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LIVES DISRUPTED: EXPLORING AND UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS IN A JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL SETTING

By
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Abstract

The positive impact of parent/guardian engagement on a child’s educational experience along all points of the educational pipeline is well documented. Level of parent/guardian engagement is linked to parent income and education level. In turn, level of formal education impacts access to resources, channels of information, and the availability and effective use of social capital. Engagement of parent/guardians of first-generation students has been studied in the public school and post-secondary arena but what is missing is the examination of the experience of engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students as a function of social capital in the private, Jesuit secondary school setting. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how 18 parents/guardians of first-generation students experienced and perceived engagement in their student’s educational experience as a function of social capital. Ethical leadership informed by the Ignatian charism of cura personalis and employment of the Best Interests of the Student framed this phenomenological study. The primary findings suggest that parents/guardians of first-generation students experience disruption of their education for many reasons, and that they engage in their student’s high school experience by participating in home-based behaviors such as explicit expectations about college attendance, talking about the value of a college education, talking about homework and grades, and taking the student to school commitments. Findings also suggest that barriers to school-centric engagement include work schedules, socioeconomic status, and language.

Keywords: Parents/guardians first-generation students, engagement, social capital, ethical leadership, Best Interest of the Student, cura personalis, Jesuit secondary schools
Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my students and their families who inspired me on this journey and to my daughters who support me unconditionally every day.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Relevant Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology Overview</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections of the Scholar-Practitioner</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation Characteristics</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Engagement</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for Parent Engagement</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Leadership in This Study</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Research Questions</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Methodology</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Co-Researchers</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Findings</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTION AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim Statement</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Solutions</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the Outcome of Implementing the Solution</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Dissertation in Practice</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A Site Permission and IRB Approval</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B Interview Protocol</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C Invitation to Participate in the Study .......................................................... 143
Appendix D Participant Bill of Rights ............................................................................ 144
Appendix E Translated Interview Protocol..................................................................... 145
Appendix F Translated Invitation to Participate in the Study ............................................. 149
Appendix G Translated Bill of Right for Research Participants ..................................... 150
Appendix H Update on First-Generation Project 2018-19 ............................................. 151
Appendix I Co-Researcher Biographies ......................................................................... 155
List of Tables

Table 1 Co-Researcher Characteristics (N=18) .............................................................. 59
List of Figures

Figure 1. Main processes of phenomenology. .......................................................... 68
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

First-generation college applicants report that their parents/guardian’s lack of familiarity with formal education and the college selection process significantly limits the level of parent/guardian engagement with them in this process (Ceja, 2006; Jehangir et al., 2015). As a result, first-generation college applicants, who are unfamiliar with the social and cultural components of higher education contexts, may feel they are navigating the process of college preparation, selection, and application without their parents/guardian’s guidance (Ceja, 2006; Jehangir et al., 2015). First-generation parents/guardian’s lack of experience in successfully negotiating avenues of access to formal education systems may be reflected in how they experience engagement in their student’s educational journey (Jehangir et al., 2015; Pena, 2000).

Parent/guardian engagement has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on student educational experience, persistence, and success along all points of the educational pipeline and has been linked to psychological processes and attributes that contribute to student success (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005). Parent/guardian engagement in their student’s education and college process has been conceptualized in the literature as engagement, expectation, acting as an important source of information (Ceja, 2006), encouragement, and emotional support (Dennis et al., 2005; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Home-based behaviors such as helping with homework, and course selection, conversations with the student about academic issues, parent-teacher communication, and creating a workspace for the student, are also examples of parent/guardian engagement (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mc Carron & Inkelas, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2007). There is
support in the literature for the impact of parent/guardian engagement across a student’s educational experience and many of the aspects of this engagement reflect the level of social capital the parent/guardian possesses and exercises (Atherton, 2014; Ceja, 2006; Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Social capital, the strength of connections among actors and across networks, can be impacted by level of education, income, language, and whether the person is born outside the United States (Coleman, 1988; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). These same attributes have been noted to contribute to a deficit orientation of school structures (culture, administration, and faculty) concerning the perception of engagement by parents/guardians of first-generation students who may also be low-income and people of color (Atherton, 2014; Ceja, 2006; Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). This perception may result in a devaluing of these populations’ expressing engagement in ways different from those of more affluent and frequently White parents from continuing-college families (Hashmi, 2018; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Coleman’s (1988) foundational theory of social capital, most frequently used in educational research, illustrates how social capital may be one of the ways parents/guardians access, experience, and exercise engagement.

Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital states social capital essentially exists in the relations between and among actors, making goal attainment possible that would not be possible without it and that can be used for the benefit of the group (Coleman, 1988; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Coleman specifically mentions how social capital within the family can positively influence the student’s educational attainment. In addition, parents/guardians who are an important part of the student’s life, and have a high
investment in the student, results in the decline of high school drop-out rates. The decline in drop-out rates is consistent with academic achievement, higher test scores, and more positive educational outcomes. There is support in the literature for Coleman’s theory of social capital and its relationship to educational development (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Dika & Singh, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005). Bjork (2012) lends additional support, noting that connections among networks can have far reaching effects on a child’s educational achievement and thereby their educational choices and upward mobility. According to Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) parent/guardian engagement as a form of social capital communicates the norms, trust, and authority necessary for educational goal attainment, and by extension upward mobility.

Parent/guardian engagement as a form of social capital can also be expressed as college knowledge, how colleges work, familiarity with vocabulary associated with higher education and financial aid, and campus values (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Two types of relationships build social capital: between student and parent/guardian and between the parent/guardian and adults connected to the high school (Dika & Singh, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005). This relationship building between and among the actors is consistent with Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) construct that parent/guardian motivation for engagement is an actively and socially constructed role. The authors state that because this role is socially constructed, it is also affected by social influences. Integral to this conversation are the concepts of cultural capital and funds of knowledge in the creation and exercise of social capital.

Cultural capital refers to the competence and knowledge embedded in the life experiences of underrepresented students and their families (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Rios-
Aguilar et al., 2011). Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The author theorized that cultural capital is passed on to the child within the family and permeates that individual’s thinking and character, or *habitus*. Bourdieu employed cultural capital as a way to explain the disparity in academic achievement of children in France during the 1960s and suggested that the greater the distance between the family’s cultural capital and the culture of instruction, the more the family’s culture will be devalued. Cultural capital interacts with or influences how and to what extent a person may access and exercise social capital and upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika & Singh, 2002; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

The concept of funds of knowledge was developed by Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) in their study of how working-class, economically marginalized Latino families use social networks to navigate the uncertainty of their socioeconomic disadvantage. Challenging a deficit orientation lens, the concept also relates to how marginalized people decode the formal educational system and thereby access a pathway to participate in power sharing in those institutions which then translates into social capital (Gibson et al., 2004; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). It can then be argued that the concept of funds of knowledge is directly related to social and cultural capital because the processes can be transformed into other symbolic and more tangible forms of capital (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

There has been no academic research specifically addressing the experience of engagement for parents/guardians of first-generation students in Jesuit high schools. Integral to this conversation is the influence of cultural capital and funds of knowledge in
the creation and exercise of social capital. This study adds to the existing knowledge on how the parents/guardians of first-generation students understand and experience engagement through social capital by extending it beyond the public institutions into the private, Jesuit secondary school setting.

**Statement of the Problem**

The level of parent/guardian engagement is linked to parent income and education level (Ceja, 2006; Jehangir et al., 2015). Parents/guardians of first-generation students do not have experience successfully negotiating formal educational systems and may not be able to play the vital part of imparting vital information and guidance in the college selection process and the preparation needed in high school (Ceja, 2006; Gofen, 2009; Jehangir et al., 2015). The lack of experience may be reflected in how they experience engagement in their student’s educational journey (Jehangir et al., 2015; Pena, 2000).

The influence of parent/guardian engagement on the educational experience of children along all points of the educational pipeline has been well documented (Bjork et al., 2012; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Ceja, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jehangir et al., 2015; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). In addition, there is a growing body of literature regarding relationships among social capital, its distribution, its impact on power asymmetry in educational settings, and access to resources that may facilitate educational attainment and upward mobility (Bjork et al., 2012; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Jehangir et al., 2015; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Missing from the discussion are the results from this phenomenological inquiry, and its subsequent transmission into actionable form will provide practitioners a depth of knowledge on how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement.
and factors that may facilitate or hinder engagement in a Jesuit secondary school. Adding to this knowledge base will inform policy in Jesuit high schools to better support parents/guardians of first-generation students, create pathways for their engagement through the mechanism of social capital, and by extension positively impact their student’s educational experience. It is clear from a search of the Jesuit School Network (2019) that the network only identifies 26% of students as students of color. There is no designation or recognition of first-generation students and, by extension, their parents/guardians. It is incumbent upon the leaders of Jesuit high schools to ensure the intentional care of all the families in our care.

Central to this study is the role of leadership. Effective, ethical leadership rooted in the ethic of care, critique, justice, and community is inseparable from the Ignatian charism of cura personalis. These concepts, nested in each other, are integral in developing and implementing best practices resulting from this study. There is no data on the size of the population and demographics specific to first-generation students and their parents/guardians in the Jesuit School Network (2019). Without knowing who attends our schools and their perception of their experiences while in our care, and without orienting ourselves in that lived experience, we cannot meaningfully examine and expand our practice of cura personalis for those in our care. This study challenges not only the school in which the study was conducted but also the greater context of the Jesuit School Network in how cura personalis is exercised in “inspiring improved praxis” (van Manen, 1990, p. 30)
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand how parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their experience of engagement across all grade levels at a Jesuit Western Province Catholic all-boys high school which has a census of over 1,000 students. This study explored the experiences of 18 parents/guardians of first-generation students.

Research Question

As a way to expand the knowledge regarding this phenomenon the following research question guided this study: how do parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their engagement in their student’s high school experience? To provide a fuller description of the experiences of engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students four sub-questions also guided the study:

- How do parents/guardians of first-generation students experience social capital in engagement?
- How do parents/guardians of first-generation students practice engagement?
- What are the factors, internal and external that promote or impede engagement? (i.e. cultural norms, gender, socioeconomic status, language, school structures, and issues of power asymmetry).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this dissertation in practice was to understand the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students and to utilize the data collected to inform best practices to support the engagement of that parent population. Research with this population has been centered in the public school and postsecondary school
environments, and this study is important because it is the first time research has been conducted with this parent population regarding engagement as a function of social capital in a Jesuit secondary school. The anticipated impact of the study will allow the school leadership to create effective pathways for engagement and support this parent population in response to the data. Examples of the positive impact of this study would be more attention to making information accessible in languages other than English, including written material and presentations, explicit invitations to participate in school-based events, and events specific to parents/guardians of first-generation students. It is also important in the implications it has for informing policy and best practices for the Jesuit School Network at large.

Ignatian education leadership grounded in cura personalis and the related paradigms of the ethic of justice, care, critique, and community is mandated to intentionally serve all persons in our care. The implications of this study on how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in their son’s high school experience will identify what factors may facilitate or hinder that engagement. Parent involvement is integral to student academic success, persistence, and attainment and linked to student psychological well-being (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Definition of Relevant Terms

First-generation: The term “first-generation” does not have a standard definition in the literature (Jehangir et al., 2015), and how parent/guardian postsecondary experience has been defined varies from parents/guardians with no college experience (Billson & Terry, 1982) to parents/guardians who have not completed a baccalaureate
degree (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). The definition employed in this study includes parents/guardians who have some college or an associate degree (Stebleton & Soria, 2013) and all levels of formal educational achievement from grade school through high school. In addition, having guardians in the terminology makes the definition more inclusive. There may be families in the study who do not fit the traditional biological parent-as-caregiver family model. For this study, the phrase “first-generation parent” will be augmented by adding “guardian.” For the purposes of this study, a parent/guardian of a first-generation student will be defined as a parent or guardian who has not earned a bachelors’ degree in the United States, and will be referred to as parent/guardian of a first-generation student. Inherent in this description, and in this school setting, is the expectation that the student will apply to college.

*Engagement Home-based and School-centric:* The word “engagement” has been used interchangeably with “involvement” in the literature including the following parent behaviors: encouragement; expectation; homework help; paying for standardized tests (like SAT/ACT); having a dedicated study space; conversations about academics, grades, and college; choosing classes; emotional support. School-centric engagement includes attending school events; contact with teachers; and frequency of contact. For this study, the term engagement will be used and recognize home-based, and direct interaction with the institution, or school-centric interaction.

*Best Interests of the Student Model:* The Best Interests of the Student Model, frequently used by educators when discussing professional practice, is grounded in genuine concern for the well-being of students and focuses on the ethical dimensions and ethical decision making of educational leadership in the dynamic context of the school
community (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). The Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004) is inseparable from ethical school leadership and ethical decision making and may be approached from different foundational perspectives: philosophy, legal, or social justice (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). This study, grounded in the Ignatian ethic of *cura personalis*, will focus on the perspective of social justice. The model communicates “overall well-being of stakeholders, the preeminence of educational goals, and the maximization of long-term benefits” (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p.214) despite socioeconomic level, culture, or language or country of origin. It may be applied at the individual level to the cross-cultural level. For the purposes of this study, the Best Interests of the Student Model was applied to the level of the group, parents/guardians of first-generation students, and the organization, the context of a Jesuit secondary school environment. It is the intent to extend this framework to the Jesuit Western Province and then to the Jesuit School Network at large.

**Jesuit high school:** A four-year secondary educational institution, originated by the Society of Jesus, grades 9 through 12, within a network of 62 secondary schools in the United States inclusive of single-gender and co-educational environments. Jesuit high schools promote the educational ministry of the Society of Jesus by educating young men and women of faith, scholarship, service, and leadership (Jesuit Schools Network, 2019).

**Deficit thinking or deficit orientation:** Views students and/or parents/guardians from populations of color, of low socioeconomic status (SES), who may have been born outside the United States, for whom English is an acquired language, and first-generation college applicants as lacking in some way, being deficient in some way, or not possessing the same value as the dominant culture of instruction. Deficit thinking views these
communities as disadvantaged and less-than and locates the basis for academic failure in the student, their family, and their culture. The cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities of populations with one or more of the mentioned characteristics go unrecognized and unacknowledged in school structures (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004).

*Social capital:* Pertains to the existing network of individuals, institutions, and community and the connections among those actors that support and facilitate achievement of stated goals that would not be possible in its absence. The level of social capital an actor can exercise depends on the size of the network(s) connections that can be effectively mobilized for a specific goal (Bourdieu, 1977). It is not independent of cultural capital.

*Cultural capital:* Tangible and intangible assets that fall into three categories: education or specialized knowledge (institutionalized), language, skills, personality (embodied), and clothes and belongings (objectified) that promote social mobility. Transmitted by the family and the cultural context, cultural capital varies with the distance between dominant culture of instruction and the culture of the family (Bourdieu, 1977). Acquired through the family, it confers power and authority, and Bourdieu (1977) states cultural capital is, “no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives greater weight” (p. 246).

*Funds of knowledge:* Refers to the competence, knowledge, and skills embedded in the experiences and resources of underrepresented students and their families and how those resources are strategically bartered through social networks with other households (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). It is a “currency of exchange” tied to
social and cultural capital through networks essential for the household’s and individual well-being (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 165).

*Cultural wealth:* Is a dynamic process, an expression of cultural wealth formed by the knowledge, and abilities used by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression. Rooted in a response to deficit thinking, Yosso (2005) cites five tenets that attend cultural wealth. This study focuses specifically on the centrality of experience and the commitment to social justice.

*Cura personalis:* Latin for care for the person or personal care, and which communicates dedication to human dignity (Creighton University, 2019). The Xavier University (2019) website states that *cura personalis* describes the type of care we give as educators. In Jesuit education the phrase describes an educational experience respectful of each student’s unique identity and needs, attending to their spiritual, moral and intellectual development, and anxious for the comfort of each one. As Jesuit educators, we “give not only of our knowledge, expertise and skill, but of ourselves as well” (Xavier University, 2019).

*Protective agent:* Refers to an older sibling, extended family member, member of the community, or friend who attended college and may act as a guide in the unfamiliar territory of college discernment, application, and matriculation. This person may assist in accessing information resources, and thereby act as a conduit for social capital (Gofen, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

*Disrupted education:* One of the key findings is co-researchers expressed that their education or educational goals were disrupted by life events. The term disruption was selected over interruption. An interruption stops an action, or breaks the continuity of
an action. A disruption is something that changes plans. It is an unplanned interruption of an event or a process caused by a disturbance, or a problem (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

**Methodology Overview**

This study sought to describe and understand the lived experience of first-generation parents/guardians with engagement in their student’s education. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to inquiry involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews and demographic information to address the research question. The approach allowed for a thorough exploration of experience with and perceptions of engagement by first-generation parents/guardians; insights into their own disrupted lives; and the meaning education holds. Phenomenology is especially suited to educational research because of its practical application for, “…inspiring improved praxis” (van Manen, 1990). This method is valuable in studying the lived experience of first-generation parents/guardians and to discern how to better serve this parent population.

**Delimitations, Limitations, and Personal Biases**

The study is delimited by the participant criterion of parents/guardians of first-generation students in one particular Jesuit high school in the western province. Due to the qualitative research approach, the results of the study are not intended to be generalized to the experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students at large, but may inform best practices and the design of programmatic support for this population in other private Catholic high schools. To obtain a clearer picture of the experiences of parents/guardians of first-generation students, the study did not address a specific cultural expression or ethnic group. Two parents/guardians in the sample required a translator to participate in the study. Arrangements to have an interpreter for the interview were made,
and this additional presence was noted. Translated interview protocol, invitation to participate, and the bill of rights for research participants are included as Appendices E, F, and G.

The study was limited by the parents/guardians who accepted the invitation to participate in the study. The Catholic school setting, in which the study was conducted, by its nature as a tuition-based, consumer-driven market, acts upon the experience of the parent/guardian and student population. Parents/guardians and students in this setting may have advantages over their peers in larger public secondary school environments. Because the study is specific to a Catholic school, a comparison with public school populations was not made. The methodology limits the type of data that could be gathered through semi-structured interview questions, and further limitations were imposed by the time frame of the Dissertation in Practice process to conduct and transcribe interviews and to code interview transcripts.

Creswell and Poth (2018) make note “that the writing of the qualitative text cannot be separated from the author” (p. 228). In phenomenological inquiry, the researcher was the instrument used to collect data and is part of the inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). It is pertinent to the qualitative research process and integral to phenomenological inquiry to make note of biases, personal history, and experiences through bracketing and epoche (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is the process of setting aside any pre-judgements, and the ordinary way of seeing the world. Epoche requires the researcher to see the experience of the co-researcher with fresh eyes. Creswell and Poth (2018) also note the vital role reflexivity plays in qualitative research. The researcher was careful to position themselves in the study, and make note of how the researcher’s
background relates to the phenomenon and how they might shape the interpretation of the data.

Creswell and Poth (2018) conceptualized reflexivity as having two phases, the first the researcher recognized biases and experiences with the phenomenon being explored. The second phase was to discuss how these experiences may have influenced how results were interpreted. As a first-generation college student from a working-class family the researcher had many of the experiences the co-researchers disclosed. It was necessary to recognize these experiences as biases and to bracket the researcher out of the study by discussing personal experiences, and making process notes after the interviews. Moustakas (1994) labels this practice as epoche, the setting aside of the researcher’s experience in order to see the experience of co-researchers with fresh eyes. During interviews, when the researcher became aware of a bias influencing the interview, the researcher made notes on the interview protocol to review after the interview concluded. The use of memoing directly on the transcript during coding and journaling helped identify experiences and biases.

**Reflections of the Scholar-Practitioner**

The impetus for the focus of this dissertation in practice (DIP) was the researcher’s personal history as a first-generation student, and the work with this student population and their families at the current place of employ. What began as casual conversations with students on their needs grew to conversations with colleagues about what could be done to close the gap of recognition and support for these students and their families, and then grew to more formalized recognition and support. The Ignatian charism of *cura personalis* framed the promise of more robust intervention and the
ongoing present day-to-day work. It is the care for the whole person and for all students with intentionality and equity that continues to drive the efforts of the researcher. The overall intent is to impact institutional policy to recognize and equitably serve with intentionality this population of parents/guardians is an extremely important component. The process has been an arduous one fraught with anxiety, sacrifice, and growth of self-awareness and leadership skills.

Dickel (2011) offers a taxonomy of reflective practices to which the researcher frequently referred. The researcher subscribed to a combination of primarily deliberative and critical reflection practices. Deliberative reflection with the emphasis on research, experience, input from others, and personal values fits well with the perspective of a constructivist world view (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the multiple perspectives that give voice to phenomenological inquiry. Deliberative reflection considers organizational culture, relationships with families and students, in addition to the researcher’s own behaviors as the research study unfolded. Deliberative reflection, in tandem with the Best Interests of the Student Model that framed the study, reflected the researcher’s drive and purpose. In addition, ethical decision making hallmarked by the ethic of critique and community, is consonant with the researcher’s world view, best interests of the student, and deliberative reflection. Critical reflection addresses cura personalis as well in the focus on understanding and improving the situation of underserved groups and social action (Dickel, 2011). The purpose of the DIP was to inform policy and best practices of the organization, to address the social reproduction perpetuated by inaction within the context of that community, and help impact the inequity of service to this population.

During the process of data gathering and coding, the act of memoing and practicing
epoche were an expression of both deliberative and critical reflection resulting in moments of the researcher becoming aware of blind spots or over identification with the narrative of a co-researcher.

The findings of the study have supported its original intent, which was to understand the experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students and how the institution could create more robust support and accessible pathways for engagement. In addition, the intent was to exercise this knowledge at the meso or organizational level of the Jesuit high school where the study was conducted and to encourage similar effort at the macro-level of the Jesuit Western Province and Jesuit School Network at large.

Summary

The positive influence of parent/guardian engagement on educational outcomes for a child along all points of the educational pipeline has been well documented (Bjork et al., 2012; Coleman, 1988; Ferrara, 2015; Hashmi, 2014; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jehangir et al., 2015; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). Parents/guardians who have not obtained a bachelor’s degree in the United States, are absent of a frame of reference for effective engagement in the formal educational processes of secondary school course selection, college entrance examinations (SAT/ACT), college selection, and matriculation. This void of experience leaves the student without the guidance of their parent/guardian and may be reflected in how the parent/guardian experiences engagement in that student’s educational journey.

Parent/guardian engagement has been conceptualized as frequency of attending what Stitt and Brooks (2014) label school-centric activities such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and volunteering on campus. Parent/guardian
engagement has been expanded to include expectation, encouragement, and emotional support (Epstein, 2001, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), but these same studies have been criticized for an over-dependence on White, middle-class parent/guardian populations and focus on higher standardized test scores and higher GPAs (Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Parent/guardian engagement may be reflected by the level of social capital the parent/guardian possesses and is able to exercise (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Coleman, 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005). Support in the literature regarding parent/guardian engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students as a function of social capital in Catholic secondary school settings is largely absent. Too little is known about what kind of knowledge parent/guardians of first-generation students have and what factors facilitate or hinder their engagement.

This phenomenological study brought into the conversation how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement through the lens of social capital that was previously absent in the literature. Most research on parent/guardian engagement has been conducted in public school settings and post-secondary settings (Atherton, 2014; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Choy, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Dennis et al., 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Epstein, 2001, 2011; Hashmi, 2014; Jehangir et al., 2015; Tennies, 2017). This research expanded on that examination extending it into the private, Catholic secondary school setting.

Grounded in the Ignatian charism of cura personalis, ethical leadership, and best interests of the student, the study broadened the researcher’s ability to be a more effective leader and inform the creation of best practices to serve this parent/guardian population at the
site where the study was conducted and with the intent of extending best practices to the Jesuit Western Province and Jesuit School Network at large.

The following chapter presents the body of literature relevant to parents/guardians of first-generation students and engagement. How engagement is experienced as a function of social capital and the factors influencing engagement such as SES, language, and work schedules are discussed. Chapters following the review of the literature present the methodology, findings, and implications.
The phrase parent/guardian engagement has been used to describe the various ways in which parents/guardians support their child’s learning in school (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Durand and Secakusuma (2019) describe an evolution of the definition of involvement from, “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication, involving student learning and other school activities” (p. 4) to one of partnership between parents/guardians and the school to engagement emphasizing a socially constructed process intended to build reciprocal relationships rather than focus on specific school-centric activities. The existing literature on parent/guardian engagement emphasizes the importance of engagement all along the educational pipeline of the child (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005). Research exploring engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students reflects a perception of first-generation parents/guardians by their child and by institutions as being less supportive of educational goals, not being able to offer instrumental support, an inability to act as a source of vital important information regarding academic choices and direction, and lack of engagement with the school (Billson & Terry, 1982; Dennis et al., 2005; Mehta et al., 2011).

Much of the literature is rooted in a deficit thinking or deficit orientation model of parents/guardians of first-generation students. Deficit thinking or deficit orientation reflects the bias that low-income, families of color, first-generation, or born outside of the United States obstruct their children’s educational outcomes because they are deficient in intelligence, normative cultural knowledge and skills, and lack motivation to support their child and to be engaged in their child’s educational experience (Rios-Aguilar et al.,
2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Yosso, 2005). This important feature of deficit thinking contributes to the reproduction of inequity of experience and access in educational institutions for underrepresented students and their parents/guardians in favor of the dominant culture of instruction (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). There is a growing body of literature demonstrating greater inclusivity of the experiences of parents/guardians of first-generation students and the many characteristics that attend this status that acknowledges a social capital lens can help better understand parents/guardians of first-generation students and educational opportunity (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004).

To better understand how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement through social capital, this review focused on the following topics that are related in the literature: first-generation characteristics and that of their parents/guardians, social capital, and parent/guardian engagement. First, there is an overview of the demographics of first-generation students and parents/guardians, the perceptions of those characteristics, and import of first-generation status. Second, a review of social capital and how it relates to the development and exercise of engagement followed by a review of parent/guardian engagement, its evolution, and the barriers to engagement. The intersection of ethical leadership and the Best Interests of the Student Model is also reviewed followed by some existing opportunities for parents at Catholic high schools, and an organized overview is provided.
First-Generation Characteristics

First-generation does not have a standard definition in the literature. Typically, it means the parent/guardian as having no college experience (Billson & Terry, 1982). In contrast, federal TRIO programs, a term coined for a series of federal educational opportunity programs (Upward Bound in 1964, Talent Search in 1965, and Student Support Service in 1968) for low-income, underrepresented populations define first-generation as neither parent/guardian having completed an undergraduate degree (Jehangir et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Combining the definitions resulted in a more dimensionalized, more inclusive conceptualization of the first-generation student.

First-generation students vary significantly from their non-first-generation peers, and may do so in one or more of the following ways: racial, ethnic, SES, academic preparation, immigration status, and role of the parent/guardian in the entire academic process leading to college selection process (Jehangir et al., 2015). In other words, they are more likely to be students of color, non-English speaking or English as an acquired language, matriculate to college later, or work to contribute to their family’s economic well-being in addition to attending college (Atherton, 2014; Ceja, 2006; Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015; Terenzini et al., 1996).

First-generation status, even among academically well-prepared students, in and of itself is considered a risk factor all along the educational pipeline and a critical predictor of their college expectations, persistence, and degree attainment (Choy et al., 2000; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Sy et al., 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996). Academic achievement, performance of the student, and taking college entrance exams tend to vary
with level of parent/guardian education as well (Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017; VanSciver, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). A report by the U.S. Department of Education (2019) reports statistics on the impact of first-generation status on college attainment. The report relies on three data sources; the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002), the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/09), and the 2008/12 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:8/12).

The study surveyed a nationally representative sample of high school sophomores from public, Catholic and other private schools, totaling 15,362 students. Among the high school sophomores in this 2002 study, who enrolled in college, 24% were from first-generation families compared to 34% who were from continuing-education families. Nationwide, first-generation students in 2011-12 account for 33% of students enrolled in postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This represents a decrease from 37% (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). College choice and matriculation may also be influenced by family roles and expectations that require close proximity to family or because the student contributes to the family income (Jehangir et al., 2015). Data on the number of students who are first-generation in high school is inferred by the percentage of students enrolled in postsecondary environments who identify as such. A search on this population specific to Jesuit high schools yielded only that 26% of all Jesuit high school students are, as referred to on the website, minority students (Jesuit School Network, 2019).
Parents and Guardians

Parents/guardians of first-generation students are described in the literature mainly in the context of research conducted on the student population. This study used the definition of parent/guardians of first-generation students that encompasses parents/guardians with no college experience (Billson & Terry, 1982) and parents/guardians with some college, including an associate’s degree as under the definition in the federal TRIO program, and foreign nationals who have earned degrees in another country. This broader definition included parents/guardians whose level of formal education varies from attending grade school, completing grade school, attending high school, graduating from high school, having some experience with post-secondary education (including an associate’s degree) but not earning a bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution in the United States.

Socioeconomic Status

The parents/guardians of first-generation students are frequently low-income, of color, non-English speaking, and born outside of the United States (Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015) and parents/guardians of first-generation students frequently work in low-paying jobs. Redford and Mulvaney Hoyer (2017), report that in 2002, 27% of high school sophomores whose parents/guardians were first-generation made $20,000 a year or less. Parent/guardian occupation and income also impact the student’s college success (Jehangir et al., 2015) with 47% of students who were sophomores in 2002 enrolled in some postsecondary institution but had not obtained a credential (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). Jehangir et al., (2015) report that between 1999 and 2010 college enrollment right after high school for students from low-income and middle-
income families was at 52%. That is 30 percentage points lower than students from high-income families. Parent/guardian income is critical to understanding educational and social mobility (Jehangir et al., 2015). Parent/guardian income impacts access to resources, the perception of education, educational aspirations, and attainment (Hashmi, 2014; Jehangir et al., 2015; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Tennies, 2017). The lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students and that of parents/guardians of continuing-education students, and majority families, brings up the conversation on cultural capital, funds of knowledge, and social capital.

Cultural Capital, Funds of Knowledge, and Cultural Wealth

Cultural capital, “cultural goods” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 30) according to Bourdieu (1986) is conceptualized as three types: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital is acquired over time and permeates the person’s way of thinking and character or in Bourdieuean terms, *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) inclusive of language. Objectified capital refers to material objects: art, books, or instruments. If the objectified capital is consonant with the dominant culture [of instruction] it may facilitate access to social capital. If it is too dissonant from the dominant culture of instruction it can be used as a path to exclude its holders (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). Institutionalized capital is formal recognition by an institution of a person’s cultural capital usually in the form of academic credentials. Institutionalized capital can be converted to economic capital, and then into social capital resulting in increased social mobility (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986).

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) used cultural capital to explain the disparity in academic achievement among children in France in the 1960s and proposed that the greater the
distance between the cultural capital of the family and the culture of instruction the
greater the negative value ascribed to that culture by school structure. Yosso (2005)
expands the concept of cultural capital to a cultural wealth model. The cultural wealth
model takes an empowerment-and strengths-based perspective of the accumulation of
family, community, and cultural practices, especially of underrepresented groups or
populations. The deficit orientation lens on populations outside of the dominant culture
and language of instruction creates barriers to parent/guardian engagement and
communicates a recognition of the illegitimacy of that culture (Bourdieu, 1977). Yosso
(2005) and Lewis-Charp, Yu, and Friedlander (2004) expand upon this with the notion
that all aspects of cultural capital may be used as a means to understand the ways
parents/guardians may or may not be able to access cultural funds that will enhance their
child’s ability to access [cultural] experiences, books, museums, travel, film, or
standardized test preparation for example, and by extension the social networks that
influence academic success and upward mobility.

Yosso’s (2006) more nuanced conceptualization of cultural capital challenges that
of Bourdieuean cultural capital theory in that it stated the Bourdieuean theory rested on
cultural capital defined by “White, middle class values, and is more limited than wealth-
one’s accumulated assets and resources” (p.77). Yosso (2005), using the lens of Critical
Race Theory (CRT; Solórzano, 1997), asserts there are six forms of cultural capital,
aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Critical Race
Theory challenges the traditional interpretation of cultural capital by shifting the lens
from a deficit view to a recognition of the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities
possessed by marginalized groups. Although the tenets of CRT focus on the centrality of
race and institutionalized racism, it could be argued that the theory’s additional tenets of the centrality of experiential knowledge, commitment to social justice, and challenge to dominant ideologies can be applied to help understand the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students many of whom are from communities of color, are born outside of the United States, and have English as an acquired language.

The theoretical framework of funds of knowledge, the totality of experiences and home-based knowledge (Litton & Martin, 2004), was used primarily to document the wealth of knowledge that exists in economically marginalized Latino households (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992; Gonzalez et al., 2005). It constituted a challenge to the deficit thinking orientation that characterized much of educational bias regarding low-income Latino students and their families (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Funds of knowledge have since been applied to the embedded competence and knowledge of many underrepresented populations and the educational bias regarding those populations (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Because a family’s funds of knowledge may not include college knowledge and navigational facility with formal educational structures it is theorized to be tied to cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Funds of knowledge has some commonalities with social and cultural capital because (Bourdieu, 1986; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) it represents an exchange among networks of households or a community that can access benefits for its members that would not be achievable without it. It is important to note that funds of knowledge and cultural capital should not be conflated. Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) cautions that melding the terms intimates that everyone has cultural capital and so sidesteps the inequities of access in education and social reproduction that can clearly
relate to parent/guardian experience of engagement (Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). From a funds of knowledge perspective, the engagement of school structures with parents/guardians of first-generation students is essential to deconstruct existing deficit orientation. It then is incumbent on the school to recognize parents/guardians as unique sources of insight and support and to create effective pathways for engagement. Engagement and social capital are socially constructed, and it can be argued that if parents/guardians perceive opportunities for engagement, that engagement will increase the social capital of families who have been on the margins.

Social Capital

Social capital can be defined by its function (Coleman, 1988). It denotes connections within and among actors and social networks and it is the product of the relationships among actors and some aspect of social structures. Social capital is productive, providing access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the achievement of stated individual or collective goals that could not be possible in its absence (Bjork et al., 2012; Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). There are two main theorists in social capital, Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized social capital as privileged knowledge, resources, and information attained through social networks. Coleman (1988) noted that social capital is passed through families to children: “Social capital is the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organizations and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child” (as cited in Gofen, 2009). The family and the community then play a key role in the development of social capital. Coleman’s (1988) theory of social capital, most frequently used in educational research, explains that one of the
resources of social capital is the resource of information channels (Ferrara, 2015), and
that in its most fundamental sense, is dictated by level of education of the parent/guardian
(Bjork et al., 2012; Ferrara, 2015; Gofen, 2009; Plagens, 2011). Plagens (2011) not there
is a cycle in social capital where the basic skills of education, (reading, writing, and
math) create access to social capital and in turn, social capital drives success.

The family is the context for generating and accumulating social capital, and
according to Coleman (1988), social capital and all its benefits of access is rooted in the
education level of the parent/guardian, it follows that parents/guardians of first-
generation students do not possess the same level of social capital as parents/guardians of
non-first-generation students (Bjork et al., 2012; Gofen, 2009; Plagens, 2011; Soria &
Stebleton, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). In other words, parents/guardians of first-
generation students are not able to pass on the social capital requisite for success in
education and beyond, because they did not earn a bachelor’s degree (Gofen, 2009; Soria
& Stebleton, 2011). The cascade of consequences for the student is they are less likely to
be in academic and social experiences that foster success in college, engage in study
groups, interact with faculty, or participate in extracurricular activities, or use support
services (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In other words, they do not have the same level of social
capital as their non-first-generation peers (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Stanton-Salazar
(2004) counters this point of view by noting individuals who find themselves embedded
in social networks (in this case the Jesuit high school environment) where they may have
greater access to “…supportive contexts and to institutional agents and resources” (p. 21)
may mitigate the negative effects of parent/guardian educational level and promote
academic success for the student.
Social capital has been used in the literature as a lens through which to explore and understand parent/guardian engagement (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Ferrara, 2015; Gofen, 2009; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Parent/guardian engagement between the school structures and the home promotes the relationships and information channels that are hallmarks of social capital. To be successful in the school sphere families need to have the resources to engage with the school. Many parents/guardians of first-generation students may be unfamiliar with the language of instruction and information from the school, low SES, have limited access to or facility with technology, and inflexible or unpredictable work schedules (Ferrara, 2015). Beyond the family context, social capital is accessed in relationships between the parent/guardian and adults related to the school, and students and adults in the school and their peers. High social capital individuals are more willing to belong to and participate in school groups, community groups, or associations where the relationship between them increases their social capital (Plagens, 2011). Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes an additional network role in accessing social capital. The role of protective agents. A protective agent, according to Stanton-Salazar (1997) is a family member or community member, “…who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities” (p.6). These protective agents have the conceptual tools and college knowledge that the parent/guardian lacks and that facilitate access to social networks and influence upward educational and social mobility (Ceja, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2004).

It is important to note that inherent in school settings, through the lens of social capital, there is a power asymmetry (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). Stanton-Salazar
(2004) notes that academic success is contingent on engagement with actors who control access to institutional resources necessary for educational achievement and success. Durand and Secakusuma (2019) state that schools have taken the lead in defining what effective parent/guardian engagement is and that there is a power asymmetry between parents/guardians of first-generation students, teachers, and the school itself (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). It is important to address the issues of power asymmetry especially in the school context, “…where the voices of diverse families are often compromised or silenced by dominant middle-class ideologies, ethnic minorities or immigrant status, low-income, limited English proficiency, or cultural discontinuity and mistrust” (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019, p. 3). Stanton-Salazar (2004) goes further with the concept of power asymmetry and social capital by describing forms of institutional support are not easily accessible to low-income, first-generation families of color, who may be born outside the United States. The author posits that schools use a deficit orientation, the privilege of class, and race to maintain this disparity in power and social capital. Stanton-Salazar states, “…the concept of social capital highlights the common practice of discrimination and exclusion – a particular relation between those who have power, capital, and privilege and those who don’t” (p. 29).

Social capital acts as an invisible resource for understanding the nuances of and expectations of the high school and collegiate cultures (Jehangir et al., 2015). Social capital, emphasizing the role of creating and sustaining relationships with institutional structures (teachers, counselors, the school itself) is linked to cultural capital and the system of reproduction in the dominant culture of instruction (Bourdieu, 1977; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). The linkage among social capital, cultural capital,
and funds of knowledge is a common understanding of culture as dynamic, and experienced in everyday life (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). The dynamic context of the school community and the exercise of social and cultural capital in it by parents/guardians of first-generation students impacts the degree and nature of parent/guardian engagement.

Parent/Guardian Engagement

Parent/guardian engagement is a nuanced, multidimensional concept and has been used in the literature interchangeably with parent/guardian involvement. In Epstein’s (2001) foundational work, effective parent/guardian engagement consists of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. In the author’s later work, she further develops the construct by including family-school relations as a Venn diagram of intersecting influences of the interests of the school, families, and community. In this iteration, Epstein emphasizes that these spheres interact with the historical, organizational, and interpersonal factors influencing involvement and the student adding more nuance and inclusiveness to the concept of parent/guardian engagement.

Parent/guardian engagement has been regarded as an important element in education and positively linked to multiple indicators of success in school: student achievement, teacher ratings of student competence, grades, achievement test scores, lower drop-out rates, higher on-time high school graduation rates, and higher rates of participation in advanced courses (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Specifically, for parents/guardians of first-generation students, the level of engagement has also been linked to educational aspirations and
attainment of their student (Jehangir et al., 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006). There is support in the literature that parent/guardian encouragement on educational aspirations and schoolwork was more important than family income (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

The deficit thinking lens on parents/guardians of first-generation students has described this population as lacking in encouragement and involvement in their child’s educational journey, ill-equipped to provide vital information on formal educational issues, or emotional support (Billson & Terry, 1982; Tennies, 2017; Yosso, 2005), putting their child at risk for dropping out at many points along the educational pipeline (Swecker et al., 2013). Because of their inexperience with navigating formal educational systems, these parents/guardians have also been described as trusting educators to make the appropriate educational decisions for their child, including course selection and level of rigor and feel they have little to contribute in this arena (Ceja, 2006; VanSeiver, 2006). In addition, they may be unsure of how to advocate for their child in formal educational settings and this may impact their school-centric engagement in this aspect of their child’s educational experience (Ceja, 2006; Jehangir et al., 2015; Litton & Martin, 2009).

Despite the challenges parents/guardians of first-generation students face, they are credited with having particularly powerful voices in their student’s decision making on college due to the emphasis some place on the importance of family and remaining close knit (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Jehangir et al., (2015) notes that family plays a vital role in the educational journey of the first-generation student. First-generation parents/guardian demonstrate engagement and support through academic encouragement, aspirations for educational attainment, support of academic preparation, paying for
standardized tests, or driving a student to [standardized] test sites or other opportunities (Ceja, 2006; Dennis et al., 2005; Hashmi, 2014; Jehangir et al., 2015) but that students tend to rely on extended family or community members who have gone to college (protective agents) for guidance on academic matters rather than seek the counsel of their parents.

The engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students in their student’s education may be constrained by factors that frequently attend first-generation status: lower SES, fewer resources, less parental integration into professional workforce, and less familiarity with the college-going process (Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). In addition, Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2005) note that engagement is socially constructed and shaped reciprocally by parent/guardian perceptions of their role (Martin, 2009) and about what they are expected to do in relation to their student’s education. The authors go on to state that parent/guardian expectations of the school, home-based school support, sense of agency in formal education, prior personal experience with engagement, current experience with their child’s school, and perceived opportunities for engagement are socially constructed as well (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This socially constructed role may also be influenced by income, level of familiarity with the language of instruction, and family and cultural obligations (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2007) and experienced as barriers.

**Barriers**

Barriers to parent/guardian engagement have been conceptualized as emanating from the parents/guardians: low SES, lack of familiarity with formal educational systems,
work obligation, family obligation, race or ethnic identity, and language and may represent another example of a deficit orientation lens on underrepresented populations including parents/guardians of first-generation students. While these factors may indeed impact a parent/guardian’s ability to engage in school-based activities related to parent/guardian engagement, Ferrara (2015) notes that institutions can encourage parent/guardian engagement by cutting through what the author calls “educanese” language of education and data literacy that confront parents/guardians of first-generation students. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) adapt Epstein’s (2001) framework of parent/guardian engagement as overlapping spheres of family, school, and community and elaborate on barriers in each sphere.

Parents/guardians who have a low level of belief in their ability to help their child in that arena and may not have a facility with the language of instruction may avoid school contact (Ceja, 2006; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Martin, 2009). The parent/guardian perception of implicit and explicit invitations from the school is a factor as well (Epstein, 2011; Hashmi, 2014; Martin, 2009; Tennies, 2017). Invitations that demonstrate a disconnect between words and actions are a barrier to engagement if the parent/guardian think teachers and school structures do not value parent/guardian engagement, especially, the authors note, that secondary education is often perceived as highly bureaucratic and unwelcoming (Epstein, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). Explicit efforts to engage parents/guardians need to take into consideration the barriers of educational difference, culture, marital status, and employment status (Epstein, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Tennies, 2017). Examples of such explicit efforts are the door-to-door invitations conducted by teachers and staff for parent-school partnerships.
(term used in the study) in Tennessee housing projects (Reece et al., 2015), living room outreach conducted by school personnel noted in Martin (2009), a parent/guardian support program for low-income Latino families including a parent/guardian liaison and English classes (Reece et al., 2015), and holding information sessions in local churches (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

Barriers of language, immigration, structural barriers, and exclusionary communication (Lewis-Charp et al., 2004) may all hinder or limit the engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Stanton-Salazar (1997) noted that these factors prohibit the development of a trusting relationship between parent/guardians of first-generation students and other marginalized parent populations and school agents (teachers, counselors, middle-class peer parents). Explicit invitations by school structures to parents/guardians (Reece et al., 2015), living room outreach (Martin, 2009), and having parent/guardian informational events about financial aid or college deadlines on weekends instead of weekdays or evenings or at local churches (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008) and in languages other than English, may help build a trusting relationship with parents/guardians. Trust is an important component of parent/guardian-school interactions and must be nurtured in order to create effective parent/guardian engagement (Beycioglu et al., 2013). When parents/guardians trust in school structures, and when these structures communicate appreciation for parents/guardians, interest in school-centric participation increases (Lazar, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). In turn, this socially constructed, trusting relationship offers access to social capital which may have “far reaching effects on their children’s
future opportunities and choices, and educational achievement” (Bjork et al., 2012, p. 246).

A conversation on parent/guardian engagement would be lacking if the impact of social class and ethnicity were not included. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) suggest there is an essential bias of White middle-class values that are blind to diversity in education. Lewis-Charp et al. (2004) note in their case study of student school engagement of Mexican-descent youth, that cultural-ethnic-racial differences may not create barriers to learning and engagement with the institution, but the “borders” (p. 109) between a predominantly White, middle-class give rise to prejudice and exclusionary communication. It is another outcome of a deficit orientation. This can be extended to the parents/guardians of first-generation students. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) suggest that parent/guardian engagement efforts by institutions benefit this same group (White middle-class) who display high participation and thereby perpetuate marginalization of this population and social reproduction. It is important to recognize that family culture enhances the opportunity for parent/guardian engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004) through establishing trust between the home and school spheres. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) also mention the gendered nature of parent/guardian engagement. The authors contend that parent/guardian engagement falls under the mother’s (female’s) purview, and fails to consider how culture, economics, and family obligation may constrain engagement. Martin (2009) emphasizes if school structures (school leadership, teachers, school culture) fail to recognize the multi-dimensional landscape of diverse parent/guardian populations, they are only seeing part of their lived experience. It should be noted that engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation
FIRST-GENERATION PARENTS/GUARDIANS

students, primarily conceptualized by the work of Epstein (2001a, 2011b) and Hoover-Dempsey (2005), has been criticized for overemphasizing school-based involvement, relying on middle-class White definition of parent/guardian engagement, and an overemphasis on standardized test scores (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Finally, the social capital role of protective agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) may not necessarily act as a barrier (italics added for emphasis) to parent/guardian engagement, but more of a deterrent (italics added for emphasis) or another tool. The parent/guardian of a first-generation student may rely on the protective agent to transmit vital college information to the student, and may feel they are thereby absolved, or relieved of the responsibilities of this role. The role and effectiveness of the protective agent in the college navigation process may also be an expression of how families use funds of knowledge as a “currency of exchange” through social networks, the context of cultural capital, and social capital drawing on networks of community resources. School structures need to recognize the nuanced, multi-dimensional characteristics of this population when considering constructing opportunities for parent/guardian engagement.

Opportunities for Parent Engagement

Parent engagement has been demonstrated in the literature to be pivotal in the aspiration and attainment of educational goals for students at all points along the educational pipeline (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005) but programmatic support for first-generation students either do not have a parent/guardian engagement component, find it challenging to make it effective, or establish a number of points for mandatory parent/guardian engagement (Hashmi, 2014). Epstein (2011) notes that parent/guardian engagement tends to decline across levels
unless the institution develops and implements appropriate practices specific to that institution’s parent/guardian population.

This institutional effort is attended in part by discontinuing the use of the traditional definition of engagement as parent/guardian-institution onsite contact and the frequency of that contact which favors more affluent and frequently White parents (Epstein, 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). In addition, realizing the critical role school environment has on engagement, and embracing a strengths-based orientation instead of a deficit thinking orientation regarding parents/guardian engagement (Epstein, 2011; Martin, 2009; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). Hashmi (2015) notes that there are a few postsecondary settings that incorporate parent/guardian engagement in first-generation student programs by making it a mandatory component for the student to participate and benefit from the program. The author also notes the difficulty of maintaining parent/guardian engagement without making it an explicit requirement.

At the secondary school level there are examples of institutionalized opportunity for parent/guardian engagement in the public sector such as the federally funded programs Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), TRIO, and state-specific funded programs such as Families United in Leadership (FUEL) in Massachusetts. It should be noted that parent engagement is mandatory in TRIO, and the private, non-profit FUEL has the monetary incentive of contributions to a college fund savings account (Hashmi, 2014). In the private Catholic secondary school arena, although there is no consistent framework for the engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students, there are a few examples of idiosyncratic institutionalized opportunity for parent/guardian engagement. The examples are in Saint Ignatius High School in San...
Francisco, California, Brophy College Preparatory School in Phoenix, Arizona, and the all-boys Catholic high school in an urban area of the Jesuit Western Province where this research was conducted. Information on parent engagement was gathered from the school websites.

The Role of Leadership in This Study

This study focused on the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students with engagement as it informs development of best practices to serve this parent/guardian sub-population. Effective, ethical leadership rooted in and inseparable from the Ignatian charism of *cura personalis* is integral in developing and implementing these practices. Leadership has been described as the exercise of influence on individuals or in a group context (Johnson, 2015). It is that specific relationship between leaders and followers whereby leaders establish vision, direction, obligation, exercise power, and take more responsibility than followers (Ciulla, 2004; Johnson, 2015). Ciulla (2004) stated that ethics is central to this relationship, and by understanding the ethics of this relationship, leadership and its impact may be better understood. Ethical leadership offers a lens through which this relationship may be examined and how it applies to challenges in the development of best practices supporting parents/guardians of first-generation students in an all-boys Jesuit secondary school environment in Southern California.

Ethical leadership hallmarked by duty, justice, and moral obligation (Bass, 1998; Ciulla, 2004; Johnson, 2015) serves well addressing this real-life problem. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) discuss ethical leadership in education, with its moral imperative and (Ciulla, 2004; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007), calls for a focus on Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Stefkovich and Begley (2007) note that the
term best interests communicates “overall well-being of stakeholders, the preeminence of educational goals, and the maximization of long-term benefits” (p.214). The evidence is consistent that parent/guardian engagement in a student’s educational experience significantly contributes to student educational success and psychological well-being (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Tennies, 2017). Parent/guardian engagement, by extension, is a direct influence on best interests of the student and it is important to emphasize that “this ideal of best interest must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders” (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p. 212). Best interests is exercised within the context of each school community and it is evident that it is incumbent upon school leadership to engage in two-way communication (Epstein, 2011; Ferrara, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Tennies, 2017) and to partner with parents/guardians of first-generation students as an underserved population with intentionality using an eclectic approach (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Epstein, 2011; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017) enhancing parent/guardian experience and by extension the best interests of the student.

Stefkovich and Begley (2007) note ethical leadership that truly and intentionally serves and reflects the needs of marginalized populations requires ongoing self-reflection, and a willingness to understand the experience and needs of the others in their care. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) trace the concept of best interests of the student to legal proceedings involving child custody and child labor. The authors created a model to address the multiple factors that are embedded in a context to help determine best interest. There are three elements to this model: rights, responsibility, and respect.
Rights: Essential in determining what is the best interest of the individual. These rights include the fundamental right to an education in an environment free from the threat of bodily harm, and to be treated with dignity, and equality (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007).

Responsibility: The community has moral responsibilities for the individual in the context of that community (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004), informed by Kant’s moral imperative and Rawls justice as fairness (Johnson, 2015), connect ethical decision making with the responsibility a person has in making moral choices. The authors contend a just, moral decision is one that is fair regardless of the person’s social status.

Respect: Respect is the cornerstone of ethical behavior and reciprocal interactions “symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships, even those, such as teacher and student… commonly seen as unequal” (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, p. 204). It is ethical leadership in education in conversation and interconnected with best interests model and the Ignatian charism of cura personalis that will guide this phenomenological inquiry.

There are several key elements within each area the authors discuss (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004) and given the nature of this study, the focus will be on responsibility and its relationship to the Ignatian charism, cura personalis. The authors note that school leadership must “promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004, p. 198) and thereby create a caring community. The authors postulate that community, the context of the school, becomes another facet of ethical decision making and the space in
which all the other aspects of ethical decision making are practiced in the dynamic
environment of a school (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). The context of the school
community shapes parent/guardian engagement (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008) because it
is a socially constructed communal process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Stefkovich &
O’Brien, 2004) and involves the recognition, access, and execution of social capital
(Gibson et al., 2004; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016).

Rowan-Kenyon et al., (2008) suggest the parent/guardian involvement between
and among actors in the context of the community (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004) of the
school represents reciprocity that shapes that relationship. Rogosic and Baranovic (2016)
pose the effectiveness of the relationship between and among family members and school
structures, representing social capital, depend on if it serves the actor or actors involved
in the achievement of an agreed upon goal. Yosso (2005) supports this point of view by
noting cultural and social capital can be acquired from and/or through an individual’s
family or through school structures. If effective pathways are not made accessible
through these structures, social reproduction is then maintained by limiting access of
marginalized populations to capital through those same institutional structures.

In the language of the Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & O’Brien,
2007) community (context of the school) is “the moral responsibility of educators to
engage in communal processes” (p. 200). The reciprocal influence of parent involvement
with the school community falls within this responsibility of communal process
(Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004), and it is the responsibility of school structures to be
proactive and explicit in outreach to parents/guardians encouraging engagement with
school-centric opportunities. It is also the responsibility of school structures to recognize
and value home-based activities (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008) in order to create opportunities for access to social capital. The authors suggest several recommendations on how to communicate valuation of home-based behavior through multiple modes of communication, accessible language, and offering school-centric opportunities on weekends when working parent’s schedules may make attendance possible.

Responsibility, according to Stefkovich and Begley (2007), “emanates from an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care” (p. 218), and context is critical to its exercise.

The call to lead is fundamental in a Jesuit educational environment and in that, is the mandate to lead ethically and address injustices that present themselves. In the researcher’s role of college counselor, ethical leadership, best interests model, and the Ignatian charism *cura personalis*, broadened the researcher’s perspective on the multiple stakeholders involved and how to address the complex interaction of their needs in relationship to the organization. This intersection continues to enhance and inform the researcher’s capabilities to be more effective in a leadership role as it continues to unfold in response to the needs of the parents/guardians of first-generation students and their student. There is no law dictating this type of intentional service, in the Jesuit School Network, for this previously underserved population but the hallmarks of ethical leadership, best interests, and the Ignatian core value of *cura personalis* provide the strong encouragement and the direction to do so. The moral nature of the reciprocal relationship between parents/guardians of first-generation students and school structures necessitates an exploration of ethical leadership.
Ethical Leadership

There are several perspectives leaders may use to make ethical decisions. Ethical problems are dynamic, ambiguous, complicated, and attended by social and organizational structures and pressures (Trevino & Brown, 2004). Understanding that this dynamic ambiguity exists, effectively addressing ethical challenges can be facilitated by applying more than one ethical system to better understand them (Johnson, 2015).

Ethical leadership emphasizes duty, responsibility, and observation of and respect for the rights of others (Johnson, 2015). Ethical leadership is consonant with the Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and with the Ignatian charism of *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis* conveys an educational experience respectful of each student’s unique identity and needs, attending to their spiritual, moral and intellectual development, and for the comfort of each one (Xavier University, 2019). The charism and practice of *cura personalis*, by definition, crosses all cultural and economic demarcations and includes all the people in our care, inclusive of our parent body. *Cura personalis* focuses on the human dignity of and respect for each individual (Xavier University, 2019) and is congruent with the frameworks of Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) which communicates the centrality of life experience. It communicates that marginalized people are competent and their life experiences have given them knowledge and that knowledge is inherently valuable.

The Best Interests of the Students Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) pertains to ethical leadership in education and may be seen as a direct extension of it. The Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) in its fundamental sense
communicates a genuine regard and responsibility for the student and so for the student’s family as well. It emerges as a major influence on ethical leadership and ethical decision making in education (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and because of its characteristics of care and responsibility can clearly be construed as relating to the Ignatian charism of *cura personalis*. Ethical leadership that truly serves and reflects the needs of marginalized populations requires educational leaders to participate in ongoing self-reflection and to cultivate a desire to understand the experience and needs of the others in their care. The theoretical lens of Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) along with the Ignatian charism of *cura personalis*, offer a structure and an argument for examining how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in a Jesuit secondary school environment.

Stefkovich and Begley’s (2007) discussion of Best Interests of the Student Model echoes the complex, ambiguous nature of ethical decision making, and the important influence of context (Trevino & Brown, 2004). The authors recognize that ethical decisions in the educational context require bringing to bear not just professional judgement within that context but encompasses the ethics of justice, care, critique, and community (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). This eclectic approach, under the overarching umbrella of *cura personalis* not only enriches the repertoire of ethical decision-making skills, but directly relates to the ‘why’ of pursuing an understanding of how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement.

The ethics are nested in each other (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and inextricably interconnected with *cura personalis*. The authors cite Starrat (1994) in the recitation of
this relationship among the ethics that inform ethical decision making in an educational setting:

The ethic of justice needs the profound commitment to the dignity of the individual person; the ethic of caring needs the larger attention to social order and fairness if it is to avoid an entirely idiosyncratic involvement in social policy; the ethic of critique requires an ethic of caring if it is to avoid the cynical and depressing ravings of the habitual malcontent; the ethic of justice requires the profound social analysis of the ethic of critique in order to move beyond the naïve fine-tuning of social arrangements in a social system with inequities built into the very structures by justice is supposed to be measured. (p. 215)

All of which are guided by the model’s elements of rights, responsibility, and respect, and again, in a Jesuit setting, subsumed under the Ignatian charism of cura personalis. Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) must be at the heart of ethical decision making for educational leaders, for serving parents/guardians of first-generation students with intent, and it can be argued, that in a Jesuit setting, cura personalis is at the heart of best interest.

Inherent in the model of best interests of the student (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) is that all decisions have a moral component and moral consequences impacting multiple stakeholders (Elm & Radin, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). Ethical leadership practiced with the model of best interests of the student (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) promotes equity, social justice, and explicit intentionality in the engagement of parents/guardians of first-generation students among leadership and school structures. Noting that our schools and society at large are becoming increasingly diverse it is of
greater importance that there is a valuation of parent/guardian engagement beyond the school, and community (Epstein, 2001, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Tennies, 2017). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) echo Sergiovanni (1992) regarding the need for school leaders to promote equity, justice, and more democratic schools where “every parent, teacher, student, administrator, and other member of the school must be treated with the same equality, dignity, and fair play” (pp. 105-106).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the essence of the lived experience of how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in a private Jesuit secondary school setting. The positive impact of parent/guardian engagement at all points along the educational pipeline has been demonstrated in the literature (Bjork et al., 2012; Hoover-Demspey et al., 2005; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005). Parent/guardian engagement has been defined as frequency of attending school-based activities such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, volunteering or membership in parent associations, learning at home, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001, 2011). Engagement has been linked to enhanced educational outcomes, educational aspirations and attainment, and psychological well-being (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Much of the literature on parents/guardians of first-generation students is rooted in deficit thinking (Rios et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004, Stitt & Brooks, 2014), but there is movement in the literature that is more inclusive of the experiences of this population, the characteristics that attend this status, and the impact of social capital.
and educational mobility (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014).

Parents/guardians of first-generation students, defined in this study as not having achieved a bachelor’s degree in the United States, are more likely to be low-income, of color, non-English speaking or English as an acquired language, born outside of the United States, and work in low-paying jobs (Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015). Parent/guardian income is directly related to educational mobility and begins the conversation on the import of social capital (Jehangir et al., 2015).

Coleman’s (1988) social capital theory, is most frequently used in educational research and is employed in this study. Coleman’s (1988) theory emphasizes social capital is passed through families and through community organizations that will help the child. Education is one of the fundamental resources of information and dictates access and degree of social capital obtained and exercised (Bjork et al., 2012; Ferrara, 2015; Gofen, 2009; Plagens, 2011). Parents/guardians of first-generation students, because they do not have the access through formal educational channels, are not able to pass on the social capital necessary for upward social mobility and success (Gofen, 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2011).

Social capital and its relationship to parent/guardian engagement has been explored in the literature (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Gofen, 2009; Ferrara, 2015; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). The lens of social capital on parent/guardian engagement must include the barriers of power asymmetry between the school and parents/guardians of first-generation students (Durand & Secakusma, 2019), language, transportation, family culture, and work schedules making engagement with the school
less accessible to this parent/guardian population (Durand & Secakusma, 2019; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). It is important to consider a White middle-class bias in the conversation on engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parent/guardian engagement efforts by schools suit and benefit the [parent] group privileged by class, race, and gender who display high participation, (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). The support of high participation group secures and perpetuates that group’s [social] position in the school’s institutional hierarchy inclusive of parent groups and boards of directors, for example, and highlights practices of discrimination and exclusion of people of color, and parents/guardians of first-generation students (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014).

Cultural capital and funds of knowledge are integral to the conversation on social capital and the impact on engagement. The theoretical framework of the Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and the attending ethical paradigms of justice, care, critique, and community (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2007) find direct application to cultural capital, funds of knowledge, cultural wealth, and by extension to social capital. For the purposes of this paper, the ethic of critique and community are especially germane. Stefkovich and O’Brien (2007) note the ethic of critique challenges the status quo by giving voice to silenced marginalized populations, and considers the power asymmetry resulting from privilege, culture, and language (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) in their book on ethical decision making in the context of education, emphasize that the function of the ethic of critique is that it deals with the inconsistencies in education that reinforce and reproduce social inequities. The authors go on to state that the ethic of
critique leading only to discourse is insufficient. The value of discourse lies in actionable outcomes and informing school leaders to make better decisions in the practice and development of a caring school community. For the purposes of this paper, what the authors refer to as the “language of possibility” informs those actionable outcomes that are intended to be policy change at the micro-level of the school specific population and expand to the macro-level of the western province system level. The ethic of critique, demands educational leaders look at the inequities in their schools and ask themselves, “Who makes the laws? Who benefits from the law, rule, or policy? Who has the power? Who are the silenced voices?” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 16). The authors also bring the ethic of community into the conversation. For the purposes of this paper the ethic of community is especially germane because the relationships among actors, school structures, and access to social capital is socially shaped within and influenced by community.

The ethic of community is a dynamic concept and relates specifically to which decisions are made and which practices are executed in the ever-changing context of a school community. This includes how to best engage parents/guardians of first-generation students as members of a marginalized parent population in the educational community setting. Stefkovich and O’Brien (2007) cite Furman (2004) in their analysis of the ethic of community: “as the moral responsibility of educators to engage in communal processes” (p. 200) in ethical decision making regardless of the individual’s status in the social-educational hierarchy. The ethic of community demands that educational leaders make ethical decisions with (italics added for emphasis) the community. The ethic of community and the ethic of critique echo not only the Ignatian
charism of *cura personalis*, but clearly relate to the valuation and recognition of cultural capital, cultural wealth, and funds of knowledge of parents/guardians of first-generation students who are more likely to be low-income, of color, non-English speaking or English as an acquired language, born outside of the United States, and work in low-paying jobs (Choy et al., 2000; Jehangir et al., 2015).

Finally, it is important to recognize parents/guardians of first-generation students, who are frequently constricted by several factors, should not be problematized. Ethical decision making in an educational context requires recognition that it is incumbent upon the school and school structures to bear responsibility to create more effective methods of engaging this previously underserved parent/guardian population.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand how parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their experience of engagement in an all-boys Catholic high school, in an urban area of the Jesuit Western Province across all grade levels. The literature suggests that parents/guardians of first-generation students lack the information on the college process, while recognizing the importance of their engagement as integral to their students educational persistence, attainment, and psychological well-being (Gofen, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Most research on parent/guardian engagement focuses on public educational institutions and post-secondary institutions. This study contributed to the body of research by expanding it to include private Jesuit Catholic secondary settings. All information on the school was gathered from the school website. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the co-researchers, the specific website reference has been redacted.

Research Questions

The question that guided this study is, how do parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their engagement in their student’s high school? In order to provide a fuller description of the experience of engagement, the following sub-questions also guided the study:

- How do parents/guardians of first-generation students experience social capital in engagement?
- How do parents/guardians of first-generation students practice engagement?
- What are the factors, internal and external that promote or impede engagement? (i.e. cultural norms, gender, SES, language, and school structures).
Method

This study was designed to address gaps in the literature on the experience parent/guardians of first-generation students have with engagement in their child’s high school experience. Specifically, parent/guardian experience in a private Jesuit high school setting which is absent from much of the extant literature. The study focused on the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students and so a phenomenological method of inquiry was appropriate. Van Kaam (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) notes the basis for the reflective analysis phase of phenomenological methodology are the comprehensive descriptions provided by the co-researchers which allow for the essence of experience to emerge. In addition, a phenomenological methodology does not distort the co-researcher’s experience with preconceived experimental designs (Moustakas, 1994).

A semi-structured interview lasting 45 minutes to an hour was conducted at a time and day convenient for the parent/guardian on the school site in the counseling conference room. Follow-up interviews were held in that same space as well, again at a time and day convenient for the parent/guardian. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by Rev.com. The exceptions to this were the interviews with the two Spanish-speaking co-researchers. A translator was engaged to conduct the interviews and translate the recorded interviews into English. The primary researcher was present for those interviews. The transcripts were reviewed according to the process of phenomenological analysis. Two interviews had to be conducted in the researcher’s office when the regularly scheduled room became unavailable. The power asymmetry was addressed by asking the co-researcher to sit on the sofa, the researcher in a chair, not the office chair,
that was away from the desk, and the computer screen was closed. Phenomenological process of analysis begins with the necessary step of epoche. Epoche is the step when the interviewer sets aside all biases to view the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

The next step was phenomenological reduction. The first step in phenomenological reduction is bracketing, a process considering only the content of the question with an open mind. Significant statements, all considered to have equal weight, are identified and highlighted. This is the step of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) and offered insights into each co-researcher’s experience. Units of meaning emerged from this process and through imaginative variation, the taking of multiple perspectives, that the units of meaning were clustered and themes identified. This process allowed the researcher to approach the “what,” the textural experience, and the “how,” the structural experience in order to arrive at the invariant structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The invariant structures are further reduced to the essences of the experience. There is no saturation in phenomenology, only reporting an essence at a moment in time. This process until there is a moment reached, when it is felt the essence of experience has been sufficiently described (Moustakas, 1994) (see Figure 1). The population under study was parents/guardians of first-generation students at a Jesuit Catholic high school in an urban area of the Jesuit Western Province. The population of first-generation students represented 18% of this school’s total population, or 224 students at the time the study was conducted. Parents/guardians of first-generation students were invited to participate in the study with the goal of having the unique
parent/guardian experiences and perspective inform best practices for engaging this parent/guardian sub-population.

**Research Design Overview**

The characteristics of qualitative research are consonant with the needs of the study. The study used a phenomenological approach to inquiry. A phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate because it “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences…describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, as explained by Creswell (2007) this type of research design is best when it is important to understand a shared, common experience of several individuals with the intent of developing policies and improving *praxis*. This methodology allowed parents/guardians of first-generation students to share their experiences, their relationship with the school, and how they engaged with their student’s education. The study explored the experience of engagement from the perspective of the parents/guardians and sought to understand the meaning of engagement and the contexts influencing that engagement. All co-researchers were parents/guardians of first-generation students and experienced engagement in their student’s high school experience as a function of social capital.

**Co-Researchers**

Criterion purposeful sampling was used to determine the research sample. Criterion sampling involves selecting co-researchers that have experienced the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, it was co-researchers that met the criteria of identifying as parents/guardians of first-generation students in a Jesuit high school in the western province. Purposeful sampling is the intentional
sampling of co-researchers that can best inform the primary researcher about the question being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Parents/guardians of first-generation students can provide rich data communicating their experience with engagement. No other inclusive or exclusive criteria were applied.

The co-researchers in this study were current parents/guardians of first-generation students from across all four grade levels in an all-boys Jesuit secondary school in the western province. Permission to use the site and to access and subsequently recruit parents/guardians of first-generation students as co-researchers was obtained through the director of counseling and IRB approval had also been obtained (see Appendix A). The criteria to be solicited as a co-researcher in the study was to identify as the parent/guardian of a first-generation student on the school’s information management system, PowerSchool. The school’s information management system was changed during this study however the information was consistent. For the past 4 years, before students may register for classes, the parent must indicate if their student identifies as a first-generation student. For the purposes of this study, first-generation status represents all iterations of formal education achievement from grade school to college degrees achieved outside of the United States (Stebleton & Soria, 2013). Moustakas (1994) notes the essential criteria for co-researcher selection is each co-researcher has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and (perhaps a follow-up interview), grants the investigator the right to tape-record…the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation (p. 107).
The population of parents/guardians that met the criteria numbered 214. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that each qualitative inquiry approach has sample size consideration. In the case of phenomenological inquiry, there is no specific number of interviews recommended, but 15 interviews are deemed appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sixty parents/guardians were invited, 15 from each grade level, in an effort to have a final sample population of 15. The sample was selected by the director of counseling who then gave that list to the researcher. The researcher sent an email invitation in Spanish and English to participate to those parents/guardians identified (see Appendix B). As responses to the invitation to participate came in, the researcher followed up with an email or a phone call, if requested by the co-researcher, to make appointments for face-to-face interviews on campus in the Counseling Center Conference Room at a convenient day/date/time for the co-researcher. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and it was clearly communicated in writing and verbally that the co-researcher could leave the study at any time.

The study sought to interview 15 co-researchers, 16 responded initially, and two additional later acceptances by Spanish-speaking co-researchers offered an opportunity to incorporate a broader population into the study enhancing the understanding of the essence of the experience of engagement and trustworthiness of the study’s findings. The total population sample was 20 (N=20). Sample size for phenomenological inquiry may range from one to 365 with a recommended number of three to 10 co-researchers, with five to 20 interviews seen as common (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The emphasis lies on the collection of thick, rich data that describes the meaning of the phenomenon.
Phenomenological research focuses on arriving at the essence of the co-
researcher’s experience derived from the, “intuitive integration of the fundamental
textural and structural experiences into a unified statement of the essences as a whole”
(Moustakas, 1994, p.100). Saturation of data is not reached in this form of qualitative
totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at
a particular time and place from the vantage point of the individual researcher” (p. 100).
Table 1 is a list of the characteristics for the 18 co-researchers.

Table 1

*Co-Researcher Characteristics (N=18)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Researcher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic/racial identity</th>
<th>Immigrant/ Non-immigrant</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GJ</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJ</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KT</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>AA/Japanese</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>N/I</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher was attentive to when that particular time, and place, and vantage point was reached, and the researcher stopped collecting data. Saldana (2016) notes that saturation is achieved “when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (p. 248). Although saturation is not reached in this form of inquiry, keeping it in mind was useful in deciding at what moment in time data collection and phenomenological reflection would cease.

Data Collection

A researcher-designed interview protocol was used to conduct the interviews. Eighteen interviews were conducted using 12 semi-structured questions to guide the interaction. The protocol was informed by the literature and by the experience, involvement, interest, and commitment of the researcher. The use of epoche and bracketing prior to and during the interview encouraged a deep reflection of co-researcher experience, as recommended by Moustakas (1994). The researcher was mindful of the guidance offered by Moustakas (1994) that the “aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13), and to allow the interview to take its own direction in obtaining the rich, thick descriptions of the experience. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for parents/guardians of first-generation students because their insights are largely untapped. Co-researchers were assured verbally and in writing that their interviews, their identity, and the identity of their student would be kept confidential.
Data collection procedures. Co-researchers were identified through the school’s information management system, PowerSchool. The director of counseling selected 60 parents/guardians of first-generation students, 15 from each grade level, and gave that list to the researcher. The director of counseling did not know and did not have routine contact with parents. The criteria for participation were that they (a) identified as the parent/guardian of a first-generation student in the school’s information management system, PowerSchool and (b) were willing to participate in one or more recorded interviews. The researcher sent an email invitation to participate in the study and a bill of rights for research participants in Spanish and English (see Appendices C, D, E, F, & G) and waited for replies. From the 60 invitations, 20 co-researchers accepted the invitation to be interviewed. There were two Spanish-speaking co-researchers.

A researcher-designed interview protocol was used to conduct interviews with the 20 co-researchers. Eighteen interviews were conducted using 12 semi-structured interview questions with additional probing questions available if necessary. Four questions were designed for demographic information and to discover first-generation characteristics. Three questions were designed to allow co-researchers to reflect on the impact of social capital in their engagement, and three questions addressed their experience with engagement. All interview questions were aligned with the literature on parents/guardians of first-generation students but did not dictate the interviews. The interview protocol was pilot tested with two parent/guardians of first-generation students who were not on the co-researcher list and solicited for feedback on the effectiveness of the protocol in helping the co-researcher describe their experiences. Some minor changes were made resulting in the protocol used (see Appendix B).
The in-person interviews that lasted 45 to 60 minutes were conducted on the high school campus, in the counseling conference room, at a time and day convenient for the co-researcher. There were three exceptions to the length of the interview which lasted up to 90 minutes. These exceptions run true to phenomenological inquiry, where the interview is interactive and responsive to the co-researcher fully sharing their story. To address the power asymmetry inherent in interviews and from the interview site, co-researchers were invited to sit at the head of the rectangular table, a seat of honor. At this point a copy of the Invitation to Participate and the Bill of Rights for Research Participants was given to the co-researcher (see Appendices C & D). These same documents were available in Spanish (see Appendices E & G). Both Spanish-speaking co-researchers requested the documents be read to them. This was done by the Spanish-speaking interviewer.

Once the parent/guardian reviewed the documents, the interview commenced and recording commenced as well. Holding true to Moustakas’ (1994) progression of the interview, there was some ‘social talk’ and then the first question posed. At the conclusion of the interview, the co-researcher was thanked and reminded that they would be asked to review the content of the interview (member checking) and return for follow-up interviews. Six of the 20 co-researchers returned for follow-up interviews. Two of the six follow-up interviews were conducted on the phone at a time and day indicated by the co-researcher, and for the convenience of the co-researcher. Sixteen interviews and all follow-up interviews were recorded and transcribed by Rev.com, and timestamps were added to help discern when a change in meaning was detected. An interpreter was used for the two Spanish-speaking interviews, the interviews were recorded using voice
memos on the researcher’s phone. The researcher was present to ensure probing questions were asked when appropriate. The interpreter translated and transcribed one interview and due to time constraints, a transcription service, GMR, was used to translate and transcribe the second. Co-researchers were assured their identity and the identity of their student would remain confidential. All audio recordings and transcriptions were stored in a password-protected computer and hard copy transcripts were kept in a locked file drawer. The researcher had the only key. The researcher employed the use of a research journal to document biases and bracket any preconceptions prior to the interview and afterward as an additional exercise of reflexivity.

Trustworthiness was established by careful attention to reflexivity through the use of a research journal, member checking, and multiple sources of thick description. Member checking, to check for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) and follow-up interviews were conducted when possible and member checking occurred at the time and in the follow-up interviews. In addition, and consonant with Moustakas (1994), trustworthiness was enhanced by the researcher returning to the data repeatedly for “constant appraisal of the significance and checking and judging facilitate the process of achieving a valid depiction of the experience” (p.18).

Creswell (2014) describes reflexivity as a process where the researcher positions themselves in their writing, and engages in self-understanding of background, values, and biases that the researcher brings to a qualitative study and how it may influence how data is perceived. Moustakas (1994) describes a process specific to phenomenological inquiry where the researcher grows in self-awareness and self-knowledge through repeatedly returning to the data, “constant appraisal of significance” (p.18), and sharing with them
the meanings from reflection on the transcripts and getting their assessment on accuracy. Memoing on the transcript itself was utilized not only to document co-researcher insights but also as a tool for reflexive comments in the research journal as the study progressed. Creswell and Poth (2018) state the heart of researcher reflexivity is “reviewing and then discussing how biases, values, and experiences impact emerging understandings…and how these experiences may have potentially shaped the findings, conclusions, and interpretations drawn in the study” (p. 229).

I was sensitive to my background as a clinical social worker and that in many of the interviews, co-researchers described past or current events for which I would have constructed an intervention, ongoing support, or links to resources in the community. I was also sensitive to my experience as a first-generation student and to my current and ongoing work with first-generation students and their families. It was important that the challenges I faced as a student and with which I currently help my students not infiltrate my interpretation of the co-researcher’s responses. One example was regarding disrupted education and the impact that had on the lives of the co-researchers. This was an area that reflected a deep personal experience for me in my own educational journey and might have shaped the findings, conclusions, and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I reviewed and discussed these experiences and inner processes with a member of my dissertation committee. This process of peer debriefing was helpful in that it ensured my research was not only relevant but served a therapeutic function and helped me process and cope with the emotional stresses of the research project.

Dependability, an additional way rigor was established, was to account for the changeability of the context within which the research occurred. In this study for
example, the instability of the context was the interview itself and if the researcher
needed to ask all the questions or ask different follow-up questions. In addition, the time
of day chosen by the co-researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018) or if the co-researcher’s
recounting of experiencing the phenomena took the interview in a different direction as it
unfolded. There were three interviews that were not held in the originally anticipated
space and had to be held in the primary researcher’s office, two interviews conducted in
Spanish, and two follow-up interviews conducted on the phone in order to accommodate
the co-researchers.

**Data collection tools.** The tool used in the study was a researcher-developed
interview protocol rooted in the work of Moustakas (1994). In phenomenological
research, the in-depth interview is the method used to collect data on the topic or question
(Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological interview consists of open-ended questions
and is presented as interactive and informal conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018;
Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994) the researcher may create questions in
advance intended to bring out a comprehensive accounting of the parent/guardian lived
experiences and feelings about those experiences, but Moustakas makes clear these
questions may very well be altered or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the
full story of their experience(s).

Prior to each interview, the researcher engaged in the first step of the
phenomenological process, epoche. Epoche, “is a Greek word meaning to stay away or
abstain” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The researcher is charged to free themselves from all
preconceived thoughts, biases, and a priori facts and sets them aside so they do not
penetrate the interview or coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).
Epoche, noted in Moustakas (1994), does not deny reality, only the “knowing of things in advance” (p. 85). I began the interview with social conversation, or small talk, intended to create a climate that is welcoming and comfortable (Moustakas, 1994). The interview protocol for this study consisted of 15 questions (see Appendix B), and was organized in the following way, first-generation characteristics, social capital, and engagement. Interview questions were crafted beginning with the open-ended prompt of what, how, tell me about, or can you describe, in order to offer the best opportunity for the co-researcher to reflect on their experience of the phenomenon and any feelings that may surface as a result of that reflection. For example, three interview questions regarding social capital:

1. Who do you talk to when you have questions or concerns about your son’s education, or what classes he should take, or his grades?

2. What about other parents at the school? How would you describe conversations with them?

3. How do you help your son? What feelings does this bring up for you?
   a. Describe a time when you could not help him with something related to his school, or with his education?

Follow-up probing questions are also available in the protocol if necessary for the co-researcher to offer a comprehensive recounting of their experience of the phenomena (see Appendix A).

**Data Analysis**

Creswell and Poth (2018) employ Moustakas’s (1994) approach to phenomenological data analysis because it has systematic steps for data analysis and for
the assembling of textual and structural descriptions, was employed in this study. Steps for this method of data analysis include epoche, horizontalization of each significant statement, listing of units of meaning, and clustering of those units into themes and then arriving at the essences of the experience. Figure 1 represents the main processes of phenomenological process and analysis.

Saldana (2016) notes that using more than one coding process may lead to enhanced insights and more textured essences of co-researcher experience. The researcher used both phenomenological reduction and open coding. The aspects of open coding that enhanced and supported phenomenological reduction was the close and repeated line-by-line examination of the data from verbatim transcripts. Open coding allowed the researcher to follow the direction of the study through periods of “digesting and reflection” (p.115). This method of data analysis is complementary to and consonant with phenomenological reduction with the dual emphasis of repeatedly returning to the data to discern the essence of the experience. This resulted in the formation of a picture of the co-researcher’s experiences, challenges, insights, and recommendations.

Prior to reading the transcripts, the researcher listened to each interview for tone, emotion, word choices, and pauses which provided additional context beyond the words themselves. The verbatim transcripts were read using a holistic approach, then detailed re-reading in a line-by-line approach to discern significant statements. Consistent with the method of analysis described by Moustakas (1994) the researcher returned to the verbatim transcripts and reflected “with continuing attention and perception, continued looking…Things become clearer as they are considered again and again” (p. 93).
Detailed memoing directly on the right side of a hard copy of the transcript led to the identification of significant statements. Specifically, from 18 verbatim transcripts, 85 significant statements were extracted. The significant statements were then reduced to units of meaning and ultimately to the essences of the experiences and themes.

The first review of the transcripts was to gain a general awareness of the experiences of the co-researchers. Subsequent review of transcripts allowed the data to be
organized according to interview questions relating to the areas of first-generation characteristics, social capital, and engagement. The researcher hand-coded transcripts and color-coded highlights (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of similar references made by the co-researchers which offered an immediate visual representation of the data. Several significant statements emerged that were common to all co-researchers. For example, all co-researchers responded to questions regarding what meaning education had for them. The significant statements ranged from reflections on education as a foundation for success in life to protection from loss of opportunity in the workplace to personal and economic struggle, or experiencing guilt or shame. Phenomenological reduction required the researcher to ask “What is this an example of” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 202), and from imaginative variation the units of meaning discerned expressed the lived experience of the greater challenge of a life without education, being left out or overlooked for advancement, and preparedness for the uncertainties of life. These units of meaning were further reduced to the theme of education as protection, as a shield. The same process was used for social capital and engagement.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues can arise along all phases of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to accessing the site, co-researchers, and conducting the study, permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Creighton University and site use permission was obtained from the director of counseling (see Appendix A). After all approval was obtained, relevant ethical considerations and plans for addressing those concerns were as follows:
Respect for Participants

Co-researcher privacy and confidentiality was protected by removing identifying information from the data and giving each co-researcher initials. The order of transcripts did not correspond to the order in which the co-researchers were interviewed. Each co-researcher was informed of the purpose of the study, the anticipated time commitment of the initial interview and any follow-up interviews. Any mention of their student by name was removed from the transcripts. All identifiers of the research site were removed augmenting confidentiality. Confidentiality was further ensured by keeping the data in a password-protected computer and hard copies of transcripts were in locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

Concern for Welfare

Each co-researcher was informed of the purpose of the study, the anticipated time commitment of the initial interview and any follow-up interviews. Co-researchers received this information in the original email sent, but this was reiterated verbally before the interview commenced. Agreement for participation was verified verbally just prior to the onset of the interview (see Appendices B & C). It was clearly stated that participants may withdraw from the study at any time without any concern and that participation was completely voluntary. The researcher is employed as a counselor by the school the participant’s child attends and because of this there is an inherent asymmetry of power. It was clearly stated in writing and verbally that there was no repercussion for their student whether they stay in the study or choose to leave. There was no risk to their child. In addition, interviews were conducted on the school site in the counseling department conference room. This represents another point of power asymmetry. To address this
asymmetry of power communicated by the setting, co-researchers were asked to sit at the head of the rectangular conference table, a place of respect and honor. In addition, three interviews could not be conducted in the originally designated location, had to be conducted in the researcher’s office. To offset the power asymmetry in that setting, co-researchers were invited to sit on a couch and the researcher sat in a chair away from the desk and office chair and the computer was closed.

It is of importance to note an additional source of power asymmetry exists as a function of language and racial or ethnic identity (Dennis et al., 2005 Gibson et al., 2004; Hashmi, 2014; Jehangir et al., 2015; Pena, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Solórzano, 1997; Stebleton & Soria, 2013; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). The seating may address this imbalance in part, and obtaining an interpreter helped in addressing the language barrier, and communicated an honoring of the co-researcher’s language and culture of origin. The nature of the interviewer-interviewee situation can also create power asymmetry due to the, “hierarchical relationship often established between the researcher and the participant” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.57). The first phase of phenomenological research, epoche, the setting aside of all pre-judgements and allowing the phenomena to be seen with fresh eyes (Moustakas, 1994), helped diminish the perception of power asymmetry. In addition, the individual being interviewed was perceived as a co-researcher, a collaborator in phenomenological research, not a participant. This semantic difference is subtle but profound in the formation of the relationship. The power asymmetry was further addressed by the process of member checking with the co-researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Justice

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that justice is demonstrated by respectful co-researcher recruitment and sampling strategies. Explicit communication of the voluntary nature of participation is also inherent in this aspect of ethical consideration. Information from the study will be shared with all stakeholders.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the essence of the lived experience of how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in a private all-boys Jesuit secondary school in an urban area of the Jesuit Western Province. Using purposeful, criterion sampling, 60 parents/guardians were solicited for participation from the population of 250 parents/guardians of first-generation students which yielded 20 co-researchers and 18 interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to gather rich, thick data from the co-researcher’s comprehensive description of the experience to reveal the essences of engagement for these parents/guardians. The data collection and analysis were consistent with the systematic steps identified by Moustakas (1994); epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, synthesis, and repetition of these steps to a moment where the essence is represented. Issues of power asymmetry and the ethical considerations of privacy and confidentiality protection, equitable treatment, informed consent, were identified and addressed through the researcher’s practice of reflexivity and positionality.

Finally, it is important to recognize parents/guardians of first-generation students, although impacted or constricted by several factors, should not be problematized. It is also important to recognize that it is incumbent upon the school and school structures to
bear responsibility for creating more effective methods of engaging this previously underserved parent population. This study contributed to the existing research and existing programmatic support in Catholic secondary schools by honoring the unique perspective of parents/guardians of first-generation students and by using it to inform best practices on parent/guardian engagement.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will describe the findings resulting from this phenomenological inquiry. First there is a review of the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology including a summary of the data analysis. Consonant with phenomenological inquiry, the identified themes were supported by verbatim examples from the interviews that were representative of the lived experiences of the co-researchers. The themes identified from the units of meaning that emerged are organized according to the categories in the interview protocol: first-generation characteristics, social capital, and engagement. The themes expressed how the parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement, barriers they perceived, insights, and some recommendations. Both unifying and some exceptional units of meaning were explored to create a more robust picture of the co-researchers’ experience. Three themes were identified: educational attainment and disrupted lives, educational attainment as a shield, and educational attainment and emotional truths. The themes were organized by the main topics of the interview.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand how parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their experience of engagement across all grade levels at a Jesuit Western Province Catholic all-boys high school. The aim of the study was to use data collected to inform best practices in order to support parents/guardians of first-generation students. While there is a robust body of research regarding first-generation students and their families, research has primarily
focused on public school and post-secondary settings. This study is important because it addresses a gap in the literature and includes the influence of social cultural capital and funds of knowledge in the conversation through the inclusion of the voices of parents/guardians. The study also added to the knowledge and understanding of this population by extending it beyond public and post-secondary institutions to include the private, Jesuit secondary school setting where there is no research on this population. This phenomenological inquiry carried additional importance because of its practical application in enhancing the praxis of the Ignatian charism *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis* is at the heart of Jesuit education and demonstrated for all members of the community in our care. It is also framed by ethical decision making, and the Best Interests of the Student Model (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question #1: How do parents/guardians of first-generation students perceive their engagement in their student’s high school?

Sub-Question #1: How do parents/guardians of first-generation students experience social capital in the engagement?

Sub-Question #2: How do parents/guardians of first-generation students practice engagement?

Sub-Question #3: What are the factors, internal and/or external that promote or impede engagement? For example, cultural norms, gender, SES, language, school structures, and issues of power asymmetry.
Review of the Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological form of inquiry that consisted of semi-structured interviews to reveal the essence of the lived experience of 20 co-researchers. The multiple resources of the interviews, and follow-up interviews, member checking, and memoing directly on verbatim interview transcripts provided the rich, thick data for phenomenological reflection in order to grasp the essential meaning of the experience (van Manen, 1990) through the voices of parents/guardians of first-generation students. A holistic reading approach (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994) highlighting significant statements on the transcript, provided an understanding of the experience, or horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) which then resulted in clusters of units of meaning. Through phenomenological reflection and reduction themes were identified to “determine what the themes, the experiential structures that make up experience” (Magrini, 2012, p. 4).

Description of Co-Researchers

The criteria to participate in this study was to identify as a parent/guardian of a first-generation student through the school’s information management system. Co-researchers in this study were parents/guardians of first-generation students in a Jesuit secondary school in an urban area of the Jesuit Western Province. The parents/guardians of first-generation students were from across all four grade levels, selected by the chair of the counseling department from a list of all parents/guardians of first-generation students. Co-researchers were sent a hard copy letter in both Spanish and English (see Appendix C). The co-researchers ranged in age from 34 to 62. The first-gen-ness (italics added for emphasis) represented by the experience of the co-researchers with formal education.
ranged from completing second grade outside the United States to earning an advanced
degree outside the United States. There were 14 women and six men (one interview was
with a married couple who wanted to be interviewed together and counted as one
interview). Eleven co-researchers were immigrants. The parent/guardian co-researchers
represented racial, demographic, and socioeconomic diversity (see Table 1). There were
two co-researchers who were predominantly Spanish-speaking. The services of a
translator were offered, accepted, and engaged, for the purposes of those interviews. The
primary researcher was present for the interviews conducted in Spanish. Seven co-
researchers agreed to return for a follow-up interview. One co-researcher agreed to
participate in a follow-up interview, but did not show up for it. Each parent/guardian co-
researcher experienced the phenomenon of engagement in their child’s educational
experience, and demonstrated interest in exploring the factors that impact that
relationship of engagement. Biographies of co-researchers are included in Appendix H.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data from the interview transcripts were analyzed according to the process of
phenomenological analysis. First, the transcripts were read through in their entirety to get
a sense of the interview. Each transcript was then re-read, more slowly noting when a
change or shift in tone or direction was detected consonant with Moustakas (1994).
Detailed memoing (Saldana, 2016) directly on the transcript assisted in discerning every
significant statement which was then listed, and reflected upon to determine if it was
necessary to the understanding of the experience, or horizontalization. The process of
horizontalization continued with the data review for verbatim significant statements and
phrases that directly related to the lived experience of engagement with their son’s high
school experience. Imaginative variation was then applied to the significant statements resulting in a reduction to the what and how of the co-researcher’s experience. These descriptions were clustered into units of meaning, which were further reduced and resulted in themes.

**Presentation of Findings**

Educational attainment, its disruption and the subsequent disruption of lives were central in the co-researchers’ narratives. Co-researchers express desire for something better for their children, something more in life than what they experienced as a result of that disruption. As co-researchers delved into their lived experience, the perception of educational attainment as a shield against hard labor, long work hours, economic struggle, poverty, and boundaries to access to social networks and upward social mobility became salient. Additionally, educational attainment was perceived as a shield against loss of opportunity, against lack of choice, against being overlooked for advancement in employment, and against embarrassment and exposure. Just as co-researchers perceived educational attainment as a shield against a life absent of choice, they expressed educational attainment as inverse of that.

Educational attainment was also perceived as the inverse of a shield. It was perceived as the path to freedom for self-determination, upward social mobility, access to increased social capital, and social responsibility. Co-researchers also expressed the emotional truths that attended their lived experience as parents/guardians of first-generation students. These emotional truths were expressed as longing, loss, feeling put down or lesser than, feeling dumb, having to lie, and living a life of sacrifice and
hardship. An additional emotional truth was the perception of the student’s educational attainment as a dream realized that would elevate the family for example.

The findings represent the essences of the experiences of parents/guardians of first-generation students. The findings and the themes identified are arranged according to the topics of the study: first-generation characteristics, social capital, and engagement. The themes identified are educational attainment and disrupted lives, educational attainment as a shield, and educational attainment and emotional truths. Although the phenomenological method of inquiry dictates that unifying themes under the topics are reported, it is important to recognize other units of meaning, not as salient as those reduced to themes be noted. This was done to provide greater nuance of the co-researchers’ experience. Capturing the characteristics of parents/guardians of first-generation students inclusive of backgrounds, experience with education, and the meaning of education offers insight into their experience with access to and exercise of social capital and engagement.

**First-Generation Characteristics**

Parents/guardians of first-generation students have a wealth of experience to share with their educational community partners to improve the praxis of *cura personalis* and for that educational community to accompany the students and their families on their educational journey. Fundamental to understanding how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement is understanding the context of their backgrounds, their personal experience with formal educational attainment, the impact of disrupted education for them, and the meaning of educational attainment for their student.
**Educational attainment and disrupted lives.** The desire for completion of education is significant for first-generation students, and even more so for their parents/guardians. Co-researchers explored this desire through recounting significant events or combination of events that disrupted their lives and by extension their educational attainment. Thirteen of the 18 co-researchers commented on the lack of parent support, interest in, or expectation regarding their pursuit of educational attainment as contributing to the disruption of their education. The importance of parent support and interest is well expressed by SW:

It was just me and my mom. She wasn’t as involved. There was no expectation, honestly. What was my mom thinking? When it came my turn, I guess, to go to the college, I didn’t know what to do. I was on my own. My mom didn’t help or anything. I didn’t have anybody pushing me to do it or backing me up to do like “You should continue.” There wasn’t any expectation for growth, anyway.

Other co-researchers shared similar sentiments as SJ did when she stated:

Oh God, no. Involved at all? No, no. No, my dad was always working. My Mom, I don’t know what she was doing. She said she was helping my dad work, but she was just, she was not around ever. She was never doing things for our school, or she was never there to pick us up. Sometimes she wasn’t even home when we got home from school.

JA provides additional context on the importance of parent support in the pursuit of educational attainment:

And my mom wasn’t a cheerleader for me. Not so much guiding, showing me or even putting somebody in my path that could be a mentor. There was no big college presence,
if you will. It was not a big deal. I mean at that time. I graduated, was huge. Yeah. And so, that was good enough. But it wasn’t.

It is clear how the absence of parental support and parent expectation affected co-researchers’ continuity of educational attainment.

Half of the 18 co-researchers reported work had a negative impact on their ability to pursue formal education. KS expressed how working took precedence over pursuing college:

I worked the day I turned 16. Literally, I went to the hamburger joint and was flipping burgers. My mind was on, “How much is minimum wage? How much am I going to make over minimum wage?” And I was really focused on what was in my bank account, survival mode, versus you starve now and you win later. If I would know 20 years ago what I know now, I wouldn’t be in this situation. We struggle, sometimes terribly.

In many cases, co-researchers reflected on despite having a supportive family, the needs of the family superseded their own desire or their own plan to pursue an education as MI expressed so poignantly:

Es larga… es muy larga. Yo pues este… nací en una familia humilde, una familia pobre, una familia grande… fuimos… yo tengo 8 hermanos. Sí.. sí.. Este.. una familia muy numerosa… este tuvimos una carencias económicas pero no de amor. Estuvo papá y mamá siempre. Este mi papá solía venir a trabajar por unos meses y regresaba porque nunca quiso quedarse por no descuidarnos a nosotros y solo venía o dos o tres meses y así regresaba… y así fue mi niñez y mi adolescencia. Este… desde muy joven, me puse a trabajar para ayudar a la familia. En este momento era de sacar adelante la familia. Yo tomé un rol de que no podía que eso iba a ser pasajero… que no podía estar siempre así la
solución. Entonces esto por eso, yo… yo trabajé porque mi deseo hubiera sido estudiar.

Esa fue pero o sea yo vi que mi prioridad es ofrecer mejor para la casa…. para mi familia

Translation:

I was born in a humble family, a poor family, a big family. I have eight brothers. We had our economic difficulties, but no lack in love, dad and mom were always there, well my dad would leave for a few months and would come back. This, from a young age, I went to work to help the family. At this time, it was to move the family forward. I thought that this would be temporary, that the solution could not always be like this. I worked, but my wish would have been to study. But I saw my priority is to offer better for the house, for my family.

Five of the 18 reported pregnancy, raising a child, or single parenthood as the life event or events that disrupted their educational attainment. AC explained, “I did think about going to college. I did go, I started out at a community college. I felt like I was not going to finish. And then I got pregnant. Oh, then I quit. Right.” NA explained: Yeah. I started taking some classes at community college for, I had a couple credits, and taking three classes one time, and I did well. But then I had other things, family, everything got in the way and I couldn’t continue. Life gets in the way. And you have to make a living.

Attending these reflections is an inescapable sense that an event or series of events left them without any choice in the pursuit of their educational goals. As MD states so succinctly, “As I said, I didn’t have, there was no choice.” The perception of educational attainment as a shield and not having any choice permeated co-researcher experience. It is of particular import when it comes to the access and exercise of social capital.
Social capital. The lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students represents an intersection of a variety of social, economic, and immigratory experience. In several cases co-researchers connected events and experiences that contributed to the disruption of their lives to educational attainment and then to the access and exercise of social capital. This was expressed in the formation of and forging of new social network connections among other parents, with school structures, and the ways in which they help their son. It was also expressed as barriers to better-paying work or advancement in work. This is then directly connected to social capital and upward social mobility. The findings indicate the essence of the experiences of parents/guardians of first-generation students is that educational attainment protects someone from a life of hardship and offers a pathway of access to social networks, the exercise of social capital, and upward social mobility. The second theme, educational attainment as a shield, was explored from the vantage point of their own experience and their hopes for their student’s future.

Educational attainment as a shield. All co-researchers mentioned how educational attainment protects people from a variety of life’s struggles. While this was manifested differently in each interview, the theme was unifying. BB expressed, Education, in my own mind, it means everything that you can do to better, to improve your life, your living, your security, you know what I mean? If you get educated you can prop up your life, you can see the difference in your life. You know what? My life is not easy.

Other co-researchers shared this same sentiment with the added emphasis on the freedom educational attainment offers. WC expressed this idea when he stated,
I would say education is the groundwork for a life of meaning. It’s a process of development and self-determination. It frees a person to determine the course of their life and gives them the ability to be flexible in terms of career interests. It offers flexibility and opportunity.

What emerged was the perception that educational attainment as a shield had a dual purpose: to protect and then allow those in its shelter to advance. All but one co-researcher noted that in addition to the inoculating effect educational attainment has for the individual against a hard life it acts as a facilitator for access to social capital. Co-researcher JA’s reflection was representative of the dual nature of educational attainment as a shield and facilitator to social capital access and upward social mobility.

Education is the key to the world. It’s a key to not being pushed down and being able to move wherever you want to move without feeling restricted. It definitely means success to me for them. I want them to feel like they made it. I want them to feel like they are a part of this society. And that they can mix well with anybody of wealth, anybody, and be educated.

Educational attainment as a facilitator of social capital was commented on this way by SJ:

This guy I know and I’ve worked with him before. He went to Harvard. And everything is about like, “Oh, my roommate knows him” or “This guy at Harvard knows him.” It’s all about the connections. It’s not just going for your education, but it’s also going for the people that you know and the people that you meet. It’s just the networking. It’s so easy for the man with that whole Harvard thing.
All co-researchers commented on the increased opportunity, flexibility, and choice educational attainment offers and saw it as a facilitator to access and exercise of social capital. The possibility of travel, leisure, or vacation noted by the co-researchers is embedded in the flexibility and opportunity which is tied to social capital and upward mobility. NA expressed the dual nature of educational attainment as a shield and a facilitator to social capital access in this way, “Not having to work the rest of your life, work yourself to the bone, having the ability to have leisure time, and go on vacations and do things, and visit and travel.” TC’s reflection offers additional context, We have worked very hard to live in like a White neighborhood, and I didn’t do for that reason, I did it because I wanted my kids to grow up in a safe neighborhood. See something better (italics added to communicate emphasis in the interview), people go on vacations. In 28 years we have not been on a family vacation.

In addition to educational attainment as a shield from hardship and a facilitator for access to social capital, all but one co-researcher indicated that educational attainment carries with it a social responsibility to be a good person and to be an agent of change in the community. KS communicated this consensus well when she said, It would mean everything if he were to do something with it. Education is everything, but at the same time it’s not. Being a top student at [name of the high school redacted to maintain confidentiality] is everything. But we don’t want you to be an asshole. Don’t be a jerk. You guys are meant for others. That is why you’re here. Be a good a human. It has been demonstrated that educational attainment acts as a shield against hardships, an encouragement for social responsibility, and a facilitator of access and exercise of social capital. An additional way to access social capital is through protective agents.
Formation of relationships with parents and school structures: Protective agents. A sub-theme of relationships with protective agents was identified. Protective agents are family members, community members, or a friend who has attended college and can act as a guide for the student and the parent/guardian. NA expressed, that although he does not have a college education, his workplace gave him access to people, protective agents, who had advanced degrees. It influenced his ability to access social capital and upward social mobility:

It gave me a broader view of what you can even work with different types of people. If I hadn’t gone to [workplace redacted to maintain confidentiality], I wouldn’t have met people that had education, and learned from them. I wouldn’t have lived in [upscale suburb-redacted to maintain confidentiality], and met people with education, and lived with them, and learned from them.

This level of interaction with protective agents and the resulting access to social capital and social mobility was reported by six of the 18 co-researchers.

Social capital involves connections among actors in a network that facilitates the achievement of a goal or set of goals that would not be possible otherwise. In the school setting, access to and the exercise of social capital is expressed in part, by forging relationships with school structures and/or other parents. Ten of the 18 co-researchers reported that they have reached out to their student’s counselor or to the teacher at least once, when they had a question about their student’s education, grades, or what classes he should take. This indicates the perception of a resource in the school structure, exercise of social capital, and the use of protective agents. HJ’s comment was representative of this experience:
Le digo (italics added to communicate the emphasis during the interview). Estoy preocupado (name redacted to maintain confidentiality). Ella habla con él por mí. Le hablo a ella. Ella nos ayudó mucho cuando llegamos. Si tengo un problema o una pregunta, le hago una pregunta. Le pregunté, ¿puedo pagar esto? ¿A dónde voy? ¿Con quién hablo? Y ella dice: "Voy a ver qué puedo hacer"

Translation:
I tell her (italics added to communicate the emphasis during the interview). I’m worried about (name redacted to maintain confidentiality). She talks to him for me. I talk to her. She helped us a lot when we came. If I have a problem or a question I ask her. I asked about, can I afford this? Where do I go? Who do I speak to? And she says, “I’m going to see what I can do.”

Co-researchers described discomfiture reaching out to school structures with questions about their son’s education, classes, or grades. GJ noted a shift in the educational environment when she expressed,

When he was in grade school, I talked to the teacher directly. But since we’ve been here, we’re not allowed to. When we first came here, all the teachers in grade school told me, do not act like elementary parents because it’s different. They already gave me a warning. You cannot just go inside the campus and move around. You can email them, but no face-to-face. So that’s my number one. There are some activities that we’re allowed to engage.

Rather than making connections with the school structures, half of the co-researchers made comments that reflected their perception of lack of access to the school
environment coupled with a value that the student’s education, his grades, and his classes are his responsibility. JJ expressed it well when he said,

I talk to my son. I question him when I see the emails of his grades. So I’ll just ask him. Some classes, are hard. Okay, but…We told him that it’s not because it’s hard…It’s still going to reflect on your grade so you (italics added to communicate the emphasis during the interview) have to do something about it. We speak directly to him.

Four co-researchers reflected their lived experience, their perception of access to school structures, social capital, and student responsibility in their advice to their student. TC emphatically stated,

Don’t rely on people to give you the answers. Rely on yourself. I teach them how to take care of their problems. I don’t think we have a teacher that is not doing right. Do you need help? You are the problem, this is your grade, it’s not your teacher’s grade. It’s up to you to get help.

The formation of new social networks with parents was also used as a demonstration of the exercise of social capital as well. Ten of the 18 co-researchers commented that they do not have relationships with other school parents, and by extension do not have them as a resource. Those co-researchers commented that the parents they reach out to for information or support come from their student’s middle school. MD expressed it well when she said,

I don’t know, you just have parents there who, have the same struggles and relate. And their conversations were great. Like the community, with those parents were awesome. And the fact that they really embraced us, and I mean, to this day, I have those relationships with those parents.
It is clear co-researchers do not see an opportunity or are not comfortable forging new relationships within the context of the high school, they retain a previous social network.

Results show co-researcher took advantage of pathways to relationships, and, in the context of the high school, athletics was indicated as a path to forge relationships with other high school parents. Co-researcher AI stated succinctly when reflecting on this pathway “When we played football we talked to them. But that was last year. We seldom see any parents. Right now, we don’t have communication with other parents.” The precarious nature of this pathway was echoed by all the co-researchers who used it. It seems that when this opportunity no longer exists, the path for the relationship with other parents/guardians, and that avenue for the access to and exercise of social capital dries up as well.

Other opportunities to forge relationships with other parents reported by six of the 18 co-researchers were related to school-based activities for parents all with a social component. These parent activities range from parent orientation to parent organizations, and parties hosted by the school. Parents/guardian’s perception of school-centric pathways as opportunities to forge relationships with other parents, and exercise social capital was expressed well by SW when she said with enthusiasm in her voice, We came to the freshman retreat. We did all the events, both of us, with the freshman retreat. We did all the dances, welcome events. Football games, yeah. So we really are just taking in all the resources. I joined the parent organization for mothers [name redacted to maintain confidentiality]. You just feel the support system of the women that you know. We also got invited to the Latino Association. We found our tribe.
SW noted taking advantage of resources, and the significant support she felt. The perception that resources are available and that parents/guardians of first-generation students have access to them, can be construed as an exercise in social capital. Additional ways to access and exercise of social capital was explored was through co-researcher reflection on how they helped their student and what resources they perceived they can utilize.

**Perceived access to resources: Helping the student.** All co-researchers reflected on the many ways they help or support their student. All co-researchers commented they help their student with home-based support such as daily inquiries regarding his progress or struggles with schoolwork, encouragement, making meals, emphasizing student responsibility, sometimes paying for a tutor, and transportation. MD expressed the value of helping her son with transportation instead of ride sharing services,

That is expensive, and that’s not really an option for me. I look at those times as an opportunity to really connect with my child. The time my child is in the car with a complete stranger, and you are missing out on the time of…I treasure that, if I can continue that. I’m going to be able to pick him up. I’d rather meet, drive, take the 45 minutes in my day and say, “So son, how was your day?” And see what’s happening, get a temperature check. Like what’s going on, what do I need to know. Have important conversations.

Making monetary sacrifices in order to pay tuition, for a tutor, summer school, or therapy was noted by co-researchers as an example of how help their student. MD’s comment is representative when she says,
But he knows that mommy is making the sacrifice. And not only do I do that Monday through Friday, but I work as (redacted to maintain confidentiality) on Sundays. I’m trying to balance being both parents, work two jobs. Where’s the money come from that I got to find you a tutor? I said, we want to take trips, we want to do other things, but if I got to send you to summer school, if I got to get a tutor, there goes the money. BB states it rather succinctly when he says, “Everything you do for your kids is a sacrifice.”

All but one co-researcher commented that they were very hands on with their student’s schoolwork when they were in middle school, but the high school academic work quickly became beyond them. This experience of not knowing how to help their son with a specific subject was expressed by 10 of the 18 co-researchers. SJ’s comment was representative when she expressed,

Well, I try to be supportive. I take him where he needs to be and help with anything I can, but I haven’t been able to really help him with his homework since maybe fourth grade. That math is crazy now. I have no clue what we’re talking about. It’s crazy, but you know I will find him the resources I can to help him do what he needs to do.

This same group noted their heavy reliance on Google as a resource they accessed regularly. Frequently co-researchers expressed the weaving together of perceptions of lack of access to school structures, helping their student, and accessing additional resources. RH’s reflection was representative when she said:

I was checking grades on PowerSchool. Okay, monitoring and it’s getting better except physics, is low. He’s getting better but I want to help because I think he needs it. I sit down next to him, and say, “Let me see your homework.” I want to be honest with you. I
just pretend that I know the theme, but I don’t. I just pretend, but I don’t. So I go to Google. I go to Google for different teachers.

Many co-researchers mention Google as a reliable and free source of information for them and their student. Additionally, they cite providing transportation, making monetary sacrifices, and other home-based behaviors as a show of support for their student. Co-researchers also noted barriers to access and exercise of social capital in the form of forging relationships with other parents and with school structures.

**Barriers.** There are parent/guardians who perceived one or more barriers to opportunities to forge relationships with other parents and with school structures. Barriers identified by co-researchers included SES, language, accents, immigration, and work hours. Eight of the co-researchers reflected that forming relationships with other parents and the school was negatively impacted by SES and work schedules. TC explained:

I cannot be involved in a lot of the stuff, because it requires money. It requires time. And where I work, I have to work 50, 40 hours a week. I have to pay tuition on time, and if the kids want extra things, like (name redacted to ensure confidentiality) has two trips, I rather save that money. I have to be careful on the choices I make. If I feel it’s better for my kids to engage in the than for me to engage socially, because first of all I don’t have the funds to do it. I don’t.

JA offered additional context to the socioeconomic barrier when she reflected,

I kind of shut down here. I was very involved at (middle school name redacted to maintain confidentiality). They made it easy. So there has been a disconnect. It’s just a different circle. More affluent I would think. More affluent socially and education wise.
Language or having an accent was also noted as a barrier to form relationships with other parents or school structures. Six of the co-researchers noted language as a barrier to those relationships. RH noted,

We used to go to events in middle school. They always provided two languages. They speak two languages. The principal always has a translator. We are not the same. Families that are all rich, they have their own world. They are the same. Most are not very welcoming. You can see right away when they have a different education and they don’t see you. It’s hard to have a conversation, because my English sometimes can get misunderstood.

Co-researchers reported that their facility with English meant they spoke more slowly, had to search for words, or spoke haltingly and they felt embarrassed. This resulted in the co-researchers remaining in their language community and not forging new relationships with other high school parents. Only one co-researcher made specific mention that her accent was a barrier to forging new relationships with other high school parents. GJ expressed it in this way:

I struggle to have a total encounter with parents. I mean they speak well in English. They’re really Americans, and they’re talking, they have the diction and everything. I don’t know if other parents from other nations also have that kind of feelings. We talk in a different language, with an accent.

In some cases, immigration narratives framed the experience of co-researchers. Eleven of the 18 co-researchers were immigrants and 8 commented that English as an acquired language played a part in the disruption of their lives. Information was not translated or it was conveyed in inaccessible language. Work hours coupled with care-
First-Generation Parents/Guardians

Giving responsibilities were cited as hampering their English acquisition as well. In order to find better-paying work, one co-researcher mentioned it took him five years to learn English taking night classes through adult education. He knew he would be able to obtain a better-paying job. Co-researcher immigration narratives varied depending on if they immigrated through work, marriage, or on their own. Legal status played a role for seven of the co-researchers, who had immigrated illegally but had been able to achieve some level of legal status, a green card, or amnesty. One co-researcher’s legal status remained uncertain at the time of this study. To be clear, it is not immigration or immigration status in itself (italics added for emphasis) that is perceived as a barrier. Parents/guardians describe events or series of events that contributed to disrupted education. Immigrating to another country, not having facility with the dominant language of the country, contributed to employment access, pay, and interfacing with school structures was reflected upon as barriers.

It is clear that parents/guardians of first-generation students experience barriers to forging relationships with other parents, and with school structures. Engagement was explored as a facet of this experience and what factors may encourage or impede engagement in their student’s high school experience.

Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is an influential element at all points along the educational pipeline. Engagement is a multidimensional concept inclusive of home-based behaviors and school-centric behaviors, interacting with the socioeconomic, organizational, and personal factors. Interview questions regarding parent engagement were intended to understand what it meant for parents/guardians to engage in their student’s education,
what it meant to their student, and what facilitated or impeded that engagement. As was the case with access and exercise of social capital, there was an intersection of factors influencing engagement. The same factors that parents/guardians noted affected access to and exercise of social capital in the form of relationship with other parents have an on impact engagement: SES, language, and work schedules.

In addition, all but one co-researcher conveyed emotionality when responding to many questions during the interview protocol. The theme of educational attainment and emotional truths was highlighted when co-researchers reflected on how the absence of educational attainment left them feeling exposed, embarrassed or ashamed. Co-researchers also communicated loss and longing when reflecting on their own history and wanting to do better for their son. Feelings of personal achievement and pride at the prospect of their student’s educational attainment were also expressed. While the theme of emotional truth manifested differently in many interviews, the theme was unifying.

**Educational attainment and emotional truths.** The theme of educational attainment and emotional truths was conveyed throughout co-researcher narratives. Whether it was co-researchers reflecting on their own experiences growing up without parent support or encouragement, accounts of educational disruption, harrowing immigration narratives, or how they wanted more for their student, there was an unmistakable sense that the co-researchers had sustained emotional injuries, emotional wounds. The possible discovery of their disrupted education left them exposed to embarrassment and shame. There was also an unmistakable sense that the co-researchers had carved out productive lives despite or because of the emotional injuries they had sustained. The emotional wound became an experience survived but that remained
accessible. It became a truth of their personal stories. What follows is how educational attainment and emotional truths are woven into the experience of engagement.

Nine of the 18 co-researchers indicated they have some interaction or engagement with the school structures in the form of counselor or teacher contact. Those same co-researchers reported attending school-centric events such as back-to-school night, parent group meetings, school sponsored parent parties, and volunteering on campus. All co-researchers communicated their awareness of how important it was for them to be engaged in their student’s school experience. JJ and AI, the couple who wanted to be interviewed together expressed both the awareness of the importance of and impact of engagement and the barriers. JJ stated:

I want to be active with the school no matter what. I try to volunteer with the fathers every chance I get, and I’m available to help. For the HSPT. So they wanted fathers and I was there. He sees that I am active with the school. I’m interacting with the school. It means a lot of encouragement to him. It says I’m here, and he gets a big ol’ grin, that I’m active. I think it gives him some kind of pleasure. I’m just trying to do my best. JJ’s statement is representative of the of co-researchers’ awareness of the importance of engagement, and the emotional truth of doing better for their son than what they had. AI works the night shift, and although she would like to participate, her work schedule, timing of opportunities, and an absence of forged relationships with other parents are barriers. AI expressed:

The (name of parent group redacted to maintain co-researcher confidentiality) is meeting Wednesday and mostly I’m working or I have to go to sleep. It’s really
difficult to attend that meeting. I’ve been looking at the schedules, and I prefer to go with another parent, but I might just be by myself there. I don’t know.

JA’s comment was representative of co-researchers’ experience with barriers to school-centric engagement, social capital, and the impact on her sons:

I don’t have inaction with the school. I just don’t have the time. And then I think I do and I can, but I’m exhausted and just don’t. And I’ve been feeling guilty about that, I’m not going to lie. They see I’m not involved. And it bugs them because they are used to me being so involved. And (name redacted to maintain confidentiality) even asked me, “Mom, do you not feel like you belong with the other moms? I don’t think anybody will know what your struggles have been.” I just feel like it’s a risk.

Three of the 20 co-researchers described the emotional truths of embarrassment or shame that attended the absence of educational attainment. NA expressed it in this way:

I realized that, even though I could do the job that they could do, that I had from pure experience, that I didn’t have the title. I always felt…and then they were, “Hey, where’d you go to school?” It was actually embarrassing for me, and I have even lied to people in the past. I’d tell them yeah, I went to (name of university redacted to maintain confidentiality). And one time a guy caught me. They just made assumptions.

JA communicated the emotional truths of exposure and shame when she shared:

And nobody would ever think that I didn’t go to college. And then I’m having lunch with the GM of company and another VP of the company and “What school did you go to?” Like, “I didn’t.” “You didn’t go to college?” I’m like, “No.”
They couldn’t believe it. They thought I was joking. And I can say I’ve never thought less of myself of not going to college until that moment.

All co-researchers described feelings pride and personal accomplishment at the prospect of their son going to college. HJ expressed the emotional truths of pride and that her son is the banner carrier for the entire family:

Cuando va a la universidad, no sé si es más mi sueño o el de él. Y pienso en toda la familia. Sí, debido a todos los hermanos (14) cuántos en la familia, y para que él vaya a la universidad, es como si representara a todos.

Translation:
When he goes to college, I don’t know if it’s more my dream or his dream. And I think of all the family. Yes, because of all the siblings (14) how many in the family, and for him to go to college, it’s like he would represent everyone.

MI’s comment notes the emotional truths of personal accomplishment and personal sacrifice with the following:

Significa un futuro diferente al nuestro. Él va a realizar sus sueños. Sus como dos logros: uno es suyo y el otro es mío. Esto me ha costado. Esta es porque en un país que no es mío, en un idioma que no es mío. UN estado migratorio que aún no hemos resuelto. Es dificil continuar con nuestros objetivos.

Translation:
It means a future different from ours. He is going to realize his dreams. It’s like two achievements: one is his and the other is mine. This has costed me. This is because in a country that is not mine, in a language that is not mine. A migratory status that we don’t have worked out yet. It’s difficult to continue with our goals.
All co-researchers made mention of the emotional truth that they trusted the school to help make their sons into men, and not just successful men, but men who would be involved in doing good in the world. There were a few recommendations as to how the school could improve support for them and by extension their student. Half of the co-researchers had English as an acquired language, or were mono-lingual language of origin, recommended having information made more accessible. This meant all written documents, website material, all written communication home, and parent gatherings. It also meant having more people on campus, faculty and staff, who speak a language other than English. For the co-researchers in this study, those languages were Korean, Tagalog, and Spanish. It is challenging to feel part of a community when language is exclusionary.

**Discussion**

Previous research demonstrated that access to and exercise of social capital impacts the ability of parents/guardians to engage in their student’s education (Bjork et al., 2012; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Dika & Singh, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005). In addition, social capital has been demonstrated to be impacted by level of education, income, language, and whether the person is born outside the United States (Cole 1988; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017). There is robust research conducted in post-secondary or public school environments. The findings reported in this study are in accord with the many studies demonstrating that the barriers noted impact the ability of many parents/guardians of first-generation students be involved in school-centric opportunities. The study extended the conversation to include a Jesuit high school environment which was absent from previous research, and to specific events that
contributed to the disruption of educational attainment and by extension access to social capital, and engagement.

The first set of findings address the events or series of events that disrupted the educational attainment of parents/guardians of first-generation students: lack of parent support and interest in educational attainment, work, needs of the family, and pregnancy or single parenthood. These findings are consonant with previous work, but what has been absent is the perception of lack of choice. Lack of choice surfaces in the findings as contributing to disrupted educational attainment and a life disrupted. The second set of findings address educational attainment as a shield against a life of hardship and as a pathway to self-determination and upward mobility. The third set of findings address engagement and educational attainment and emotional truths. Parents/guardians who avoid school contact opportunities did not have a facility with the language of instruction, perceived dissonance between their educational attainment and their SES, and that of other parents. These factors contribute to a perception of an unwelcoming or inaccessible educational environment. They were however engaged in several home-based engagement behaviors. The emotional truths were identified as a theme when co-researchers reflected on how absence of formal educational attainment left them feeling exposed, embarrassed, or ashamed. It can be inferred that emotional truths impact their ability to engage in school-centric opportunities for fear of exposure.

**Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

The phenomenological method of inquiry limits the generalizability of the findings to other school environments. However, because the mission of Jesuit education is consistent across Jesuit schools, an argument for the implication for improvement of
praxis for this population can be made. The study is further limited by conducting it on only one campus. Although the study supports how dimensionalized the population is, conducting it on more than one site, in different geographic areas, would lend to the dependability of the data.

A strength of the study is the focus of attention on this previously underserved parent population and on the importance of identifying the population. It is in giving primacy to their voices and the centrality of experience, that school structures may serve them with greater intentionality. The study was conducted in the private, Jesuit educational setting and has distinct application for the broader community of the Jesuit School Network and simultaneously expanding the national conversation on serving and supporting all of the families in our care. The findings indicate that an event or events that disrupted the path to educational attainment influenced the co-researcher’s was the trigger that subsequently influenced their ability to access and exercise social capital. The indication is then, that the events that disrupted their lives had implications for accessing social capital in the form of school-centric engagement opportunities.

**Contribution**

The study has contributed to the field because it has practical application to enhancing the praxis of the Ignatian charism *cura personalis*, ethical decision making, and framed by the theoretical framework of best interests of the student. The study contributed to the influence of social cultural capital, funds of knowledge, and the centrality of experience and emotional truths in the conversation through the inclusion of the voices of parents/guardians in a Jesuit school environment.
Summary

The chapter presented a review of the purpose, the research questions that guided the study, the method of inquiry, and data analysis. The study sought to explore and understand how parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in their student’s education as a function of social capital. The study used a phenomenological method of inquiry consisting of a semi-structured interview protocol and phenomenological reduction resulting in the identification of three themes.

The findings were organized according to the main topics of the interview protocol, first-generation characteristics, social capital, and engagement. The themes identified were arranged according to those topics in order: educational attainment and disrupted lives, educational attainment as a shield, educational attainment and emotional truths.

The theme of educational attainment and disrupted lives was identified through the units of meaning of the importance of parent support, work as a disruptive set of events, priority of family needs, and the advent of raising their own family. The unit of meaning that also emerged was the inescapable sense that one of more the disruptive events left them absent of choice in pursuit of their educational goals. The theme of educational attainment as a shield was identified through their experiences of forging new relationships with other parents, school structures, and how they help their student. The theme of emotional truths was related to the exercise of engagement. The lived experience of the impact the absence of educational attainment on the co-researchers left them feeling exposed, embarrassed or ashamed. Loss and longing regarding their own history was also expressed in the context of wanting more, or better for their son. Barriers
to engagement were also identified as barriers to the exercise of social capital: language, income or SES, and work schedules.

Chapter 5 discusses how the findings inform a proposed solution of policy change and improved praxis. Chapter 5 will also address implementation at the micro-level of the individual school, and the macro-level of the Jesuit Western Province and recommendations for additional research.
CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

Parents/guardians of first-generation students are largely absent from the literature on parent engagement, and there is no research conducted specifically on parents/guardians of first-generation students in the Jesuit Western Province secondary schools. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students in a Jesuit secondary school environment. The aim of this study was to utilize the data collected to inform best practices in order to support engagement of this population at this specific site and to offer a plan to expand identification and enhanced support to this population to secondary schools in the Jesuit Western Province. This study, framed by a theoretical framework of Best Interests of the Student (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007), will be one of the tools that benefit school leaders in Jesuit education as they guide their communities toward enhanced praxis of cura personalis. The study’s aim was addressed by a set of proposed recommendations and supported by rationale. Implications for implementation, future research, and leadership are presented in addition to a summary.

Aim Statement

The aim of this dissertation in practice was to understand the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students and to utilize the data collected to inform best practices to support the engagement of that parent population.

Proposed Solutions

The findings make it clear the parents/guardians of first-generation students are engaged in their student’s educational experience through home-based behaviors.
It was also found that parents/guardians of first-generation students are not taking advantage of school-centric opportunities for engagement and the support those opportunities offer to enhance the experience of the adults and, by extension, that of their student. Co-researchers report they experienced events or series of events that disrupted educational attainment and their lives. Those events, combined, contributed to barriers to school-centric engagement: language, income, SES, and immigration. For example, a co-researcher who is an immigrant may not have a frame of reference for navigating school structures in the United States. Lack of navigational capital (Yosso, 2006) necessary to maneuver in school structures could impede participation in school-centric opportunities.

These findings inform the four recommendations made by this study:

- Offer all communication from the school in more accessible language. This means using language absent of “educanese” (Ferrara, 2015), a language other than English, and making invitations more explicit by personalizing them.

- Collect data that will help guide outreach efforts and determine effectiveness and relevance of those efforts.

- Identify and engage current parents/guardians of first-generation students to act as parent partners.

- Make one or more school-centric opportunities mandatory for parents/guardians of first-generation students.

The four recommendations, based on the study’s findings, represent an eclectic approach, by the institution, that will support and encourage parents/guardians of first-generation students to participate in school-centric opportunities (Hashmi, 2014; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Tennies, 2017). Additionally, the recommendations will
communicate that the parents/guardians of first-generation students and their home-based behaviors are recognized and valued by school structures (Epstein, 2001; 2011; Hoover-Demspey et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Tennies, 2017).

The first recommendation, as noted above, is to offer all school communications in more accessible language, in languages other than English, and to make invitations more explicit and personal. Explicit invitations are personal, pro-active by the school structures, and relate specifically to the recipient’s student (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). The second recommendation is to collect data on this population to, first, find out how many parents/guardians of first-generation students are part of the school community and the language spoken at home. The data collected will help guide outreach efforts and determine effectiveness and relevance of those efforts. The third recommendation is to identify and engage current parents/guardians of first-generation students to serve as parent partners who will act as a bridge to school structures. The fourth recommendation is to make one or more school-centric opportunities mandatory for parents/guardians of first-generation students. The study’s findings and support for the recommendations from the literature review are highlighted in the sections below.

Evidence that Supports the Solution

The results of this study were discussed in the previous chapter. It was found that parents/guardians of first-generation students experienced events or series of events that disrupted their educational pursuits and disrupted their lives. The impact of the disruption echoed into their future exercise of social capital in their son’s high school experience in the form of barriers to forging relationships with other parents and with school structures.
Additionally, they all shared engagement in the form of home-based behaviors, but many did not take advantage of school-centric opportunities. Consistency was found in the recognition of the importance of educational attainment as protection against a life of hardship and as a facilitator of social capital access and tool for self-determination. The emotional truths of loss, embarrassment, and exposure attended the access to and exercise of social capital in both forging relationships with other parents and taking advantage of school-centric opportunities. The intent of all recommendations is to aid in the reciprocal, socially constructed roles between parents/guardians of first-generation students and school structures making the high school campus more welcoming (Hashmi, 2014; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008) and removing perceived stigmas attached to their lived experience. The rationale for recommendations and support from the study’s findings and the literature follow next.

The first recommendation in the eclectic approach is grounded in co-researcher reports that identify events or series of events that contributed to barriers to school-centric engagement: language, immigration, income, and SES. The eclectic approach is programmatic in nature and includes having all communications from the school, on the website, emails to parents, or notes from teachers, offered in more accessible ways. An example is to use a language other than English during parent information presentations, welcome events, Open House, and back-to-school night. In addition to recognizing the importance of language of origin or language spoken in the home, effective non-exclusionary language, “educanese” (Ferrara, 2015) as well as the language of instruction and data literacy should be avoided to make information more accessible.
Augmenting information posted on the school website, invitations for school-centric opportunities are to be explicit and made to communicate school information opportunities, such as back-to-school night, parent association meetings, and social events hosted at the school. The invitations would come from the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) as a single point of contact. Ultimately, the school website will have tabs identifying a language other than English so that parents/guardians have more ready access to information relevant to their student and to parent/guardian opportunities. Invitations should also be made in multiple modalities, meaning a phone call or hard copy letter home. Explicit invitations that have hidden exclusions need to be avoided. An example of hidden exclusions is making explicit invitations for on-campus opportunities to parents/guardians of first-generation students but hosting the events only on weekday mornings and only in English. Weekday mornings may not obstruct access for some families but may conflict with work schedules and act as a barrier for others, as noted in co-researcher reflections, such as when AI expressed,

The [name of parent group redacted to maintain co-researcher confidentiality] is meeting Wednesday and mostly I’m working or I have to go to sleep. It’s really difficult to attend that meeting. I’ve been looking at the schedules, and I prefer to go with another parent, but I might just be by myself there. I don’t know.

The theoretical framework of the Best Interests of the Student (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007), in which the ethic of critique is embedded, demands that school structures look at the inequities of access to opportunities and avenues to ensure marginalized populations’ voices and opinions are heard (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The lens of social capital on parent/guardian engagement intersects with the ethic of critique to have
school leaders take inequities into consideration when planning school-centric opportunities. This was best exemplified by JA when she articulated, 

I kind of shut down here. I was very involved at [middle school name redacted to maintain confidentiality]. They made it easy. So there has been a disconnect. It’s just a different circle. More affluent I would think. More affluent socially and education wise. Catholic secondary school in the Jesuit tradition offers liturgies and retreats for parents/guardians to encourage community and promote equity and justice. However, the reflections of JA indicate a disconnect and allude to a perception of exclusion or inaccessibility. To enhance efforts currently made by Jesuit secondary schools, the school is to offer more democratic school-centric events which also promote and support equity and justice (Sergiovanni, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

The second recommendation is to collect data on parent/guardian of first-generation students as a key to discerning the effectiveness of interventions to engage this population. Although there is a school-centric welcome for these parents/guardians, there is no follow-up with them because the school does not gather data on attendance in order to make those explicit, follow-up contacts. Data collected through brief online and telephone surveys, and speaking directly to the student, will enable the school to discern the family’s work schedules, the family/home responsibilities, and the best form of communication: email, texting, hard copy, note in student’s backpack, phone call, or a combination of modes. Additionally, information will be collected on the best times and days to participate in school-centric opportunities and whether providing childcare would be helpful. In more than one case, work schedules were such that coming to campus at all represented a challenge. In addition, surveys would allow parents/guardians of first-
generation students to tell the school what is working for them and what is not. This example underscores the importance of discerning what methods of communication are most effective and demonstrates the communal nature of ethical decision making in how best to engage parents/guardians of first-generation students in an educational environment (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2007). Data on language spoken at home can be collected via the school information management system, PowerSchool. Although this has been requested, at the time these recommendations are being made, this has not yet been implemented. To be clear, the school does collect data on first-generation status, but it gathers no other data pertinent to effectively outreach and develop reciprocal relationships.

The third recommendation is to invite current parents/guardians of first-generation students to act in a function similar to Ferrara’s (2015) parent involvement facilitator (PIF). The PIF in Ferrara’s public school district study was a school employee and acted as a direct link between the parents/guardians of first-generation students and school structures. The difference in this recommendation is the PIF is not an employee of the school, incurring additional cost, but a member of the community of parents/guardians of first-generation students. Although some co-researchers reported they were able to forge relationships with other parents and school structures, many reflected they felt there were no other parents to talk to, and school-centric opportunities were exclusionary. For the purposes of this recommendation a new reference, parent partner, communicates more effectively the relationship intended for the parents/guardians of first-generation students who accept this role.
At the study site, this person or persons could be identified through the summer school course for rising first-generation freshman students, *College Connections*. This course is taught by alumni who are first-generation students. The course was designed for rising freshman students who identify as first-generation college applicants, offering an experience that pairs freshman summer reading with the unpacking of the identity of a first-generation college applicant. The course includes campus map construction, local university visits with first-generation-specific admissions presentations and campus tours. The course culminates with a family member interview on what it means for the student to attend the high school and then go to college. There is also a free celebration hosted on campus, inviting course attendees’ parents/guardians to view student work, meet each other, and have exposure to campus. Bilingual parents/guardians in this group would be invited to act as parent partners. In addition, intentional, explicit invitations to current parents/guardians of first-generation students who speak languages identified through PowerSchool or a survey would be issued through the OEI. The parent partner would act as a bridge to forge relationships with other parents and school structures and work directly with the OEI.

Parent partners, as members of the community and as bridges to school structures, would follow up on any explicit invitation issued by the OEI for school-centric opportunities with additional, personal invitations. Embedded in those invitations would be inquiries on what may be perceived as obstacles and ongoing data collection to inform effective and relevant interventions. Parent partners, as members of the community, would help in the socially constructed, mutual relationship building between parents/guardians of first-generation students and school structures, facilitating the access
to and exercise of social capital in the school community and dismantle barriers to engagement. On a larger scale, this parent partner model can be implemented with many different levels of school budgets and infrastructures. Discovering how many families in a school community is a necessary first step, and depending on existing infrastructure, can be done electronically or paper and pencil.

The fourth recommendation is for the school to make attendance at one or more school-centric events mandatory for parents/guardians of first-generation students, such as on-campus community service with a social component to encourage the forging of new relationships among parents. Although co-researchers did not mention mandatory opportunities, extant programs in the public sector, AVID, TRIO, and the FUEL program in Massachusetts, support a mandatory component to engagement efforts with parents/guardians of first-generation students (Hashmi, 2018).

All the recommendations are framed by the theoretical framework of the Best Interests of the Student (Stefkovich & Begeley, 2007) with its fundamental, genuine regard for the student and the student’s family. Ethical decision making, in the researcher’s perspective and engaged in by the researcher as an educational leader, is seen as a direct extension of best interests of the student and the Ignatian charism cura personalis. For school structures to execute their moral responsibility and serve marginalized populations with intentionality by embracing a strengths-based orientation (Epstein, 2011; Martin, 2009; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tennies, 2017) through a communal process (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Stefkovich & Begeley, 2007), the recognition of the dynamic nature of the school context is necessary (Trevino & Brown). The context of the study site is grounded in the Ignatian charism of cura personalis and requires the
school structures to care for all of our community. The recommendations all refer to *cura personalis*, which can intersect with the utility of the theoretical framework of Best Interests of the Student (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) in the practice of educational leadership.

The study site is a data-driven environment, and data collection will help communicate not only the “what” but also support the “why” of intentional support for parents/guardians of first-generation students. The recommendations can be implemented at the study site and within a variety of school budgets, not limiting implementation to well-resourced Jesuit schools in the western province. The recommendations are actionable and can be measured lending to the practicality of the plans.

**Evidence that Challenges the Solution**

The recommendations noted may encounter barriers to implementation. Challenges to the recommendations are that co-researchers report the perception that they are not supposed to reach out to school structures; opportunities for engagement are perceived as exclusionary by SES, income, and educational attainment; space availability; cost in money and time to the institution; and attention focused on a smaller population. Additionally, the culture and climate of the study site and secondary schools in the Jesuit Western Province may prove to be barriers to the recommendations.

The first barrier noted is the perception by co-researchers that they were not supposed to reach out directly to teachers, indicating an unwelcoming environment. The perception of an unwelcoming environment was expressed by GJ:

When he was in grade school, I talked to the teacher directly. But since we’ve been here, we’re not allowed to. When we first came here, all the teachers in the grade school told
me, do not act like elementary parents because it’s different. They already gave me a warning. You cannot just go inside campus and move around. You can email them, but no face-to-face. So that’s my number one. There are some activities that we’re allowed to engage.

Co-researcher reflections like GJ’s indicate that the study site communicates in contradictory language, inviting parents to come to campus and be part of the community while telling them not to hobble their son’s growth and maturation by interfacing with teachers, coaches, and other school structures, as he needs to do that himself.

The second barrier is the perception by co-researchers that school-centric opportunities are exclusionary by income, SES, and educational attainment. JA expressed that she shuts down at the prospect of engaging in on-campus opportunities because of the perceived distance between her SES and educational attainment and those of other parents. Other co-researchers echo this perception as they reflect on their attempts to engage in on-campus opportunities; not feeling seen, other parents of wealth and education do not speak to them, or if they do, not for very long resulting in non-engagement in school-centric events.

The third barrier is the possible cost to the institution in money and time and managing the community’s perception of special attention focused on a smaller population. Monetary cost may vary with each institution depending on what infrastructure is already in place, but recommendations can be implemented with relatively low monetary impact on the institution. Recommendations will necessarily involve many stakeholders in the schools because the context of any school is dynamic and the roles of parents/guardians and school structures are socially constructed and
reciprocal in nature. Critical stakeholders that might impede the recommendations of the study are parents/guardians who identify with the dominant culture of instruction, faculty, and the administration.

**Parents/Guardians**

Parents/guardians who identify with the dominant culture of instruction may not perceive a need to focus attention and resources on a smaller population. To assist in dismantling this possible challenge, faculty who identify as first-generation or administration may act as supports and allies in the implementation of the recommendations. Addressing stakeholders introduces the conversation on school climate, culture, and organizational change.

**Implementation**

Successful implementation of the recommendations should consider the culture and climate of each school. Culture, the way things are done on a Jesuit campus, should be consonant with the Standards and Benchmarks (2015) for guiding Jesuit schools. Although this document guides all Jesuit schools, the way in which the standards are expressed may vary. It will be important to have meaningful conversations with the school community (faculty, staff, administration) in order to approach implementation in a respectful way. Successful implementation could take four years, depending on the culture and climate of each school community.

A point that is especially germane to conversations with school communities from the Standards and Benchmarks is that, “as partners in mission, Jesuits and our colleagues are never content with the status quo, the known, the tried, the already existing” (p. 1). Standards 12 and 13 have direct application to the conversation on implementation in the
macro and the micro environments (Standards and Benchmarks, 2015). Standard 12 refers to *cura personalis* as it applies to students and parents engaging in opportunities for meaningful engagement. Standard 13 finds direct application for implementation invoking respect for the dignity of the individual and the development and maintenance of an inclusive school environment. Once again, from the researcher’s perspective, supported by the findings of this study, there is intersection among the standards, the utility of the theoretical framework of the Best Interests of the Student, and ethical decision making in a school context.

Successful implementation has a set series of steps, according to Kotter (1995): establish a sense of urgency, form a powerful coalition, create a vision, communicate the vision, empower and delegate others to act on it, plan for short-term wins, consolidate improvements to spark more change, make connections between the successes and institutional success. In the study site and in the broader context of the western province, establishing a sense of urgency depends on anecdotal experience with students, finding out how many families fall into the population, conducting a literature review, and polling peer Jesuit institutions regarding their communities. Developing a coalition of allies and identifying a champion is necessary in each school. In the western province, an important ally may be found in JSN leadership or assistant to the Provincial.

Kotter’s (1995) next step is to create a vision with actionable strategies for the community. This step can be assisted by use of the Standards and Benchmarks and informed by data gathered from the western province and each school community. Communicating the vision, step four, should use every vehicle possible, and depending, once again, on the culture of the schools, consider how each community communicates
best. Kotter encourages change agents to “communicate in words and deeds” (p. 64) and to create “credible communication and lots of it” (p. 63).

Empowering others to act legitimizes those in their own community to act and have ownership over implementation of the recommendations. Removal of obstacles, organizational or other, may require the champion of the group to exercise political capital to effect that. Short-term win creation follows. Recognition of any short-term win is necessary to keep momentum. This could be sharing a success in obtaining permission to conduct this study in the western province or obtaining permission to send out a survey to parents or students at a particular school site and gaining permission to create a summer school course for rising first-generation freshman students. Short-term wins are to be celebrated. Short-term wins, according to Kotter should also be used to short-circuit declaring success too soon. At the study site, challenges arise periodically, and updated data on impact of interventions and short-term wins assist in facing challenges.

Finally, change must be galvanized as part of the culture. Short-term gains can echo out into the school community and the community at large. Kotter encourages the communication of successes and how they have positively impacted the community. In the study site, this has been done by soliciting coverage of events and successes in the school newspaper and telling staff in the advancement department about successes so they may share recommendations with supporters of the school. A review of implementation of recommendations at the study site follows.

In the context of study site, the implementation of the proposed recommendations requires adding language(s) spoken at home to the school information management system, PowerSchool. This will inform what language is most accessible for the
parents/guardians of first-generation students. Website information and any information sent home will be translated. Phone surveying will yield data on most effective means of communication and best days and times to make engagement opportunities available. The size of the population will dictate how many phone contact attempts to make each day for follow-up or to reinforce explicit invitations. Data collected on welcome events will allow follow-up with parents/guardians of first-generation students with contacts from the school welcoming questions and making certain they know where to find information.

First-generation freshman students are invited to voluntarily participate in a summer school bridge program, *College Connections*. Parents/guardians are invited to attend a party at the end of the summer session to view student work. This invitation may be made a mandatory component of their student’s participation in the program. At this time, the opportunity to become involved as a parent partner would be made. Current parents/guardians of first-generation students will be invited to act in this capacity as well and invited to attend as valued sources of information and a bridge to the institution.

At the study site, there is a first-generation student group on campus, and there is an end-of-the-year banquet honoring graduating seniors. Parents/guardians of first-generation students and additional family members are invited to attend. This is a ticketed event, and the ticket price is waived if it presents an obstacle to participation.

Parents/guardians of first-generation students will be notified that part of their son’s community service requirement will be met by their mandatory participation in an on-campus community service opportunity. For example, HSPT tutoring and a social component will be added to encourage forging relationships with other parents and
school structures. Parent partners will also attend, acting a bridge and facilitating connection to the school structures and a sense of belongingness.

A calendar should be kept for reaching out to parents/guardians of first-generation students once a quarter. This would be intended as a check-in contact and an invitation to ask questions. This is intended to create a sense of a caring community and an accessible school structure. At the end of each year, students and parents/guardians of first-generation students would be polled regarding effective and non-effective engagement efforts. Implementation of recommendations requires interfacing with stakeholders, assessing necessary funds, and accessing existing current resources in the school community. The relevant points are highlighted in the next section.

**Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Implementation of Solutions**

There are several stakeholders necessary to interface with in order to effectively execute the solutions. The chair of the counseling department is critical to engaging and gaining buy-in from the school community in the study site. The chair has significant vertical and horizontal capital, and can facilitate effective communication with other stakeholders such as the office of technology, and budget access for social events. An ongoing relationship with the office of technology is necessary for data gathering, specifically on language of origin or language(s) spoken at home through PowerSchool. The office of technology is also integral in sending emails to groups in the study site’s community. At the study site, a relationship with support staff is key to scheduling space for meetings, parent/guardian social events, and mailings. At the study site, there is an office of catering, and this office is used to provide food or coffee for these events. This office works with the leader and the chair of the department to set non-exclusionary
prices for any ticketed events. Additionally, interfacing with the staff of the website will be necessary for updating material in language other than English. Navigation of the translated material on the website should be piloted with a focus group of parents/guardians of first-generation students. These parents/guardians would be invited from this parent population.

Obstacles to implementation of the recommendations for school-centric events are anticipated to be scheduling space, making certain explicit communications are made, and followed up on to help ensure parents/guardians of first-generation students have received the invitation and know their involvement is valued. As an interdisciplinary practitioner, personal contact with stakeholders is valued. Email requests followed by an in-person conversation that communicates respect for the stakeholder’s time and expertise is productive and contributes to the communal nature of ethical decision making and avoiding resistance.

