experienced
needing to learn a new language (Yosso, 2005). However, linguistic capital also
represents a mode of how a group may express themselves artistically or in a manner to
connect with other group members (Yosso, 2005). The study revealed instances where
this linguistic capital emerged. Spirituality provides a cultural connection for many
African Americans. During the closing brunch after the prayer was delivered, the group
took part in a short sing along, which had the feel of being in a congregation sing along.
The experience represented linguistic capital in that it appeared to draw on African
American’s use of spirituals during the fight for civil rights.

*Familial*

This study revealed “familial capital” to be the most prominent throughout the
engagement events. The program was very intentional and deliberate about building
relationship with the families to benefit the students. The closeness among the staff was
evident of this as well as the close relational ties to the communities where the parents are
from. The staff who are alumni make the connections possible. Additionally, the parents
had previous experience with the program through an older student, niece or nephew, or a
friend’s child contribute to their comfort and knowledge about the program.
Lastly, resistant capital was hinted at with the presentation on the Politics and Policy of Education which was designed to empower parents to take charge of their child’s education by understanding that the education system in South Carolina. The conversation and real talk was about what “minimally adequate” education means for their children’s educational experience and how they can prepare for managing their future relationships with the schools and school system.

A new conceptual model that depicts the various forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as integral pieces within the parent/guardian results from this theoretical analysis and reflect the opportunities for more intentional engagement efforts.

**Implications for Practice**

Although a single case study on parent and family engagement practices cannot provide guidance for all pre-collegiate programs, the implications of this study provides some insight into some opportunities that could be leveraged by the Tomorrow’s Hope as
well as other organizations seeking to enhance their engagement efforts with parents and families of their participants.

McDonough et al (2000) stressed the importance of building trusting relationships with parents and families. In support of this finding, the study revealed that the staff members who were affiliated with the same communities as the program participants might have contributed to building trusting relationships with the parents/guardians. Several parents during the group discussions commented about how they felt comfortable with their child in the program given that they knew one of the Program Advisors. The Assistant Director, who is also from one of the communities, stated that this year there were more Program Advisors who were program graduates than previous years. Selecting paraprofessionals and support staff from the same communities as the program participants may be an effective strategy for programs concerned about building trusting relationships.

The second implication for practice is to consider offering a mid-year or mid-program meeting or gathering of the parents/guardians for them to reconnect. The study revealed that the parents/guardians who attended the Parent Awareness Weekend were inspired and motivated by the end of the experience. Currently, the program does not convene the parents and families beyond the Paperwork Meeting after they attend the PAW event. A practical event may be to host a FASFA night, to provide assistance and support for completing the FAFSA form. Perna (2002) found that an essential parent involvement activity that contributes to students transitioning to college.
Lastly, Swail and Perna (2002) reported that institutional support in the form of a dedicated staff member was essential for the success of pre-collegiate programs. This study revealed that the Program Director tenure was due to institutional support. Additionally, the program has been provided a development officer from the institution to help guide their fundraising and development activities. This practice should be considered by other institutions with a similar program to Tomorrow’s Hope or interested in creating a program.

**Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, further research might explore the Tomorrow’s Hope participants’ perceptions of their parent/guardian involvement following their participation in the Parent Awareness Weekend. This exploration should occur during the student’s second and third year in the program. This may indicate the type of involvement that parents are able to provide as well as where students may need the most support, and if there is any alignment between capabilities and needs.

Second, it would be helpful to repeat this study in one or more programs at different institutions. Though it would not provide the same information on practices, it may provide a broader look at practices in use for engaging parents and families.

Third, more exploration needs to be made into how programs leverage cultural wealth for engaging parents and families from marginalized communities. The study revealed that there were practices that have tapped into or influenced the use of one of six capital sources within cultural wealth. What would the engagement practices look like for a program that deliberately leverage the six forms of capital for engagement?
Lastly, the study revealed the appreciation and praise for the staff, particularly the Program Director. A study that explores the team dynamics and leadership style and practices within pre-collegiate programs would provide useful insight for the practice.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to identify how a pre-collegiate summer program engages its participant’s parents and families. Using a single case study method, the researcher gathered and analyzed data from observations, individual interviews, group discussions, and program documents. This study revealed that the primary engagement practices included a meeting with all program participants and their parents/guardians; an overnight weekend campus visit for the parents/guardians of new program participants; and efforts around creating a relationship with the program participants and their families. A central component of these efforts include funding resources, institutional support, and program alumni on staff. The study also revealed that the parent and family engagement efforts can either: leverage, promote, influence, extend, or use the various sources of cultural wealth intentionally and unintentionally. The study also provides implications for practice and suggest topics for further research.
APPENDICES
Appendix A - E-mail Invite

Dear XXXX,

Hello. My name is De Morris Walker and I am a doctoral candidate at Reach University. I write to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-Collegiate Summer Program”.

Broadly stated, the purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

The details of the project can be found in the invitation and consent forms, which are attached to this email. However, if you would like to participate, the extent of your participation would include one interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

If you are willing to participate, please respond to me at dwalke2@Reach.edu and we can set up an interview to be conducted in a format, time, and location that is most preferable to you.

Thank you so much for your time,

De Morris
Appendix B - Invitation to Participate

Dear XXXXX,

Hello. My name is De Morris Walker and I am a doctoral candidate at Reach University. I write to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-Collegiate Summer Program”.

Broadly stated, the purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

You have been identified as a potential participant given your relationship with the pre-collegiate program. In addition, your name may have been provided by a colleague affiliated with the program.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. The extent of your participation would include one interview. The interview would last approximately 60 minutes. The exchange of information will be conducted in a format that is most convenient and preferable to you. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded and transcribed. You could also be contacted via e-mail or telephone with any follow up questions or clarification after the interview. You and your organization will be assigned a pseudonym.

If you are willing to participate, please e-mail me at dwalke2@Reach.edu. Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr. is the principal investigator and my dissertation chair. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact him at satter3@Reach.edu or 864-656-5111.

Your time is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

De Morris Walker
Appendix C - Invitation to Participate—Consent for Observation

Dear XXXXX,

Hello. My name is De Morris Walker and I am a doctoral candidate at Reach University. I write to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-Collegiate Summer Program”.

Broadly stated, the purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

The Summer Program Director suggested that I contact you to obtain your consent for your site to be a part in this research project. As part of this study, I will be observing and taking notes on naturally occurring interactions and conversations among summer program staff and the parents/guardians during the “going-way” moment when the new students will be picked-up from the _____ site to attend the summer program on Saturday, June 13, 2015. This research will not require additional time or activities from participants.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. As part of the capturing the setting and context of the interactions and the activities being observed, the researcher may take several pictures. No images with identifiable persons will be used for any publications, documents or presentations without obtaining informed consent. You and your organization will be assigned a pseudonym.

If you are willing to participate, please e-mail me at dwalke2@Reach.edu. Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr. is the principal investigator and my dissertation chair. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact him at satter3@Reach.edu or 864-656-5111.

Thank you for your consideration. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

De Morris Walker
Appendix D - Invitation to Participate - Consent for Participant Observation

Dear XXXXX,

Hello. My name is De Morris Walker and I am a doctoral candidate at Reach University. I write to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-Collegiate Summer Program”.

Broadly stated, the purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

The Summer Program Director suggested that I contact you to obtain your consent for your site to be a part in this research project. As part of this study, I will be participating in the informational and sign-up meeting for parents/guardians on ____ date. I will also be observing and taking notes on naturally occurring interactions and conversations among parents and adult family members of the students and the Summer Program staff in this session. This research will not require additional time or activities from participants.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. As part of the capturing the setting and context of the interactions and the activities being observed, the researcher may take several pictures. No images with identifiable persons will be used for any publications, documents or presentations without obtaining informed consent. You and your organization will be assigned a pseudonym.

If you are willing to participate, please e-mail me at dwalke2@Reach.edu. Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr. is the principal investigator and my dissertation chair. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact him at satter3@Reach.edu or 864-656-5111.

