

RESEARCH REQUEST & PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Proposals shall not be more than five pages and no smaller than 12 font in size.

Name: John Benner PhC. **Organization Affiliation:** University of Washington

Title of Project: P-6 Parent Engagement Study

Schools and Grades Involved: 1 Head Start and 1 Elementary School it matriculates to. Pre-K through 6th grade.

Statement of Purpose:

(including intent, educational area for investigation, type of investigation, reason for undertaking the study, possible value to the school district, anticipated generalizability)

As children move from age 3-5 and into kindergarten and elementary, parents' roles change from one of intense involvement in every facet of life to a differently intense involvement as they help their children become independent and participate in schooling. Similarly, the roles and expectations of parents in schools shift as children grow older. While family engagement is recognized by Head Start and public school districts as essential for promoting student success and closing the achievement and opportunity gap, there may be differences in how family engagement happens in each setting. These differences may influence how parents learn to support their children and may impact their participation in each Head Start or public school.

Head Start programs have policies on family engagement that feature practices like home visits, parent policy council, parent education workshops and staff positions like family advocates.

Public school districts have their own system of policies designed to promote family engagement that often emphasize practices like curriculum nights, parent-teacher conferences, programs like Natural Leaders, Parent-Teacher Associations and Building Leadership Teams, and volunteering.

There is little research that shows how parents who participate in Head Start experience this transition from Head Start to public school, and how these parent engagement practices in each setting may or may not build on each other. There are no studies that show how parents make use of what they learn in Head Start throughout their child's schooling to support their learning. This study will look at Head Start and elementary schools in their function as formal and informal learning environments for parents.

This study will center parent voices and experiences with formal and informal family engagement practices and the policies that guide those practices. It will balance parent experiences with the goals and intentions of school staff and administration to identify potential alignment or breakdown between policy, implementation and the experience of parents.

Research Hypotheses, Questions, or Objectives:

This comparative case study of parent engagement practices in public elementary schools and Head Start programs will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How is parent engagement structured in a Head Start program? What practices and routines foster alignment between home and school and promote learning throughout a child's life?
2. How is parent engagement structured in a Public Elementary School that the students in this Head Start program matriculates to? What practices and routines foster alignment between home and school and promote learning throughout a child's life?
3. What examples of cross-institution parent engagement practices exist? What are the institutional features that prevent or promote consistency between Head Start and public elementary schools' parent engagement practices?
4. How do parents experience these parent engagement practices? What kinds of practices are most supportive for them in their efforts to promote their children's growth and development?

The potential benefits to the Head Start and elementary school include better understanding of one another's family engagement philosophy, policy and practices. This research can set the stage for professional development and greater integration of best practices across early learning and elementary schools. District level administrators may also find the P-6 focus of this study useful in their efforts to develop and improve system-wide family engagement strategies.

Methods of Study:

(Population and Sample, including method, size, justification, desired schools/grades, procedures; Design & Procedures, including research design, variables, validity & reliability, data collection, and debriefing procedures)

Site Selection, Population and Sample: Adults in this study will be recruited from 1 Head Start program and 1 elementary school that the students in that Head Start matriculate to. This study will only focus on adults, both parents and educators and no data will be collected or analyzed on children beyond ages and grades of the participants own children. The sampling strategy will be purposive sampling, where parents and educators fitting the criteria of the study (parents/educators in a designated Head Start program and its elementary school. Through purposive sampling, I will also make an effort to recruit participants who reflect the diversity of the Head Start and elementary school selected for the study. **(the following numbers are estimates, if more parents or educators volunteer to participate, these exact numbers will change.)**

- 12 Current Head Start Parents: At least 3 focus group interviews of 4 parents. If possible, will include parents on policy council as well as Head Start parents not in any leadership roles. Depending on demographics, these groups may be organized by language, and conducted in parents' first language. Parents from these interviews may be selected for 1hr follow up interviews.
- 12 Current Elementary School Parents: At least 3 focus group interviews of 4 parents. If possible will include Natural Leaders, and PTSA members as well as parents not in any leadership roles. Depending on demographics, these groups may be organized by language, and conducted in parents' first language. Parents from these interviews may be selected for 1hr follow up interviews. If possible, one focus group will be parents who currently have students in Head Start AND their local elementary school.
- 2 Administrators: 1 from Head Start, and 1 from its local elementary school.
- 4 teachers: 2 from Head Start, 2 from its local elementary school
- 4 staff members: These are staff tasked with family support or who interact most often with parents. Examples include Family Advocates, Family Liaisons, and front office staff, 2 from Head Start

Methods: This comparative case study will use the following ethnographic research methods:

- 1 hour Semi-structured focus group interviews of parents in Head Start and related public schools. Purposive sampling for parents of children in both settings to foster comparisons
- 1 Hour follow-up semi-structured individual interviews of parents in focus groups.
- 1 hour Semi-Structured interviews of teachers and administration staff (eg. Principals, Family Engagement Liasons, front office staff, Program Directors) at South Seattle Public Schools and Head Start ECEAP programs to determine range of parent engagement practices.
- Document analysis of public parent communications (flyers, parent handbooks, school-wide emails, district announcements- no confidential information will be collected)
- Observation in public family engagement events, drop-off and pick-up times, and front-office observations in the schools and Head Start programs in the study.