Data collection is important in assessing effectiveness of programmatic support, what to maintain, what to discontinue, and what to add. The leader, in concert with support staff, will create surveys, for example, to assess effectiveness. The leader will then have review conversations with the chair of the department and parent partners for feedback to make any adjustments going forward.

**Timeline for Implementation of the Solution**

The implementation of the proposed recommendations at the study site could take place over the course of two calendar years. The timeline may vary depending on the culture and climate of each school and the infrastructure already in place. Some of the infrastructure is already in place at the study site. For example, families have to check a
box upon course registration indicating if their student will be a first-generation college
student. The students are then sent an invitation to attend the summer bridge program.
From this attendance, parents/guardians can be contacted and the relationship building
can begin according to the recommendations. This same data triggers an invitation to the
parent/guardians of first-generation student welcome event on campus. Attendance at that
event is verified by a sign-in form, and follow-up contacts can be made. Scheduling of
any on-campus events, the students’ end-of-summer-school presentation, and the student
association’s end-of-the year banquet, for example, need to be done months in advance.
This is because space demand on campus is competitive, and scheduling can be
completed with the help of support staff.

Translating all communication from the school may take a year to two years to
roll out. Discerning possible providers and cost will be a necessary part of this process
and are unknown at the time of this study. Other schools that do translate school
communication would be identified and contacted for possible resources and
recommendations. The school administrators may impact completing this vital part of the
recommendations and the timing for full implementation. Discerning impact of the
recommendations will be facilitated by attendance at school-centric events, reflections of
parents/guardians of first-generation students on what was helpful and what was not
through surveys, personal conversations, and a student focus groups. Any programmatic
support must be evaluated to discern if it is addressing the needs of the community.

**Evaluating the Outcome of Implementing the Solution**

Evaluation of the impact of recommendation implementation will be assessed
against the best interests of the student, through data collection, and feedback from
stakeholders. The researcher recommends that a committee, including the leader, chair of the department, and parent partners be convened biannually to review data collected and brainstorm strategies for the ensuing year. A survey regarding what was beneficial for the parents/guardians of first-generation students will be conducted and data reviewed in annual meetings. It is recommended that a student focus group be included taking into consideration their voices as well.

Implications

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study will contribute directly to the mission-aligned work of the study site, and the results of implementation can then be disseminated to other schools in the western province. This study will directly impact the lived experience of a previously underserved parent population and, by extension, the experience of the students. This study, for the first time, focuses on the lived experience of parents/guardians of first-generation students in a Jesuit high school setting in service to improving the praxis of cura personalis in that setting. Support, in the form of a partnership with JSN and the western province will further legitimize the implications.

Implications for Future Research

Topics that emerged from this study that could be addressed by future studies include perceptions of the school structure as a welcoming environment, resilience as part of the world view of parents/guardians of first-generation students, and the exploration of the concept of support. Additionally, the study should be conducted on multiple Jesuit high school campuses in the western province to create a construct that could offer a structure for improved praxis of cura personalis while being responsive to and relevant
for the specific populations of parents/guardians of first-generation students on each campus.

**Perception of the school environment.** Co-researchers made note of how involvement changed for them in the high school environment. Many reflected on feeling embraced by the middle school environment as opposed to barriers to engagement in high school, inclusive of school structures. This is of importance to the study site school to make all parents/guardians feel welcome partners in their students’ educational journey.

**Resilience.** The narratives of parents/guardians of first-generation students relay experiences of the life-long impact of disrupted educational attainment. The impact was noted as being overlooked for advancement in the workplace, lower paying or insecure employment, sacrifice, shame, and embarrassment. Some narratives included immigration experiences and experiences of violence and sexual abuse. How all these experiences contribute to resilience and how this resilience may or may not contribute to engagement would be valuable to explore in understanding and serving this population.

**Explore the concept of support.** Questions on the interview protocol regarding first-generation characteristics were intended to explore educational attainment and disrupted lives. In addition to co-researchers reflecting on their disrupted lives, the concept of support was frequently reported. JA’s comment was representative when she said,

And my mom wasn’t a cheerleader for me. Not so much guiding, showing me, or even putting somebody in my path that could be a mentor. There was not big college presence, if you will. It was not a big deal. I mean at that time. I graduated, was huge. Yeah. And so, that was good enough. But it wasn’t.
Co-researchers also reflected on the exercise of social capital in how they support their student. It will be important to operationalize support to better understand their experience and in creating more effective methods of engagement in the communal context of the school.

**Expand research to the Jesuit Western Province.** To create a construct to address the improved praxis of *cura personalis* for parents/guardians of first-generation students, expanding this research to Jesuit high schools in the western province will be important. Jesuit high schools in the western province only report percentages of students of color on their campuses (Jesuit School Network, 2019). This means the JSN does not have data on how many first-generation students are on the campuses and issues specific to the lived experience of those students and their parents/guardians. Serving parents/guardians of first-generation students requires knowing who they are, their lived experience, and how they perceive barriers and facilitators of engagement.

**Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice**

The implications of this study support ethical decision making in an educational context through the application of best interests of the student and the practice of *cura personalis*. The implication is the strong encouragement to be a reflective leader employing the ethic of critique and recognizing how our schools, policies, and practices maintain the reproduction of inequity of experience in our institutions echoing out to society at large. It requires acute practice of self-awareness to practice decision making in the dynamic context of each school’s environment and through the exercise of the ethic of community. It may be of use to encourage school leaders to spend time critically evaluating whether their school environment is “marked by a pedagogy that engages the
world through a careful analysis of context in dialogue with experience, always open to 
evaluation through reflection for the sake of action” (Provincials Assistants for 

**Summary of the Dissertation in Practice**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand how 
parents/guardians of first-generation students experience engagement in their student’s 
education as a function of social capital. This study was important because it addressed 
the gap in research by extending it from post-secondary settings and public school 
environments to include a Jesuit high school environment. The aim of the study was to 
inform best practices to support the engagement of this parent population.

The study found that parents/guardians of first-generation students experienced 
disrupted lives as the result of events or series of events that disrupted their educational 
attainment. They felt they had no choice about the disruption and the cascade of life 
events that ensued. The study also found that co-researchers conceptualized educational 
attainment as a shield against hardship and as a facilitator of access to and exercise of 
social capital. The theme of educational attainment as a shield was expressed through 
their challenges in forging relationships with other parents, school structures, and how 
they help and support their student. Additionally, the study found that emotional truths, 
the result of emotional injury or injuries sustained through lack of parent support, 
immigration narratives, and wanting something better for their own student were a 
driving force in their desire to have their student attend college. Perhaps this desire 
communicates an effort to heal their own emotional wounds as witnessed by co-
researcher reflections that the student represents the family. Barriers to forging
relationships with other parents, school structures, and engagement intersected: language, work schedules, SES, and income.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that the Jesuit school study site translate all school communication into non-exclusionary language and languages other than English. It is also recommended the school collect data from parents/guardians of first-generation students to discover the effectiveness of the recommendations. The third recommendation is that the school make one or more school-centric events mandatory and pair a social opportunity with it.

It is hoped the results of this study will lead to serving this population with greater intentionality, enhancing their experience and, by extension, that of their student. It is also hoped the study can be extended to Jesuit high schools in the western province to enhance the praxis of *cura personalis* in the dynamic context of the school environment. This phenomenological inquiry was informed by research on ethical decision making, best interests of the student, the Ignatian charism of *cura personalis*, and social capital and cultural capital. The results of this inquiry were meant serve current and future leaders in Jesuit education as they support this previously underserved population.
References


Bass, B. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. Organizational Dynamics, 18(3), 19-31


http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:14121779


https://www.socialworkers.org/


August 27, 2019

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Gina Liberotti permission to conduct research titled, Caring for the ‘Extended’ Person: Understanding Engagement of Parents/Guardians of First-Generation Students in a Jesuit Secondary High School setting, at Loyola High School Los Angeles. This also serves as assurance that this school complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

Paul Jordan, Ed.D
Assistant Principal of Student Life
Director of Counseling
Pjordan@loyolahs.edu
DATE: 04-Oct-2019
TO: Liberotti, Gina
FROM: Social / Behavioral IRB Board
PROJECT TITLE: Caring for the 'Extended' Person: Understanding Engagement of Parents/Guardians of First-Generation Students in a Jesuit High School Setting
REFERENCE #: 2000353
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application
REVIEW TYPE Exempt
ACTION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: 04-Oct-2019

Thank you for your Initial Application submission materials for this project. The following items were reviewed with this submission:

Creighton University HS eForm

This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2.

All protocol amendments and changes are to be submitted to the IRB and may not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 402-280-2126 or irb@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and number in all correspondence with this committee.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview scripts: Good morning/afternoon. Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we begin the interview, there are a few things that I will need to cover to make sure you understand. Here is a copy of the Invitation to participate and the Bill of Rights for Research Participants (provide both). With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. Is it okay to start the recording now? All right. First, you should know a little about my study. I am interested in the experience parents of first-generation student have with engagement in their son’s educational experience. The study will involve more than one interview, like this one, and will take 45 minutes to an hour. There will be about 12 main questions with the possibility of some follow-up or clarifying questions and there are absolutely no right or wrong answers. As I mentioned, the interview will be audio recorded with your permission to make sure that your words are accurately transcribed. (Check for understanding). Everything we discuss will be kept confidential and your name will be replaced by a code made up of numbers. Any reference to your son’s name will also be removed to protect you both. A week or so after the interview, I would like to schedule a follow-up meeting where you can review our
conversation to make sure it is accurate. (Check for understanding). I am going to ask questions about your history, family, experience with education, and how you experience engagement or involvement here at school or at home. Some of the questions may cause you unintentional emotional discomfort, or nervousness, but you should know there are no serious risks as a result of participation, and there is no risk for your son. Also, you should know there is no financial benefit, only that you are helping me with my research. (Check for understanding). If you choose to participate, we can take a break now, or you can choose not to participate and withdraw from the study at any time if you feel you need to do so. Great! Do you have any questions before we begin? (Answer any questions). Okay, so if this all sounds good to you, please sign the consent form so that you know I have reviewed all of this with you. Let’s get started.

**Demographic Questions:**

1. How old are you?
2. Who do you live with? Who is part of your household? What is your marital status?

**Theme 1: First-Generation characteristics**

1. So I can create an accurate picture of you and your experience as parent/guardian here at school, tell me, how do you describe yourself? Your family, your background?
2. Think back to your own educational experience? Can you describe that experience for me? What is the highest grade in school you reached?
   a. Where did you complete your own education?
   b. In light of your experience what does education mean to you?
c. What do you believe education means for your son?

d. What does it mean to you to have your son go to college?

Theme 2: Social Capital

1. Who do you talk to when you have questions or concerns about your son’s education, or what classes he should take, or his grades?

2. What about other parents at the school? How would you describe conversations with them?

3. How do you help your son? What feelings does this bring up for you?

   a. Describe a time when you could not help him with something related to his school, or with his education?

Theme 3: Parent Engagement

1. Can you describe for me how you interact with the school?

2. How do you feel this impacts your son?

3. What does it mean to be involved/engaged in your son’s education?

   a. What does involvement look like? What form does it take?

   b. What are some of challenges?

Wrap Up Questions:

1. Is there anything that you would like to add to any of your comments?

2. Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear _________________,

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Gina Liberotti, a counselor at your son’s school, for Creighton University, in Omaha, Nebraska in partial fulfillment for the Doctorate Degree in Interdisciplinary Leadership. You were selected as a potential participant in this study because your son is identified as a first-generation student- the first-generation in your family to go to college. The information you provide will offer a fuller description and better understanding of your experience of engagement in your son’s educational experience and will inform how the school can better serve our parents of first-generation students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study will be to explore and understand how parents of first-generation students

Your participation will be in the form of a face-to-face interview on campus in the Counseling Conference Room at a day/date/time that is convenient for you, including evenings and weekends. The interview will last 45 minutes to an hour. I can answer any of your questions in a phone conversation. I will be following up with you regarding your participation a few days after you should have received this invitation to schedule your interview. Thank you so much for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Gina Liberotti MSW, LCSW
Counselor
First-Generation Support
Appendix D

Participant Bill of Rights

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.

2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.

3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.

4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.

5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.

6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.

7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.

8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research participant.

9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:

   a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.
Appendix E

Translated Interview Protocol

APÉNDICE E: PROTOCOLO DE LA ENTREVISTA

Hora de la Entrevista:

Fecha:

Lugar:

Entrevistador(a):

Entrevistado(a):

Guiones de la entrevista: Buenos días/Buenas tardes. Gracias otra vez por tomarse un tiempo para reunir y hablar conmigo hoy. Antes de empezar la entrevista, hay algunas cosas que necesitaré repasar para asegurarme de que usted entienda este proceso. Aquí tengo una copia del formulario de consentimiento para repasar, el cual le pediré su firma si usted decide participar. También, le voy a explicar lo que dice el formulario. (Provee el formulario). Con su permiso, me gustaría grabar el audio de la entrevista. ¿Está bien comenzar la grabación ahora? Bueno. Primero, usted debe saber un poco sobre el estudio. Estoy interesado(a) en la experiencia de los padres de estudiantes de primera generación, específicamente su involucramiento en la experiencia académica de su hijo. El estudio tendrá muchas entrevistas como ésta, y cada entrevista tomará 45 (cuarenta y cinco) minutos a una hora. Habrá más o menos 12 (doce) preguntas principales con la posibilidad de algunas repreguntas o preguntas aclaratorias, y no hay absolutamente ninguna respuesta incorrecta o correcta. Como he mencionado, la entrevista será grabada con su permiso para asegurarme que las palabras sean transcritas con exactitud. (Revisa que todo haya quedado claro). Todo de lo que nos conversamos será anónimo y
confidencial, y su nombre será reemplazado por un código hecho de números. Cualquier referencia al nombre de su hijo también será removida para proteger las identidades de ustedes dos. Una semana o más después de la entrevista, me gustaría programar otra consulta donde usted puede revisar la transcripción de nuestra conversación para asegurarse de su exactitud. (Revisa que todo haya quedado claro). Le voy a preguntar sobre su historia, familia, experiencia con educación, y cómo experimenta su involucramiento aquí en la escuela o en casa. Algunas preguntas pueden causar desasosiego o ansiedad, pero debe saber que no hay ningún riesgo por consecuencia de participar; tampoco no hay ningún riesgo para su hijo. También, debe saber que no hay ningún beneficio financiero; su participación solamente me ayuda con mi investigación. (Revisa que todo haya quedado claro). Si elige participar, firmará el formulario de consentimiento. Si no elige participar, puede dejar el estudio en cualquier momento. ¡Excelente! ¿Tiene usted preguntas antes de empezar? (Contesta cualquier pregunta que tenga el/la entrevistado/a). Bueno, si todo le parece bueno, firme el formulario de consentimiento para dejarnos saber que ya he revisado todo esto con usted. ¡Comencemos!

**Preguntas demográficas:**

1. ¿Cuántos años tiene usted?

2. ¿Con quién vive usted? ¿Quiénes son parte de su domicilio? ¿Cuál es su estado civil?

**Tema 1: Características de primera generación**
1. Para crear una idea precisa de usted y de su experiencia como padre (madre)/guardián (guardiana) aquí en la escuela, dígame, ¿cómo se describiría usted mismo/a? ¿su familia y sus antecedentes (o su historia personal/familiar)?

2. Reflexiona sobre su experiencia académica. ¿Puede describir la experiencia para mí? ¿Hasta qué nivel/ grado realizó sus estudios?
   a. ¿Dónde completó su propia educación?
   b. Según su experiencia escolar, ¿qué significa educación para usted?
   c. ¿Qué cree que significa la educación para su hijo?
   d. ¿Qué significa para usted si su hijo va a la universidad?

Tema 2: Capital social

1. ¿Con quién habla cuando usted tiene preguntas o preocupaciones con respecto a la educación de su hijo, o a qué clases debe tomar él, o a sus calificaciones?
2. ¿Qué tal los otros padres/guardianes en la escuela? ¿Cómo describiría las conversaciones que tiene usted con ellos?
3. ¿Cómo ayuda usted a su hijo? ¿Cómo se siente o qué sentimientos tiene cuando le ofrece ayuda a su hijo?
   a. Describe un momento cuando usted no pudo ayudar a su hijo con algo relacionado con la escuela, o con su educación.

Tema 3: Involucramiento de padre/guardián

1. ¿Puede describir cómo se relaciona usted con la escuela?
2. ¿Cómo cree que esto impacta a su hijo?
3. Para usted, ¿qué significa ser involucrado/a en la educación de su hijo?
a. Para usted, ¿qué es involucramiento? ¿En qué forma toma? ¿Cómo se manifiesta?

b. ¿Cuáles son algunos desafíos?

Últimas preguntas:

1. ¿Hay algo más que quiera agregar a sus comentarios previos?

2. ¿Tiene otras preguntas para mí?
APÉNDICE F: INVITACIÓN PARA PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO

Estimado/a ________________,

Le preguntamos si usted quiere participar en un estudio investigativo llevado a cabo por Gina Liberotti, una consejera en la escuela de su hijo, para la Universidad Creighton en Omaha, Nebraska en cumplimiento parcial de su doctorado en liderazgo interdisciplinario. Usted fue seleccionado/a como participante potencial en este estudio porque su hijo es identificado como estudiante de primera generación -- o sea él será la primera generación en su familia que irá a la universidad. La información que provea usted ofrecerá una descripción más profunda y un mejor entendimiento de su experiencia de involucramiento en la experiencia escolar de su hijo, y informará cómo la escuela podrá servir mejor a nuestros padres de estudiantes de primera generación.

PROPOSITO DEL ESTUDIO

El propósito del estudio será para explorar y entender cómo los padres de estudiantes de primera generación perciben su experiencia de involucramiento en la experiencia secundaria de su hijo.

Su participación se realizará en la forma de entrevistas en persona en nuestro campus en la Sala de Conferencias de la Asesoría (Counseling Conference Room) el día/fecha/hora que sea conveniente para usted; esto incluye noches y fines de semana. La entrevista durará 45 minutos a una hora. Puedo contestar cualquier de sus preguntas por conversación telefónica. Daré seguimiento a su participación después de algunos días y después de que usted reciba esta invitación para programar su entrevista. Muchas gracias por considerar esta oportunidad.

Atentamente,

Gina Liberotti MSW, LCSW

Consejera

Apoyo de (las Familias/Estudiantes de) Primera Generación
Declaración de los Derechos Humanos para Los Participantes de la Investigación

Como participante en un estudio investigativo, usted tiene el derecho:

1. De tener suficiente tiempo para decidir ser parte o no ser parte del estudio investigativo, y para tomar esta decisión sin presión de las personas haciendo la investigación.

2. De rechazar ser parte del estudio en su totalidad, o parar participar a cualquier momento después de empezar el estudio.

3. De comprender lo que el estudio intenta de averiguar, de lo que le pasará a usted durante el estudio y de lo que el estudio le pedirá si participa en el estudio.

4. De entender los riesgos probables de ser parte del estudio.

5. De ser informado/a de los beneficios posibles de ser parte del estudio.

6. De comprender si hay costos asociados con su participación en el estudio y si usted recibirá remuneración por participar en el estudio.

7. De ser informado/a de quién tendrá acceso a la información acumulada sobre usted y cómo su confidencialidad será protegida.

8. De ser informado/a a quién usted contactará con preguntas sobre la investigación, los perjuicios relacionados con la investigación y sus derechos como participante de la investigación.

9. Si el estudio involucra tratamiento o terapia:

   a. De ser informado/a de otras opciones de tratamiento no - investigativo que usted tiene.

   De ser informado/a en dónde hay tratamiento disponible en caso de tener algún perjuicio relacionado con la investigación, y quién pagará el tratamiento relacionado con la investigación.
Appendix H

Update on First-Generation Project 2018-19

Reflecting on the Process: Findings from High School’s First-Generation Project

INTRODUCTION:
Applying to college can be a complex and difficult process; even for students whose parents have a college degree. For First-Generation students, navigating the educational “pipeline” may be twice as challenging because of their limited “college knowledge.” The purpose of this update is to share findings from our First-Generation Summer Project designed for incoming freshmen.

OUR MISSION:
High School remains committed to creating and sustaining a vibrant, inclusive community that reflects the expansive demographics and rich mixture of persons who live in Southern California; first-generation students are, undoubtedly, part of those expansive demographics. First-generations students have a unique set of challenges and need additional support when preparing for their post-secondary education. As a college-preparatory school, High School is prepared to offer an educational experience and academic environment that provides support to all students including first-generation students for successful entry to higher education.

The First-Generation Project at High School offers student’s valuable resources and opportunities for academic professional, and personal growth. Our mission is to emphasize the unique social capital first-generation college students bring into the high school setting in order to create a sustained community in which our students may thrive during their years at High School of Los Angeles.

ABOUT THE WORK:
What emerged as a series of informal conversations with colleagues and leadership on the lived experiences of a few first-generation students, slowly developed into a systematic strategy designed to support this hidden population of students and their families. Many of the student’s interviewed echoed the research on peer social capital in that the student connected with peers and peer networks that provide resources and other non-tangible forms of support such as pro-academic norms and identities. In essence, these “self-identified” first-generation students relied on one another to decode the educational system often with mixed results. Our conversations with these students formed only part of the impetus for a support system.

With so little known about first-generation students at High School, the objective of our work sought to explore and understand the educational experiences of first-generation students by posing the following question(s): “Are we effectively identifying first-generation students and offering a formal campus support network?” What do they perceive as barriers to their schooling experience?”
FIRST-GENERATION DEMOGRAPHICS AT HIGH SCHOOL:
Spring 2015 was the first year that “First-Generation” status was part of the registration process. Students in Grades 9-11 had to check the box (if applicable) in the re-registration packet. Incoming students (those accepted) had the same box in their registration packet. As of September, 2015, First-Generation Demographics are as follows:

- Grade 9: 44 Students
- Grade 10: 44 Students
- Grade 11: 56 Students
- Grade 12: 61 Students

N=205 Students (17% of total student population)

As of September, 2016 students in Grades 9-12 indicated first-generation status

- Grade 9: 36 Students
- Grade 10: 50 Students
- Grade 11: 54 Students
- Grade 12: 61 Students

N=201 (14% of the total student population)

As of September, 2017 students in Grades 9-12 indicated first-generation status

- Grade 9: 69
- Grade 10: 45
- Grade 11: 54
- Grade 12: 53

N=221 Students (19.35% of the total student population)

As of September, 2018 students in Grades 9-12 indicated first-generation status

- Grade 9: 56
- Grade 10: 67
- Grade 11: 45
- Grade 12: 55

N=223 Students (16.7% of the total student population)

SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM, SUMMER 2015
The Summer Bridge Program was created to give first-generation students entering High School the “seamless support system” necessary to navigate successfully through High
School and into higher education. The course was designed by drawing upon several research-based resources (College-Board, Pew Hispanics Research). Yet, it was the invaluable input and guidance shared by Dr. LaTonya Rease Miles, who at the time was the Director of the Academic Resource Center and “First-To-Go” Program Director at Loyola Marymount University, which aided this endeavor. Dr. Rease Miles has since moved to UCLA to guide that university’s first year experience.

In April 2015, all students accepted to High School received a letter informing them about the program with specific criteria designed to meet programmatic goals. Of the thirty students identified as first-generation who met the designated criteria, fifteen accepted the invitation to participate in the summer program.

The class met for five weeks and was taught in companion with the Summer Reading Course. The class incorporated two trips to universities in order to meet with Admissions Offices, Tour the Campuses and meet with representatives from their First-Generation Programs and support systems—Loyola Marymount University and the University of Southern California. A key component of the class was reflecting on the identity as “first-generation” and developing a digital story that captures the essence of what it means to be first-generation. The course was as much a part of the lives of the parents as it was for the students.

In 2016 the College Connections college campus tours were expanded to 3 campuses to include UCLA. The instructional staff includes current first-generation upper classmen and first-generation alumni. The 2016-17 year saw expansion of the project into a special targeted presentation for junior students at the annual Career Day incorporating faculty, staff, and alumni in addition to first-generation senior students to offer their immediate experience of the college discernment and application process along with their destination schools.

In 2017-18 the College Connections continues to impact our first-generation rising freshman. The instructional staff this year was solely first-generation upper classmen and first-generation alumni. The 2017-18 year saw continued support by our own first-generation faculty, alumni in addition to first-generation senior students.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Engaging families is crucial in constructing effective support for first-generation college applicants. In service to this effort, the Project hosts an annual banquet, and Mass of Thanksgiving. This year the Project engaged two parents who are first-generation in their families, to reach out to our first-generation parents through Mother’s PTA and Father’s PTA. Parents were invited to coffees, The Father’s Club Poker Night, and a school wide Dia de Los Muertos celebration. We will continue to reach out to our first-generation parents in this way and continue to discern additional ways to more effectively involve them.

LOOKING FORWARD
It is important for the First-Generation Project to maintain relevance, and in order to do this we will be conducting a student survey and parent survey harvesting their experience at High School, and how we might better serve all of our students and their families with greater intentionality.
Co-researcher GJ participated in two interviews. Co-researcher GJ is a 55-year-old Filipina immigrant who grew up in a large city and lives with her husband and her 10th grader, an only child. Tagalog is spoken at home. She came to the United States in 2000 and then again in 2001 as a tourist. She received a job offer, if she was to return to the United States. After marrying in the Philippines, she returned to the United States and obtained a working Visa and started a new life from “scratch” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). Both GJ and her husband are college graduates earning their degrees in the Philippines. Co-researcher GJ began a master’s degree program there but did not complete it. She was diagnosed with cancer when her son was four years old, and because her job did not have health insurance, she and her son returned to the Philippines for a year for her treatment, and her husband pursued a degree in Pharmacy there as well.

GJ articulated that education is very important. She came from a family of eight children. She states her parents emphasized that although they did not have possessions for them to inherit, they could give them an education. “Anywhere you go you can carry that. Nobody’s going to steal it” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019).

She also stated that her son going to college was the “biggest achievement. Nobody’s going to put you down. You’re going to boost your confidence. And education will bring you different places, you will discover deeper meaning of life” (GJ personal
communication, October 18, 2019). Education is directly related to “everything” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019): higher earnings, ability to travel, knowledge about social life, economics, and politics. Education means, “…you can understand what other people’s minds, you can also contribute what’s on your mind, what’s your idea” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). During the follow-up interview she commented that education is “…a treasure…once you have education you can find a job that will help to sustain your needs. You can adapt into a situation because you have knowledge…to socialize with other people…” (GJ personal communication, December 6, 2019).

She states she email teachers directly with questions about grades or classes. She was emphatic that she does not speak to teachers directly. She was informed by other parents and from back-to-school night that high school is not like middle school or elementary school. She took that as a warning, “No face to face” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). She commented that high school helps the students become more independent and prepares them for the transition to even greater independence in college.

Her conversations with other parents are mainly through volunteer opportunities on campus, for example High School Placement Test (HSPT) tutoring, or Open House. She states these parents have students who are older than her son and characterizes many of these conversations as beneficial information sharing in nature, and that she has connected on a deeper level with a parent she met at HSPT tutoring and stated that that was “really great” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). She attended the welcome meeting for first-generation parents, and was excited at the prospect of having a
community with which to connect and share “struggles” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019) but that did not materialize. She attends daily mass on campus and speaks with parents and faculty/staff who also attend that service and noted her participation increases her comfort level in the community, and that she is the one who starts a conversation with the other daily communicants.

She helps her son with transportation to and from school and to school events, and uses that time for conversation about his day, if he had any difficulty in a particular subject, and she shares her school experiences to let him know he is not alone in his academic challenges. She also encourages him to go to the library and to focus on his weaknesses. She is happy he followed her recommendation and regularly spends time in the library and his performance has improved. She described a time when she could not help him, with his speech impediment, that caused him to be a bit reticent to speak aloud, and some students made fun of him. She did not expect students from the to behave in this way, and stated it was “heartbreaking” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019).