Thank you for your consideration. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

De Morris Walker
Appendix E - Informed Consent - Interview

Information about Being in a Research Study Reach University

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

Mr. De Morris Walker, doctoral student at Reach University, supervised by Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr., Assistant Professor at Reach University, is inviting you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

Specifically, De Morris Walker would like to interview you about the summer program’s beliefs, values, strategies and outcomes for parent and family involvement activities. Your participation will require approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a format preferable to you, either via telephone or face to face. Just the same, the time and location of the interview is of your convenience. With your permission, all interviews will be audio recorded. All recordings will be stored under lock and key and will be coded with a pseudonym. You could also be contacted via e-mail or telephone with any follow up questions or for clarification after the interview.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study as you and your institution will not be identifiable by name.

Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, upon completion of the study, you will be provided with an executive analysis of an issue that is important to your organization. This research will also contribute to the limited literature on pre-collegiate summer program parent and family engagement practices.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study. Your name will never be used in any dissemination of the work (reports, analysis, articles, and presentations, etc…). You and your program will be assigned a pseudonym. In addition, any particular or unique information that might make you identifiable will be excluded. Lastly, in efforts to protect confidentiality any data collected will be kept under lock and key and
password protected. Upon completion of the study and dissemination of the results, recordings will be erased from both recording device and computer (Summer 2016).

**Choosing to Be in the Study**

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr. at Reach University at satter3@Reach.edu or 864-656-5111.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Reach University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@Reach.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

**Consent**

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant’s signature: _______________________________ Date: __________________

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix F - Informed Consent - Focus Group

Information about Being in a Research Study Reach University

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

Mr. De Morris Walker, doctoral student at Reach University, supervised by Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr., Assistant Professor at Reach University, is inviting you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore how a pre-collegiate summer program engages the parents and families of their program participants.

Specifically, De Morris Walker is interested in hearing your valuable opinion about the your perceptions of the summer program’s engagement practices for the parents and families of it’s participants. Your participation will require approximately 45-50 minutes. The focus group will be conducted face to face with approximately 8-13 participants.

We would like to tape the focus groups so that we can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas we hear from the group. All recordings will be stored under lock and key and no names will be attached to the focus groups. The responses will be coded with a pseudonym.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study as you and your institution will not be identifiable by name.

Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, upon completion of the study, you will be provided with an executive analysis of an issue that is important to your organization. This research will also contribute to the limited literature on pre-collegiate summer program parent and family engagement practices.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study. Your name will never be used in any dissemination of the work (reports, analysis, articles, and presentations, etc…). You and your group will be assigned a pseudonym. In addition, any particular or unique information that might make you identifiable will be excluded. We will ask
participants to respect each other’s confidentiality. Lastly, in efforts to protect confidentiality any data collected will be kept under lock and key and password protected. Upon completion of the study and dissemination of the results, recordings will be erased from both recording device and computer (Summer 2016).

Choosing to Be in the Study

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr. at Reach University at satter3@Reach.edu or 864-656-5111.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Reach University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@Reach.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

Consent

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix G - Participant Observer Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Participant Observer Protocol

Program Name:  Participant Role:  Location:

Date:  Time Observation Began:  Time Ended:

Before the observation begins, briefly describe in #1 below, what you expect to be observing and why you have selected it.

1. Subject of the Observation. ____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

At the very beginning of the observation, describe the setting. Be sure to note any changes in setting as the observation proceeds. Also note how the session begins.

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Describe the program setting (color, size, shape, number of desks/tables, number of windows, furniture or equipment in the space room, temperature, noise level). ________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe how the session begins. (who is present, what exactly was said at the beginning). ________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

4. Describe the chronology of events in 15 min. intervals.

• 15 min. ________________________________________________________________

• 30 min. ________________________________________________________________
• 45 min. 
• 60 min. 

5. Describe participant role in the activity. 

6. Describe the interactions taking place during the observations? 

7. Describe the nonverbal communication of the participants? 

8. Describe program activities and participant behaviors (i.e., what’s happening during the session and how participants respond). 

9. How did participants respond or react to what was happening with the program during the observation? Roughly what proportion (some, most, all) are actively engaged? 

10. How does the program end? (What are the signals that the activity is ending? Who is present, what is said, how do participants react, how is the completion of this activity related to other activities?) 

Reflections on Participant Role: 

Reflections on Observations: 

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Appendix H - Nonparticipant Observer Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Nonparticipant Observer Protocol

Program Name: Location:

Date: Time Observation Began: Time Ended:

Before the observation begins, briefly describe in #1 below, what you expect to be observing and why you have selected it.

1. Subject of the Observation._______________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

At the very beginning of the observation, describe the setting. Be sure to note any changes in setting as the observation proceeds. Also note how the session begins.

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

2. Describe the program setting (color, size, shape, number of desks/tables, number of windows, furniture or equipment in the space room, temperature, noise level)

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe how the session begins. (who is present, what exactly was said at the beginning)

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

4. Describe the chronology of events in 15 min. intervals

• 15 min. ______________________________________________________________
- 30 min.
- 45 min.
- 60 min.

5. Describe the interactions taking place during the observations?

6. Describe the nonverbal communication of the participants?

7. Describe program activities and participant behaviors (i.e., what’s happening during the session and how participants respond).

8. How did participants respond or react to what was happening with the program during the observation? Roughly what proportion (some, most, all) are actively engaged?

9. How does the program end? (What are the signals that the activity is ending? Who is present, what is said, how do participants react, how is the completion of this activity related to other activities?)

Reflections on Observations:
Appendix I - Program Leadership Interview Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Program Leadership Interview Protocol

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

1) Introduction
2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to interviewee
3) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

General / Demographic

- What is your role in the organization?
- How long have you been with this organization?
- What is your educational background and/or training?
- Where did you grow-up?
- How would you classify your generation?

Values, Beliefs and Practices

- What does parent and family engagement mean to you and your organization?
- Describe the major challenges with engaging parents and families?
- Discuss the benefits of engaging parents and families?
- Who is responsible for engaging parents and families?
- In what ways should parents and families be engaged?
- Discuss how you engage/interact with parents and families?
- Describe how your beliefs, ideas or understanding may have changed based on your experiences in this organization with parent and family engagement?
- In relation to the program goals, discuss how well do your program's parent and family engagement efforts align?
• Describe any philosophy or theories that inform/shape/influence your efforts about parent and family engagement.

**Working Parts**

• What knowledge, skills, training, and/or experiences would benefit a staff member with engaging parents and families?
• Describe the activities, events, and/or processes employed to engage parents and families.
• Describe any external support or assistance if any that contributed to the program's efforts to communicate, increase awareness or involve parents and families?
• Discuss the level of frequency your program communicates/outreaches to parents and families. How much time is devoted to engagement activities?

**Context**

• Describe how you interact with parents and families during the pre-program, program (PAW), and post-program periods.
• In what settings has the program, experienced the greatest level of parent/family participation or involvement?
• What method of communication has proven to be more impactful for reaching parents and families?
• Describe any strategies you used and the situations where you effectively engaged a parent or family member of a participant?
Appendix J - Program Staff Interview Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Program Staff Interview Protocol

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

1) Introduction
2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to interviewee
3) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

**General / Demographic**
- What is your role in the organization?
- How long have you been with this organization?
- What is your educational background and/or training?
- Where did you grow-up?
- How would you classify your generation?

**Values, Beliefs and Practices**
- What does parent and family engagement mean to you and your organization?
- Describe the major challenges with engaging parents and families?
- Discuss the benefits of engaging parents and families?
- Who is responsible for engaging parents and families?
- In what ways should parents and families be engaged?
- Discuss how you engage/interact with parents and families?
- Describe how your beliefs, ideas or understanding may have changed based on your experiences in this organization with parent and family engagement?
• In relation to the program goals, discuss how well do your program's parent and family engagement efforts align?
• Describe any philosophy or theories that inform/shape/influence your efforts about parent and family engagement.

*Working Parts*
• What knowledge, skills, training, and/or experiences would benefit a staff member with engaging parents and families?
• Describe any external support or assistance if any that contributed to the program's efforts to communicate, increase awareness or involve parents and families?

*Context*
• Describe how you interact with parents and families during the pre-program, program (PAW), and post-program periods.
• In what settings has the program, experienced the greatest level of parent/family participation or involvement?
• What method of communication has proven to be more impactful for reaching parents and families?
• Describe any strategies you used and the situations where you effectively engaged a parent or family member of a participant?
Appendix K - Program Affiliates Interview Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Program Affiliates Interview Protocol

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

1) Introduction
2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to interviewee
3) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

- Describe how your organization assists the pre-collegiate summer program with their parent and family engagement practices?
- How do you define parent and family engagement?
- Describe potential challenges with engaging parents and families of the participants in the pre-collegiate summer program.
- What strategies might help to overcome the challenges that were previously mentioned?
- Describe the methods and/or resources needed for engaging parents and families.
- If you were to develop a guidebook for engaging parents and families, what would be some of the major sections or topics discussed?
- How long has your organization been affiliated with the Champions Pre-collegiate Summer Program?
- Describe the place, setting, situation or context that may enhance/contribute to parent and family engagement efforts?
Appendix L - Program Personnel Focus Group Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Program Personnel Focus Group Protocol

Focus group discussions description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

1) Introduction
2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to participants
3) Provide participants with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Ground rules and confidentiality
5) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with group interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

Perceptions

- What are your expected outcomes for the various activities and efforts for engaging parents and families?
- How would you describe the PAW experience?
- Describe something that was different this year from previous year (what was unexpected)?
- What happened that was expected?
- What are some considerations for other programs wishing to host a similar event with parents and families?
- What did you learn about working with parents and families from this year's experience?
- What advice would you give to new program staff in regards to engaging parents and families?
Values, Beliefs and Practices

- What role did your parent/guardian/family caregiver play in your college going experience?
- What is your definition of parent involvement?
- What are some ways in which parental figures can help get their students ready for college?
- From your experience in preparing for college with your parental figure/s, what advice would you give to other parental figures regarding preparing students for college?

Working Parts

- Provide any details about key elements in the planning, preparation and/or implementation that contributed this year's PAW success?
- What knowledge, information, training or experience helped you personally in your role for engaging parents and families?
Appendix M - Parent and Families Focus Group Protocol

Parent and Family Engagement Practices in a Pre-collegiate Summer Program

Parent and Families Focus Group Protocol

Focus group discussions description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

1) Introduction
2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to participants
3) Provide participants with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Ground rules and confidentiality
5) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with group interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

*Perceptions*

- Describe or share any concerns, questions, and fears about your student's participation in the program?
- Discuss how you learned about the program - who was the source of information and how was the information communicated/form it was received?
- What are your perceptions of the experience?
- Overall, what engagement effort/activity has made the biggest impact on your experience with the summer program?
- What was the most surprising about the program?
- What are the biggest challenges or obstacles that you have faced with participating in any of the events or activities sponsored by the program?
- Discuss any methods that might be more effective?
- Discuss what efforts have motivated you to increase your involvement?
- Describe any programs, events or information that has helped increase your awareness about the program or higher education?
• Discuss what efforts helped to enable your participation in activities sponsored by the program?
• Based on your experience with the PAW, discuss what concerns/questions/fears have been addressed and how?
• What helped influence your decision to allow your student to participate in the Champions Pre-collegiate Summer Program?
• Describe what helped influence your decision to participate in the PAW?

Values, Beliefs and Practices
• How would you describe parent/family involvement?
• How do you define involvement?
• How do you define college awareness?

Working Parts
• Looking back at all the communication and interaction you had with the pre-collegiate summer program, is there anything that seemed to be more influential in your decision to permit your student to participate. If so, what was it and why?
• Discuss who helped address your questions/concerns or how you were able to overcome your fears?
• What was the most effective communication method used by the program that worked for you?

Context
• Describe an "a-ha" moment in relation to this program and what was the message/information, communication method, and context or situation?
• Looking back at all the communication and interaction you had with the pre-collegiate summer program, is there anything that seemed to be more influential in your decision to participate in the PAW. If so, what was it and why?
REFERENCES


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US Census Bureau. (2012). *Clemson (city) quickfacts from the us census bureau*.