Justification for Methods: For qualitative research, it is essential to triangulate data from multiple sources in the analysis. In this study I will be triangulating interview data from parents and school staff with observations of ordinary family engagement interactions, and document analysis of public communications between schools and families. This will allow for corroboration or contradiction between interview responses and observations and is a recognized method for improving the rigor and reliability of qualitative research.

I am using different interview formats for different populations in this study: Focus group interviews and individual interviews.

Focus Group Interviews: For parents, I am using a focus group format with semi-structured interview questions. Focus group interviews allow for a balancing of power between interviewer and participants, and parents may feel more free to speak when in a group of other parents. Focus groups also allow for participants own answers to serve as elicitations for other participants, as a parent's memory of events or their perspective on an event may be triggered by hearing another parent's experience. Focus group interview data will be video and audio recorded for later transcription and analysis. The video data will be to identify speakers for accurate transcription.

Individual Interviews: It is likely that during these focus group interviews, I will encounter data that I will want more detail on, so I will likely do follow up individual interviews with parents recruited from the focus group. In this case, the more intimate and private setting will allow parents the space and privacy to elaborate on previous answers and experiences not yet shared. The focus group interviews will allow me to establish a rapport with parents I can use to facilitate Individual interviews. I am also using individual semi-structured interviews for teachers, administrators and staff for two reasons. First, it will be less intrusive on the educators' responsibilities if they are able to schedule interviews at their convenience. Second, individual interviews are most appropriate due to the small sample size. Individual interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Document Analysis: I will be seeking copies of newsletters, email reminders, parent handbooks, and other non-confidential public communications. I will also take photos of all signage and parent notices posted in public areas within each program. I will analyze these communications for both content and tone. What kinds of information do they provide? What kinds of messages

are being communicated: Boundary setting? Invitations? Requests for help? Etc. Paper documents will be scanned and saved with emails and e-newsletters, and handbooks. These documents will be coded using Atlas qualitative coding software.

Observations of Drop-Off and Pick-Up Times and Front Office Interactions: The most frequent point of interaction between parents and educators happens during drop-off and pick-up time. Similarly, parents most common interaction with school staff besides their child's teacher is with front-office staff. The content and quality of these adult-adult interactions play a significant role in how parents experience the school and their willingness to engage or disengage with their child's schooling. The frequency and quality of these interactions also impact the relevant knowledge that teachers have about students and their families, such as child strengths, interests and challenges, knowledge of cultural traditions and practices, and opportunities to extend learning outside of school. I will conduct at least 3 observations of drop-off or pick-up times at each site and 3 observations of front-office interactions 30 minutes immediately prior to and following the drop-off or pick up time. Observations will be recorded with pen and paper notebooks with photos of the building, public spaces, and bulletin boards. Hand-written observations will be converted into ethnographic field notes.

Observations of Whole-School Community Events: School wide community events include celebrations, performances, curriculum nights, PTSA meetings, and other information nights. While some families are not able to participate in whole school events, they can be a key point of interaction for families with their child's school and often represent a major effort that schools make in family engagement. These observations will also serve to triangulate between stated goals of school staff and stated experiences of parents. These observations will also be recorded with pen and paper notebooks with photographs of room arrangement and copies of all handouts and other materials. Handwritten observations will be converted into ethnographic field notes.

Analyses:

(data reduction and analysis, responsibilities and resources, and timeline)

Data Analysis: Interview data will be transcribed and translated if needed. Observations will be converted into ethnographic field notes. Documents will be compiled into a database for qualitative coding. My methods of analysis will begin with rounds of inductive analysis where I will make sense of the data using qualitative codes based on existing research literature on family engagement in P-6th settings. I have created a list of potential codes based on my literature review and will use these codes to help identify themes in interviews and observations. After my inductive analysis I will do a round of open coding to identify themes not predicted in the literature. To ensure reliability in my qualitative analysis, I will have colleagues review and code anonymized data to determine accuracy in my coding. I will also use the practice of member checking where I will submit transcripts and some samples of my analysis to participants to ensure that my transcripts are accurately reflecting their experience and my analysis is grounded in that experience.

Responsibilities and Resources: I am going to be the sole researcher responsible for data collection and analysis under the supervision of my doctoral committee consisting of Leslie Herrenkohl, Ann Ishimaru and Manka Vargnese. While this is unfunded research, I should be able to get UW dissertation grants for translation and interpreter services if they are needed. If not, I am assuming all financial responsibility for this research.

Timeline: Data collection will begin upon approval from the district and last for approximately 2 months. Analysis will occur concurrent with data collection and continue for an additional 2 months. The manuscript writing will be complete by the end of 8 months from when data collection begins. If data collection can begin in January, data collection will be complete by March, and the dissertation project will be submitted for review in June.

Anticipated Final Product:
(distribution, timeline)

The primary final product of this research is my doctoral dissertation which I expect to complete by Fall of 2018. I also anticipate writing articles about components of this research, focused on groups of findings as they relate to specific topics and themes. I will be preparing presentations of the findings to share with district staff and the participating Head Start program and Elementary School upon completion of the dissertation. The district will receive electronic and printed copies of the dissertation and any articles that come from this study.

This project has already received UW IRB exemption and the approval of my doctoral committee.

I have read the Research Policy and Procedures of the Shoreline School District and agree to follow all guidelines outlined therein.

Submitted by: John Benner
Title: P-6 Parent Engagement Practices
Date: 11/30/17

Approved by:
Assessment Administrator (& Supt. Staff)
Date: