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**ACTIVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND COLLEGE AND CAREER  
READINESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

Tarah Rose Santaniello

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
March 29, 2018

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Barbara Bole Williams

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## **Dedications**

For parents/guardians, especially my own parents, raising a child is the most important role that a person can take on. Raising a child to be respectful, well adjusted, and an all-a-round good person takes courage, patience, and a certain level of trial and error. Let this research study be an example of partnership and community building. Know that you are not alone and that help and assistance is not far. For my parents, Glenn and Donna, you have raised five amazing children who are all unique and different in their own ways. However, one constant is the love that you have instilled in all of us. Your constant sacrifices to make our lives better have provided us with countless opportunities for success. I am proud to share this achievement with you, because without you, it would remain a dream.

## **Acknowledgments**

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I would like to extend a special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Barbara Bole Williams. From the School Psychology program to now, your guidance, mentorship, and friendship were invaluable and appreciated. You have inspired me through your passion and dedication to the field of education, your family, and your students. I truly appreciate all of the guidance that you have given to me. Above all, I will forever value our conversations, your patience, understanding, support, and your positivity and encouragement.

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## **Abstract**

Tarah Rose Santaniello  
ACTIVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND COLLEGE AND CAREER  
READINESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY  
2017-2018  
Dr. Barbara Bole Williams  
Doctor of Education

The development of emotional competencies occurs across many environments in a child's life. Research suggests that adequate development of a child's emotional intelligence leads to confident decision making and has a positive impact on student academic success (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b; Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). An active partnership between educators and parents/guardians promotes a continuum of positive supports for students developing healthy social-emotional learning behaviors transferable in college and careers.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college/career readiness concerning social/emotional competencies in adolescents (Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data presented and analyzed in this research study suggests that an active partnership between parents/guardians and school districts contributes to the development of emotional competencies as a student becomes college and career ready.

Collaboratively espousing the importance of social-emotional learning and an active partnership maximizes success for students and fosters a transition after high school. To better support the needs of school districts and families, high schools could implement a framework for a successful college and career ready student, specially focused on an active parental partnership.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Typically, parents and caregivers are a child's first and most involved teachers. This role does not cease to exist when children enter school; in fact, families play a critical role in the education of their children as they grow (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Working with the school, parents/guardians, and caregivers can help create collaborative partnerships that support all aspects of a child's life. Parent-school collaborations, particularly parental involvement and participation, are useful tools for facilitating holistic educational learning environments for children to develop both academically and emotionally (Sottie, Dubus, & Sossou, 2013). Parental involvement boosts a child's perceived level of competency and autonomy, offers a sense of security and connectedness, and helps to internalize the value of education and performance. Parental influences can have a considerable impact from kindergarten through high school on a child's academic and personal development (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Over the course of a child's development, he or she will face many obstacles which will require a set of inter and intrapersonal skills. As a child progresses through their schooling, there will be a natural evolution of independence from their family unit. This level of autonomy and decision-making must be nurtured for the child to be successful. While development of a child may encompass many areas, the development of their emotional intelligence is critical (Goleman, 2005). A child's ability to have healthy social/emotional regulation will enable their development to be fluid and meaningful.

## **Social-Emotional Learning and Emotional Intelligence**

The development of emotions and emotional intelligence play a critical role in a child's life (Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011). Emotional intelligence is the ability to access and generate feelings, facilitate thoughts, and process those feelings and thoughts. Emotional intelligence is regarded as central to a child's development, as it allows the child to perceive accurately, appraise, and express their own emotions.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to access and generate feelings, facilitate thoughts only then to understand those feelings. Emotional intelligence then requires a person to connect those feelings to his/her ability to regulate those feelings to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Goleman, 2005). Connected to emotional intelligence through a schooling lens is social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL involves the process through which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions. Skills include (a) setting and achieving positive goals, (b) expressing empathy for others, (c) establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and (d) responsible decision making (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). These social and emotional skills are critical to one's ability to be a good student, citizen, and worker. There are five target areas that SEL encompasses: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, (e) and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b). These five areas create cognitive, practical, and behavioral competencies for children to develop over time and throughout their schooling. Parental involvement is crucial when promoting a child's emotional intelligence through supporting SEL curriculum in schools. SEL initiatives are more likely to succeed when a community partnership and parental engagement are established

(Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The development of emotional intelligence does not occur in a vacuum independent of the variables in a child's life. Creating secure wrap-around services and a continuum of support is critical to a child's emotional well-being and positive mental health (NAMI, 2015).

### **Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health**

According to the U.S. Surgeon General (1999), approximately 20% of children suffer from a mental disorder that produces at least mild functioning impairment. Similarly, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2011) reported that 22% of children suffer from a mental disorder that has potential to affect their lifelong functioning. According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness, nearly 50% of children, aged 8-15, do not receive the mental health services they require to maintain a positive and healthy lifestyle (NAMI, 2015). Given the likelihood that adolescents will experience psychological distress or encounter a peer with a mental illness, it is vital that children receive adequate mental health literacy and a continuum of support in school and at home (Bulanda, Bruhn, Byro-Johnson, Zentmyer, 2014). Jorm (2000) described mental health literacy as the ability to recognize a mental health disorder, being knowledgeable about risk factors or causes of mental health disorders, and being knowledgeable on helpful resources when seeking help and information. The infusion of SEL and of emphasizing emotional intelligence can help aid in the awareness of mental illnesses and promote positive mental health in children (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b). Emotional development does not operate in only one environment of a child's life. A shared partnership between schools and caregivers creates a secure network of support when developing a child's emotional competencies. Research suggests that adequate



development of a child's emotional intelligence leads to confident decision making and has a positive impact on student academic success (Goleman, 2005). Currently, school districts are assessing college and career readiness by evaluating the academic success of its students, neglecting a formal curriculum in SEL. School districts can better prepare their students for college and careers by establishing and maintaining a shared partnership with parents/guardians to support curriculums that offer SEL and influence the development of a child's emotional competencies and their emotional intelligence.

### **Social-Emotional Learning and Achievement**

College and career readiness are commonly understood as the level of preparation a student needs to enroll, and succeed, in a college program or the workforce, without requiring remediation (Venezia & Jaegar, 2013). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the most extensive assessment that gathers a representative sample of students' achievement levels across curricular areas. In 2009, only 38% of 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students across the U.S. performed at or above the proficient level on the NAEP reading assessment; even fewer, 26%, were at or above the proficiency level in mathematics. Similar data from the ACTs and SATs revealed that U.S. high school graduates were below expected achievement scores when compared to international students, widening the achievement gap of students across the globe (Venezia & Jaegar, 2013). Many factors attribute to the achievement gap between our nations' high school graduates. Achievement gaps occur when one group of students (such as students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error) (Schofield, 2010). A large factor in the achievement gap is the

role that families play in support of a child's education. Students' families play an important role in setting expectations and creating conditions that make it more likely that students will be ready for college and careers (Venezia & Jaegar, 2013). Conditions such as overseeing the completion of homework, encouraging a variety of learning opportunities, supporting positive educational habits, and creating a sense of institutional commitment are all ways parents create positive conditions to support a child's education.

### **Social-Emotional Learning Programming**

Interactions at school and in the community influence students, both positively and negatively (Venezia & Jaegar, 2013). An active, positive partnership between schools and families help in supporting children as they grow and develop the skills necessary to be successful in life. This partnership includes placing importance on the influence of the non-cognitive ability, such as emotional intelligence when determining whether a student is ready for college or a career (Venezia & Jaegar, 2013). Students perform better academically, including on achievement tests, when they receive SEL programming in school and have parents who engage in an active partnership with schools. When students receive a combination of SEL curriculum in school and active parenteral involvement, their scores on achievement assessments increase, on average, by 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2011). Researchers assert that districts should treat SEL curriculum as a priority along with academic achievement (rigorous academic curriculums), high school completion, and college and career readiness (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). The Common Core State Standards and the Common Core Curriculum Standards, which New Jersey has adopted, do not have a stand-alone standard for SEL. Standards from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life and Careers, Comprehensive Health and

Physical Education, and Social Studies embed aspects of SEL. In an interview with Dr. Maurice Elias for *Edutopia*, co-chair of the Education Advisory Council of the Character Education Partnership, Kristie Kink, stated:

The standards do not explicitly address the quality of the learning environment or the culture of respect, responsibility, and excellence that must be in place for optimal student learning. Every student needs to feel that the school has a deep commitment to preserving his or her safety, worth and dignity. The school community must have as a standard genuine, caring relationships between and among students, teachers, parents, and staff. The standards also lack a specific focus on teaching moral and performance characteristics, and the social-emotional skills that help students develop the stamina and self-discipline to grapple with more rigorous curriculum to indeed become college, career, and *civic* ready (Elias, 2014).

There is a need for explicit integration of common core standards and character development that addresses the whole child, not just the academic side.

### **Federal Initiatives**

The U.S. Department of Education's recent round of *Race to the Top* competition awarded significant bonus points for applications that made SEL a key ingredient in district-wide improvement efforts. At the national level, the importance of SEL and emotional intelligence are gaining the attention of policymakers and leaders from three landmark reform policies and agendas.

**Supporting Social and Emotional Learning Act.** In January 2015 Rep. Susan Davis (D-Calif.) introduced H.R. 497, the "Supporting Social and Emotional Learning Act." This legislation amended the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 to require the National Center for Education Research to research the impact of social and emotional education. The legislation also called for the Commissioner for Education Research to support research into social and emotional skills and habits. Furthermore, comprehensive centers will be created to provide training, professional development, and technical

assistance to educational leaders regarding the use of scientifically valid teaching methods and assessment tools. These teaching methods and assessment tools are intended to infuse social and emotional life learning into school wide curriculum programming. The act also amended the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require highly qualified teachers to have preparation in the understanding, use, and development of SEL programming. Finally, the act requires Teacher Quality Partnership grants when preparing prospective and new teachers and educational leaders to understand, use, and develop SEL programming.

**Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act.** Bipartisan groups of legislators demonstrated their interest in SEL by repeatedly introducing the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act in the U. S. House of Representatives in February 2015. The bill defines SEL, and SEL programming for schools. Also, the bill identifies core areas of social/emotional competencies and amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to allow funding for teachers and educational leaders training and professional development be used for SEL programming (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Until there is a secure national policy to assist the growth of SEL and emotional intelligence, local districts can work in conjunction with parents to create an active partnership to promote student success and achievement.

**Every Student Succeeds Act.** In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the new federal education legislation; the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Several elements of the new law support or have the potential to promote social and emotional learning. They include:

1. Adopting a broader definition of student success by allowing more leeway to states and local school districts when defining and assessing student success. The law specifically refers to nonacademic factors as indicators of accountability. Student engagement, school climate, and safety, for example, could be among the indicators.
2. Including language that encourages schools to "establish learning environments and enhance students' practical learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success" (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 179). This language appears in two places specifically: in Title II, referring to funds for professional development, and in the new program called Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants in Title IV. This grant program, in particular, allows local education agencies to select and implement activities for a variety of uses.
3. Defining specific recommendations for activities to support safe and healthy students. These include (a) fostering “safe, healthy, supportive, and drug free environments that support student academic achievement” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 177), (b) helping to prevent bullying and harassment, improving “instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 179), (c) providing “mentoring and school counseling to all students” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 179), and (d) the “implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 180).

4. Mandating a broader approach to professional development and student learning.

The new law says that professional development must be "sustained (not stand-alone, one-day, and short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused" (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 295).

5. Formulating the inclusion of specialized instructional support personnel in (a) developing state and district school improvement plans, (b) identifying and supporting students most at risk of school failure, (c) addressing school climate and school safety, and (d) promoting the mental and behavioral health of students.
6. Increasing the School Improvement Program grants from four percent of the total Title I funds to up to seven percent. Although specific guidelines are in the stages of development, ESSA replaces the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and allows more leeway to states and school districts in creating their school improvement plans, which can include social and emotional growth as part of a school's improvement strategies.
7. Creating an evidence-based research and innovation program similar to the Investing in Innovation program, which, under the previous version of the law, funded projects focused on social and emotional learning.

The adoption of such laws and policies that recognize SEL as essential to a child's development is monumental for all stakeholders in education. Local school districts, state departments of education, and federal departments of education must continue to work in unison to implement each new policy to gain the maximum benefit for students.

## **Parental Partnerships**

Many factors influence a student's ability to be successful in school. Intrinsic variables such as motivation, drive, and academic competence play a role in his/her preparedness for college and careers. Many external variables also play a role in such preparedness. Parental involvement is a significant contributor to a child's ability to develop his/her academic, social, behavioral, and emotional well-being (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Researchers argue that when considering a student's ability for preparedness for entrance into college and career, their emotional intelligence, and social/emotional competence be sufficiently developed to navigate all social situations (Goleman, 1994). Through a shared partnership with schools, parents can become active participants in their child's school life, supporting their development of emotional competencies.

Restructuring partnerships involve a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools and a redistribution of power (Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Lines, Miller, Arthur-Stanley, 2011). Partnering refers to an ongoing, joint action among caretakers and stakeholders in a child's life that integrates families and schools through open communication (Lines, Miller, Arthur-Stanley, 2011). There must be a changed mindset from a standalone family unit versus the school to a real family-school partnership with shared visions and values. The underlying assumption of restructuring as a reform strategy is that changing the roles of parents will lead to a partnership that can enhance schooling for all children (Elmore, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). As opportunities for school choice expand, some of the changed roles for parents include that of customer and consumer of educational services. Also, parents are

assuming new roles in school governance as they are empowered to participate in decision-making forums (e.g., Hess, 1991,1992).

Parent participation in school governance is one-way to involve parents in schools and can exercise influence (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). Participation refers to the involvement of parents in providing input or being consulted about school affairs or their child's progress without exercising influence. Empowerment refers to the parents' role in exercising influence within a school. Typically, this is accomplished through decision-making forums and is usually accompanied by legitimate sources of power and authority (Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Saxe, 1975). A partnership between parents and schools is an instrument to improve and develop schools as parents involve themselves in the schools' activities to benefit their child's education. This relationship creates opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's education in a more formal and structured partnership (Bauch & Goldring, 1998).

The heart of the problem is the challenge associated with changing bureaucratic relationships at the federal, state, and local levels of school governance. Currently, there is no widespread consensus as to an alternative model of school management, organization, and accountability that involves all parents in governance decisions. Some believe, however, that the only hope for a real partnership role for parents is to restructure the present bureaucratic model of public schools to a collaborative one (Conley, 2003). A restructuring enables parents and community members to have a real and pragmatically attainable role in decisions that affect them and their children, not one that is accountable to the next higher level of a school system hierarchy (e.g., Sarason, 1995; Seeley, 1993). Epstein (2004) reminds us of subsidiarity reform efforts that move decision



making back to local governments, as mentioned in the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution (Conley, 2003). Parents may need to become more knowledgeable about schools and how they are organized to interact with the schools efficiently. These changes may require restructured schools to find ways to enable parents to participate in school decisions and to provide for the developmental needs of both parents and schools through learning communities (Putnam, Gunnings-Moton, & Sharp, 2009). Organizationally, schools need to develop a culture of caring and community that will support their members to meet high expectations and build common meaning and commitment to the community itself (Newmann & Oliver, 1967; Noddings, 1984).

### **Purpose of the Research Study**

Despite the efforts to infuse SEL into school curriculums and gain the participation on various levels of their child's school, there is disconnect between what is being done by the schools and the reinforcement of SEL and emotional intelligence, as proven by mental health statistics (Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting mental health and emotional functioning in adolescents by conducting a visual and contextual analysis of these relationships. This exploration leads to an understanding of how a family-school partnership supports a child's emotional functioning as they prepare for college and careers.

Chapter Two discusses the research study conducted, focusing on an active parental partnership with schools and its impact on student achievement. Previous research conducted explored the vantage point of schools, but the parent/guardian

perspective requires exploration when understanding a genuine, active partnership between all stakeholders. Also, Chapter Two explains self-determination theory and highlights pivotal studies in which active participation employed self-determination theory. Chapter Three describes the rationale for the application of a qualitative case study design and, in so doing, identifies the study's research questions, sampling strategies, strategies of inquiry and analysis, and timeline.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Chapter Two (a) defines college readiness and discuss the parental role; (b) presents current theories on active parental involvement with schools and define trust as used in this study; and (c) reviews empirical support for factors associated with active parental partnership with schools and discuss considerations for research on active parental partnerships with schools that promote college and career readiness in students.

Previous research showed student academic engagement as a strong predictor of academic and emotional wellbeing (Li & Lerner, 2011; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Lacking within the research are resources that support the interaction between parents and schools and how that partnership may play an important role in both sustaining academic achievement and enhancing adolescent mental health. Further, it is important for educators to understand how parents become active in their student's educational careers and foster lifelong learners. The partnership developed between schools and parents will promote academic achievement, positive mental health, and college and career readiness. There is a need for research to uncover this partnership between schools and parents. By gaining an understanding of how parents are involved with their child's school, educators can create more effective outreach programs and connections with parents in their district. Social and emotional learning research has confirmed that a unified front between schools and families will promote positive student outcomes (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab-Stone, & Shriver, 1997). Understanding how parents become engaged is critical to this process.

## **College and Career Readiness**

Postsecondary readiness and college and career readiness are defined in this paper as possessing sufficient skills, both academic and non-academic, to enroll and succeed in a postsecondary educational environment that is appropriate for attaining a realistic career goal. This definition matches Pohl's (2012) measurement of personal readiness for college and careers, based on the personal skills that contribute to postsecondary success.

Given the emphasis on college and career readiness in the No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama's Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), the role of parents in the college readiness and preparation process has become a significant topic among educators (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2004). In December 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (P.L. 114-95) which will go into effect in 2017. The ESSA specifically makes mention of college and career readiness as a priority for our nation. Schools must set higher standards for students to compete in the international job market. The ESSA asserts that schools and local communities need to set real-world expectations for students, which will better prepare them for college and careers. Setting and providing higher standards for students cannot be done in isolation. Schools and parents must create an active partnership to help students reach high standards. Access to selective 4-year colleges and universities (admitting less than 50% of all undergraduate applicants) has become a highly competitive process in which many parents use extensive and elaborate resources to ensure that their children have the opportunity to attend the most prestigious institutions. Unfortunately, parents who have not had opportunities to attend college themselves have

neither experience with the process of college preparation and college-going nor sufficient access to needed information (Ceja, 2006).

The skills necessary for success and persistence in college are identical to those needed for success in technical school, other postsecondary education options, and employment as an adult (ACT, Inc., 2006; Lippman, Atienza, Rivers, & Keith, 2008). Thus, the skills and competencies investigated in this paper apply to success in any postsecondary educational venue as well as in the workplace. Due to the low postsecondary readiness skills of today's students, education researchers have begun investigating what being "college ready" means. Comprehensive definitions of college readiness focus not only on content knowledge and the ability to learn what courses are intended to teach but also on the context of the college culture and the non-cognitive factors needed to be successful within that environment. Conley (2007) defined college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution" as well as "the mindset and disposition necessary to enable this to happen" (p. 5). This "mindset" includes skills that allow a student to succeed in a postsecondary learning environment.

In their meta-analysis of college retention predictors, Robbins and colleagues (2006) found several factors to be more important even than high school grade-point average in predicting retention in college: (a) academic goals, (b) institutional commitment, (c) social support, (d) academic self-efficacy, and (e) academic-related skills, which include time-management skills, study skills and habits, leadership skills, problem-solving and coping strategies, and communication skills. Pohl (2012) used these

non-cognitive factors to create a scale that may be used by secondary students to track their level of personal readiness for college. By including these non-cognitive factors, she estimates progress toward college readiness by measuring self-regulated learning, persistence, expectations, and self-efficacy regarding postsecondary education.

Educators and parents/guardians need to be cognizant of the role, and active partnership they play when developing the nonacademic skills needs to be successful after high school.

Educators understand the importance of parent involvement, and as a result, the literature related to home-school partnerships is increasing in every aspect of education (Peleo, Jacobson, Ries, & Melka, 2000). Hence, the documentation of benefits of parental involvement, there is a reason to believe that high levels of parental involvement increase the college-going rates for students. Research has indicated that parental support is one of the most important indicators of students' educational aspirations. And, students who are strongly encouraged by their parents to attend college are much more likely to attend 4-year institutions than are students who do not receive that support from their families (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

### **Adolescent Mental Health and SEL**

There is a great deal of data indicating that large numbers of students are contending with significant social, emotional, and mental health barriers that prevent them from succeeding in both school and life. Sometimes, the inability to surmount these barriers leads students to engage in risk-taking behaviors, and often this can contribute to poor academic performance. Educators can address some of the social, emotional, and mental health barriers by helping students develop better social-emotional learning (SEL)

skills and creating a safe, caring, and well-managed learning environment that fosters positive decision making and academic success. SEL involves the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotion, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Results from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011), the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2011), and the National College Health Assessment (American College Health Association, 2012) indicate that many high school and college students are engaged in health-risk behaviors. Many of these, such as alcohol and drug use, violence and bullying, and risky sexual behavior, are major contributors to the leading causes of death among persons aged 10–24 years in the United States.

The problems extend to students' disengagement from school, especially once they reach the high school setting, which influences attendance, graduation, college going, and college retention rates. In a 2007 survey, only 53% of the high school students in Philadelphia agreed with the statement, "In one or more of my classes, I usually look forward to going to class" (Jahi, 2008). According to the latest statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics, only 74.9% of public high school students graduate with a diploma in the United States. In 2011, 3,030,000 public school students dropped out of high school (Education Week, Children Trends Database, 2012). Although the percentage of students enrolled in college directly after high school has increased during the past several decades (from 60% in 1990 to 68% in 2010), a low

percentage of these students receive a bachelor's degree within six years (58%). Only 29.9% of first time, full-time associate degree- or certificate-seeking students in the nation's two-year colleges graduate within three years (Aud et al., 2012). By providing students with comprehensive SEL programming characterized in safe, caring, and well-managed learning environments supported with the instruction of SEL skills, schools can address many of these learning barriers and associated risk factors. An active partnership between educators and parents/guardians can promote a continuum of positive supports for students to develop healthy SEL behaviors.

Five core SEL competencies can help students develop other academic and lifelong learning skills, including higher-order thinking skills (e.g., problem-solving, critical thinking), academic success and employability skills (e.g., organization, teamwork), and public/consumer/life skills (e.g., civic engagement, social media). For example, SEL competencies can help students become better communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders and self-advocators, resilient individuals, and caring, concerned members of their communities (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). These skills have been identified by today's employers and educators as important for success in the workplace and postsecondary settings and hence, contribute to students being college and career ready. To lend support to this theoretical rationale, a growing body of research documents benefits for students who participate in SEL programs in a range of areas such as: (a) students' social-emotional skills, (b) attitudes about self, school, and others, (c) social interactions, (d) emotional distress, (e) alcohol and drug use, (f) violence, (g) truancy, (h) bullying, (i) conduct problems, and (j) academic performance (Hawkins et al., 1997; Wang, Haertel,



& Walberg, 1997; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the benefits of SEL programs comes from a review of (a) positive youth development, (b) SEL, (c) character education, and (d) prevention interventions designed to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents aged 5–18 (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor., & Schellinger, 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Dymnicki, Kendziora, & Osher, 2012). Participation in SEL programs associate with six positive impacts on student outcomes: (a) improved SEL skills, (b) positive attitudes toward self and others, (c) appropriate social behavior, (d) increased academic performance, (e) reduced conduct problems, and (f) reduced emotional distress. The impact on academic performance translated to an 11<sup>th</sup> percentile point gain in students' achievement test scores.

### **Parental Influence on College and Career Readiness**

Preparation for college is a lengthy process that requires the acquisition of appropriate skills, knowledge, and competencies, and young people need help to become ready for postsecondary education (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Schools can help students prepare, but a partnership with parents/guardians provides a continuum of support. Parents/guardians have expertise about their child, enabling them to provide help that complements the school's approach. Parental involvement is essential for educational success, and help from parents may also be a key element in postsecondary readiness (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). In fact, supporting postsecondary readiness may be the most important role parents/guardians can play in their children's future. Many school-based college readiness programs are developing parent components, which include information that the school shares with parents/guardians

(e.g., [www.rampuptoreadiness.com](http://www.rampuptoreadiness.com)). Such a component is an important way to increase parental knowledge and improve parents' ability to help their children prepare for college and careers. The difficulty in delivering information to parents, however, is that they may not attend to it or be aware of their role as active participants.

The extent to which parents/guardians receive and use this information is dependent on their willingness to participate or listen to the school's messages. A parent/guardian who does not trust the school may not be receptive to these programs, and they would be of little use. Parental trust can influence how parents/guardians hear messages from the school. If the school is disseminating information about postsecondary preparation, it is important for parents/guardians to pay attention. The degree to which a parent/guardian attends to information from their child's school may depend on their level of trust in the teachers, administrators, and staff they encounter in the school (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams, 2008; Forsyth, 2008).

Emerging research suggests that parental trust of the school could be an important factor in school functioning and student learning. Research on the parental trust of schools links with academic achievement, student identification with school, parent involvement, and school climate (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams, 2008; Forsyth, 2008), which are related to postsecondary readiness. No research exists that specifically investigates a relationship between trust, college and career readiness, and active partnerships. Schools can promote this trust by increasing their communication with families through four specific avenues (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011).

1. Create child-centered communication that is specific to students. This form of communication is engaging because it provides a personalized message and individualized relevance.
2. Communication must be constructive, meaningful, and useful to provide practical suggestions.
3. Guidelines and strategies provided to families must be clear and concrete when supporting a child's ability to learn.
4. Communication with families must be continual and ongoing to keep families engaged and informed of classroom practices, school policies and initiatives, and child performance and skill development.

### **Support System**

As a child grows, he or she needs role models and a continuum of support (at home and in school) while their emotional intelligence develops. This high level of support cannot stand alone at school or home. A child spends the majority of his waking day in the presences of his family and his teachers. A partnership and connection between schools and families can be established and maintained to support the needs of children as they grow (Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011). While this partnership may seem simple to create and maintain, many schools struggle with establishing a true connection with parents/guardians (Forsyth, 2008). Many times parents/guardians do not actively engage in their child's school life. To understand the phenomena of parental engagement, this research study will look through the theoretical framework of self-determination theory, which is a theory rooted in cognitive development.

## **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is rooted in the evolution of cognitive development surrounding one's intrinsic motivation and involvement in organizations (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Gagne, 2014). This theory was born out of an interest in the study of intrinsic motivation, defined as doing something for its own sake, out of interest and enjoyment that not explained through behavioristic or drive-theory principles (Berlyne, 1950; Dashiell, 1925). SDT suggests that people stretch their capacities and express their talents, eventually actualizing their human potentials. Psychodynamic and humanistic theories of personality and cognitive development documents the need for a person to become engaged and involved in organizations (Freud, 1927; Malsow, 1943; Rogers, 1963). While psychologists have been observing and defining human behaviors for over a century, Deci and Ryan (1985) differentiated SDT from other behavior theories by exposing the human tendencies toward active engagement. SDT begins by embracing the assumption that all individuals have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an elaborate and unified sense of self. SDT posits that there are obvious social-contextual factors that support this innate tendency and that are other factors, such as motivation, that will hinder this fundamental process. SDT proposes that motivation is multidimensional, and resides along a continuum of self-determination ranging from motivation (lack of motivation) to extrinsic motivation (controlled motivation), to intrinsic motivation (autonomous motivation).

Amotivation represents the lack of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and characteristics include the lack of value for an activity or the belief that the activity will not result in desired outcomes (Thogersen-Ntoumani & Ntoumanis, 2006). A prediction

is made to determine developmental outcomes, ranging from relatively active and integrated self to a highly fragmented, almost passive self, as a function of social-environmental conditions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When considering SDT and parental involvement in schools, it is critical to assess a parent's sense of motivation and involvement in school-related decisions. One factor that can influence a person's motivation to be actively involved in the environment in which the schools operate. For the purpose of this study, the perceived school environment that parents experience will play a critical role in their active engagement.

### **Self-System Process Theory**

Emerging from SDT is self-system process. Self-system process describes a person's role in a particular group as his interpretation and adequacy to perform or contribute to that group (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009). That is, if a person does not feel he is adequate in contributing to a group, he will not join the group. These beliefs are not momentary self-perceptions, rather relatively strong convictions about the nature of one's self and the world. Because self-system process guides participation in and interpretation of social interactions, it also helps create compelling experiences of apparent reality. When applying self-system process to parents/guardians and schools, parents/guardians need to feel that they are productive partners with schools and that schools hear their voices, as that is their apparent reality. But where does this partnership start? Lines, Miller, and Arthur-Stanley (2011) have established a handbook on the importance of a family-school partnership with a practical framework from which a culture can be created. Their mindset involves

a shift from parental involvement in education to family partnerships with educators who have shared responsibilities.

When applying SDT and the self-system process, parents create environments that can support or undermine youth's perception of themselves as being competent to succeed, connected to others in school, and autonomous learners (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Wellborn, 1994). SEL research has confirmed that a unified front between schools and families will promote positive student outcomes (Elias et al., 1997).

### **Parental Role in Postsecondary Readiness**

First-generation students are students whose parents have no college education (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). These students are less likely to enroll in and graduate from college in comparison to their peers whose parents have at least a bachelor's degree (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Synder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2004). Students whose parents did not attend college are one segment of the population less likely to attend college themselves. Students whose parents attained a college degree are 1.5 times as likely to enroll in college than students whose parents only have a high school diploma, and more than twice as likely as students whose parents have not graduated from high school (Choy, 2001). The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) followed a cohort of students from 1988 to 2000, beginning when they were in eighth grade. Analysis of this study found that parental attainment of a bachelor's degree affects a student's likelihood of enrolling in college even when controlling for income, parental involvement and expectations, academic preparation, and peer influence (Choy, 2001). Even when they do enroll in college, first-generation college-going students are less

academically prepared, less likely to attain a degree, more likely to drop out of college, and less likely to return once they leave college than students whose parents have a degree (Choy, 2001; Horn & Chen, 1998). Once first-generation students to attain a degree, however, it appears that differences between them and other students disappear, and they can take advantage of all the benefits that a degree can offer, including higher wages and job security (Choy, 2001). As discussed above, a college degree affords a great improvement in life outcomes, of which students from disadvantaged backgrounds are being left out. Given this phenomenon, all parents/guardians would benefit from being aware of the impact of their educational level and their influences on their child's ability to be college and career ready.

It is clear that students are less likely to enroll or succeed in college if their parents have not attended college. Some evidence suggests that it is because parents who did not attend college are less likely to help their children choose rigorous high school courses (Adelman, 2006; Horn & Nunez, 2000). Parents/guardians may decide not to be involved in course choice because they may be completely unfamiliar with the process of college preparation, even though most parents say they want their children to attend college (Bridgeland et al., 2008). Parents/guardians who attended college can help their children more easily, having gone through the process themselves. Studies and polls have found that 92% of parents and 90% of high school seniors believe they will attend college (Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup, 2010; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Since the actual enrollment rate is much lower, there is a clear disconnect between student and parent/guardian assumptions about college enrollment and reality. The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll's findings and the research from Schneider and Stevenson (1999) are

currently unclear as to how parental involvement in education influences college readiness.

Research on partnerships between school districts and parents/guardians is growing in scope and rigor and adjusting how schools view family and community involvement. Most dramatically, studies indicate that school, family, and community partnerships must provide an official component of a school organization to promote student learning, rather than as an accidental set of activities for a small number of parents (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). As part of school organization, it is the responsibility of district leaders and school administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and other partners to organize effective and equitable structures, processes, and plans for partnership programs that involve all families in ways that support student success in school.

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence asserts that students learn more when parents/guardians, educators, and others in the community recognize their shared goals and responsibilities for student learning and work together, rather than alone (Epstein, 1987a, 2001). In this model, three contexts - home, school, and community - overlap to some extent, thereby identifying areas of separate and combined influences on children. The external structure of the model shows that these contexts may be pulled together or pushed apart by the philosophies, policies, and selected activities that are operating in each context. The internal structure of the model identifies the interpersonal relationships and connections between and among parents, children, educators, and others in the community that may affect student success in school. The goal is to develop positive and productive interactions with home, school, and community to produce the



best results for students. To implement positive and productive interactions, organizational structures should assess the quality of plans, activities, implementations, and results to be measured, monitored, and continually improved to engage families to benefit students. Within the areas of overlap, studies at the elementary, middle, and high school levels identified a framework of six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2009). The types of involvement are broad, separable categories of practices that involve parents with teachers, students, and community partners in different locations and for specific purposes, all contributing to student learning and success.

There is a plethora of literature that illustrates the positive influence family involvement has on the development of students' educational goals and success (Ceja, 2006; Hoover- Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Moles, 2000; Rich, 1985). In fact, family and/or parental involvement positively links to several outcomes, including (a) higher academic achievement, (b) sense of well-being, (c) school attendance, (d) student and family perceptions of school climate, (e) student willingness to undertake academic work, (f) quantity of parent and student interaction, (g) student grades, (h) aspirations for higher education, and (i) parent satisfaction with teachers (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

### **Defining School-Community Collaboration**

School-community collaboration refers to the action in which educational, health, and social service institutions and agencies take among themselves to integrate services for children and their families. Although schools are among key participants in the

collaborative process, this integration requires a partnership for working together to address problems of mutual concern (Bruner, 1991). According to Gray (1989, p. 5), "Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their limited vision of what is possible." The Institute of Educational Leadership (1992, p. 27) affirms that such a process, "leads to the creation of a shared vision and goals between agencies and organizations to address problems beyond any individual agency's purview." The Institute notes that in addition to the creation of a new community of learners, the collaborative process optimally will lead to the formation of a seamless web of support for children and their families in the community.

Much too often, society uses the word collaboration interchangeably and erroneously with terms such as communication, cooperation, and coordination. The literature, however, suggests that these concepts are points along a continuum of interaction (Hord, 1986; Kagan, 1991). Communication, the most basic level of interaction among individuals or organizations, characterizes the simple exchange of information and by only minimal contact. Cooperation goes beyond just communication; it is mutual assistance so that each partner can meet their individual, organizational goals although without substantial changes in the primary services provided or in their governing rules and regulations. Cooperation should enhance the work of the participating agencies while they continue to operate separately and independently. Coordination, the next level of interaction, implies the sharing or exchange of some resources by two participating groups working together around a specific task or program (Kagan, 1991). In these relationships, however, the concerns addressed are not broad

enough to involve a rethinking of the missions of the organizations involved. Connecting schools with communities require a shared vision and understanding that students are the priority of the community.

In collaboration, the highest degree of interaction, Kagan (1991) states that the involved agencies and organizations engage in the creation of a shared vision and goals, and act in concert with each other to address more effectively and efficiently problems of common concern. More than simply pursuing their agendas, partners in a true collaboration agree to pool resources as they work together to achieve this shared vision (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Current literature articulates these distinctions as valuable differences where partners need to have clear from the beginning of their relationship. According to Melaville and Blank (1991), partners who are considering moving to a more complex relationship need first to understand the advantages and disadvantages that each valid model offers for working together. Then they can decide upon the most advantageous kind of new relationship in light of the nature of the local environment (availability of resources) and the goals they want to achieve. Furthermore, Hord (1986), drawing from research on collaboration, points out that these distinctions are useful for partners at any level in designing, implementing and evaluating a new initiative. Partners in this effort need to look at the system as it exists, determine where they are, and decide where they want to go. The success of our nation's youth must be a priority for educational institutions and parents/guardians. Therefore, a high level of partnership and collaboration is required to achieve this shared goal.

## **Parents/Guardians and School Partnerships**

Vatterott (2009) emphasizes the importance of partnership, who asserts that the "power relationship between schools and parents must be realigned to embrace as equal partners in their child's education" (p. 55). The utopian partnership between parents/guardians and the school lies in (a) the management of organizational systems, (b) physical and financial resources, (c) human resource management, (d) the management of teaching and learning, and (e) the management of policy, planning, school development, and governance. Demonstrated through both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, research has consistently shown that with the increase in parent/guardian partnerships in the governance of schools, there is a connected increase in student achievement (Ramirez, 2001). Nothing motivates a child more than when the school community's value learning and families are working together in partnership (Blankstein, 2004; Cotton, 2001). Student variables such as (a) academic achievement, (b) sense of well-being, (c) adequate school attendance, (d) positive attitudes, (e) homework readiness, (f) increased grades, and (g) educational aspirations connect to the active parental partnerships with schools (Gonzalez, 2002). Parental partnerships with school districts lead to more significant achievement irrespective of factors such as socioeconomic status, background, educational level and whether or not parents are employed (Blankstein, 2004; Cotton, 2001). This evidence concludes that school and family partnerships are necessary for all students to learn most effectively, succeed in school, and become productive citizens. It is also apparent that attitudes, values, and behavior of educators must shift to develop strategies for building a strong and consistent partnership between schools and families. Both the use of connections

between families and schools and the selection of alternative strategies of active parent involvement in the instructional process of their children are becoming a key part of schools functioning.

Further, parent/guardian partnerships have positive effects on student attitudes and social behavior, and more positive parental attitudes towards teachers and schools (Cotton, 2001; Hornby, 2000). When parents are actively engaged in their child's education and the decisions made by the schools governing body, student achievement and social/ emotional learning flourish (Mbokodi & Singh, 2011). Students can view their parents as engaged in their education, which in turn creates a greater sense of accountability for the student.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the partnerships between parents and school districts when promoting mental health and emotional functioning in adolescents by conducting a visual and contextual analysis of these relationships. The importance of exploring parent/guardian characteristics, beliefs, and experiences with school partnerships as they develop a college and career ready child will provide school districts valuable information when maintaining partnerships. While it is ultimately the students' choices and skills that will cause them to succeed in college, they are influenced by parenting and schooling throughout their lives. If schools can form collaborative partnerships with parents/guardians, more students may develop the skills necessary to graduate with the postsecondary degrees required for success in today's global marketplace.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter provides, in detail, the overall design of this research study starting with a review of the study's purpose statement and guiding research questions. Further, this chapter provides a rationale and assumptions for qualitative research, the case study strategy of inquiry, participant selection strategy, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis. Lastly, this chapter concludes with a discussion surrounding data quality and rigor, and ethical considerations.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study explored the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college/career readiness concerning social/emotional competencies in adolescents. Parental perception of active school involvement is a new phenomenon in education. As such, the vast majority of research on the topic is either quantitative in nature or related to policy analysis. This research study seeks to understand how parents/guardians describe a partnership with school districts when promoting college and career readiness in adolescents, specifically related to their social/emotional competencies. This research study explored the structure and process associated with the development of an active partnership.