She characterizes her engagement with her son’s high school as supportive but more hands off, allowing her son to have more control, and trusting he will approach her when he needs help. She does not perceive or experience any barriers to engaging in her son’s education. If she has a question she checks the school website and will contact the person listed. She trusts the school to make the best decisions for her son. They talk about college at home, the necessary grades and test scores, and how to pay for it. She promotes ROTC as an option for this. She does perceive her accent (Tagalog) as a barrier for engaging with other parents especially at on campus social events. She mentioned she
and her husband were seated with non-Filipinos, “…they were all white, Americans, and they’re talking, they have the diction and everything” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). She feels some parents judge them because Tagalog accent is hard for some people to understand. Although her husband is monolingual Tagalog in his expressive language, but he has high receptive language in English. She told her husband that in high school, “you really have to mingle” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). In a follow-up interview she reflected she has relationships with some other Filipino parents she knows from elementary school. She shares with her son, “You were born here. Like a seed. So, you have best opportunity” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019). By this she means opportunity for success which she defines as being a good person. “Those cars will not assess of look your good self. It’s not going to speak about you. But the way you act, the way you think, and the way you deal with people, that’s character” (GJ personal communication, October 18, 2019).

GJ has a history of direct involvement in her faith community in the Philippines and in the United States and states that she prays daily. She notes that this makes her, “…feel like part of the environment” (GJ personal communication, December 6, 2019). An additional outcome of this feeling is she has become, “…more courageous to ask questions, and more curious to find an answer. I email the person…I even call the school, asking question…What are the things that I can qualify?” (GJ personal communication, December 6, 2019). She was responsible for discovering the first-generation opportunity and her son thanked her for finding it for him.
KJ

Co-researcher KJ is a 62-year-old divorced African American woman native to Los Angeles who has lived in her car for the past 3 ½ years. She lost her job, became ill, and then lost her house. Now, working part-time, her situation is further complicated by kidney disease for which she receives dialysis treatment. Her only child, a senior, lives with a relative, or in KJ’s words, “…or sleeps [there]…and I pick him up every morning, bring him to school, we do stuff afterwards…we have dinner or something and then I drop him off so he can sleep there and shower” (KJ personal communication, November 26, 2019). Co-researcher KJ attended USC for three years. She left college to help her aging parents, one who had Alzheimer’s disease, and the other a series of strokes. They died within a year of each other.

Co-researcher KJ had very humble beginnings, parents who picked cotton in the Southern United States eventually coming to Los Angeles where her father found long-term work as a truck driver and her mother as housekeeper for an upscale hotel. Her mother was able to complete 2nd grade and instilled in her the value of education. She reflects with emotion in her voice that her son going to college, “…means everything since I never wanted him to be like this…I want him to pick a field where there is almost always an opportunity to work…to make him self-reliant” (KJ personal communication, November 26, 2019).

She speaks directly with her son’s counselor or emails teachers when she has any questions or concerns about his education, classes, or grades. She characterizes conversations with other parents as non-existent except for a couple mothers she knows from elementary school. These conversations are more “detailed because I know them
more, and we compare notes” (KJ personal communication, November 26, 2019). One of
those mothers invited her to a school social event at her house, and KJ interacted with
other parents and learned about what the boys should be prioritizing on college
applications. Her son frequently goes to this family’s house.

Co-researcher KJ states she has not been as helpful to her son as she would like
because her living situation does not allow for it and her health limits her ability to
engage in on campus volunteer opportunities citing Open House as an example. She
states she tries to make sure he has enough time to study, access to a computer and wi-fi,
and stresses the importance of good grades. She takes him to a public library or a local
college library where the hours are longer, and there are quiet study floors. She discovers
and accesses educational support resources when she has the money to pay for it subject
tutoring or tutoring for when he was preparing to take the HSPT. She responds that it
feels good when is able to help him.

Co-researcher KJ describes a time when she could not help her son, especially
when she cannot pay for an educational support opportunity. She then points out free
resources, but none-the-less, “…it makes me feel bad, like a failure” (KJ personal
communication, November 26, 2019). She also talks about her son’s living situation as
something she does not the agency to impact. Her ex-husband lives in the same house
with one of his other children, and he makes it hard on her son and does not participate in
his life. For example, he will not pick up her son from school if she has a doctor
appointment that conflicts with pick up time.

Her interactions with the school are minimal attending one of the annual African
American luncheons and one other on campus event her son’s sophomore year. She
believes her son wishes she was more involved, but she can’t be more involved. Her
financial situation is precarious and this limits her involvement at school, her ability to
provide books, computers, and other supplies, and causes her great concern about the cost
of college. During our conversation KJ displayed her ability to access information to help
her navigate college applications and asked questions about the Common Application and
how her son can individualize it for specific schools.

MD

MD is a 47-year-old unmarried African American woman who grew up in the Los
Angeles area. After attending public high school, she attended a local community college
and left school when she had her son. A single mother, she and her son live in a duplex
owned by a family member. She works two jobs, six days a week, one as a software
trainer and one as a pharmacy technician, in addition to acting as a caregiver for her
grandmother. She states her son knows she is making sacrifices for him so he can have
lunch [at school] or some other kind of “extra.” She also sells items online through sites
like eBay or Poshmark. She notes she is trying to balance being both parents and work
two jobs.

MD believes education is the “…backbone to people’s futures…it’s a base, a
foundation” (MD, personal communication, November 26, 2019). She did not have the
chance to finish school, and she reiterates this and her perception of not having any
choices several times in our conversation. There is a level of expectation that her son will
go to and persist in college, that in her eyes “…there is no other option” (MD, personal
communication, November 26, 2019).
When she has questions about his classes or grades she speaks directly with her son’s counselor and she and her son sit together and review grades and what direction might be best for him to take. She reflects that she really doesn’t talk to other high school parents. She comments the school is so large in comparison to elementary and middle school, and she mentioned the student population was homogeneous African American in one school and her son was the only African American in the other. She felt that “…you know, you just have parents there who have the same struggles and relate. Their conversations were great. Like community, with those parents were awesome. They really embraced us (MD, personal communication, November 26, 2019).

She reports several instances where she helps her son. She has accessed tutors, found a civil air patrol opportunity, and a programming class for him. All of these opportunities require her to take him and pick him up or on the odd occasion, arrange for another parent to provide a ride one way. She views the time she has with him in the car as “…an opportunity to really connect with my child…and say, son how was your day” (MD, personal communication, November 26, 2019). She construes paying for summer school or AP exam fees as one of the ways she helps and supports her son. She reflects that when she is able to help her son in these ways she feels “…like, okay, I’m doing what God is…what my purpose is right now. I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing. So anything else that mommy wants, is going to come later” (MD, personal communication, November 26, 2019).

She comments that parent involvement with school “…shows your kids that, I’m behind you 100%...” and that she was “totally involved” (MD, personal communication November 26, 2019) in her son’s previous schools. She attended a recent information
night, and back-to-school night last year, and sent apology emails to all her son’s teachers this year. She made it clear that if a teacher indicates they would like to have a meeting she will come to campus or arrange for a phone conference. She does come to campus when her son, who is in the school band, plays for athletic events, helps out in the school store, and she has started attending the luncheons for the school’s parent group (for mothers). She comments that she feels good about her involvement, and that her son says “…Mom, I know sometimes I challenge you but I know you’re doing the best that you can” (MD, personal communication, November 26, 2019). She did not identify instances when she felt she could not help her son.

She speaks about God in her life, how God has placed her and her son in specific situations, or given her challenges, “…you have to go through them…there’s going to be something else there for you” (personal communication, November 26, 2019). There is a real sense of tenacity and resilience communicated.

**AI & JJ**

AI and JJ are a married couple who requested to be interviewed together. The wife is a 47-year-old Filipina who immigrated to the United States in 2001. She grew up in an urban environment in the Philippines and earned her medical degree there. She cannot practice medicine in the United States, and works the night shift as a nurse on a cardiac unit in a large HMO hospital. The husband is a 53-year-old Mexican-American born in Tijuana, Mexico and was brought to the United States as a baby. He attended a local community college and played football with the intention of continuing his studies in engineering at a four-year college as a transfer student. The football program was cut, and his priority shifted to working and starting a family. He has worked for a government
agency for 31 years, and works the day shift. They have one child who is a sophomore. The husband repeatedly stated during the interview that he “regrets nothing” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019) in reflection on his experience of lack of parental engagement or presence and having to quit school.

When he reflected on what education means to him he said, “Son, I work with my heart and my body. My hands are always dirty. So, I don’t want you to work with your hands. I want smarter, work with your brain…” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). “I want a better life for him than that. For me…I can’t travel back in time, to finish my education, I wasn’t able to. But I don’t regret anything…family comes first” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). He comments that he would love to return to school but in same breath rejects that he was at a disadvantage growing up in a family of eight children as the oldest. His father was “a picker” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019) and his mother worked as a seamstress. His parents were not able to be involved in his school experience, but he is committed to doing for his son what his parents were unable to do for him and his siblings.

The husband feels that education for his son is “…learning in connection with his future. So he can make things better for himself. And later make good for his family” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). Both parents communicate, in an indirect fashion, that success is their son’s interest in accessing medical school, and the importance of giving back to the community, and taking care of his family. They both mention repeatedly the importance of giving back to the community and that as a family they participate in community service outside of the school opportunities.
When there are questions or concerns regarding their son’s education, grades, or classes they speak directly to their son. They monitor the school’s information management system and ask their son directly if there is a low grade on an assessment. They encourage him to speak with his teachers and emphasize his responsibility for his education “…We told him that it’s not because it’s hard…it’s still going to reflect on your grade, so you have to do something about it” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). In addition, they speak directly to their son’s counselor commenting that she is approachable and knows his interests.

Neither parent engages with other parents at the school. The husband noted that attending his son’s freshman sporting events facilitated conversations with other parents, but when his son did not play sophomore year, he did not continue pursuing contact. The husband comments that even during volunteer opportunities, there isn’t much conversation with other parents, he is focused on the volunteer task, “Right now we don’t have communication with other parents” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). The wife notes her work schedule is a barrier and the parent association meetings are held during her work hours. She checks the school website for opportunities to connect with other mothers but is reticent to attend school events or engagement opportunities on her own for fear of being by herself.

They help their son by engaging in home conversations about his academic performance and the path to college and getting him a tutor if he needs one. They support him by taking him where he needs to go, for example the daily drive to school and picking him up, taking him to practices when he played a sport or needed to come to campus to participate in HSPT tutoring or attend a dance. JJ had an immediate response
when asked to think about a time he could not help his son, and he conceptualized this as not being able to attend a couple of Christmas recitals at school. It is clear he draws a connection from that experience to his own childhood experience of parental absence at school events. Al could not think of a time when she could not help her son. She stated “I cannot think of that, I’ve been there most of the time” (Al, personal communication, October 23, 2019).

The parents reflect on how they engage and interact with the school. They both comment on how accessible the teachers are and how approachable their son’s counselor is. They have attended back to school night, the husband has volunteered with the parent association (for fathers), and Open House. The husband notes that his son sees his school engagement

That I am active with the school, he sees that. And that I do like. It is just a lot of encouragement. It says that I’m here…he gets a big ol’ grin…it gives him some kind of pleasure. (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019).

The wife notes that her absence because of work doesn’t negatively impact her son

“…because he is there. At least somebody is there for his activities. But with assignments or anything about the school matters, I try to be there all the time” (Al, personal communication, October 23, 2019). Both parents comment that their interaction with the school takes the form of attending school-based opportunities for example, parent-teacher conferences, sporting events, or Open House. Both parents emphasize they trust the school to make the right decisions for their son. “We can see it. The school’s looking in the best interest of the student and also the parents…The school wants our children to succeed. I appreciate that” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019). “I’m trusting
the school …I feel 110% comfortable of the fact that you have my son’s better interest” (JJ, personal communication, October 23, 2019).

KT

KT participated in an interview on November 14, 2019. She is a 52-year-old Korean immigrant married with two children. She graduated from a college in South Korea. She began working part-time in a restaurant while still in high school to help her then recently divorced mother with household bills, and worked through college. In college she began tutoring children in addition to her restaurant job. Her immigration journey seemed uneventful in the sense that she married a Korean man who had US citizenship, and benefitted from his citizenship status.

Education prepared her for her future, missing only acquiring English as a second language, which she is doing now on her own. For her son, she thinks education is a guide for him to prepare him to attend a top university, for example Stanford, UC Berkeley, or MIT. She reflects that an education in the United States, in English, for her son offers him a totally different future. He can do whatever he wants. She believes every country speaks English and so he has more opportunity than she did.

When she has questions about her son’s education, his grades, or his classes she speaks directly to her son, and engages her husband as well. She checks PowerSchool several times daily and uses this as the springboard for daily conversations about school and school performance with her son. She never checks his homework; he manages his time well on his own.

She does have conversations with other parents at school. With her Korean peers she state the conversation centers on grades and test scores. She became very specific
about how this parent group compares what their children are taking, who tested into honors and who did not. She knows these parents from middle school, not from forming new contacts or networks with other high school parents. She has conversations with the parents from middle school who have sons in upper grades, and characterizes the nature of the parents as resources for information about classes. Other than her Korean peers she does not talk to other parents at school. Her husband does not want to talk to anyone and does not engage with the school through, for example, parent-teacher conferences or back to school night. Language is the main barrier cited.

She helps her son through supporting him by taking her him to visit the universities in which he is interested. To be inspired by the physical campus. She apparently exerts too much pressure in her expression of support and encouragement and her husband has asked her to not push him so much. She feels she helps him by pushing (she motions with her hands) him to join a club, for example Speech and Debate, and five other clubs. She said he does not want to try out for a sport, and that is just what she is pushing him to do. She states she also helps her son by making home warm and comfortable. It is her job to prepare the home like this, and wait for him to talk to her if he has a problem. If her son needs help with math, her husband helps him. It is evident that sending her son to this school, and paying tuition, is a sacrifice for the family. She reflects that when she can help her son, it makes her feel warm, a sense of love.

She recounts that when she was starting her own business and her husband had his own business, she was not available to take her children to extra-curricular opportunities, and they had to go to work with her. She feels guilty that they were not able to do this and feels the lack of extra-curriculars resulted in her son not be offered admission to
other selective high schools. She also mentions how language is a barrier for her to help her son. She is still struggling with English (although she is learning English on her own) and when her son asks her something in English, it is too fast for her, and she can’t catch up. When she asks him to repeat, he just tells her to never mind. His Korean is not as fluent, and so it can make communicating with her son challenging and it hurts her feelings. She is confident she has always been able to help him with anything relating to his education.

She interacts with the school by attending a few parent association meetings (for mothers) and enjoyed them, and volunteering for HSPT tutoring. She was unsure if she should speak to the teachers or if was appropriate for her son to use his teachers as resources. She visits the school website three-four times a week, and construes this as a form of engagement. She also uses her son as a resource for information. She has not yet reached out to her son’s counselor.

Barriers to school engagement seem to be, she is waiting for the school to reach out to her. If someone asked her to volunteer, she would do so. Her facility with English is also a barrier, and motivates her to keep studying it. She also mentioned that involvement requires money to buy a ticket or to make-a-donation.

WC

WC participated in two interviews one on October 25, 2019 and one on December 4, 2019. The second interview was conducted on the phone for convenience of the co-researcher. He is a 59-year-old White Canadian immigrant married to another Canadian immigrant. They have two boys. He immigrated in 1994 to Los Angeles. He is in the entertainment industry, and used his work to facilitate the immigration process. The
entire family has dual citizenship. He comments that Canadians have an outsider’s perspective on the United States, it’s culture, and it’s government. He graduated from a Canadian university and so did his wife. The family has had the opportunity to travel back and forth to Canada, and to Australia to visit other family members who live there, taking advantage of their “good fortune” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019). In his family one side were academics and one side were farmers.

WC’s perception of education is that it is “…the ground work for a life of meaning. It provides you with the entrée and the tools to carry on learning for as long as you are able” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019). For his son to go to college is part of his son’s process of development and self-determination. Education “…frees the person to determine the course of their life…gives them flexibility in terms of what their career interests they might have, vocational or otherwise” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019). He repeated several times that education offers opportunity and choice, and allows a person to be self-reliant. There is a family expectation that his son will go to college, but if his son chose otherwise, he would need to make a convincing, well researched argument.

When WC has a question about his son’s grades he will first speak to his son. If there is a persistent hurdle or a question about the fit of class for his son, he will speak to the teacher, and then department chair or principal of the school. He is clear that this is a lesson for his son about how to navigate the high school landscape and into the broader world. Regarding conversations with other parents, he remarks that as parents of a freshman, they are still in the getting-to-know-you phase. There are parents they know from elementary school with older boys, and these parents are a resource for information
on navigating the school, classes, what teachers they like, and which ones to try and avoid.

He helps his son by monitoring his internet use, quizzing him to prepare for upcoming tests, talking with him about his process at school, and reviewing his work with him after it has been graded. PowerSchool is checked so he knows how the grading is going or if there are missed assignments. This gives him a sense of satisfaction, that he is “…fulfilling my role… looking after my responsibility to help him with whatever issues he has” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019). In addition, he feels he helps his son by offering reflections on his own educational experience with challenging teachers or subjects, and that his son will be the better for it. He and his wife encourage their son to pursue his interests in education and that there is a family expectation that he will pursue an advanced education which will intern offer him a better sense of options. He repeated the importance of education as groundwork to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities, and the need to be persistent to get where you want to go. He makes more than one reference to education as a roadmap. Someone has to give you a roadmap and communicate to your that education and its pursuit is fulfilling, but that doesn’t happen, that in and of itself could be a barrier. “The greatest gift that a parent can give to a child is to say, ‘Look, you can do this…’ The more you can fill in the details about how someone achieved their goals, the more accessible those goals seem” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019).

He also sees his role as an advocate for his son, and this is another way he helps his son, another kind of roadmap.
WC recounts a time when he could not help his son when he was dealing with bullies at a previous school. He made suggestions, but felt his son needed to figure out how to deal with that. He was not able to articulate feelings about not being able to help, but stated that if an outcome was not positive there were other resources to access; family therapy, grandparents, and other parents they knew through the former school. He definitely perceives that there are many resources the family can access. As parents, “…I don’t think we have ever thrown up our hands and said, oh, we can’t do anything. We’ve always thought, well what can we do next?” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019).

He interacts with the school by attending the school-based social events, the freshman orientation dinner and mass, and a football game. He and his wife are “…trying to follow the school’s lead…” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019). He is clear that the intent is to get to know the parents of his son’s friends. He feels his son is aware he and his wife on “…on his case…” (WC, personal communication, October 25, 2019) and that they as parents are going to be involved by supporting education at home and being involve at school. He remains involved as a board member of his son’s former school. He communicates a sense of agency, in that there is a self-expectation that he and his wife will be engaged as volunteers on the student level and as committee or board members.

Barriers to engagement are work schedules and the sense that there are long established groups, and a lack of familiarity with the routines of the school. He recognizes that integrating into the school socially and in school structures takes some
initiative on their part. He also communicated a sense of agency when commenting that as he and his wife get to know the school structures and community, they will engage in fund raising or other committees.

SJ

SJ participated in two interviews on October 25, 2019 and December 4, 2019. She is a 56-year-old single parent with one child. She has always been a single parent and her son’s father lives close by but is not involved. She is from the east coast, and comes from a family of six siblings. She is second to the youngest. She attended a mix of Catholic and public school, attended a community college in Southern California and then went abroad to attend college. That ended up being too much of a distraction and she did not finish. She returned to the United States and began working in marketing and has had her own entertainment promotion business, and worked in some form of marketing ever since. Her work history is varied both geographically and by employers. She has worked in Europe, and many cities in the United States, and there is a real sense of someone who has been able to re-invent herself to remain relevant. She comments on how dysfunctional her family is, and that her friends are the family she has constructed.

She does not live close to her family. She is resourceful, resilient, and seems a little adventurous.

She feels education represents opportunity, it “opens up a lot of doors…and it’s a transition into adulthood that is really important” (SJ, personal communication, October 22, 2019). For her son to go to college she reflects it is part of her son’s life experience, college friends he can bond with for a lifetime. Something she missed out on. She feels a
person may have more longevity in the workplace and more connections or networks to access with an education. She wants to make it easier for her son that way.

When she has questions about her son’s classes or grades she speaks to other moms whom she knows from elementary and middle school. She mentioned she has met a couple of other moms from attending events at school and characterizes her conversations with the other moms as chatty. She notes the moms sometimes see each other outside of the school context for lunch, for example and experiences this as support for her. She knows the parents of his friends and has a good relationship with them characterizing those relationships as supportive and informational. She feels less on her own.

Her involvement in school stems from a long history of involvement in her son’s elementary and middle schools where she was deeply involved in fundraising for the school. In high school, she has engaged with the school by attending several social events on campus some of which require purchasing a ticket, a parent information night, back to school night, and parent-counselor meeting. She mentioned she liked putting faces to teacher names and getting a sense of what her son’s path is every day at school. She is also engaging with the school through the parent association (for mothers) and helping them with her organizational skills. She notes that this is her pattern of connecting to the parents and the school structures, eventually getting to know the teachers, and finding her niche as she did in elementary and middle school. She notes her work schedule and money impact her ability to engage with the school in on campus opportunities. She comments that when children see their parents involved in school “…they feel validated and valued…” (SJ, personal communication, December 4, 2019). She is committed to
always be involved in her son’s school, although her son does not want her to hang out
with him on campus when she is on campus for a meeting. She also engages in her son’s
education with daily conversations about his day at school, what happened in class, and
which teachers tell jokes. College conversations have not really begun yet.

Her own parents were not involved in her school. Her father was working and her
mother worked with her father and was rarely home. The siblings were engaged on
weekends cleaning and do minor repairs on properties owned by the family and her
father’s office. Her engagement in her son’s education and giving her son opportunities is
her way giving him a better experience than she had.

She helps her son by supporting him through transportation, finding someone to
help him with any academic related needs, and advocating for him, when he allows it.
She hasn’t been able to help with homework since the fourth grade. The work especially
math, has become too hard. She uses Google for homework support and giving her a
frame of reference for her son’s homework. She feels these ways of supporting him is a
direct display of affection and love to him.

SJ notes there are times when she hasn’t been able to help her son. She mentioned
that sometimes financial constraints impact her ability to help him or offer him
opportunities. She will try to find someone else who can help her son access an
opportunity if she cannot. The demands of her work impact her ability to be at school for
pick up and her son takes the bus home. He does not like it. She reflects that even though
he is complains about taking the bus, he is learning valuable life skills. There is a sense of
guilt communicated about this situation and there is emotion in her voice when she
speaks about parents sometimes not stopping to give her son a ride home.
RH

RH participated in two interviews. One interview was on October 29, 2019 and the second was on December 2, 2019. English is an acquired language but she did not want an interpreter for the interviews. She is a 39-year-old Latina who lives with her two sons, her mother, and her boyfriend who is not a biological parent. He does not have legal status. She had been working long hours, 12-hour days, in a commercial laundry and in a warehouse. The couple re-arranged their work schedule so she could stay home with the boys and “…better invest time for them. To do their homework, to pick them up, to drop them to school” (RH, personal communication October 29, 2019). They also decided that because she doesn’t speak English well, her opportunities for work are more limited than her partner who has a greater facility with the language.

When her son was born, and she was working, she put him in pre-school at HeadStart. It was here his speech delay was discovered. RH and her partner moved in together when her son was four years old. The adults did not share that he is not the boy’s biological parent until much later. This carries greater significance because RH never knew her father and under similar circumstances—neither man wanted children and left. She can tell that her son is burdened by his biological’s father’s absence, and this is painful for her. She becomes emotional when she tells this part of her story.

She is from a small village in Mexico where she completed the second grade. Her mother left her and began another family in another town and left her with her grandmother and her grandmother’s husband and some extended family. They were very poor, and she reports not having shoes, many days without food, and not being able to bathe. She recounts not going to school because she smelled so bad. She found a crypt or
a mausoleum in a cemetery where she found water, and somehow had some chocolate. She recounts she “…made a house inside. It was peace, nobody bothered…” (RH, personal communication December 2, 2019). Neglected by her grandmother and sexually abused by her grandmother’s husband starting when she was seven years old, she finally got permission to go to work as a baby sitter and domestic worker in another village when she was 11 years old. She worked long days beginning at 5:00AM getting children ready for school to after dinner. She would send all the money she made to her mother. She reflects sometimes she was hit by employers or got paid intermittently, and sometimes the employer felt a place to live and food to eat was enough. She felt the job was more important than the abuse and recognized that she did not have rights and therefore no options to exercise. She was hired away by another family and they treated her “…like family…gave me clothes…” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019). When she was 14 her mother visited her and invited her to go to the United States with her immediately. She was not scared at the prospect of the unknown journey ahead, she had already been through so much adversity, she just wanted her life to get better.

Her immigration journey is a harrowing story. She speaks about how “…big her dream…” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019) was for a better life in the United States. She goes with her mother to meet the smugglers and her mother tells her they are going in separate cars, but it will be ok. On the first leg of her journey she was under the front seat and in the next leg transferred to another smuggler who put her in the trunk. Stopped at the border and discovered by Immigration Officers she was placed in a detention area, separated from her mother. She lied about her age in order not to be sent back and gets into another car. She has no money, she doesn’t know where her mother is,
and doesn’t know where to go. She was dropped off somewhere she could not identify and a man standing close by approached her to offer to smuggle her across the border but wanted assurance of payment. She called her uncle and arrangements were made. She begged the smuggler “…to take me to my family, I’m not hiding any money” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019). He takes her along with her mother and other immigrants and they walk for two days in the desert. At some point, the smuggler tries to take her in a different direction from the rest of group, and her experience with sexual abuse tells her he wants to do her harm. Scared, she gathered her anger and yelled at him successfully defending herself. There was no water and no food, and she could not continue. She passed out and her next recollection is tasting something sweet. The smuggler had brought her a hamburger. That same day she was dropped off at her uncle’s house and two weeks later was working in a factory sewing clothes in downtown Los Angeles. She had to repay her uncle for the smuggler fee. She worked long hours, 5:00AM-7:00PM. She comments she had no choice. She knew it was hard to get a job at 14 years old. Education was not valued by her family because going to school is “…lost time…” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019).

She was encouraged by a boyfriend to go to school, he paid her living expenses, and she completed high school. It was there she was somehow identified to see the school counselor. Although she was afraid, she began therapy where she identified so many periods of her life as traumatic. Her family did not celebrate or attend her graduation.

Education and going to college mean her son will be able to get a good job, something he really likes and it means success. She comments that her son’s high school education is teaching him about his relationship with God, and to be involved in and help
the community, not just themselves. She defines success as finding a job he loves and helping other people, just as scholarships have helped him to attend high school. She states this will make them both happy, and emphasizes the importance of helping other people with his good fortune.

When she has questions about her son’s grades or classes she doesn’t speak to anyone. She states “…I’m not going to say anything. Maybe I’m going to get in trouble” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019). She feels if she speaks to a teacher it might reflect negatively on her son but because she has a positive frame of reference for counselors, she tells her son to speak to his counselor when he has earned poor marks. She also speaks directly with her son and they check PowerSchool together. She comments there is no excuse for not earning good grades “…I was only in the second grade when I got out of school…but at least I graduated… there is no excuse for not getting good grades” (RH, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She makes him responsible for his grades, it is not the teacher’s fault. Her conversations with other school parents have not been successful. She states that she has really only spoken with Spanish-speaking parents and parents she knew from her son’s sport team in middle school.

She states she helps her son by checking his homework and sitting with him to be sure he completes it, and encouraging him to ask for help if he doesn’t understand something. If she doesn’t know something she goes to Google. She also helps him by waking him, getting his clothes ready, breakfast, and getting him to school. She repeatedly mentions getting her son prepared. This means making him responsible and to be able to take care of himself and to be able to cope with any changes life may bring.
She has a history of helping her son demonstrated by advocating for accessing services and interventions when he needed speech therapy, taking him to therapy, or by following through with accessing Head Start. She comments that it is her parental responsibility to work for the well-being of her son and that her “American dream” (RH, personal communication, December 2, 2019) for her son is for him to be kind, to have values.

She comments her interactions with school structures has been challenging. She attended an on campus social event, but no one other than school employees spoke to her. She states the communication from the school is not always accompanied by Spanish translation. She identifies language as a significant barrier to engagement in written communications sent home and when on campus. “It’s hard because sometimes you’re misunderstood…and you can make a mistake…so I’d rather keep quiet instead to say the wrong thing” (RH, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She also attended one of the coffees held at the beginning of the school year, and invited another [Spanish-speaking] parent so they would not feel neglected as she did at another school-based event. She also identifies socio-economic class as a barrier to school-based opportunities. Her experience is there are many rich people (parents) at the school and that she is at a different “level” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019). Despite these barriers, she trusts the school to make the best choices for her son.