The setting for this study included two public high school districts in New Jersey:

1. North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District
2. Phillipsburg Regional High School District

## **Research Questions**

Three research questions explored the partnership between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college/career readiness in adolescents:

1. What stories do parents/guardians tell when describing the relationship between themselves, school districts, college and career readiness, and social/emotional learning in adolescents?
2. What is the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/emotional learning in adolescents?
3. How do these partnerships promote college and career readiness for adolescents?

## **Rationale for and Assumptions of a Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The purpose of this qualitative, case study explored the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college and career readiness and social/emotional competencies in adolescents. Specifically, the research study warranted a qualitative approach since the nature of research questions required *exploration* (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research questions often begin with *how* or *what*, so that the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of what is going on relative to the topic (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2003). A qualitative study allows the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The purpose of a case study is to understand human interaction within a social unit, a single instance bounded by the researcher in the process of designing the research (Stake, 1995). While an intrinsic study wants to learn about a person or phenomenon that we merely inquire to know more about, an instrumental case study promotes an understanding of specific issues. This research study is an example of an instrumental case study because it is the intersection between parents/guardians and school districts in creating an active partnership to promote college and career readiness in adolescents that this researcher wished to understand. This research study looked to uncover how schools and families work together and collaborate to develop the SEL competencies needed for college/career readiness.

For the present study, I explored participants' *perceptions* and *lived experiences* (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) of parents/guardians when developing a partnership with school districts to promote college/career readiness and SEL competencies in adolescents. Qualitative research methods are the best approach when studying phenomena in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). Also, qualitative methods emphasize the researcher's role as an active participant in the study (Maxwell, 2005). For the present study, I, the researcher, will be a crucial instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings (Stake, 1995).

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

Qualitative case study research served as the strategy of inquiry for this research study. This section describes the background of case study research, defines case study research, examines the relevance of case study, explores the characteristics and



misconceptions of case study methods, and describes case study research designs created from case study research. All components of the research design are connected. However, these connections are not rigid. Maxwell's (2005) rubber band analogy explains the connections and interactions clearly: "This 'rubber band' metaphor portrays a qualitative design as something with considerable flexibility, but in which there are constraints imposed by the different parts on one another, constraints which, if violated, make the design ineffective" (p. 6).

Stake (1995) describes case study as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Case studies bind cases by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period. For this research study, the phenomenon under investigation was an active partnership with parents/guardians and school districts. The *case* for the current study were parents/guardians within two school districts in New Jersey. Case study researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period. For this research study, I gathered data through in-depth interviews and conduct graphic elicitations, and additionally, reviewed documents provided to me by the participating school districts. Specifically, I conducted and recorded interviews, then transcribed them into texts, reviewed district documents, such as School Report Cards, and coded data for emergent themes.

Stake (1995) aligns with Louis Smith's (1978) belief that researchers should view cases as "a bounded system" and inquire into it "as an object rather than a process" (p. 2). Case studies are "a specific, a complex, functioning thing," more specifically "an

integrated system" which "has a boundary and working parts" and purposive (in social sciences and human services) (p. 2). Accordingly, given this definition, Stake notes that case study methods are more beneficial when studying programs and people and less useful when studying events and processes. For this research study, I examined the people (parents/guardians) who make up the partnership with school districts.

Stake (1995) explains four defining characteristics of qualitative research including qualitative case studies. They include holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathic. Holistic means that researchers should consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its contexts. Empirical implies that researchers base the study on their observations in the field. Interpretive means that researchers rest upon their intuition and see research as a researcher-subject interaction. Lastly, empathic means that researchers reflect the vicarious experiences of the subjects in an emic perspective. Stake (1995) argues for a flexible design, which allows researchers to make significant changes even after they proceed from conception to research. This flexibility enables the researcher to integrate the holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathic means of the case study to better align with the research questions.

### **Philosophical Foundation**

The epistemology framing of this research study is constructivism. This epistemological approach asserts that different people construct meaning in different ways, even when experiencing the same event (Crotty, 1998). Crotty identified several assumptions of constructivism, three of which are fundamental to this study: (a) because meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions, so that the

participants can share their views; (b) humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives; (c) the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The research interpretations and findings in qualitative research, therefore, are context-specific.

Constructivism is useful as the philosophical framework for this research study.

According to Stake (1995), out of all the roles that researchers play, the role of gatherer and interpreter is central, stating, “most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction” (p. 99).

Regarding analysis, the interpretive theoretical perspective provided a framework for understanding the ways that parent/guardians interpreted and made meaning to a partnership with school districts. This research study is specifically interested in discovering how parents/guardians participated in developing an active partnership with school districts to promote social/emotional competencies for college and career ready adolescents. The interpretive tradition asserts that researchers should begin by examining the context studied through actions and inquiry, as opposed to predisposed assumptions. The fundamental interpretive study exemplifies the assumption that the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, mediated through the researcher-as-instrument.

The strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Generally, rather than beginning with a theory or preconceived notion of the way the world works, researchers should begin by immersing themselves in the world inhabited by those they wish to study (Esterberg, 2002). Specifically, understanding how

individuals in the world construct and interpret reality should constitute the primary emphasis (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Constructivist and interpretive approaches subscribe to the notion that all social reality constructs, creates, or modified all the social players involved. Thus, it is vital to consider Stake's (1995) argument that, "most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction" (p. 99). Constructivist researchers focus on understanding and reconstructing the meanings that individuals hold about the phenomenon studied (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Jones, 2002) by examining in-depth their *lived experiences* (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) through use of open-ended questions (Crotty, 1998). Thus, for this research study, I conducted interviews with parent/guardians within two school districts, conduct graphic elicitations, and continually analyzed the data in an attempt to understand and construct the meaning of participants' perceptions and experiences when developing an active partnership with school districts.

### **Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection**

Data collection, including sampling techniques, are driven from the research design. In a qualitative case study design, the data are collected through participant sampling. The objective of the research study, research goal, purpose, and questions must be determined prior to deciding the sampling scheme. Sampling should identify the site, the participants (including gaining access to these participants), and sample size (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

## Cases

Case studies conducted on small groups allows for more detailed and in-depth review of the experience and meaning of the subjects (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002). A case, according to Yin (2012) "is generally a bounded entity, but the boundary between the case and its contextual condition – in both spatial and temporal dimensions – may be blurred" and is defined by its significance (p. 6). The organization type- public high schools in New Jersey, as well as geographical location, bound the cases selected for this research study. The two high schools chose, North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District (NHVRHSD) and Phillipsburg Regional High School District (PRHSD) are both located in western New Jersey, approximately 20 miles apart from each other. NHVRHSD is located in Hunterdon County, while PRHSD is in Warren County, which is neighboring counties. The New Jersey State Performance Report Cards from the 2013-2014 school year rated NHVRHSD *very high* when compared to other high schools in the state, placing in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized College and Career Readiness Assessments, such as the SATs, the ACTs, and Advanced Placement Exams. In comparison, PRHSD *lags* in contrast to schools across the state and places in the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized College and Career Readiness Assessments. Further, the cases selected had not previously been researched, supporting a *revelatory* paradigm (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010). This inaugural research study produced significant findings that have implications for practice when creating and sustaining an active partnership with parents/guardians and school districts.

## **Participants**

This research study employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to select parents/guardians for personal interviews. A strategy referred to as, "purposeful selection" which, by one definition (Maxwell, 2005), denotes that "a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). This research study accessed purposeful sampling when selecting parents/guardians for interviews, in that they play a critical role in the partnership with school districts. The within-case sampling was purposeful, consistent with a case study application (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010). The research study sampled participants and organizational artifacts based on both criterion and snowball approaches to data collection. The participant pool included parents/guardians from both districts (n=3,000 families). Purposive sample size determined the theoretical saturation or the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions (Saldana, 2013). The research study identified participants using criterion sampling, meaning that informants demonstrated a specific set of characteristics (Patton, 1990), such as being parents/guardians to high school students beginning summer 2016. Then, in the tradition of snowball sampling, I asked each participant to recommend another participant who could provide additional insight into our discussions and contribute to the research questions.

This research study collected data using parents/guardians of high school students within the establish contexts (described in depth in Chapter Two) during the winter of 2016. I gained permission to conduct the study using parents/guardians within the district

by sending a formal request to the appropriate gatekeepers (Seidman, 2003), including the superintendent and the school principal, as well as the Rowan University IRB. Once approved, I reached out to parents/guardians, via email request, seeking participants (Patton, 2002). The school districts agreed to send an email blast to all parents/guardians within the districts requesting volunteers to participate in this research study. This form of home communication is ideal because it reaches the most participants in a quick period. Before moving forward with data collection, all participants reviewed and signed a document indicating their informed consent.

### **Documents**

The collection of organizational artifacts used purposeful sampling, as well. School district and state level websites served as data collection sources for organizational artifacts. Additionally, the research study asked participants to provide documents that would further expound the nature of the phenomenon. Examples of materials may range, including parent reports, emails, and letters highlighting parental partnerships, news reports, photos, spreadsheets, program descriptions, parent communication and parental involvement with school-sponsored activities.

### **Data Collection**

Before data collection, the research study sought approval to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board on Human Subjects (IRB) at Rowan University. The research study also asked permission from the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Board of Education and the Phillipsburg Board of Education to gain access to the parents/guardians in their districts. Upon approval from Rowan University IRB, this

research study used four forms of data collection: participant interview, participant graphic elicitations, document review, and a research journal.

## **Interviews**

Seidman (1991) states, "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (p. 7). Based on the scope of this research study, which focused on making meaning and process discovery, I selected interviewing as the primary data collection technique. When conducting interviews, relationships and rapport must be established, and coupled with trust: "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. We interview people to find out from them those things we can't observe" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). Active listening and nonjudgmental behavior are two of the standard practices prioritized when interviewing for case study research.

There are six types of questions (Patton, 1987; Merriam, 2009) to be employed during the interview process for case study research: (a) experience/behavior, (b) opinion/belief, (c) feeling, (d) knowledge, (e) sensory, and (f) background/demographic. Esterberg (2002) described a pattern for general and specific questions, called, "open-ended" questions, and cautioned against dichotomous or leading questions, which could lead to a closed style of questioning. The intent of this research study is to make the interviews conversational. As the researcher, I shared information about myself with the participants to establish the trust and rapport necessary for this conversation. Conducting the interviews in this way puts respondents at ease, and allows for an optimal interviewing environment.



There were four compelling reasons for using interviewing as the primary data source for this research study. First, qualitative interviewing is appropriate when “studying people’s understanding of the meaning in their *lived world*” (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). Second, the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind. “We interview people to find out from them those things we can’t observe” (Patton, 1987, p. 196). Third, qualitative interviews result in thick descriptions of the subject studied, which enables the readers to make decisions about transferability of study results (Merriam, 2002). Finally, interviews allow for triangulation of information obtained from other sources and, thus, increase the credibility of study findings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995).

### **Graphic Elicitations**

Graphic elicitation techniques involve the use of diagrams or drawings created by researchers or study participants within the context of a study (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of graphic techniques stimulates participants to recall knowledge and experiences, which can complement and extend data collected through the interviewing process. In addition to encouraging thoughts, these techniques record them for continued participant recall; they also capture data for analysis and display. In qualitative research, graphic representation tools are more commonly used for data analysis and reporting than for the elicitation of data from participants (Umoquit, Tso, Burchett, & Dobrow, 2011; Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009), although their use for data collection does appear to be on the rise (Umoquit et al., 2011). A research study may employ graphic elicitations when words alone cannot express or capture a subject matter completely. Thus, the use of these techniques allows the participant and the researcher to make connections within the

domain that would not otherwise be possible. A graphic tool is used to represent information conceptually that has attributes of both text and images (Crilly et al., 2006). Examples of tools used with these techniques include maps, flowcharts, and timelines. Through a fluid process, the researcher uses the graphic elicitations to supplement the interview questions and draw out information. In conjunction with interview findings, data from the graphic elicitations contribute to the overall data collected.

### **Document Collection**

Although interviews were the primary method of data collection, I also collected and reviewed documents from within the two school districts. This review served to clarify or substantiate participants' statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and to provide thick descriptions of the case (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). The study of material culture is important to explore multiple voices and differing and interacting interpretations to ensure a thorough data collection (Hodder, 1994). Accordingly, school websites and New Jersey Department of Education Report Cards provided public material for data collection.

Hodder (1994) further describes material culture as the review of artifacts that are from within an instruction. These artifacts are critical considerations of this research study as they serve to generalize the intent and meaning of the data collected. To make document content and meaning more evident, this research study used participant interviews, graphic elicitations, and a review of collected material culture.

## **Research Journal**

A research journal is a valuable tool and technique during a qualitative research study. A research journal is an instrument that can capture the researchers' reflections during the research process (Janesick, 1999). This includes capturing field notes from observations, interviews, or observations and reflecting on the meaning experienced during the events. Newbury (2001) refers to the journal as a “melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project - prior experience, observations, readings, ideas - and a means of capturing the resulting interplay of elements” (p. 3). As such, the researcher documents rich descriptions and explanations of their role in the study and the research process and self-reflects in an open-ended way (Janesick, 1999).

The research journal documents the history and narrative of the research process and serves as mental notes for the researcher to look back on. This type of documentation allows the researcher to reflect on and explore his or her thoughts and observations, not otherwise captured during the research process. The research journal serves as a collaborative base for gathering information and researcher understanding from and about the research topic and method (Newbury, 2001). Moreover, the journal provides the researcher with a means to reflect on emergent patterns, similarities, and differences across factors and the cases and begin to make interpretations or challenge assumptions (Janesick, 1999). The journal is part of the data collection method to document the researcher's background, personal experiences, bias with the research topic, and ultimately to ensure data integrity. I employed a research journal daily to capture reflections, document field notes and research updates, and preliminary analysis.

## **Instruments**

Approval from the Institutional Review Board on Human Subjects (IRB) at Rowan University was sought prior to the commencement of data collection. When the IRB granted permission for the research, I entered the field and began collecting data.

### **Interview Protocol**

I conducted all interviews face-to-face and with participant approval, recorded the conversations to ensure accurate transcription (Merriam; 1998). I also took handwritten notes during each meeting, which enabled the tracking of key points to return to later in the interview or to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance.

As a first step in the interview process, I reminded the participants of the purpose of the research study, research procedures, expected benefits, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and protection of confidentiality. I offered clarification to participants if they had any questions about the research study or research procedures. I also provided information about myself to establish rapport and gain their trust (Patton, 1980).

The research study used the semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 2002) and a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain: (a) demographic information on the participants, and (b) participants' perceptions and experiences with collecting, analyzing, and using data for the purpose of understanding how an active partnership is developed between parents/guardians and school districts to promote college and career readiness as it related to social/emotional competencies. The interview protocol included open-ended questions to encourage participants to respond freely and openly to queries (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Esterberg, 2002; Kvale, 1996). I accessed probing and follow-up

questions, when necessary, to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify a response (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The serendipitous nature of the probing questions allowed for a better understanding of the participant's responses. Table 1 shows the relationships between research questions and interview protocol questions.

Table 1

*Interview Protocol Matrix*

Research Question	Part of Protocol: Interview Questions
RQ 1. What stories do parents/guardians tell when describing the relationship between themselves, school districts, college and career readiness, and social/emotional learning in adolescents?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define partnership</li> <li>2. Define college and career readiness</li> <li>3. Define social/emotional learning</li> <li>4. Actual events that would create a partnership</li> </ol>
RQ 2. What is the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/emotional learning in adolescents?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of an active partnership</li> <li>2. Define roles of parents/guardians</li> <li>3. Define roles of school district</li> <li>4. Events that promote social/emotional learning</li> </ol>
RQ 3. How do these partnerships promote college and career readiness for adolescents?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Events that demonstrate college and career readiness</li> </ol>

### Graphic Elicitation Protocol

Before the interview, participants completed a graphic elicitation to help center their focus on the research topic. Graphic elicitations are a creative tool used to elicit a

visual response from the participants using pictures, symbols, and diagrams rather than verbally answering a question (Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly, Blackwell, & Clarkson, 2006). The focus of the graphic elicitation involved having participants draw a picture that connects their families to their school communities. Participants drew, using pictures, the connection if any that exists between their own family and their school community. The use of images rather than words is a powerful way to describe and interpret experience.

### **Document Collection Protocol**

The purpose of a document collection protocol is to assist the researchers with organization and consistency during the data collection phase. The protocol asked critical questions about all documents reviewed for their connection to the research questions. The researcher then makes analytical notes to assist with inquiry and analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

To keep the document review clear and concise, five categories divided the document protocol. The first category described the name of the document and a brief description of what information is in the document. The second category required a description of the document location and what type of source the document is. The organization allowed for easy re-access of the documents because of their rotation during the research process. The third and fourth category allowed for the identification of critical information found within the documents that were relevant and on the research questions.

The purpose of this research study explored an active partnership between parents/guardians and school district; therefore this research study identified terms or statements involving a partnership. Themes and characteristics from Chapter Two served

as identifiers for the document review. The document protocol allowed the researcher to the breakdown of the documents into critical information for analysis and consideration as part of the research process. These *analytical notes* served as researcher prompts to organize better and label each document to reveal patterns, categories, and themes from the various sources. Being able to move between records to observe potential themes and conclusions is critical to the document review process (Creswell, 2014). The review process shows the researcher if there is enough substantial evidence to support themes and conclusions found during the research process. Finally, each interview document included in the document review protocol created easy document access to assist the researcher during coding. The Appendix section holds all materials and protocols for reference.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research studies involve a continuous interplay between data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). For this reason, I began analyzing data following the first interview to begin identifying patterns found from and within participant responses, and to facilitate subsequent data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative analysis is a form of intellectual craftsmanship. There is no single way to accomplish qualitative research since data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Similarly, a qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense of a phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) reminds qualitative researchers that, “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). Analysis, as he explains, “essentially means taking something apart” (p. 71), which in this case, not only means understanding the ways a

partnership is developed between parents/guardians, but also identifying and defining the patterns that emerged between participants from that meaning-making process.

### **Data Management**

Methodologically, Esterberg (2002) suggests, “getting intimate with data” (p. 157), and describes the main objective of immersing oneself in interview transcripts to “load up your memory” with the collected data. This research study followed the data analysis and coding procedures suggested by Creswell (2014) and Salanda (2013). Creswell (2014) mandates the traditional approach in the social sciences that allows the codes to emerge during the data analysis (p. 187). The coding process examined the data from this research study by reviewing the codes that emerged from established themes. The coding process was a two-phase process that allowed for interactive practice of analysis between the researcher and the data.

### **Coding**

A code in qualitative inquiry is a word or a short phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual text" (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). For this research study, I coded interviews and graphic elicitations based on emergent themes. Two rounds of coding took place to explore the process, stories, and values that parents/guardians experience when describing an active partnership with school districts. This two-step process of analysis provided a link between data collection and the participant's explanation of meaning (Saldana, 2013). Stake (1995) defines analysis as “a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71), which enhances the stories that unfold through the interview process and the case study research.



**First cycle coding.** For the first cycle of coding, I used a combination of descriptive and in vivo coding methods. Descriptive coding or topic coding refers to summarizing a passage or passages from qualitative data into a word or short phrase (Salanda, 2013; Creswell, 2014). This method allows for focus on the topic addressed by the participant. In vivo coding refers to the identification of words used by participants to create a theme or pattern (Saldana, 2013). This method allowed for the identification of a common language and unique vocabulary used by the participants. The combination of these two methods was appropriate because it allowed for a critical examination of the data for common words, phrases, and examples of themes and connections (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Descriptive and in vivo coding methods are a productive way for novice researchers to explore and dissect the raw data. Data analysis for this research study used a combination of these two methods by reading the transcripts of the interviews once to become familiar with the conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). On the second read through, I began to highlight common words and phrases that participants used repeatedly. I anticipated finding a common language, tone, or word selection from participants that aided when developing themes. I then identified a common language, and topics addressed by the participants and cited them in the transcripts (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Saldana (2013) mentions that in vivo coding allows the voice to the potentially marginalized participant to come to life through the transcription.

**Second cycle coding.** The second cycle of coding used a more in-depth way to examine the data. I used the values coding method. Values coding refers to the importance placed on one's self, other people, things, or ideas (Saldana, 2013). Values coding allows the participant's attitudes, beliefs, and values to become present in the

transcription. This technique was appropriate because it allowed the participants' (parents/guardians) core values and attitudes about the research topic to be paramount and visible to the reader. After reading through the transcripts several times, common themes began to emerge. It became evident that the information shared could be broken down to values, beliefs, and attitudes about an active partnership between parents/guardians and school districts when preparing students for college and careers as it relates to their social/emotional competencies, connecting back to the research questions. Once I identified a value, a belief, or an attitude I labeled it as such. I then categorized each value, belief, or attitude into themes. Saldana (2013) suggests the importance of acknowledging and hearing the participant's voice and then interpreting their responses. For example, the participant may not come right out and state their core value- it is the responsibility of the researcher to draw out conclusions.

### **Outcomes of Analysis**

Stake (1980) proposes the concept of naturalistic generalization that describes a partially intuitive process arrived at by recognizing the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context (p. 69). Kemmis (1974) points out those naturalistic generalizations develops within a person because of experience and may become verbalized, and may pass from tacit to propositional knowledge. Naturalistic generalizations have not yet, though, passed the empirical and logical tests that characterize formal scientific generalizations. According to Stake, naturalistic generalization ensues more commonly from a single study to one that is similar than from a single study to a population. Consequently, it is essential that the research report is adequately descriptive because as

readers recognize critical similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalization.

The exercise of coding prepares the data for analysis, interpretation, and generalization. I employed a matrix display to organize the data to continue to identify developing themes, compare and contrast responses, and draw interpretations. The use of a conceptually designed matrix was appropriate for this research study when documenting the various reactions, themes, and perspectives found throughout the data. The matrix display allows for comparisons across responses, participants, and sites, and provides standardization for content-analytical themes that all cases will use (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The matrix table is inductive in design. The comparison of data leads to the creation of the matrix display as concepts and themes began to emerge across the responses and become evident, as well as created generalization applied to the themes. This process coincided with data analysis and interpretation. This method allowed for a clear, concise format when providing clarity to the various sources of data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Because qualitative research entails the researcher taking an active role in the collection and interpretation of others' meaning making, to be credible, qualitative researchers must be competent and trustworthy. Stake (1995) cautions qualitative researchers against narrow thinking and instead suggests that researchers learn to understand their research as their participants do, rather than impose their assumptions. In qualitative research, these protocols come under the name of, "triangulation" (p.109).

To increase the trustworthiness of the research study's findings, I employed strategies recommended by renowned qualitative researchers. To decrease threats to credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I (a) *triangulated* data; i.e., I used multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2002; Prasad, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009); (b) performed *member checks* (Merriam, 2002) by sending participants a copy of their interview transcript and asked them to verify the accuracy of the content; and (c) requested *peer* (or *colleague*) *review* (Merriam, 2002) of the findings, as they emerged.

To increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the research study findings, I provided an *audit trail* (Merriam, 2002)—that is, a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis methods and how I made decisions throughout the research study. Finally, to enable other researchers to make decisions about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of results, I used *rich, thick description* (Merriam, 2002).

### **Researcher Positionality**

One crucial distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is the role the researcher plays in the process. It is clear that the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in case study research is the researcher. As a researcher progresses through the research process, the researcher must acknowledge him or her as a human instrument and the primary research tool. As such, it is imperative for researchers to consider their own biases, limitations, and views—throughout data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the reporting phases of the process. Qualitative research assumes that the researcher's biases and values affect the outcome of any study (Merriam, 1998). However, Peshkin (1998) submits that, “one's subjectivities could be seen as virtuous, for bias is the basis from which researchers make a distinctive contribution, one

that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities, and joined to the data they have collected” (p. 18). To enable any audience of qualitative studies to evaluate the validity of conclusions extrapolated from data, researchers should, as part of the study, neutralize or bracket their biases by stating them explicitly to the full extent possible (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). For this research study, in the interest of full disclosure and of guarding against unethical or unintentional influences on my interpretation of an active partnership between parents/guardians and school districts when supporting students’ emotional competencies through being college and career ready, the following discussion outlines my personal experiences relevant to this study.

I currently serve as a school psychologist within the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District. I began my tenure with the district in 2011. My background is in education, psychology, and human behavioral development. On a daily basis, I work with parents and school staff to develop appropriate educational programs for high school students who are transitioning into college and careers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is essential to consider the potential ethical risks when conducting research and crafting a methodological approach. Analysis as a process will disrupt the equilibrium to a topic, as the nature of inquiry attempts to reveal themes and make generalizations that may affect practice, policy, and future research (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Leading with ethical practices during all aspects of inquiry helps to ensure that as a researcher, I practice sound autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001) assert that the researcher must keep the participants at the forefront of inquiry by upholding their integrity as people. By doing so, this preserves their lived

experience with the phenomena. To ensure that the participants in this research study have protection, I obtained informed consent from every participant and their willingness to participate confirmed. As such, this research study underwent IRB approval through Rowan University and supported from local Boards of Education from the respective school districts.

As Orb et al. (2001) discuss research as a process may place stress on the current equilibrium of a topic. Given education and the partnership between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting emotional stability for students to be college and career ready, it is essential to discuss the potential power struggle that may exist. Federal, state, and local municipalities currently govern what schools teach their students. Power and responsibility fall to local school districts to implement curriculums and content standards that students should master before graduating from high school. The role of the parent/guardian can be undefined during this process. This research study may reveal opinions and perceptions from parents/guardians in regards to their role in educational policy, design, and implementation.

As stated in the Sampling section of this chapter, informed consent from all participants acknowledged the research questions and the purpose of this research study (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003). I ensured that all participants fully understood the methodology of data collection and how it applied to the exploration of the research phenomena. This information is included in the Participant Consent form found in the Appendix. All participant information is confidential and protected. The objective of this research study is not to evaluate participants and their performance, but rather to understand their lived experience with an active partnership with schools when

promoting students' emotional competencies when preparing them for college and careers. Also, this research study received approval from the Rowan University Institutional Review Board and each district's Board of Education.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Three outlines the epistemological and theoretical grounding, the methodology and methods for this study, and how these decisions anchored the research design and process of analysis. In addition, provides a description of the constructivist paradigm along with a rationale for qualitative research methodologies. This chapter also provides the rationale for the methodological decisions for this qualitative, case study. The theoretical perspectives, methodology, and methods help to illuminate the various complexities and experiences of the parents/guardians included in this case study research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the strategies used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Pending IRB and board approval, the research studies methodology deployed. Chapter Four presents the research findings, with a discussion and conclusion in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The combination of support from parents/guardians and educators plays a critical role in the education of children as they grow (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Working with the school, parents/guardians can help create collaborative partnerships that support all aspects of a child's life. Parent-school collaborations, particularly parental involvement and participation, are practical tools for facilitating holistic educational learning environments for children to develop both academically and emotionally (Sottie, Dubus, & Sossou, 2013). To maintain perspective during the exploration of data, this research study applied a constructivist epistemological approach in conjunction with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This epistemological approach asserts that different people construct meaning in different ways, even when experiencing the same event (Crotty, 1998). When applying this process to parents/guardians and schools, parents/guardians need to feel that they are productive partners with schools, where schools value their voices and input, as that is their apparent reality. Regarding analysis, the interpretive theoretical perspective provided a framework for understanding the ways that parents/guardians interpreted and made meaning of a partnership with school districts. This study was specifically interested in discovering how parents/guardians participated in developing an active partnership with school districts to promote social/ emotional competencies for college and career ready adolescents. A framework for creating an environment that fosters a college and career ready student was created from understanding and synthesizing data collected.



Through data analysis, a quadrant of broader themes emerged as answers to the research questions (Saldana, 2013). Three research questions guided the exploration of discovering how parents/guardians participated in developing an active partnership with school districts to promote social/ emotional competencies for college and career ready adolescents.

1. What stories do parents/guardians tell when describing the relationship between themselves, school districts, college and career readiness, and social/ emotional learning in adolescents?
2. What is the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/ emotional learning in adolescents?
3. How do these partnerships promote college and career readiness for adolescents?

When analyzing the data, I implemented two phases or cycles of a process of coding. This dual process of analysis allowed the researcher to engage in an interactive practice of data analysis. For the first cycle of coding, I used a combination of descriptive and in vivo coding methods. Descriptive coding or topic coding refers to summarizing a passage or passages from qualitative data into a word or short phrase (Salanda, 2013; Creswell, 2014). In vivo coding refers to the identification of words used by participants to create a theme or pattern (Saldana, 2013). This method allowed for identification of a common language and unique vocabulary used by the participants. The second cycle of coding elicited a more in-depth way to examine the data. I used the values coding method which refers to the importance we place on one's self, other people, things, or ideas (Saldana, 2013). Values coding allowed the participants' attitudes, beliefs, and

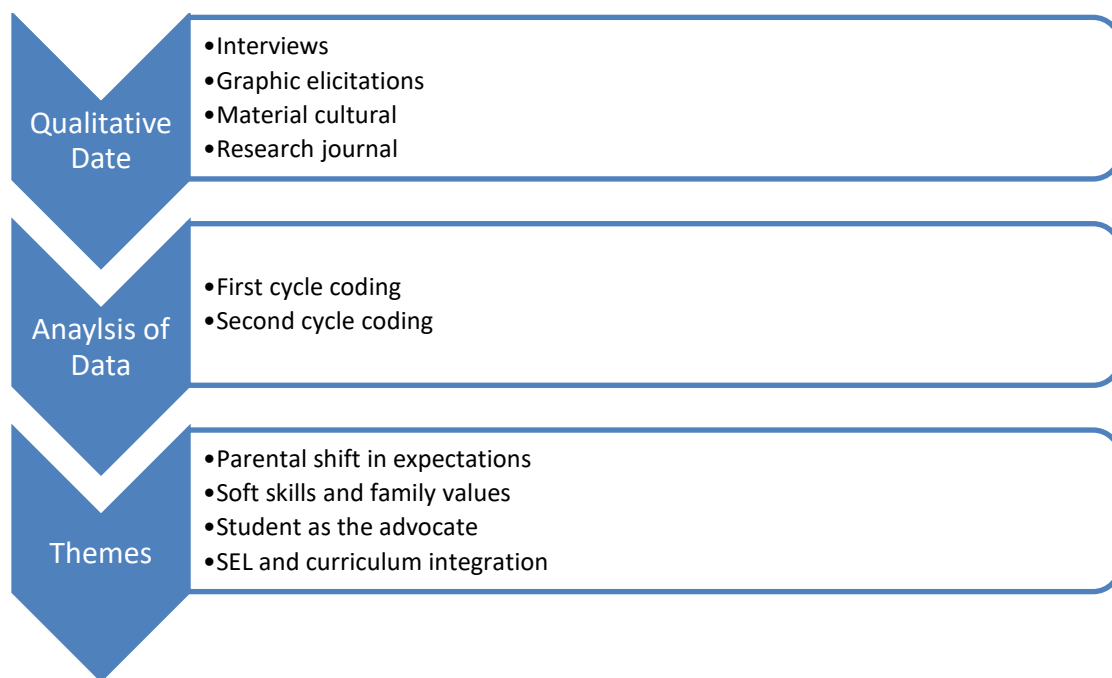
values to become present within their interview transcription. This technique was appropriate because it allowed the participants' (parents/guardians) core values and attitudes about the research topic to be paramount and visible to the reader. After reading through the transcripts several times, common themes began to emerge, and a code map (see Table 1) was used to organize themes. The code map specifically examined the second research question regarding the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/emotional learning in adolescents. Next, a concept map (see Figure 1) created an analytical framework from the merged data (Miles, Huberman, & Salanda, 2013).

Table 2

*Code Mapping and Subsequent Theme Generation- Research Question 2*

*What stories do parents/guardians tell when describing the relationship between themselves, school districts, college and career readiness, and social/emotional learning in adolescents?*

Research Question 2: What is the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/ emotional learning in adolescents?									
Third Iteration: Themes/ Second Cycle Coding									
Theme 1		Theme 2		Theme 3		Theme 4			
Parental Shift in Expectations		Soft Skills and Family Values		Student as the Advocate		SEL and Curriculum Integration			
Second Iteration: Patterns									
1A. What is age appropriate?	1B. Trust the experts	2A. Outside Influences	2B. Family Values	3A. Struggle Muscle	3B. Student Responsibility	4A. Foster Curiosity	4B. Curriculum Standard		
First Iteration: Initial Codes/ First Cycle Coding									
Real conversations about reality Helicopter parent	Administration Guidance Teachers Communication Partnership Outreach	Athletics Extracurricular Coaches Church	Outside influences Fostering curiosity and independence SEL as a foundation Self-worth	Entitlement Resilience Failure Coping skills	Accountability Ownership Decision making Involvement	Exploration Alternative career paths	Curriculum Classroom Teacher Activities		



*Figure 1.* Concept Map for Merged Analytical Framework

The concept map depicts how the qualitative data was analyzed and coded, and through several iterations, four themes appeared.

### **Using Codes and Themes**

The initial cycle of coding identified topics that parents/guardians directly discussed during interviews. Some of the topics were critical points in the interview questions. For example, I asked parents/guardians what they thought a child needs to be ready for life after high school, which I then coded as a coping skill. Similarly, if a participant described a connection between parents/guardians and schools, it was coded as the partnership. I developed codes from the responses based on four major themes that emerged between the first and second cycle coding processes. Themes included: (a) parental shift in expectations, (b) soft skills and family values, (c) the student as the

advocate, and (d) SEL and curriculum integration. When describing their lived experiences with school districts, parents/guardians were able to articulate four major contributing factors to an active partnership and preparing students, emotionally, for college and careers.

The theme of the parental shift in expectations evolved from responses about parents/guardians being unrealistic about their child's future and the role they play. Interview questions regarding their involvement in school activities and what motivates them to lead to conversations about trusting the experts (educators) and the concept of helicopter parents. Helicopter parents are a newer phrase intended to describe parents that "hover" over their child rather than allowing them to be independent as they proceed through challenges. This theme developed codes such as real conversations, communication, guidance, and partnership as parents/guardians shared their stories.

The theme of soft skills and family values emerged as parents/guardians described who helped to raise their children. Parents/guardians described outside influences, such as athletics and religious organizations, which helped to shape their child's character. Starting at home, the theme of family values emerged from codes such as fostering curiosity and independence.

The theme of the student as the advocate emerged more directly during the transition to second cycle coding. Parents/guardians described a pendulum approach to student self-advocacy on a sliding scale, shifting from negative experiences and attributes to positive when promoting emotional health. I coded terms such as entitlement, lack of resilience, and failure when describing the development of a struggle muscle, while accountability, ownership, and involvement were used to describe student responsibility.

The distinction in patterns within this pendulum derived from probing during interview questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For example, interview questions asked parent/guardians to describe and expound on what types of traits (characteristics) were needed to be emotionally ready for what comes after high school. Participants articulated such traits as resiliency and accountability but further explained that many students have not yet developed them.

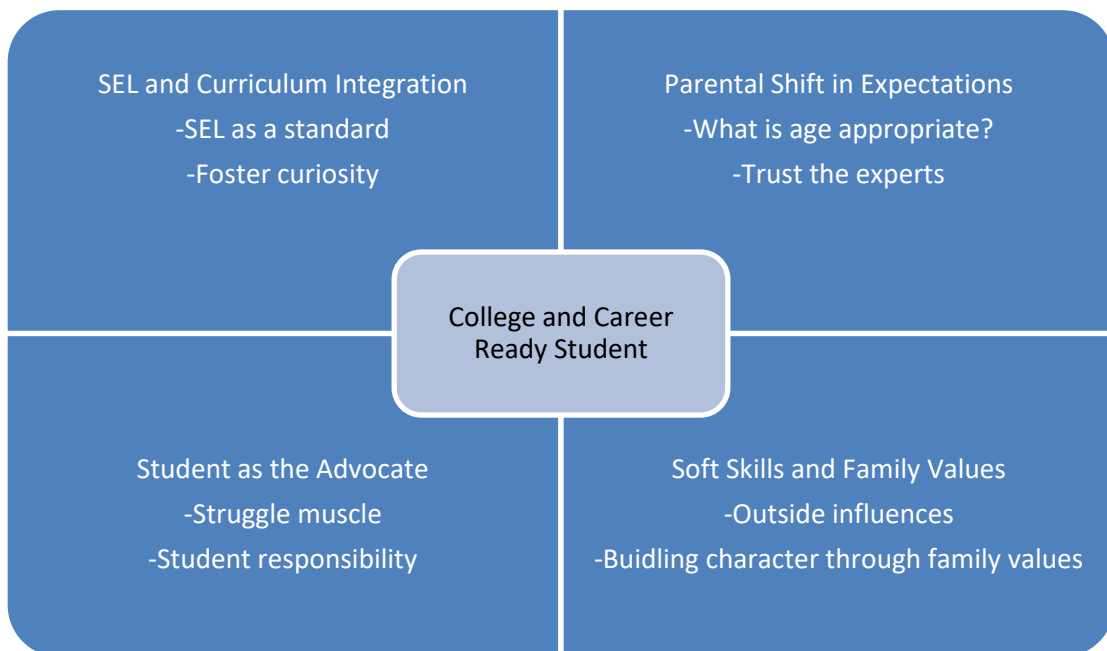
The theme of SEL and curriculum integration grew from input from parents/guardians as a way for schools to contribute to students being college and career ready. During interviews and through graphic elicitations, parents/guardians frequently brought up the lack of explicit SEL teachings in school. Many parents/guardians attributed SEL development when describing their own families and values at home.

### **Themes Merge to Form a Framework**

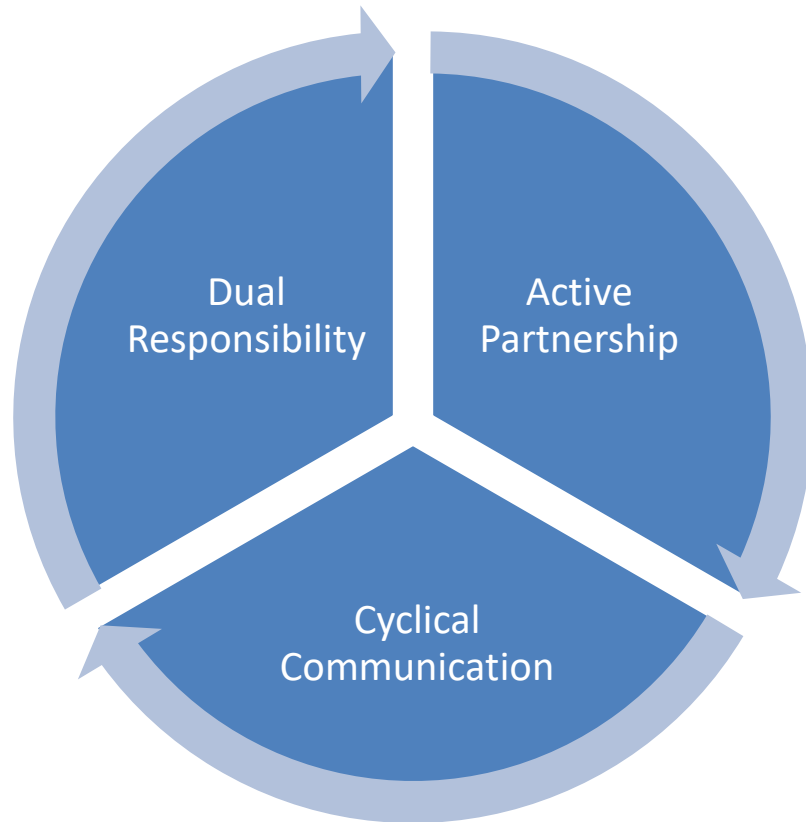
Through several iterations of data coding and merged analysis, themes of (a) parental shift in expectations, (b) soft skills and family values, (c) the student as the advocate, and (d) SEL and curriculum integration surfaced. Preparing a student to be college and career ready does not rest solely on families. An active, engaged partnership with school districts supports the development of a student's emotional well-being as they prepare for life after high school. This preparation requires all stakeholders to take responsibility for the roles they play. Foundations can begin with family values and school curriculums that promote emotional health and resiliency. Then, through life experiences and support from families and schools, students can adapt and grow into college and career ready young adults. Supported by ongoing communication, an active

partnership between parents/guardians and school districts establish and maintain promotion of social and emotional learning in students.

Using the components that parents/guardians identified as essential to an active partnership, a framework for a successful college and career ready student was created (see Figure 2). The coding process developed this framework by outlining ideas. Additionally, an overarching theme of communication emerged from participant responses when describing an active partnership. This research study combined elements that parents/guardians described during their interviews, creating a structure for an active partnership. (see Figure 3).



*Figure 2.* Framework for a Successful College and Career Ready Student



*Figure 3. Components of an Active Partnership between Families and Schools*

### **Research Participants**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study explored the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college and career readiness and social/ emotional competencies in adolescents. The *case* for the current study were parents/guardians within two school districts in New Jersey. The present research study collected data through in-depth interviews, including conducting graphic elicitations, and additionally, reviewed documents made available by the school districts within this study. Specifically, I conducted, recorded, and transcribed interviews into word documents; I



reviewed district documents, such as School Report Cards and school websites, and I coded the data for emergent themes.

### **Qualitative Participants**

This research study selected cases bound by their organization type- public high schools in New Jersey, as well as geographical location. The two high schools selected, North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District (NHVRHSD) and Phillipsburg Regional High School District (PRHSD) are both located in western New Jersey, approximately 20 miles apart from each other. NHVRHSD is located in Hunterdon County, while PRHSD is in Warren County, which are neighboring counties.

This research study employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to select parents/guardians for personal interviews. A purposeful selection which, by one definition (Maxwell, 2005), denotes that "a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). This research study defined a purposive sample size of 13 by theoretical saturation or the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions (Saldana, 2013). Additionally, this research study accessed snowball sampling. When able, each participant recommended another participant who could provide additional insight into our discussions and contribute to the research questions.

Initial communication, via email, to parents/guardians requested participation in this research study (Patton, 2002). Participants interested in participating reached out to the researcher and a private interview was scheduled. Interviews took place at two public libraries and participants' homes, when appropriate. There was one male participant, and

12 were female. All participants are parents/guardians of students who currently attend NHVRHSD or PRHSD.

### **Parental Shift in Expectations**

Four main themes emerged from participant responses during interviews. Participants found that parents/guardians need to shift the expectation and understanding of what is developmental appropriate during stages of adolescence.

#### **What is Developmentally Appropriate?**

Parents/guardians are a child's primary caregiver, although many of them have had no formal training on how to be a parent/guardian. While some may consider it a life-long dream, caring for a child is difficult. Understanding the stages in which a child goes through is beneficial when understanding what is developmentally appropriate.

Parent/guardian A shared:

You go from when they're like a sack of flour, where you can have their head in your hand and their butt in your elbow, and you literally hold them, and you feed them, and do everything for them, and parents, for the most part, don't have the understanding of what is age appropriate. The best advice I was given, by another parent, that I wish the schools could share with us that helped me tremendously was one when my daughter was about 10 or 11, and she was swimming. She said that when they were preteens, start talking to them and treating them as you would want to be treated... I think if schools can help parents get a better understanding of what is developmentally acceptable, appropriate, like the fact that your 13 or 14-year-old may start lying, and sneaking, and ways to work with

that. I recognize this is rather difficult. I don't know how you do it, but the reality is that your kid is going out into the world, and they need to develop these skills. I clarified by asking, "Perhaps more education on not only what you're going to see developmentally, but then also how you handle it, at that stage?" Parent A responded with, "Yep, and what they will need to be successful. I think what's really important here is that we're not just talking about success from a financial standpoint. Success is they're living a fulfilled life, whatever that means to them." By redefining how success is measured, parents/guardians and school districts can work together to set new goals for our students. Parent B explained:

I mean, one thing my son is teaching me is that my husband's and I's view of what we thought was going to happen isn't what's going to happen, but that's okay. Shifting that expectation. He's really teaching me a lot. If he doesn't go to college, that's going to be okay. You know? We used to say, "Oh, he's taught us how to lower our expectations," but that's something that we have to moderate as parents because what are you going to do? You know?

Parents/guardians who have an unrealistic view of what their child is capable of or wants for his or her future may create an environment that is unproductive. The communication between families and schools on every child's individual development is key to individual success. Parent C stated, "You're talking about each individual kid, and each kid is different. And they're different in the sense of how they learn. They're different in their emotional states; they're different in their behavior, they're just different in every way." Parent C shared how her child always had a second teacher in the classroom for

support. Through special education, constant communication and support from the special education teacher on her child's development occurred.

I think because she has the IEP, I think they've [school district] done a lot. She always had that second teacher in the classroom who pays close attention and helps. Her special education teacher has been phenomenal. I just think that he's really been great, I don't know, role model or pusher for her. Like he's on top of her every day, he sees her. He's asking her questions like, "Hey, did you get this done? Hey, remember that you've got this deadline here. Hey, you know, I need you to come in for opportunity period in the morning to catch up on whatever."

It's been amazing. I think, without it, I don't know that she would be as successful as she is.

Support from classroom teachers who see students every day can add valuable insight and knowledge on how a child may be progressing and what skills they have mastered and what skills still need development. Often, parents/guardians fail to grant their students the opportunity to practice essential life skills, such as independence.

### **Helicopter Parent**

The term *helicopter parent* was created to describe a parent who hovers over his or her children, like a helicopter, rather than allowing them to handle obstacles on their own. "The minute one thing goes wrong, they're right on in there doing the ... it's not just the helicoptering. It's the 'my child is special' attitude. It's damaging" (Parent D). Parents/guardians are responsible for teaching their child about life and the skills they will need to be successful, not shielding them from life.

I think parents need to teach their kids certain skillsets to prepare them for life.

Everybody says, "Well, it's common sense," well common to one person is not common to another and some people need things spelled out for them. They need practice at those skills. They're not just innate in a lot of people. I think that's something that parents should be responsible for (Parent E).

Parent E described a skillset that may be different for different people. Similarly, what students need to be successful after high school may differ as well. Many would argue that academic success is the essential predictor of success in the future, while others would argue that emotional stability and the development of coping skills are primary (Goleman, 1998).

Well yeah, because he has to, at this point, have already experienced letdowns. I think that's part of growing, and that's something, I think a lot of kids today don't learn. Mom and dad jump in too quickly, and they're like, "No, no, no I'm going to fix this," so that they don't experience anything negative in their life or any kind of loss. I was told by a therapist years ago that said I had to make planned sabotage. So that he could learn to cope in different scenarios, which it wasn't always going to be this way and it wasn't always going to be your way, and you have to learn to adjust. Like you said, emotionally, in his mind, in the beginning, it was like, "Wow, the world is falling apart," but now he realizes that "Okay, well now what's plan B?" (Parent E)

Parent E spoke about planned sabotage as a tool for allowing her child to experience letdowns.

Parents/guardians need to create situations where their children can experience and handle awkward moments.

We don't see our responsibility in bringing her into the world as being our responsibility for her to be happy. No. Our responsibility is so that she is a capable, contributing adult, and if she is joyful and happy, it will come from within, but we need to give her the skills so that when we are not here, she can thrive, not just survive (Parent A).

These experiences support the development of coping skills and allow a child to process through their struggles independently. As a child develops, it is critical that they understand how they process and cope with challenging scenarios. Understanding how to cope is one aspect of emotional intelligence. Adequate development of one's emotional intelligence leads to confident decision making and has a positive impact on student academic success (Goleman, 2005). Goleman (1998) emphasizes that emotional intelligence hold more weight than technical skills or IQ when assessing an individual's success in their endeavors.

### **Recognizing the Importance of Emotional Competencies**

Parents/guardians recognize that students require a toolbox or skillset of emotional traits to help them after high school. "Resiliency. Confidence. They need to have a feeling of empowerment. I think compassion. Whatever the opposite of entitlement would be. A little bit of humility" (Parent F). While parents/guardians may have espoused beliefs about this skillset, parents/guardians do not feel that students possess these when they graduate high school.

I don't feel that a lot of these kids are going to be emotionally ready after high school to go throw themselves into a college atmosphere. I feel like at least for my 16-year-old's generation, they have that, you know, entitlement sense. And I just feel that because of that they're not understanding the full responsibility of things. And because they have so much help, and so much given to them, I just don't see it (Parent C).

When asked to expound on the importance of emotional readiness, Parent C stated:

Oh, yeah. I think it's very important. I think emotionally, physically. I think all of it is important for you to be able to move on. And I think it's both the school and the parent. I think it's a dual responsibility in that sense. I wouldn't say that I would put full responsibility on the school because that wouldn't be fair, because then, you know, you're a parent to guide your kids through their lives, and that includes their education.

As parents/guardians continue to support the development of the whole child, it is unrealistic to expect that all parents are experts in every aspect of a child's life and their development. When thinking about that *dual responsibility* that Parent C spoke of, does a school district have a responsibility to families to educate them on child development and critical topics of life? Many districts offer outreach programs on difficult topics such as social media safety, dating violence, and substance abuse warning signs, to name a few. Within the NHVRHSD and PRHSD, the Student Assistance Counselors offer a variety of services to support mental health. Some programs go as far as extending evening presentations to the parents/guardians within the district to educate them on critical topics. However, how do parents/guardians know what are considered critical topics?

Well, it wasn't on my radar, but I think they're doing a lot better job than when my older kids were there. The Teen Pep program is there. They have the diversity. I know you have the programs where people come and talk and listen. I feel like the people who came to the heroin epidemic presentation were just people like me who know about addiction now. The frustration that was expressed that night is, "Where is everybody else because this affects all of us?" I'm more savvy, and my kids are too because they've gone to family programs with their sister. (Parent F)

Programs about real-life conversations occur, but not all stakeholders are involved.

School districts have the resources about what students are struggling with, and so do parents, just in different capacities. All *stakeholders* must facilitate effective communication to take a dual partnership seriously.

Then it is the high school's responsibility to take that information and actually do something about it, whether it's a parent night or infusing it in a health class or doing something, but my hope is that taking this information, it's not just going to be a snit-bit of a conversation of one class and one lesson plan, that it can be something that can be infused. (Parent F)

While our society takes great strides to overcome differences and to accept all people, there is still a social and societal stigma associated with emotional and mental health illness (NAMI, 2015). Parent F stated, "don't share your problems or else you'll bring shame to yourself, and the family" when describing the mental health stigma and the roadblock to conversations. With great pride, Parent F exposed a family secret in the hope of crashing through such roadblocks.



I have to be careful who I say, "Oh, yeah, I have a daughter who struggles with alcoholism. I have a daughter in recovery now." That was our family's darkest time when we had to take her out of school. We took her out of school, they [the college] didn't send her home. We took her out of school, we sent her to treatment and it was very scary time for all of us and people would say, "Well, isn't that just typical partying?" No, my kid's in the ER almost comatose so, no.

Parent F continued to explain how their family heals from the social stigma of grief, a mental health illness, and societal pressures.

I'm living it. They know that, but I feel also there's more going on with that open conversation. Even the young man who died because of suicide and was recognized in a significant but small way at graduation. I actually wrote a paper. I'm in school now myself and I wrote a paper about how families who have a lost a child to addiction are treated differently than those who, you know, might die in a car accident or to leukemia because there is still shame and stigma and you don't want to glamorize it, and the fact is you have to talk about it. You just have to talk about it. I feel like people are talking more than they used to.

As explained in Chapter One, "According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness, nearly 50% of children, aged 8-15, do not receive the mental health services they require to maintain a positive and healthy lifestyle" (p. 3). While 20% of high school-aged children (aged 13-18) suffer from a mental illness, the critical conversations about positive emotional health are appropriate and warranted. Children deserve a life where adults collaborate and communicate to create a safe, nurturing, and understanding environment for them to grow up in.

## **Trust the Experts**

Parents/guardians articulated that there should be more individual time spent with families and schools when discussing and planning for their child's future. Topics of conversation should expand beyond academics and encompass real life obstacles and potential solutions. Parent B stated, "Well, these presentations certainly help. Maybe more meetings, like let's have a ... What happened to conferences you used to have with ... They don't do that at this high school". This individual time could be used to discuss a variety of different topics, perhaps even those critical conversations. Parent G suggested:

I think that would be helpful just educating the parents a little bit earlier, or even things like the National Honor Society, why would you tell a junior, their junior year what they needed to have done the three years prior. So for me, it needs to happen earlier and be clearer communication and be a greater focus on after high school, whether it's a nighttime meeting or just one on one meetings with freshman parents, instead of waiting, again for guidance to meet with the parents as juniors.

Parent H depicted their bridged partnership between families and schools by separating the ideal from reality.

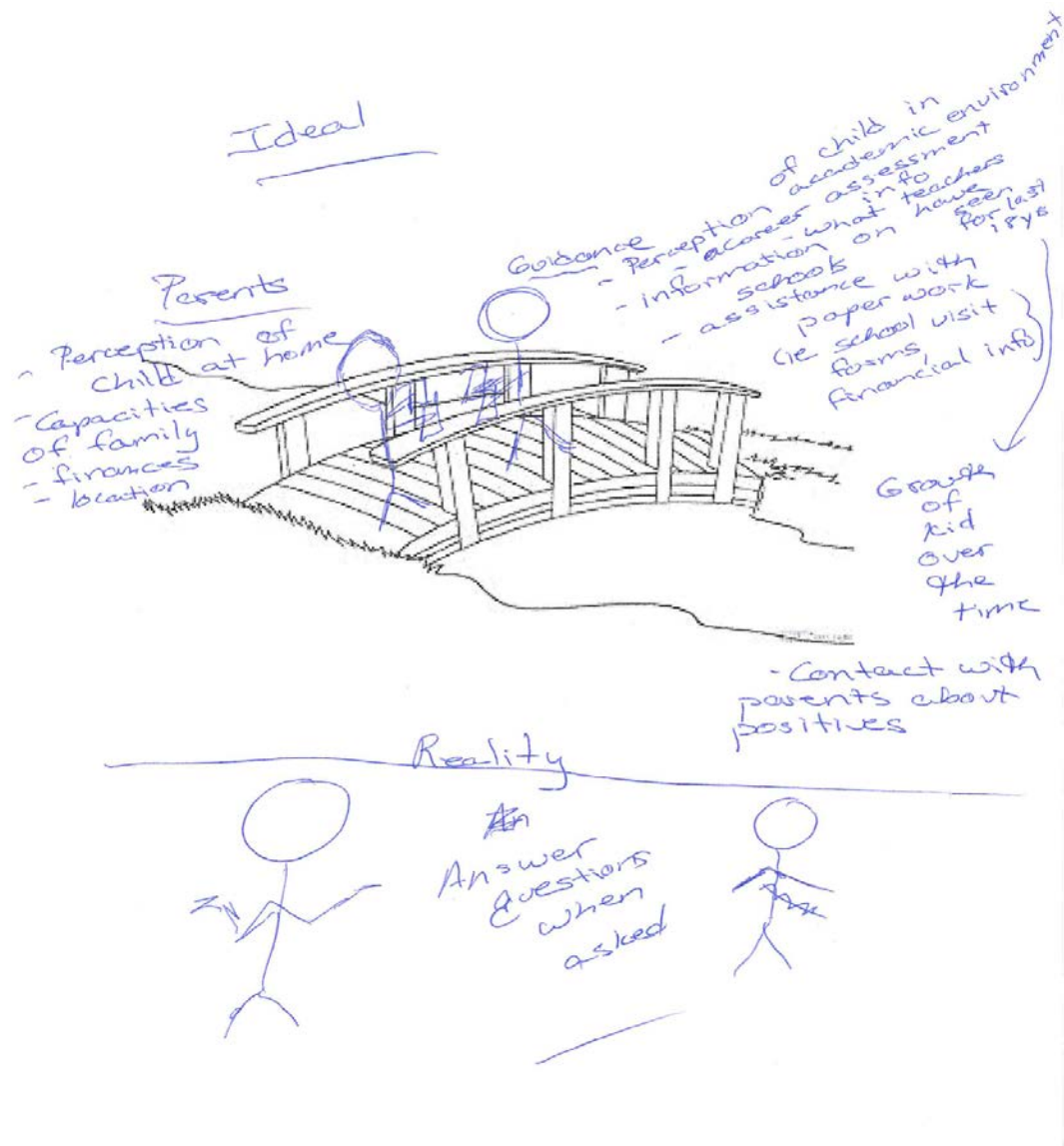


Figure 4. Graphic Elicitation by Parent H

Perhaps this partnership is best explained by Parent H's lived experience.

For my daughter, who was a straight-A student, there was zero communication from the high school, so we did not have a need to communicate with them either.

For my son, the only communication from the high school was if he had a problem. Over time, thankfully, he grew up, and he matured, and after that, we

didn't hear one thing from the school. Not like, "Gee we've noticed....," And then the icing on the cake was with basketball. He made the team freshman year. He made the team sophomore year. There was a student who had a suicide his junior year when he was trying out. Try-outs were after the funeral, and he did not make the team. My son was extremely impacted by that suicide because he had been with the kid on Friday. That set off a thing of communication. The coaches posted the list on the board, then sent them off for Thanksgiving vacation. Not good. After a kid just experienced a suicide of a friend. This is a very emotional topic for us.

Parent H continued,

So, we picked him back up. We put him in every basketball program we could find mid-year, which is a very difficult thing to do. And again, we're not saying, "Oh our kid should be ..." but a little communication, a little something. The kicker was that he contacted the coaches, "Was it possible to make it his senior year?" "Oh, absolutely." Sent him to the camps, he did great. You know, All-Star, three-point shooter, whatever you know, won their competitions. They cut him again. Again. That could be fine. No conversation. No discussion. No nothing. We sent the coach a letter. We sent a letter to the Director. Again, not like, you have to put our kid in ... but can you tell us what you saw, No answer. Nothing. It's appalling. So what do we hear from the school? We hear when things are bad. They do nothing to help these kids in certain situations, and that's just not okay.

Communication involves multiple parties. Communication, as described in Figure 4, depicts the cyclical process of dual responsibility and active partnerships. The

experience of Parent H is an example of the breakdown that can occur when this process is faulty. Parents/guardians and schools are experts, in their own right, within their own environments. A breakdown in cyclical communication between adults can result in the student as the by-product of ineffective communication. The experience of Parent H highlights a precious missed teaching moment for the student who experienced loss on many levels. Even in moments of turmoil, all stakeholders must remember that we are trusted adults who are helping to develop a young person, who can be impressionable. These teachable moments require the experts, both schools and families, to lean on each other to create a continuum of support. Such a break down only reinforces a perception and feeling of rejection on the student's behalf. When building a student to be college and career ready, experiencing rejection is undoubtedly a valuable lesson, but not at the expense of a child's well-being and without explanation. Parent C confirms that students need to experience real-world dilemmas before they graduate high school.

Yeah. I think that they should because I think that they need a little piece of that reality before they hit reality. And I think that that's going to be a huge door slammed in their faces once they get to that point because, you know, they all think, "Oh, it's going to be a piece of cake. It's going to be so easy. I'm not scared." Until they get there, and then they're freaking out. Yeah, I mean, *adulthood* is hard. It really is. And I just don't think that they know really what is all involved in that. And they think it's going to be so easy, and mom and dad are always going to be there to bail them out.

Fostering a student who is college and career ready requires parents/guardians to make a shift in their approach to collaborating with schools to maintain an active

partnership. There were three main areas that parents/guardians explained could be shifted; understanding what is developmentally appropriate for their child, releasing the *helicopter parent* role, and recognizing the importance of emotional competencies as their child progress through high school. These shifts in parental expectations will aide in efforts to maintain an active partnership with schools.

### **Soft Skills and Family Values**

Using in vivo coding, soft skills such as character and residency began to emerge. Soft skills are often observable, but are defined differently for many people. Participants from this research study shared their own definitions of soft skills how they relate to active partnerships and college and career readiness.

### **Soft Skills versus Hard Skills**

Throughout one's development, situations and experiences shape the way they will approach and handle life. Each situation and experience requires a set of skills to have a successful outcome. A child's development is a continuous process of exploration and execution of skills learned. There is a distinction between *soft skills* and *hard skills* that a child needs to access when navigating his or her life. Parent I explained:

I think the soft skills, things like leadership, communication that kind of stuff is really important, and some of it comes innate and some of it is learned. That's definitely something that needs to be a partnership between parents and school. I think they need to have social skills. Hard, soft, social skills. I think emotionally they need to be prepared to deal with disappointments and possible failure because not everybody succeeds.

Parent I used their graphic elicitation to highlight the importance of soft skills versus hard skills while using a bridged partnership for child development.

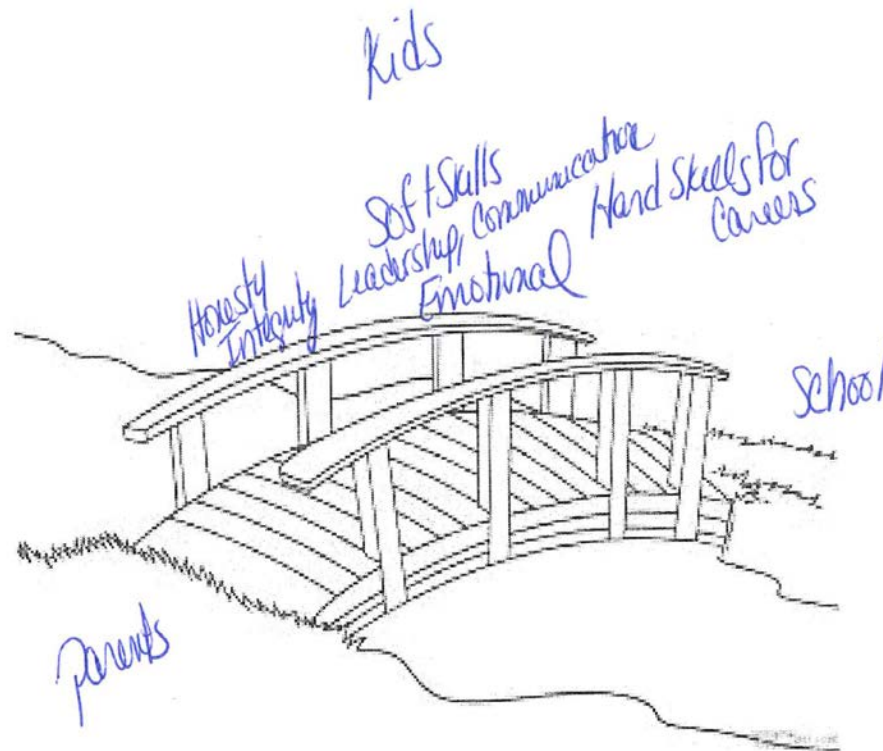


Figure 5. Graphic Elicitation by Parent I

Each soft skill that Parent I refers to require the application of meaning and value placed on it. Skills such as leadership and communication mean nothing unless they are instilled, processed, and internalized by the child. These skills are not easily measured when compared to hard skills such as mathematics or rote memory of historical events. Hard skills have the luxury of being quantitatively observed and measured by a standard

scale. Each person defines and measures soft skills differently. The mastery of soft skills comes in the execution of each skill and its effectiveness and role it plays in each situation. Parent I views soft skills as being essential to a child's development and also believes that there is a partnership between parents/guardians and schools when teaching these skills.

I think it's definitely a joint responsibility. I'm not with my kids 24/7. They do spend a good deal of their day at school. So while they're there, I think it's the school's responsibility to monitor what's going on, give them the formal education that they need to learn those skills, the opportunities to be able to practice them - whether it be public speaking or things like that. And as far as the things like honesty and confidence, I think that may come more from at home- family values, but I do expect them, if my son cheats, I expect the school to handle it with him. I'll handle my end at home. You handle what needs to be done at school. Given him a zero, give him a detention. Whatever it is that needs to be done at school, I think it's definitely a joint responsibility.

Similar to soft skills being considered jargon unless practiced, all stakeholders must understand the concept of joint responsibility. Parents/guardians and schools need to communicate what skills are necessary for success after high school and the teaching of those skills. Skills such as leadership, communication, and honesty may develop in serendipitous moments throughout a child's school day, but SEL curriculum advocates argue that there is a systematic approach to teaching such skills. Successful SEL interventions should be embedded within broader school curricula and integrated across other learning environments (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). When families



support learning outside of the classroom, it reinforces the complementary roles of parents and teachers as co-educators in fostering children's academic, social, and emotional development (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

For families to support learning, they must feel as though they have a voice and are welcome in this process. Parent I suggested, "Use research, like, being able to gather data and see what is being requested. Tracking students possibly beyond high school by doing surveys." Parent I continued to explain that feeling welcomed by her son's school was important to her. "They'll ask for help. They'll do signups saying this is what we need. When we're there, I feel thanked, and I feel like my input, and my contribution is appreciated." Self-determination theory states that a person's contribution to an organization will match how effective they feel about their contribution to that organization. When a parent/guardian feels welcomed by their child's school, their participation and partnership will be more effective and productive. It is critical that schools create an environment where parents/guardians feel welcome and heard. Schools can influence participation in school-based activities and events by creating a school community climate that values families as active and recognizable partners (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2007). Parent B offers improvements on her experience with her child's school. She stated, "I'm sure if they reached out to me more I would've probably gotten more involved. I feel very disconnected with their high school. I'm not blaming them. It's not their fault. I'm just not connected." When asked to expound on how the school could have involved her more, she offered:

What if there are more group sessions? That panel that I was talking about, I thought it was really useful to hear these other students and what they went

through now that they are out of high school. What if counselors have more group sessions? A focus group, a random set of kids. Maybe parents, maybe not. I don't know. Maybe a focus group of parents. It has to be across the board-type, ones who are going to college and ones going right to work. I think it's useful to have the spectrum. Again, parents want to be involved, but for me, I didn't know how to be [involved].

The development of soft skills for students is a continuous process requiring an active partnership between families and schools. Parents/guardians need to feel that their voices matter to engage in a productive partnership.

### **Outside Influences**

"It takes a village," stated Parent J when asked who has helped raise her child. There must be recognition that all aspects of a child's life influence their development. Children spend only part of their days in school, and the activities they participate in outside of the classroom help to instill values and soft skills that are necessary when facing challenges in life.

We're talking about school, but I can't help but bring in the piece of Boy Scouts in his life, too. I think that is a big part of having him grow into a young man as opposed to a boy, as well. And I don't subscribe to all of the details of the Boy Scouting program, but I know, just looking at my two boys, it's definitely benefiting them and making them better young men and bringing values in that they wouldn't have the opportunity just from me. (Parent I)

Every experience that a child will face helps to foster the development of secure social and emotional competencies. Being a part of a sports team is not just about the physical

endurance and health benefits, but also moments that challenge young adults to make critical decisions and experience letdowns and victories. Parent G shared a story of her son and their family experience from his junior varsity soccer season.

My son was a sophomore on the JV soccer team, and he played more time than anybody else. So the next year the coaches suggested he was going to be on varsity and then he didn't make the varsity team. So that was a discussion, and that was a huge life lesson because he was disappointed, but he had his moment of grief, I guess, and then we discussed that now you have a choice to make. What he thankfully did was voted team captain because we said you could reflect on the year before about how the older boys who got left behind, and some reached out to the younger guys and unified the team. We talked about that's how life goes.

You don't always get what you want.

A component of secure social and emotional competencies is establishing resilience. Students must experience pushing through when life becomes challenging. The story that Parent G shared explored the letdown that her son experienced, but also how her son chose to handle the situation. That experience and soft skill development could not have otherwise been developed in a classroom or around the dinner table. Participating in athletics or other extra-curricular activities, allows a child to experience and practice the soft skills that are reinforced in school and at home in an environment that is supported by their parents/ guardians. Parent F shared her daughter's experience of being injured while being a member of a cross-country team.

Last year my daughter went to every single meet, and I think she was at every single practice and she couldn't participate. The first meet was really hard, and

the kids didn't really know what to do with her, and she didn't need to be there but she wanted to be, and that was very hard for her. We talked about how the kids didn't know what to say to her. She was like, "Mom, nobody understands how this is hard." I said, "They might not. They don't know what to say." That's one of the things that's made her strong.

Religion and spirituality also play a critical role in the development of social and emotional competencies as they relate to a student being college and career ready. "And then we found our church and that's when I really started to feel part of the community and I feel like so many people helped raise our children there," shared Parent F. When asked about the development of core values Parent G stated, "It starts at home, and we're Christian, so it starts with the Lord".

The development of soft skills, such as resilience and accountability, will not occur in an isolated environment. Such characteristics are reinforced at home through family core values and experienced by children in different aspects of their lives. The stakeholders that help to mold a child to be college and career ready extends from the home through the classroom and into a variety of activities. Religious and spiritual organizations, extracurricular activities, athletics, and the Boy Scouts, to name a few, all have influences on the development of a child's soft skills. Stakeholders should be cognizant of the shared responsibility of child development when interacting and working with young people. As documented by the participants in this study, the raising of a child is a continuous process with impactful implications.

## **Student as the Advocate**

This research study discusses the need for all stakeholders to be involved. The primary focus when discussing stakeholders is on parents/guardians and schools. It would be a disservice not to explore the role the student plays in the development of their own social and emotional competencies as they, themselves, become college and career ready. While this research study identifies parents/guardians as the primary research participants, all of the parents/guardians participating spoke about the importance of involving their children in this journey. Parents/guardians discuss three areas that influences the development of social and emotional competencies in their children.

### **Struggle Muscle**

They don't know what it is to struggle. That's something that I think today's kids really are lacking. They don't have what we used to call a "struggle muscle." It hasn't been worked out. Like, we always say, "Oh, you have to go to gym class. You have to work out these muscles, you're going to go lift weights, you're going to go run, you're going to work out these muscles," but these kids don't work out the struggle muscle. (Parent E)

Every day people face challenges that require the ability to think critically about alternative situations. These situations can occur in the classroom, on the football field, or at the grocery store, to name a few. Students must experience what it means to struggle and push through obstacles. "I think that the parents have to stop intervening in everything," Parent E stated. There must be a time when parents/guardians can walk away and indeed allow their child to handle conflict on their own, even if the outcome is not advantageous.

Absolutely, I've been told by so many of my friends when I tell them stuff about my son, "Oh, I don't do that for my son," they're like, "What? Oh, my God. You're so mean to him." I'm like, "No, I'm teaching him to grow in different ways, not just academically." They're beside themselves, and I said, "Think back to your own childhood. Did your parents do these things for you? I don't think so." But something happened, and I honestly think it was since 9/11 that parents suddenly became so overprotective of their children, but in too many ways. I don't think it's wrong to be protective of your child, you're always going to have that mother bear instinct, but sometimes you just need to back off. (Parent E)

There will come the point where parents/guardians and the school will not be able to help students navigate the obstacles in their lives. It is irresponsible to expect students to suddenly be able to effectively demonstrate specific soft skills without being able to practice them. While still in high school, students have the support of their families and their schools to practice and develop their struggle muscle. As adults, we must loosen the reins of control and allow students to experience feelings of discomfort and uneasiness. It is during these moments of dissonance that students will explore their ideas and solutions to obstacles.

### **Student Responsibility**

When a student reaches high school age, there is an innate shift and expectation that they will become responsible young adults. As the above experiences will highlight, many parents/ guardians are restricting that process from taking flight. Within four years, students will enter and leave high school progressing towards college and careers. During those four years, families and schools must engage in an active partnership to

develop in students the soft skills that are necessary for success. Students need to be held accountable for their actions free from parents intervening in their growth.

Another thing that I think is sorely lacking is parents do not take accountability for their kids and their kids' actions. They want to write it off. They make excuses, "Not my child. The school is ridiculous. The school should cater to my child and to my family's needs." I think that's outrageous. I think so many people are very unrealistic in what they expect the school to do for their children. (Parent D)

In the state of New Jersey, by age 16, students are eligible to obtain a driver's permit, then at age 17 are eligible for a driver's license. During this time of adolescence, great responsibility is naturally evolving; therefore, responsibility should carry over into all aspects of their lives. "They need to have a strong enough sense of self, without taking it over the top, where they're obnoxious, to be able to walk forward and to ask for help", stated Parent H, "And the confidence and the teachers have to be ready to receive them stepping forward and even encouraging them to do that and taking them seriously in that regard". Parent H is describing an environment where the student is confident to ask for help and is received by adults in a way that fosters that growth and exploration.

### **Entitlement**

One can assume that typical family values include hard work and dedication. Families may instill these beliefs in their children, but at times, parents/guardians intervene in situations involving the school that the child may be able to work out on their own. Parent E explains her experience.

I just think that when I was a kid growing up, there was no communication. Like, teachers and parents didn't talk to each other unless there was a problem. If there was no problem they didn't really talk to each other, and I think nowadays a lot of parents expect the schools to give them everything, all the information, and then the parents are supposed to break it down for the kid as opposed to the kid learning how to figure out what they need to do. I think that in terms of the communication piece of it, I think the schools sometimes give too much information. Because there have been teachers that have asked the parents, "What do you want from us? Like, what do you want us to send you home with? What don't you want us to send home?"

Parent E is exposing a cycle of entitlement that is reinforced by parent/guardian actions. Parents/ guardians are expecting of information, perhaps information that their child could retrieve, and in turn, the schools respond with that information. This scenario removes the child as the self-advocate in their education and perpetuates the parent/guardian control on information and decision making.

### **SEL and Curriculum Integration**

As reported in Chapter One of this research paper, the Common Core State Standards, and the Common Core Curriculum Standards, which New Jersey adopted, do not have a stand-alone standard for SEL. Standards from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life and Careers, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, and Social Studies currently include aspects of SEL. Participants from this research study shared their own thoughts, experiences, and perceptions over the infusion of SEL into academic curriculums.



## Home versus School

While the Common Core State Standards may not explicitly cite SEL, parents/guardians expressed a need for SEL in a school curriculum.

Yes, I think it absolutely should. I think it should be a standard requirement. I mean, it's getting harder, and harder for these kids. You know, these kids today, they're not outwardly emotional anymore. It's no more face to face. It's all through social media, and I think that that's killing them in a sense. I think it's awful. And I think that also plays into them not being so emotionally ready because you need to have that one-on-one, face-to-face. You're going to be sitting in a classroom with a bunch of other kids, and your professor, and you need to be able to be okay with that. And I think so many of these kids hide behind the screen. (Parent C)

Parents/guardians espouse that SEL should reflect in their child's high school curriculum, although, they are uncertain as to who is responsible for carrying out the implementation of the curriculum. "I think it probably would be a good standalone, but I'm not sure that teachers could take that on. I don't see how they would squeeze that in with everything else that they're responsible for doing", stated Parent D. Parent J explained that it is not the school's responsibility to be *teaching* her child skills that would be considered SEL.

I don't think it is because I personally think teachers have too much responsibility. I think a lot of parents are almost leaving parenting up to teachers and I just don't think that's fair. It's my job to teach my daughter empathy and my job to teach my daughter how to treat other people, and how to react in certain situations, how to be fair, and how to regulate her behavior. That's my job, I think.

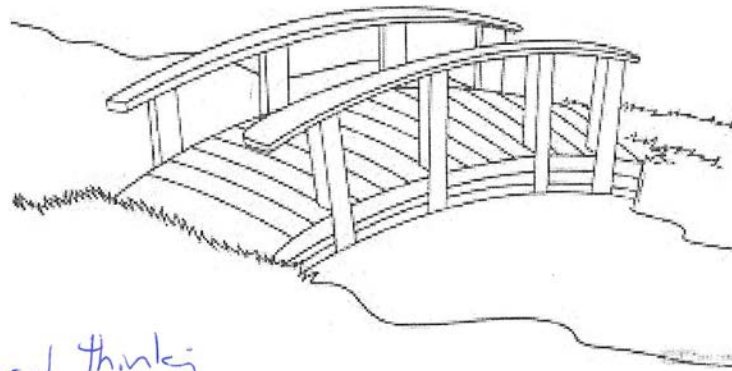
Parent D had a similar perspective on who was responsible for teaching students SEL.

I think for some kids, I don't think it's the school's responsibility. I think some of that is just a matter of maturing. Some of it is just age. It's experience. As far as I can tell, it's always been the case that some kids will go on to college, and they're going to fail out after the first year or the first semester because they're just not mature enough to do it. I don't think that there's anything the school could do to prevent that from happening.

Participants in this research study valued the importance of SEL in a child's life but were not in unison on how to best teach those topics and skills. A typical school day lasts approximately seven to eight hours. Within that time, educators have much material to cover and standards to teach. Similar to establishing an active partnership between schools and families, the teachings of a classroom should be a collaborative exercise as well. It is clear from this research study that parents/guardians believe that college and career readiness extends past academic preparedness. Syncing expectations of our graduating seniors should be reevaluated based on current findings and traditional school curriculums.

### **Fostering Exploration and Curiosity**

Almost every college classroom and career can apply the skill of critical thinking and the ability to expand on an idea. Creating high school classroom environments that foster exploration of innovations and cater to intellectually curious young adults supports this development. Parent A believed that critical thinking and fostering curiosity is a dual responsibility of parents/guardians and school districts. As documented in Parents A's graphic elicitation, fostering an intellectually curious mind is the responsibility of many.



Critical thinking  
 Work to develop curiosity  
 Discussion of the reality/automation  
 - being nimble, lifelong learning  
 Handling of failure  
 Handling of success  
 Goal Setting  
 Exploration of non-traditional careers, non-traditional  
 paths to a profession

Figure 6. Graphic Elicitation by Parent A

Moving from single loop to double loop learning elevates a student's mind to work out their struggle muscle and feed their academic needs (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

When it comes to critical thinking, and I wonder if this is something only that the AP (Advanced Placement) classes do, the AP and the honor's level classes, because my daughter has mentioned that her friends, in the lower level classes, have not had the same kind of challenging questions, but the thinking, the, "Here's a statement. Where does this meet? Where is this, maybe not right and wrong, but what do you think this means? How does this connect with this other statement

over here? How are they juxtaposed? What's the impact kind of thing?" Not just, "Find the words that were said." (Parent A)

Challenging all students at a level that meets their cognitive ability is a necessity because it allows a shift from single loop to double loop learning. Taking their thinking to the next level and allowing each student to be academically vulnerable, again, supports the development of their struggle muscle. Parent A continued her explanation by stating:

I almost think that career readiness is ancillary to all of this, because honestly, if the schools can make sure that they have a base level of skills and knowledge, either help foster, if they already have it, or if they don't have it naturally, help them develop a sense of curiosity, and a sense of self-mastery, and critical thinking, the career readiness will follow. To me, happiness without self-mastery, without, "I am responsible for my own happiness ..." It's fragile.

Conceptualizing SEL into a school's curriculum requires the acknowledgment that academics, social, and emotional learning are a shared responsibility for families and educators. The parents/ guardians within the NHVRHSD and the PRHSD do not all agree that it is the school's responsibility to teach students skills that otherwise would be considered core values at home. The traditional model of school, meaning content specific teachers in each classroom, does not support the real integration of SEL into a school's curriculum. Parents/guardians believe that classroom teachers do not have enough time nor are they qualified to teach such topics, reflecting in their dissonance. Perhaps the flaw does not lie in need for SEL but rather its limited existence in the traditional school structure domain.

## Communication

Effective communication is a highly valued characteristic across many, if not all, domains of society. Parents/guardians participating in this research study would support that claim in regards to their interactions with their child's school. When asked what would be a key component of building an active partnership between families and schools, Parent D stated, "definitely the whole communication issue." Parent D continued to explain that when there is lack of communication, the child suffers. The word *communication* was one of the most used words within interview transcriptions. Communication was also found in many graphic elicitations when participants were asked to draw a bridged partnership between families and schools.

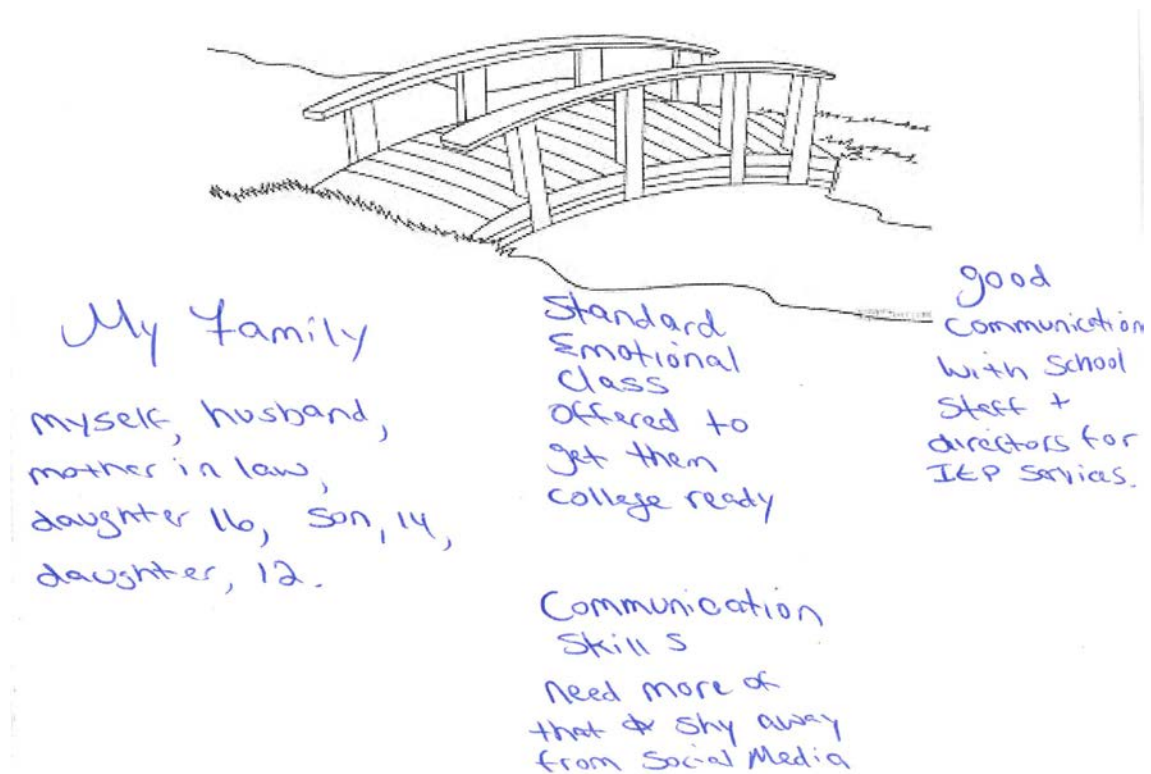


Figure 7. Graphic Elicitation by Parent C

Undoubtedly, parents/guardians view communication between families and schools as critical when discussing how to prepare a college and career ready student. Participants shared stories and experiences that were both positive and negative when asked about communicating directly with their children's school. Parent B shared, "I don't think there really was any. With my son, it was because of discipline issues. Communication from the school about what he did or didn't do. It was never positive things if there was communication. There was none". A follow-up question asked Parent B if the lack of positive communication influenced her decision to become involved with school activities. Parent B replied, "I'm sure if they reached out to me more I would've probably gotten more involved." Conversely, Parent G shared a different experience.

I try not to be a helicopter parent but I know I'm borderline. Because I am not annoying, I'm not out in the coach's face, but I do volunteer because especially at the high school there is some distance that doesn't happen in grade school. In grade school, you're called in twice a month to bring cookies or go to a hoedown or whatever. So at the high school, there's a lot of reliance on the kids to tell you what's going on, and my first born being a boy, he doesn't tell me much of anything. My daughter tells me much more. So I just use the opportunities that are already available like the parent advisory committee meeting. So that's once a month, and even though the subject matter is repeated, I find it invaluable to just be in a room with the principal and the vice principals and hear that information. Parent G is describing a committee that is made up of parents and administration within the high school to brainstorm, address concerns, and plan for events that may be occurring within the school community. The committee is on a volunteer basis and meets

once per month. While Parent B described negative communication with the school, the likelihood that Parent B would feel welcomed at the parent advisory committee is low. Applying the self-system process theory to this scenario would confirm that Parent B would not feel adequate in joining this committee (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). As addressed in Chapter Two of this paper, when applying this theory to group participation, parents/guardians need to feel that they are productive partners with schools to maintain an active partnership.

To facilitate communication, schools can access many different communication venues when trying to connect with families. Participants described email as being the most efficient way for schools to disseminate information quickly. When asked about email communication, Parent J stated, "The school I think just does just a phenomenal job of communicating and just the right amount, not too much, not too little and just right to the point." Parent J continued by explaining the types of information that the school communicated through email.

Usually, they do send out a lot of college prep stuff in terms of financial aid and things like that, but workshops that are coming up and seminars that are coming up. When there's a security concern, they send them out in such a way not to be alarmed.

From the information shared by participants, the two districts communicate to parents/guardians information regarding college readiness. Within the two districts, information needs to reach approximately 3,000 families. Email appears to be the most efficient way to disseminate information quickly. While this form of communication may work for some families, others are looking for more. "Why can't they [guidance

counselors and teachers] each individually email or talk to each student and parent?" questioned Parent B. Throughout the interview process, participants recognized that educators are often spread too thin and realistically do not have enough time during their day to accomplish all of their responsibilities. Reflection from parent/guardian responses makes it is hard to accept that trusted adults who are teaching children cannot find time during their day for individual attention to each student (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Society supports an educational slogan suggesting that one trusted adult in a child's life making a difference or impact. Of course, that trusted adult does not have to be a teacher or an educator, but it could be.

### **Conclusion**

Parents/guardians of today want to be involved in their child's education. Parent J shared,

I didn't really have that support system growing up. Sort of like I went to school, and that was it. There weren't the things then that they have now. Parents were just not involved, at least where I grew up. They just sent you to school, and that was it. I want to be part of the experience, contribute something to it without embarrassing her.

Connecting with the school and creating an active partnership where they feel welcomed is critical. Parents/guardians are part of the cycle of supporting students to be college and career ready, both academically and emotionally. Four major themes emerged from the experiences of the participants; (a) a parental shift in expectations, (b) soft skills and family values, (c) the student as the advocate, and (d) SEL and curriculum integration. This research study used these themes when answering the research questions of this



research study, specifically research question two, what is the process between parents/guardians and schools when developing an active partnership to promote social/emotional learning in adolescents? The data gathered from parents/guardians in this research study creates a framework to support an active partnership, including dual responsibilities and cyclical communication. The framework includes the four major themes discussed by parents/guardian when supporting an active partnership with schools. The active partnership between parents/guardians and schools prepares students for success in college and careers.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study explored the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college and career readiness and social/emotional competencies in adolescents. The research study offered implications in the field of family-school partnerships to prepare students to be emotionally ready to take on college and careers. The research study intended to enhance the current literature on the connections between parents/guardians and school districts from a communication context. This chapter discusses the findings regarding the lived partnerships of parents/guardians with school districts when promoting college and career readiness and social/emotional competencies in adolescents. Additionally, I explain a framework based on the data and literature compiled herein, which is meant to be applied to school district best practices when facilitating a culture that supports parent/guardian involvement and partnerships. I discuss the implications of the finding from this research study for research, practice, and policy. Lastly, I offer a conclusion to culminate this research study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Themes organized the analysis of qualitative data findings and broadly answer the research questions. A topical organizational pattern arranged this discussion, beginning with the four major themes emerging from this research study, then discussing the framework for a dual partnership and concluding with the overarching theme of communication. These responses serve to answer the three research questions that drove this research study.

1. What stories do parents/guardians tell when describing the relationship between themselves, school districts, college and career readiness, and social/emotional learning in adolescents?

2. What is the process between parents/guardians and school districts when developing an active partnership to promote social/emotional learning in adolescents?

3. How do these partnerships promote college and career readiness for adolescents?

I created the *Framework for a Dual Partnership* from the data collected and analyzed throughout this research study, literature review, and personal experiences in the field of education and working with families to promote a student's transition from high school to postsecondary or a career.

### **Parental Shift in Expectations**

Most families want their children to do well in school. However, parents/guardians have different ideas about (a) what children should learn, (b) how children should learn, (c) what it means to do well in school, (d) what children need to do to succeed in school, and (e) what parents/guardians should do to support a child's education. This constellation of social cognitions- beliefs, values, perceptions, attribution, and expectations- that relate to teaching and learning, contribute to parents/guardians' models of education, development, and learning (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Lareau, 1996). The interlacing of developmental norms and growing adolescent independence from their parents/guardians emerged as a common theme from interviews within this research study. If parents/guardians do not have an accurate perception of where their child is regarding developmental gains and skills, it is unlikely

that they will have an effective plan of action for helping their child achieve their goals and navigate through social stressors. The research from this study suggests that parents/guardians deflect to shielding their child from life experiences that may be difficult, which can be valuable lessons when preparing a child for college and the workforce. In the United States, there is an explicit and implicit focus on the development of the self as an individual and the individualism from families, resulting in an emphasis on self-confidence, self-esteem, and independence (Reese, 2002; Santayana, 1934). When the focus is on the self and self-esteem, feedback from educators and parents/guardians to children can emphasize the positive aspects of achievement and success and minimize errors and mistakes. Parents/guardians and educators need not miss these opportunities for growth and emotional advancement. Wrap-around support for children from parents/guardians and educators establishes a level of synergy between home and school. This synergy enables an active partnership to flourish; a worldview rooted in child development and appropriate child behavior.

**Parenting handbook.** Parents/guardians participating in the study expressed that there is no handbook for raising children. Parents/guardians explained that they reflect on their upbringing and experiences which help to mold their parenting styles. This research study suggests that parents/guardians may turn to schools for help and support when raising their children. This responsibility requires school districts to develop and implement best practices that enable a collaborative, active partnership to support families. Parents/guardians also need to be open to the experience of a cooperative, active partnership when raising their children. Adolescence is a time for rapid development, including a child's want and needs to be independent of their parents.

Individualism, in the eyes of the adolescent, seeks to expand their experiences and separate themselves from their families (Garder & Little, 2001). Individualism is a healthy and natural stage of development that may require parental education and guidance from schools who can serve as the expert on child development. The fusion of parent/guardian and school district communication creates a structured level of support when preparing a student for college and career readiness.

### **Soft Skills and Family Values**

When families support learning outside of the classroom, it reinforces the complementary roles of parents/guardians and teachers as co-educators in fostering a child's academic, social, and emotional development (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The idea of learning is not limited to classroom acquisition of knowledge, but the connection between a child's intellectual curiosity and the need to explore the world. Parents/guardians within this research study explained that there are soft skills and family values that need to be instilled at home and then supported by educators. These characteristics, such as resiliency, respect, and leadership, act as a foundation for pro-social behaviors. These features also represent the conceptualization of many SEL curriculums that highlight the importance of emotional intelligence as a core predictor of student success (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b; Goleman, 2005). Common features between family values and SEL standards establish a connection when evaluating an active partnership between families and schools. Parents/guardians and school districts should recognize a productive partnership that supports the shared values and consistent end-goal of student achievement. Traditional schooling, which consists of rigid classrooms and rote memorization of material, is obsolete in education. School

culture must preach intellectual exploration and risk-taking to expand the minds of our students. When reviewing the mission statements for both the NHVRHSD and the PRHSD, both include statements that support lifelong learning and curriculums that actively engage their students to become productive members of society.

Parents/guardians participating in this research study believe that becoming a *productive member of society* involves more than just the acquisition of crystallized knowledge.

Educators and families maximize their potential by transforming jargon into action, creating a secure development of a child's social/emotional competencies. Both stakeholders are working towards the same end-goal for a child. Parents/guardians and school districts must work in collaboration, not dissonance when supporting a child on being college and career ready.

### **Student as the Advocate**

The lived experiences of parents/guardians when creating a partnership with schools centered this research study. As the researcher, I found that this research study reveal unintended topics, such as relationship building between all stakeholders. Stakeholders must emphasize the student when considering the effectiveness of such relationship building. If the end-goal of parents/guardians and school districts is consistent- creating a college and career ready student, then focusing on the actual student and the development of their advocacy skills is a necessity. As adults, we advocate for ourselves on a daily basis. Students require adults to help them advocate for themselves, as a stage of development. Participants within this research study told stories including the student as the main character, rather than a supporting role. Meaning, participants recognized the importance of student advocacy when

preparing for college and careers. Ultimately, educators and parents/guardians will not hold the hands of our students forever. Like any muscle, students need to work out the struggle muscle associated with advocacy and emotional intelligence. The adults in these stories must allow students the opportunities to stretch, tone, and work out any muscle that would encourage and support a transition to college and the workforce.

There is a growing expectation that schools serve educational and social-developmental needs in an increasingly complex society at the local, national, and international levels (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2003). Fully engaging all stakeholders serves a foundation for this need. Additionally, when creating an active partnership between parents/guardians and schools, students need to feel that the partnership is collaborative and equal. Adolescents are incredibly perceptive and will notice flaws in any system. One of the components of an active partnership between families and schools includes dual responsibility. Participants from the research study confirmed that effective communication must value dual responsibility when supporting a student. Dual responsibility can ensure a continuum of services and support, and also show the student that all stakeholders have a vested interest in their success.

### **SEL and the Curriculum**

Throughout this research study, participants tended to elicit consistent responses or themes when asked interview questions. However, participants were in disagreement about the explicit teachings of SEL curriculums in classrooms. Participants did assert that SEL components were necessary for development and the preparation for college and careers, but were unclear as to the implementation of such curriculums. Two major concerns of participants included limited time during the school day for SEL curriculums

and questioned a teachers' qualifications to teach SEL components. Advocates of SEL in schools assert that there is a core formula for implementing SEL in schools and within classrooms. There are systematic approaches to SEL programming that emphasizes approach, attitude, atmosphere, and action regardless of the actual initiative (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The combination of the four A's, as mentioned above, have the utility and evaluating efforts to enhance home-school communication and family involvement to support SEL at home. Families need ongoing communication and information to maintain meaningful involvement in their child's learning and development. Creating a school culture that is grounded in a systematic approach to SEL can help facilitate such information.

### **Framework for Dual Partnership**

Schools and families typically encounter three primary practices of communication which can fully conceptualize an active partnership. Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007) created a framework that gives educators a toolbox when establishing levels of communication and implementation suggestions, especially when trying to support SEL. Figure 8 depicts how communication can be built upon, as created by Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007) and elaborated on by findings from participants in this research study.