Faith is important, and speaks about her belief in God and has communicated this belief to her son. She is very proud that he reads the Bible and prays daily. She deeply values the school formational influence on her son, and that the school is a “dream” (RH, personal communication, October 29, 2019).
JA

JA participated in two interviews. One interview was conducted on October 30, 2019, and the second interview was conducted on December 18, 2019. The second interview was conducted on the phone for the convenience of the co-researcher.

JA is a divorced, 36-year-old Latina who lives with her two sons and her mother. She describes her background as “humble” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She was raised by a single mother whom she describes as angry, bitter, and excessively strict and negative. Her childhood and young adulthood are recalled as a life of little choice. She had a bad experience at the elementary Catholic school where she experienced the same strict rules and negative response to her frequent questions. Her mother would send her to stay with an uncle, so she could go out, and it was here, at eight years old sexual abuse began and continued for two years. She was the one who ended the abuse by hitting him in the face and groin. She told her mother she would never return and threatened her mother with calling the police if she was forced to do so. JA lost her grandparent figures, people she loved and trusted, by the time she was nine years old and she became an angry child who was getting into fist fights with other girls, and “…always telling somebody off…” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019) which resulted in attending a public school.

At public school she experienced a great deal of freedom and was exposed to drugs, alcohol, and boys. She graduated from high school, but college was never a conversation at home. Graduating from high school without a teen pregnancy or chemical addiction met expectations. It was not enough for JA. She always knew she wanted more, wanted something better but she did not know anyone who had gone to college and was
without guidance to channel her drive. There was no support or roadmap and her peers were drinking and taking drugs. Fighting and other behavior choices got her arrested and court ordered therapy. Her mother told her she had to help pay the bills and that suited JA. She started working in a male dominated field (redacted to protect confidentiality) in part due to her determination and her bilingual skills, and job exposed her to business owners, CEOs, and General Managers. “No one would ever think that I didn’t go to college” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). During one conversation with executives, she was asked what college she attended, and she admitted she had not gone to college. They were shocked. She “…never thought less of myself of not going to college until that moment” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She felt embarrassed and dumb. She is driven and “…wants more…” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019), has climbed the ladder in this company, and negotiated a significant salary.

She reflects on education as an accomplishment, the “…key to the world…It’s a key to not being pushed down and being able to move wherever you want …It definitely means success to me for them. I want them to feel they are part of this society. And that they can mix with anybody…I want them to have choices” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). The expectation at home is that her sons will go to college. College is more than an opportunity to gain knowledge, it imparts “…a structure, something you grow to be responsible for… a mindset … how to be disciplined. How to show up, how to care, how to speak” (JA, personal communication, December 18, 2019). She is adamant that she is going ensure her sons get the best education, and that it is then their responsibility to use it well.
When she has questions about her sons’ classes or grades she speaks directly to them or she uses Google as a reference. She does not have conversations with other high school parents. She states she “…just shuts down here (at the school)…” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She knows a couple of moms from middle school and her sons’ sports teams but does not socialize with them.

She helps her sons by making certain they follow through on their homework and assignments. She checks their work. She checks grades daily, researches online, ways to help them be organized, and holds her sons accountable. She has set an expectation at home, she describes part of what she does as “cheerleading” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She cannot think of a time when she was not able to help her children. She gives them a roadmap, a “play by play” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

She had high engagement in her children’s elementary and middle school stating the schools made getting involved easy: team mom, room mother, fund raiser. “The families were more friendly…” (JA, personal communication, December 18, 2019). In high school she attended back to school night for her oldest son last year, but has not engaged in school-based opportunities since then. She cites the demands of her job, and she also noted “…it’s just a different circle… more affluent socially and education wise…” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019). “I kinda think it’s the people…definitely come from wealth…you can tell by the way they speak, how they dress…what college they went to...that seems to be the first thing that everybody asks…” (personal communication, December 18, 2019). She is not quite sure how to respond to that situation. Despite feeling a “disconnect” (JA, personal communication, October 30,
2019), she feels the school population is “well rounded” (JA, personal communication, December 18, 2019), she trusts the school to make the best decisions for her children, and trusts the mission of the school (name redacted to protect confidentiality). She has also been personally invited to attend the parent association (for mothers) by a mom she knows from middle school, but hasn’t taken the steps yet. Her sons notice her absence, it bothers them, and she feels guilty about it. They are accustomed to her presence on their campus. The boys have guessed she feels she does not belong, and they encourage her to join because “…those women could learn a lot from you” (JA, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

One of JA’s coping mechanisms is something she calls “just keep it moving” (JA, personal communication October 30, 2019 & December 18, 2019). She reports that she did not have anyone to talk to, share with, and no one to mentor her, so she “…didn’t have a choice, but just to bury it down deep… and not let it hinder my routine of school…Things happen… you got to just keep moving. I mean, you’re not going to stop and let the earth suck you up because something bad happened” (JA, personal communication, December 18, 2019).

CE

The interview was conducted on November 4, 2019. CE is a 57-year-old Japanese-African American male. He grew up in Japan and the United States. He lives with his wife and two sons. English and Japanese are spoken at home.

His family came from the Southern United States one worked as a house servant, one picking cotton, and attending school in one-room school house. Finally attending high school through joining the military. The Japanese side of the family was the result of one
member of that family, post-World War II, searching for a better life. He attended college for two years and then dropped out, because he was too distracted by the college social life.

Education is a “weeding out process and a socially verifiable capability…just to see if you have the fortitude for completion” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). He feels the necessity of college education for success is waning because entrepreneurship has been on the rise. Despite that, he states education is still necessary “…to have conversation with people…a foundation set…You have to be able to create a business plan…learning how to do those things…education is critical” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). He comments that the greater value of a formal education is “meeting kids from different neighborhoods” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). College for his son means motivation, and that he will have the capability to read and understand contracts, to “…create a process that doesn’t exist yet, for something you want to achieve” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019).

When he has a question about his son’s grades or classes he speaks to his son. He will occasionally speak to teachers about how to help his son improve his performance in a class in which he is struggling. He speaks with other high school parents frequently “Not usually solution driven. Usually more of making sure my kid is not the only one in just the awful situation” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). He finds the conversations with other parents helpful, and accesses those parent conversations through back to school nights, athletic events, and through the Asian and Black community events on campus.
He helps his son by being involved in his day-to-day academic performance, checking on homework, talking through assignments with him, and “…making sure he is on top of it” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). He checks in with his son to help ensure he is spending enough time and effort on his school work. He comments much of his engagement with his son regarding academics are more “Can you look at yourself in the mirror at night and say, “I really did give it 100 percent today” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). He takes more of a big picture approach and doesn’t take a “quantifiable approach” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). The only time he recalls not being able to help his son was in athletics. His son was not getting a lot of play time. Rather than insinuate himself in the coach-athlete relationship, he chose to help guide his son through the experience as an opportunity for growth, and for his son to “…come to his own realization” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019) and this was painful to witness.

He is an alum of the school, and has high formal involvement with the school structures for many years; events on campus, admissions, and outreach. He also engages with the school through attending back to school nights, counselor meetings, and volunteer opportunities. He is frequently on campus. He feels his son appreciates his involvement and the opportunities for them to volunteer together. He also appreciates his dad keeping a “safe distance” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019). The challenge to engagement CE identifies is socio-economic status. He perceives inequity in opportunity access for students “…those kinds of social things bother me and it’s hard to get those things to change” (CE, personal communication, November 4, 2019).
NA

NA participated in an interview on November 6, 2019. The original interview venue was not available and the interview took place in the primary researcher’s office. NA is a 59-year-old White male married with three children, two who live at home. He is the son of Polish immigrants and the whole family worked in steel mills for generations. He became a machinist, moved to California, and was promoted again to a supervisory position. He eventually was hired at a national research facility that carries out robotic space and Earth science missions. Now he is involved in an export business. All without a college education.

He reflects on the meaning of education and his own educational experience. He graduated from a public high school and went right to work. Education “…really didn’t mean that much…you can always get…You just get a good job” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). Education is meaningful to him “…even though I could do the job…from pure experience…I didn’t have the title…everybody I worked with has a PhD” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). If he had not worked at the research facility “…I would not have met the people that had education, and learned from them…I would not have lived in (affluent neighborhood redacted to protect the confidentiality of the co-researcher) met people, and lived with them…I would have been a steel worker” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). He states the parents in the affluent community in which he now lives have been a significant conduit for information. He reflects that he has felt embarrassed by the fact he does not have a college education.
Education for his son equals more opportunity. He believes “…it’s not going to be the determining factor in being ultimately successful. But it depends on how you measure it…if you measured money, it’s not going to have the final say. It’s a tool” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). Success is financial, and “…having my kids grow up to be good people, having education, being a positive influence on society” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). He added “…not having to work the rest of your life…having the ability to have leisure time, go on vacations… visit and travel” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019).

When NA has questions about his son’s grades, classes, or academics “…the only resources we have really is the counselor here … I ask the teachers…everything I know about the whole college admissions process has just been from asking people, because I never went through it myself” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019).

He has contact with other parents through the parent association (for fathers) “Once in a while I go to the poker nights, and you don’t really talk about school so much. You talk about football …not a whole lot. And again, I still feel a little shy about…nobody’s going to ask me about college and all that…But I’ll ask like, “Who is a good tutor?” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). He reflects that he and his wife learned a lot from the parents from elementary and middle school and by the time his son was applying to high school, he felt they had a significant amount of information about that process and the value of choosing a good high school.

He is involved with his son’s education by encouraging him and supporting him with resources: tutoring, a private college counselor, books, and standardized test preparation classes. He is also involved with his son’s education through participation in
Boy Scouts. He reflects that his son has learned a great deal from other students in his elementary and middle school “…who all had brothers and sisters who go to college…if we lived some other place…or in a different group...he wouldn’t know anything” (NA, personal communication, November 6, 2019). He cannot think of a time when he could not help his son, but he can recall not being able to help his oldest child. He could not guide the child in their college application process they did not access that school because something was overlooked on the application.

He interacts with the high school via the parent association, (for dads) attending a college case-study presentation, back to school night, and school-based social events. He feels that although these events facilitate conversations, the conversations aren’t that helpful. He suggests the school might offer an event where parents could speak with parents who have been through the college process before and share experiences. He does not have a set work schedule and this allows him greater freedom to be at the school.

TC

TC participated in two interviews. One interview on November 22, 2019 and the second on December 11, 2019. TC is a 54-year-old Latina immigrant, married with three children. She grew up on a farm in a small town in Mexico. There was no electricity or bathrooms, and she did not attend school. School, especially for girls, was not valued. Her mother took the children to the home of relative when she was eight years old and left for the United States with the intent of bringing the children as she could afford it. It wasn’t long before her mother had earned the money to pay a smuggler to bring the children to the United States. She recalls being chaperoned by an extended family member on a bus to a pick-up point and then she and her three younger siblings were
handed off to the smuggler who would transport them. They posed as a family. She said never felt afraid, only “Excitement” (TC, personal communication, December 11, 2019). The children were re-united with their mother and lived with a relative in a small apartment.

She struggled with formal education. She had not attended school and describes school as “torture” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019) she was “lost” (TC, personal communication, December 11, 2019). Adding to her struggle, was the language barrier, she did not how to ask for help, and no one recognized she needed help. She reflects she had “insecurities” (TC, personal communication, December 11, 2019) in school (TC, not wanting to read aloud for fear of making a mistake) and she didn’t want her children to have the same insecurities. She helped her mother with household chores and caring for her siblings.

TC conceptualizes education as a necessity equal to food and shelter. Education means knowledge, it is “…a whole world, and liberates you from some things” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019) and that it means her children will be better. “There’s always something better out there” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). Education also means learning “…structure, respect, and understanding” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019) and home is to communicate “…religion, food, background” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). Education for her son means opportunity, go on vacation, and not have to work as hard as his father does. She comments on the sacrifices made so her children can access tuition-based education. The sacrifice of vacations and new clothes for example. College does not determine who a person is, it is the student who determines what he
want to do with a college education. Education is the most important thing “…education is something nobody could ever take away…knowledge in your mind is priceless…” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019. “It is freedom, because you are self-sufficient” (TC, personal communication, December 11, 2019).

If she has a question about grades or classes she asks her son directly. In those conversations she emphasizes her son’s responsibility in this process “you have to work for what you want…this is your grade, not your teacher’s grade” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). There is an expectation that her son will go to college and an ongoing conversation and support at home about school work and college “…Education is expensive, but ignorance is more expensive” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). She does not really have conversations with other high school parents or engage with school-based events because “…it requires money. It requires time… I know all the events here are expensive. I’d rather save up that money for those things…special trips” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). Special trips are opportunities offered through the school, for example college tours or service immersion trips. Her son felt “cheated” (TC, personal communication, December 2019) because she has not engaged with the school by attending school social events or athletic events due to work schedules or financial constraints. She elaborates further that her son reports feeling intimidated socially because of this, an experience of disparate social status.

TC helps her son, in the broadest sense by working hard to afford living in a “white neighborhood…I wanted my kids to grow up in a safe neighborhood” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). She also emphasizes her own persistence
in encouraging her children, standing up for them, and pushing them “never giving up” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019). She reports offering to access a tutor, resources through the school (standardized test preparation for example), or therapy. She also emphasizes the importance of the right “mindset…your mindset dictates who you are…don’t get an A for me, get an A because that’s who you are” (TC, personal communication, November 22, 2019).

TC comments the additional way she helps her son is by not interacting with the teachers. She teaches her son that he needs to be the one to speak to his teachers with problems or questions, and she is teaching them how to take care of problems, to communicate, and how to get help. She recalls when she could not help her son is with his experience with personal problems or decisions that are outside her control. She states that he needs to experience his own consequences, and take personal responsibility.

TC frequently punctuates her comments and recollections with the importance of faith, humility, teaching her children respect, how to work, how to be grateful, and the importance of a good attitude, and doing the right thing. Reflecting on her own life and that of her children she notes the importance of ambition, and having a plan for your life, a vision. Her job as a parent is to offer a better life for her children, just as her mother did for hers.

AC

AC participated in one interview on December 2, 2019. AC is a 36-year-old Latina married with three children. She grew up in nearby city, attended public school kindergarten to high school graduation. Her husband did not graduate from high school. She started attending a community college but did not like it, and after she became
pregnant she did not return to community college until many years later. She notes education just wasn’t emphasized in her family. In her family “They either want you to work and they don’t want you to go away. Stay close and work and live with us” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). Education, she reflects “…is very important… as an adult I see it very beneficial for your success in life” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She feels if she had persisted in her formal education she would be making more money. Education is “opportunity” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She has worked in her industry for almost 20 years, and has a depth of institutional and industry knowledge but feels a bachelor’s degree would offer her greater legitimacy.

Education for her son means learning how to network and to discover where he wants to go in life. Her son witnesses how hard his father has to work (AC, he is self-employed), it is physical work, and he doesn’t like it. She feels with an education her son can help with the family business. It is hard for her to think of her son leaving home to attend college, but states she thinks that is the “… Latino in you where you don’t want them to go…” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She does not want him to attend community college and then transfer. She is concerned he might get off track as she did and not finish.

She states she lets her son do everything; she does not ask questions. She feels it’s his job to take care of his school work and to interface with teachers. She states her son is very independent. She can recall only one time in high school when she and husband spoke to a teacher, and then they came back to their son and emphasized his responsibility in resolving the academic situation.
When her son was in elementary and middle school she reports she was highly involved by volunteering or helping the teachers, and knew many parents. In high school it is her husband who speaks with a few other Latino parents through the vehicle of athletics. She is a bit shy and states that also limits her interactions with other parents. She states she helps her son when he comes to her for help. He is independent and even more so now that he is driving, and he will take his siblings to school. She conceptualizes helping him by her husband making dinner for him (and the family) and offering encouragement. When her son comes to her for help she goes through responses, for example “… have you spoken to your teacher or what can you do to fix this?” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She and her husband will also access resources for their son if necessary, for example accessing therapy for him. She reflects “…it feels good…when it comes out good…It feels good to be there supporting him” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). When she can’t help him, for example with math, she notes “…you just feel hopeless” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019).

She interacts with the school by attending back to school night each year, attending some athletic events, but not on campus social events. She also does not interact with her son’s teachers. She encourages her son to speak to the teacher, but she is not a parent who calls or emails teachers with questions or issues of advocacy. She states she thinks this may make her son feel sad, but she doesn’t see many mothers involved in high school. Parent involvement can be important for some kids, “…I’ve never asked (student name redacted to protect confidentiality) like, would you like me to be more involved in your high school?” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019).
She is involved in her son’s education with conversations at home about performance, classes, and about college. The family expectation is that her son will go to college. This is the main form of support and involvement. She states the school has encouraged involvement, but feels her work schedule, finances, and her more shy personality are challenges to involvement with the school. She regrets not being more involved by attending events “…because they seem important…So I regret that” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She and her husband trust the school to make the best decisions for their son “The teachers have it under control” (AC, personal communication, December 2, 2019).

SW

SW participated in one interview on October 30, 2019. She is a 34-year-old married Latina who grew up in Los Angeles, and lives with her husband and three children. She brought her children to the interview. The child of a single mother, who immigrated from Mexico, she notes her mother was not involved in her education. Her mother married when she was in high school and in tandem with a demanding work schedule in downtown Los Angeles, her new marriage took the focus off of SW. She attended Catholic school elementary to high school graduation, and states there “…was no expectation…” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019) from her mother regarding her educational attainment.

She recounts her own experience with applying for college. Her high school counselor helped with applications and application fee waivers, but the financial aid application was incomplete. She was accepted at a local university, but when she went to register for classes she could not. “…because my mom was not involved. I didn’t know
what to do. I remember…and I was on my own. My mom didn’t help or anything” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She took the community college path, but was unaware of support available for first-generation students. She reflects on that time as being very “…chaotic. It was discouraging…I didn’t have anybody pushing me …backing me up…so I just started working after that” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She tried again, at another local college, a bank came to recruit students, and she took that job. She worked two jobs, and when she became pregnant, school faded in importance. Her husband was able to work and attend college but it became overwhelming with a child to care for.

In light of her experience, she sees education as “…a foundation to everything…it is the expectation at home” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). Not having that education impacted the rest of her life, she did not realize the importance of education at the time. She wants better for her son. She states she and her husband are “…so excited” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019) at the prospect of their son attending college. She notes her son sees how they struggle economically, and she emphasizes the importance of planning ahead.

When she has a question about her son’s grades or classes she researches the curriculum and reaches out to her son’s counselor. She also speaks to other parents and comments these conversations have been immensely helpful and supportive for her transition to high school and for advice to help her son successfully transition as well. Another parent encouraged her to make the school hers by getting involved with the other parents, and that her involvement would make her son’s transition to high school easier. She took another parent’s advice on her son’s challenging transition to high school which
helped both parent and child. She has found her “tribe” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

SW helps her son by accessing resources through the school. For example, the website and its different pages, course catalogue, the club booklet, downloading all the school apps, and athletics. She reads the newsletter (online) and so she knows what events or opportunities are on the horizon. She also encourages her son to explore different opportunities and be “adventurous” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She helps him by generating classroom coping mechanisms. He shared with her that one of his teachers puts him on the spot, and he would freeze. She helped him generate and rehearse productive ways of responding that were simultaneously respectful and effective. She recounts that her son’s high school adjustment was painful for him, and there was nothing she could do, leaving her feeling “helpless…and you question yourself” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

She reports she is highly engaged with the school through back to school night, the freshman retreat, athletic events, the dances, the parent association (for mothers), the association for Latino parents, and welcome events. She characterizes the school and the school community as welcoming, and “…everyone is so nice” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She describes how her involvement with the school impacts her son “…he feels it…he feels a sense of community” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She did mention that someone had warned her about the “racial disparity” (SW, personal communication, October 30, 2019) but she has not had any negative experiences related to race. She mentioned her son took advantage of the summer program for first-generation students, but he felt those kids didn’t want to get
involved. She also emphasized she has not perceived any barriers to her school engagement and all the teachers are very accessible. She plans ahead and if she cannot arrange child care she brings her other two children with her.

KS

KS participated in one interview on October 30, 2019. She is a 36-year-old Vietnamese-American, married female who lives with her husband and two children. A child of refugee Asian immigrants, she attended public school, graduated from high school with a plan to attend community college and transfer to a four-year college. She earned her AA at a community college and started working in her parents’ business. Her plan to continue was interrupted by work and the birth of her son. She discovered she could make money and often punctuates the description of her experience with an interrupted education and work with “…it was a survival situation” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

In light of her own educational experience, she reflects she has been able to take advantage of opportunities, worked really hard, and had some luck along the way to a career. All her colleagues have undergraduate or master’s degrees, and when the conversation turns to alma maters, she commented “…Oh shoot. What do I say? Oh, I didn’t finish…it would have been great is I at least could say I had a bachelor’s” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She believes there may have been positions for which she was not considered because of her level of education attainment.

Educational attainment of post-graduate degree for her son is the expectation at home. It is the difference of being able to go on vacation in exotic places. Her son attending college “It would mean everything…If he were able to do something with
it…make the most out of it…in terms of his future” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019). She adds “…most important to be a nice guy…you are meant for others” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

When she has questions about her son’s grades or classes she speaks with parents who have sons in upper grades for advice. Athletics is the conduit for these high school parent relationships. Her son also engages with a student who is a mentor at school about courses to take. She describes her interactions with other parents as “People are very open…they were giving me advice…we would exchange numbers…very willing to help” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019).

When her son was younger, helping him meant sitting with him while he completed his homework. She and her husband support both their children with subject specific tutors, and lessons for specific interests. Although this is a sacrifice for the family, she is very clear “I want you to have what I didn’t have…You tell me what you’re interested in…we’re going to do it” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019). These financial allocations are a sacrifice and there is transparency with the children about the trade-offs, and what the family can and can’t do. She monitors grades bordering on “obsession” (KS, personal communication, October 30, 2019) and the monitoring informs daily home conversations about school, performance, and effort. She and her husband trade off attending school-based events for example, back to school night, when she could not attend but her husband could. Work schedules and finances are cited as barriers to attending school-based social events.
BB

BB participated in one interview on December 2, 2019. He is a 48-year-old, married Salvadoran immigrant who lives with his wife and two children. He comes from a large family and states “…in my country you bring them into the world for one purpose, to help the house” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). He grew up in a large city. His mother came to the United States when he was little, and brought the children one at a time as she was able to pay for a smuggler. “Everybody would work, send money home, and then the next one would come” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). She was able to take advantage of the amnesty offered in 1986 affording her a pathway to apply for legal status.

He graduated from a private high school in El Salvador reporting it was a good experience for him. He comments his high school was very similar to the one his son attends, and that he was not of same social class as most of his classmates “…they are doctors, lawyers…my family was nothing like that” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). He attended adult classes to learn English at a local high school and reflects on how hard his life was before he committed to that English course, working minimum wage jobs and using public transportation. In light of his experience education “…means everything that you can do to better, to improve your life, your living, your security…you can really see the difference in your life…education changes your life…for the better, of course, and change it forever…It helps the family” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). Education for his son is a “dream come true…I’m going to be the happiest person in the world” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). His expectation is that his son will graduate from high school and go to college.
There are conversations about college, which ones to apply to, and applying for financial aid.

When he has questions about his son’s grades or classes he speaks directly to his son. At one point, he realized his son was making excuses, and was struggling in school, at which point he contacted his son’s counselor. He does not engage with the school in any additional ways because he “…feels out of water…other parents talking about business ventures…I want to talk about the environment of the school…They talk about travel…That’s hard” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). He states language is not the barrier, it is the difference in socio-economic status.

The main way he helps his son is through conversational encouragement and when his son had to retake a class, he was paid for it. He comments he is “straight up” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019) with his son “…You start bad you’re going to end bad. So you better wake up…you have friends that are doing it. How come you can’t? He doesn’t like it” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). He notes, if he doesn’t push his son, who is going to do that for him? He can arrange his work schedule so he can pick his son up or come to school for a conference.

In addition to attending parent-teacher conference, and back to school night, he also attended the Free Application for Federal Student Aid parent information night. He states the impact this involvement has on his son is “frustration” (BB, personal communication, December 2, 2019). He pushes him, challenges him, and his son doesn’t like it. He is happy his son is graduating from this high school with its emphasis on service, and anticipates his son will help the community after graduation.
MI participated in an interview on December 12, 2019. This interview was conducted with the service of a Spanish-speaking translator. A follow-up interview was scheduled but she did not attend it. MI requested the letter of invitation to participate and the Bill of Rights for Research participants be read to her. She is a 46-year-old married Latina who lives with her husband and two children. She comes from Mexico, and her husband is from El Salvador. She reflects she is from “humble” (MI, personal communication December 12, 2019) beginnings, from a large and loving family of nine children. Her father would leave for a few months at a time to work. When she was 16 she went to work as well, to “move the family forward” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). She wishes she could have continued her studies, but helping the family took precedence, and she completed ninth grade. She states the school where she studied struggled with having supplies, and although she feels the education was good, having regular access to supplies, would have made a positive difference. There were “minimal resources” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). This experience is the origin of her drive for her children’s educational attainment.

Education is the “basis of society” (MI, personal communication, December 2010). She states “There is no opportunity without education…you can get ahead, but there is a limit…one who is not prepared academically get more difficult jobs. Without rights, are mistreated, and work for very little money” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). For her son, education “means a future that is different from ours” (personal communication, December 12, 2019). It means greater opportunities and a path to realize his dreams. She states having her son go to college is two achievements “…one
There is emotion in her voice when she says this achievement for her son “…has cost me…in a country that is not mine…in a language that is not mine…it is very difficult to continue with our goals” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). When she has questions about her son’s grades or classes she asks other parents she knows from middle school who have a son in this high school because she has a comfort level with them from a longer history, and she reaches out to one of the counselors who speaks Spanish. She does not interact with other high school parents other than a casual greeting, but categorizes these brief conversations as “nice and empathetic” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). She states the expectations set at home are threefold: be a good Christian, a good citizen, a good professional. The expectation is to honor God, be honest, execute his duty to his community, and work for justice.

The way she helps her son is by supporting him and encouraging him to speak to his teachers when he needs additional help in a subject. She seems very straightforward about getting him the help he needs from teachers “…you will go early to school…I will take you, and you will go and ask…” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). When she can help her son “…it feels good…collaborating with him, because otherwise I don’t know how to help him. I just support him” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). She cannot help him with academic questions but she will use the internet to research help or guidance for academic questions. She reflects on a time when she could not help him and again it is with an academic assignment, and it is frustrating
for her. All she can do “…is accompany him” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

She is not involved in the school, in great part because of the language barrier. She can speak some English, but she speaks more slowly and “…I feel like everyone is in a hurry that they will not wait until I search my words” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). She feels this negatively impacts her son, because “…I feel that in many things he has to face them himself, on his own” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019). She construes involvement in her son’s education is to be with him and support him. She is not involved on campus the way she was for her son’s middle school because “everything is in its place here” (MI, personal communication, December 12, 2019) meaning her perception is the school doesn’t need anything from her.

HJ

HJ participated in an interview on January 3, 2020. The interview was conducted with the help of the same interpreter used for co-researcher MI. Her mother and father were with her, and stayed in the interview. HJ requested the letter of invitation to participate and the Bill of Rights for Research participants be read to her. HJ is a 47-year-old mother from El Salvador with three children. Her marital status is separated. She describes herself as friendly and sociable. She is from a large family (14 siblings) and lived in a “…very poor, it didn’t have water. It didn’t have lights…it still doesn’t” (HJ, personal communication, January 3, 2020). She states came to the United States as a teenager with the help of a smuggler, to escape the civil war, and was granted asylum. Traveling from her home to Tijuana by bus, she crossed the US border in the trunk of a car with eight other people. She came to work, “I didn’t have time to go to school, none
of that” (HJ, personal communication, January 3, 2020). She reflects that her teachers were strict, and she completed 8th grade with the loving help of a teacher who kept encouraging her to “…put effort into school and to learn” (HJ, personal communication, January 3, 2020).

Education is “…the most important thing in someone’s life. Someone who is educated, I think, is prepared for whatever comes in life…I didn’t have that. On my mom’s side, there are a lot of educated people. So I see them, and…life is easier for them” (HJ, personal communication, January 3, 2020). She becomes emotional when she reflects on how hard her life is without education, “…you have to work in whatever comes your way” (HJ, personal communication, January 3, 2020). She works long hours, without a break, and continuing her studies was not an option for her.