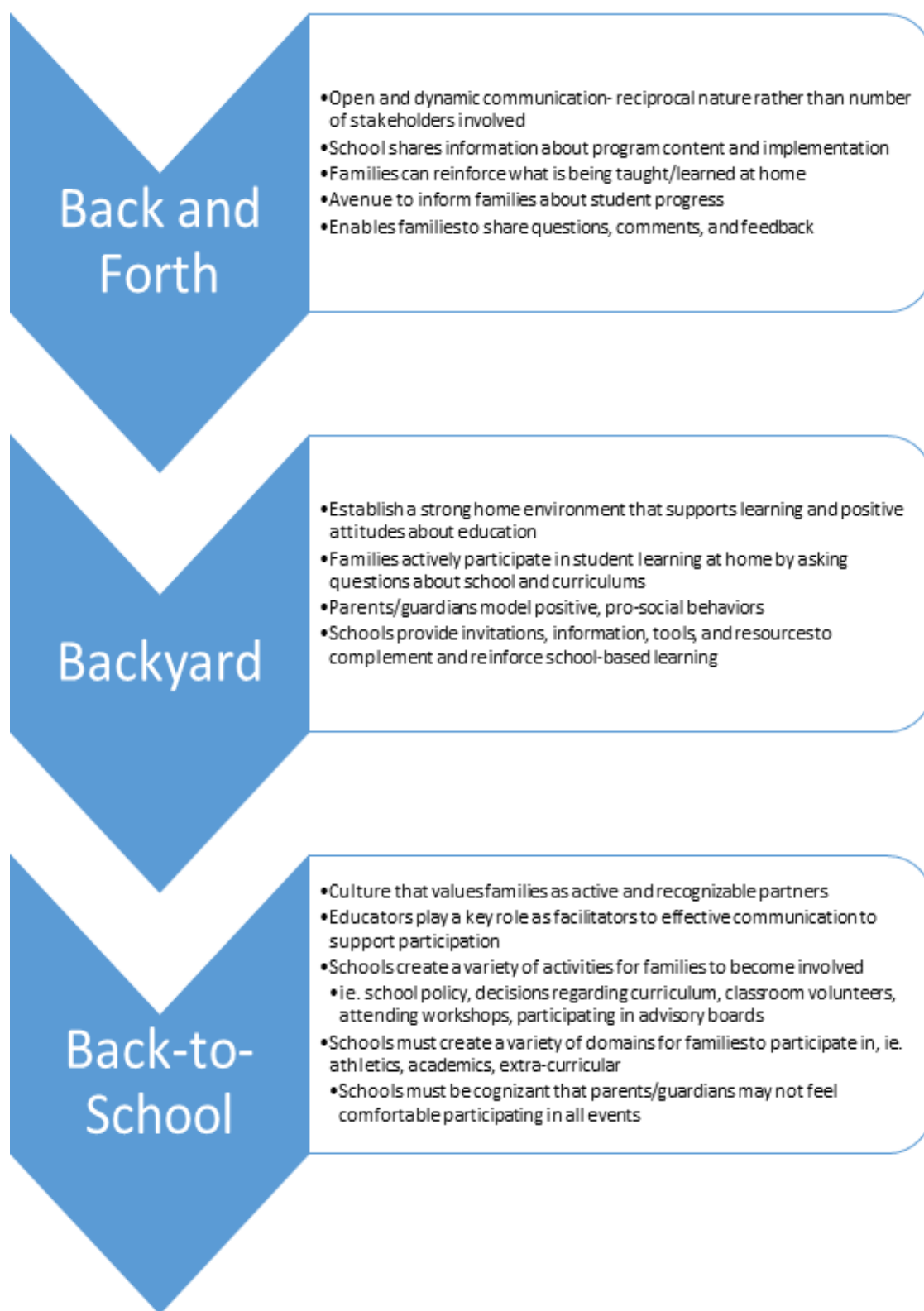


Figure 8. Domains of Communication

All stakeholders need to establish that communication is a piece of community culture and set standard, supporting the philosophy of an *active partnership*. As the levels of communication evolve, a distinguishing characteristic is the school's awareness of parent/guardian roles and participation. To reinforce the epistemological approach of Self-Determination Theory, a person's contribution to an organization will match how effective they feel about their contribution to that organization (Crotty, 1998). When a parent/guardian feels welcomed in their child's school, their participation and partnership will, in turn, be more efficient and productive. It is critical that schools create an environment where parents/guardians feel welcomed, heard, and provide them with a variety of activities to become involved with.

The third research question within this research study, *how do these partnerships promote college and career readiness for adolescents*, is best answered through the effectiveness of school and family communication and partnership. The beneficial impact of family involvement extends beyond academic outcomes and includes increased self-esteem, improved behavior at home and in school, and more positive attitudes about education from students. Participants within this research study unanimously agreed that students must possess a variety of hard and soft skills as they leave high school and enter college and careers. The findings from this research study have confirmed and elevated previous research surrounding the importance of an active partnership between schools and families (Christenson & Godber, 2001; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Leuder, 2000; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Manning, & Walberg, 2003). Regardless of a set curriculum or systematic approach to SEL,

parents/guardians from this research study value partnerships with schools to support the development of their children.

### **Implications**

This research study can derive implications for research, policy, practice, and leadership as related to educational policy and educational reform efforts. The implications section outlines those connections.

### **Research**

The findings of this study indicated that parents/guardians value communication and partnerships with schools when promoting college and career readiness for their children. This research study yielded social/emotional competencies as a significant component of college and career readiness. The importance of social/emotional competencies, as a predictor for success in college and careers, supports and confirms by past researchers (Elias et al., 1997; CASEL, 2013a, 2013b; Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011). Figure 2 conceptualizes responses from parents/guardians regarding an active partnership with schools when preparing a student for college and careers. Further, Figure 3 maps out the components of an active partnership between schools and families. Parent H spoke forcefully about the importance of communication and how it can support or destroy connections with schools. Additionally, Parents B and F expressed a need for knowledge and awareness surrounding real-world issues and stigmas that adolescents may face, expanding on the traditional academic focus in school. Therefore, future research should consider the types of information that parents/guardians would like disseminated from the schools regarding transition. Effective communication, using one of the domains cited above, between schools and families establishes a clear

understanding of what information requiring facilitation. This future research can only strengthen the communication and partnership between schools and families.

Additionally, future research can explore the types of events that parents/guardians would feel comfortable participating. Again, circling back to Self-Determination Theory and the impact on individual involvement in an organization supports this research study (Crotty, 1998).

As discussed in Chapter One of this research study, the rise in mental health issues among adolescents continues to increase (NAMI, 2015). Parent/guardian F shared their own story about the impact of mental health distress on a family unit. Given that adolescents split their time each day between home and school, there is an ethical responsibility for stakeholders to accept and internalize the importance of mental health stability and awareness. This awareness will also help to reduce the negative stigma associated with mental illness. Future research must look to understand why there is a rise in mental illness among adolescents. Once stakeholders can understand the *why*, they can create and implement best practices to support students, families, and schools. An actual college and career ready adolescent must have the resilience and coping skills to manage defeat, disappointments, and obstacles, as explained by the participants from this research study. Future research should consider areas of need and knowledge for schools and families to assist when supporting an adolescent with a mental illness, as they become college and career ready.

Future research may also consider using post-high school graduates as participants to explore their lived experiences when becoming college and career ready. With implications for policy and best practices, future researchers should consider a case

study of graduated high school seniors. A case study of graduated high school seniors would allow for a closer look at the situation and reflection over a particular school regarding policy, program implementation, partnerships, and communication from the student perspective (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Additionally, a case study would allow for a more in-depth exploration of student experiences and suggestions for change. It is vital for educators to continuously reflect on their practices and make adjustments based on feedback to improve their delivery and information that they presented (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Branson, 2006). When asked how can schools and families better understand what students need for life after high school, Parent/guardian I explained

I mean I guess the obvious, the research, the situations like this, being able to gather data and see what is being requested. Tracking students possibly beyond high school to see ... Maybe doing surveys - did you feel you were prepared?

What could we have done differently to help you? That kind of stuff.

A follow-up case study can use the framework presented in Chapter Four of this research study to examine further if parents/guardians and graduated seniors agree with what a student needs to be successful in college and careers. Schools and families can use this follow-up case study to strengthen best practices of an active partnership to support students. Lastly, future researchers could conduct a case study in which a school is implementing SEL program and curriculum within their school. The researcher could assess and review student progress, parental involvement, school climate, and other factors related to school culture. Data could compare to a control school who does not offer SEL program. The SEL program school could also be adhering to the framework and findings from this research study.

## **Policy**

As explained in Chapter One of this research study, the federal government is taking a stronger stance on the importance of social/emotional competencies within the educational arena. The 2016 Presidential Election occurred after the completion of Chapters One, Two, and Three of this research study. With the turnover of political parties, leaders, and political philosophies, there may be a shift in implementation regarding student achievement and educational policy at the federal, state, and local levels.

Congress introduced three significant initiatives in the advancement and awareness of educational policy that will influence stakeholders, directly related to social/emotional stability in schools.

**H.R. 1864- Chronic Absenteeism Reduction Act.** Congress introduced this bill in April 2017 to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to allow local educational agencies to use federal funds for programs and activities that address chronic absenteeism in students. This bill established a need to address chronic absenteeism among students through a systematic data collection measure. The bill also cites implementation of interventions that elevate the connections between schools, families, and community resources to build positive school climates and promote social/emotional learning.

**H.R. 2544- Teacher Health and Wellness Act.** In May 2017, Congress introduced this bill requiring the Director of the National Institutes of Health to carry out a study to add to the scientific knowledge on reducing teacher stress and increasing teacher retention and well-being. Research conducted to support this bill found a need to

understand the importance of teacher health and wellness better. The proposal calls for an analysis of the following programs.

1. Workplace wellness programs designed to improve teacher health, attendance, and engagement.
2. Social/emotional learning programs that help teachers improve student engagement in the classroom.
3. Teacher stress management programs that improve teacher performance.
4. Mentoring and induction programs during the school year and teacher pre-service that improve teacher well-being.
5. Organizational interventions such as principal training programs that reduce stress through supervisor/peer support and increase opportunities for teachers to participate in professional learning communities, teacher leadership positions, and decision making regarding school interventions and management.
6. Teacher residency programs that provide mental health and psychological support.
7. Complementary health approaches, such as mindfulness meditation that improve teacher performance.
8. School reorganization that creates the conditions to facilitate the transmission and sharing of knowledge among teachers.
9. Other innovative, evidence-based approaches that reduce stress and increase well-being in the teaching profession, which may include increased compensation.

It is hard to ignore the importance of health and wellness of any individual. At the federal level, Congress recognizes how crucial reflective research practices are on teacher wellness and retention (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Student programming and success in college and careers should apply these same ideals of reflective practices.

**National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.** In September 2016, The Aspen Institute launched the *National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*. This commission is strengthening the conversation of SEL in schools by uniting leaders from multiple sectors, including education, research, business, health, and the military, to advance a broader vision of educational success for all students. With the help of a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students in communities across the country, the commission will explore how schools can fully integrate social, emotional, and academic development to support the whole student.

**Research connections.** The work of researchers is essential to the advancement of policy and programming within our schools (Anderson, 2015; Fowler, 2013). Without research, best practices remain archaic and obsolete in an ever-changing global society (Ball, 1998; Spring, 2008). The continued research efforts surrounding SEL on a variety of levels and with a range of stakeholders in education support the data findings from this research study (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b). It is critical that as educators, we continue to ask questions and become active participants in policy writing to reflect the current and actual needs for our students and school communities as a whole (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).



## **Practice**

According to NAMI (2015), approximately one in five youth, aged 13–18, experience a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. Additionally, 70% of youth in juvenile justice systems have at least one mental health condition, and at least 20% live with a severe mental illness. According to the National Data on Campus Suicide and Depression, one in every 12 college students make a plan for suicide. Of those students, two-thirds will not seek treatment (American College Health Association, Spring 2015). College students reported that anxiety, depression, and relationship problems were the leading cause of distress. As a country, we cannot ignore the rising statistics and the current mental status of our youth and merging young adults. Some would consider the mental health crisis an epidemic across our nation (NAMI, 2015). In my current practice as a school psychologist, I work with students on a daily basis who struggle with a variety of mental health disorders. Anxiety, depression, and the inability to cope are the most common topics within individual and group counseling sessions. As an advocate for my students, an educator, and mental health professional, I support the need to enhance the awareness and supports available to school-aged children to develop their emotional competencies. Those competencies will carry over into adulthood and support their overall functioning in college and careers (Goleman, 2005).

The statistics surrounding mental illnesses in adolescents and into adulthood are alarming and a cause for action. This research study offers a framework to enhance an active, collaborative partnership with schools and families to support adolescents. The implications of the mental health statistics in adolescents suggest that current practices and policies meant to help children and their emotional well-being are inadequate and

lacking. A change to policy or even a school community requires that leaders recognize the importance of secure emotional competencies among students. The hiring of additional staff members who are trained to work with and educate students on mental health issues must be a priority. Participants from this research study agreed that teachers are not qualified, nor do they have the time to address emotional competencies within their classrooms. Future research can assess student progress when a teacher pairs with a mental health professional to support their classes. Researchers can collect data regarding academic growth, emotional stability, and resiliency as indicators of student and classroom success. Also, within a school setting, professional staff extends beyond teachers. A school culture that utilizes professionals, such as school psychologists, guidance counselors, and school nurses to their full capacity and human resource creates a school culture that supports the whole student.

Schools should provide mandated professional development to all school staff on the basics of mental health illnesses and their impact on learning environments. School staff needs to feel comfortable, at the very least, to ask questions and refer students to the proper supports when they think it is appropriate. This by no means implies that all school staff is qualified to make judgments about students and their emotions, rather making staff aware of warning signs and refer students when signs present in the classroom.

### **Leadership**

Parents/guardians and schools have the privilege of raising and supporting the development of children. Preparing a child to be college and career ready does not happen overnight, requires parents/guardians, and schools to collaborate and create an

active partnership. Education should not disenfranchise any child (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Referring back to the mission statements of NHVRHSD and PRHSD, both cite creating students who are responsible citizens and educating in such a way that students reach their fullest potential. SEL supporters would argue that incorporating and fostering a learning environment that supports emotional stability will help school districts to achieve their mission statement for each child that graduates (Elias et al., 1997; CASEL, 2013a, 2013b; Goleman, 2005; Landau & Meirovich, 2011). As social justice leaders, we must provide an education that is equitable for all students. An equitable education should encompass the acquisition of knowledge of emotional competencies and SEL.

The findings of this research study demonstrate that parents/guardians are in support of an active partnership with schools to support students as they transition from college to careers, but require assistance on creating and maintaining an active partnership. Using transformational leadership wherein leaders and followers work together for the betterment of change, I would like to present the *Framework for a Successful College and Career Ready Student* to school leaders, parents/guardians, and stakeholders in education to promote opportunities for an active partnership to support emotional competencies of a college and career ready student (Fullan, 2004; MacGregor Burns, 1978). Specifically, I will provide the findings obtained from this research study to participating school districts. Sharing my knowledge through presentations serves as training for in-service activities, with the intended audience of school leaders, parents/guardians, and stakeholders in education. Additionally, presenting this framework allows me to advocate for students who have mental health disorders and would benefit from the components of the framework to create wrap-around services and

open communication. Educating school communities on the elements of this framework allow reflection on their practice and utilizes information to transform their leadership and the partnerships they create with the families in their communities (Fullan, 2011; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

Parents/guardians and schools need to foster an active, collaborative partnership to support the emotional well-being of students as they prepare for college and careers. Without an active partnership, SEL elements will not be reinforced, practiced, or mastered in adolescents. School leaders, by way of administrators, teachers, and support staff, can work with families to outline and implement a vision for success and achievement in our students. The findings of this research study suggest that collaboration and communication are ongoing entities between schools and families when helping to raise a child. An active partnership between schools and parents/guardians will strengthen the efforts of all stakeholders to support college and career readiness, specifically emotional competencies in students. As students leave high school, they transition in college and the workforce, demanding a toolbox of skills required for success. Schools have a responsibility to bring to life their mission statement with the support of families, acting as a dual partnership, to educate and prepare students for college and careers. Adolescence can be a vulnerable time for children, and the social support of trusted adults strengthens the focus of emotional stabilities as it relates to success. This research study has significant implications for the way schools and families create partnerships at the high school level when preparing students to be college and career ready. When schools and families effectively partner to promote achievement

across all areas of development, children will indeed be on a path to academic, social, and emotional success. Educational institutions must ensure that all students have the resources and tools necessary as they embark on their path after high school.

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## Appendix A

### Text of Recruitment Email to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

My name is Tarah Pearson and I am a doctoral student at Rowan University. As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting a dissertation research project involving parents of high school students in the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District and the Phillipsburg High School District. **You are invited to participate in a research study about understanding partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting mental health and emotional functioning in adolescents.**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college and career readiness with regard to social/ emotional competencies in adolescents. Parental perception on active school involvement is a fairly new phenomenon in education. As such, the vast majority of research on the topic has been either quantitative in nature or related to policy analysis. This study seeks to understand how parents/guardians describe a partnership with school districts when promoting college and career readiness in adolescents, specifically related to their social/ emotional competencies. This study is looking to interview 30-40 parents/guardians of students between the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District and the Phillipsburg High School District.

In order to gain this parental perception, an interview will be conducted with the researcher. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes and consist of 10-12 interview questions and a graphic elicitation, which is a picture prompt about a specific question. Interviews will be recorded and conducted at the North Branch Library in Clinton, New Jersey or at a mutually agreed upon location in the community.

This study is being conducted by researchers in the Department of Education at Rowan University. The Principal Investigator of the study is Dr. Barbara Bole-Williams, Dissertation Chair and the Co-Investigator is Ms. Tarah Pearson, Doctoral Student at Rowan University.

If you wish to participate in this study or have additional questions, please contact Tarah Pearson at [pearso87@students.rowan.edu](mailto:pearso87@students.rowan.edu).

Thank you.

Dr. Barbara Bole-Williams, Ph.D.  
Rowan University  
Dissertation Chair

Ms. Tarah Pearson, Ed.S.  
Rowan University  
Doctoral Student

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent for Interviews of Parents/Guardians**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

You are invited to participate in a research study about understanding partnerships between parents/ guardians and school districts when promoting mental health and emotional functioning in adolescents. The purpose of this qualitative, case study is to explore the partnerships between parents/guardians and school districts when promoting college/ career readiness with regard to social/ emotional competencies in adolescents. Parental perception on active school involvement is a fairly new phenomenon in education. As such, the vast majority of research on the topic has been either quantitative in nature or related to policy analysis. This study seeks to understand how parents/guardians describe a partnership with school districts when promoting college and career readiness in adolescents, specifically related to their social/ emotional competencies. Approximately 30-40 participants will be needed for this study.

This study is being conducted by researchers in the Department of Education at Rowan University. The Principal Investigator of the study is Dr. Barbara Bole-Williams, Dissertation Chair and the Co-Investigator is Ms. Tarah Pearson, Doctoral Student at Rowan University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you would be interviewed for about 45 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and conducted at the North Branch Library in Clinton, New Jersey, on the following days and times. Participants will be asked to answer approximately ten interview questions as well as complete a graphic elicitation, which is a picture prompt about a specific question.

#### **NORTH COUNTY BRANCH LIBRARY**

65 Halstead Street

Clinton, New Jersey 08809

Dates and times to be determined with the participants and researcher

There is little risk in participating in this study; after the interview you will be given the option to have the transcription of your interview mailed to you and receive a final copy of the research study.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned an alias that is unique to this study. No one other than the researchers would know whether you participated in the study. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name will not be used in any report or publications. Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn about family-school partnerships when developing a child's emotional competencies to be college and career ready. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you

choose not to participate in this study, this will have no effect on the services or benefits you are currently receiving through your school district. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer and withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Barbara Bole-Williams at williamsb@rowan.edu or Ms. Tarah Pearson at pearso87@students.rowan.edu have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Rowan University SOM IRB Office at (856) 566-2712 or Rowan University Glassboro/CMSRU IRB at 856-256-4078.

If you wish to participate in this study please contact Ms. Tarah Pearson at pearso87@students.rowan.edu. Personal information, such as email and telephone number, will be collected for communication purposes only. This information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project.

Kindly,

Dr. Barbara Bole-Williams, Ph.D.  
Rowan University  
Dissertation Chair

Ms. Tarah Pearson, Ed.S.  
Rowan University  
Doctoral Student

**YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU  
AGREE TO PARTICIPATE**

**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Protocol for Parents/Guardians**

#### **Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you lived in the district? How many children do you have? What is your profession? Who has helped you to raise your children?
2. Tell me about your child(ren). How old are they? How long have they attended the high school?
3. Tell me about how you communicate with your school. How do you connect with the school staff?
4. What types of events do you participate in at your child's school? How often do you try to get involved? Do you wish you were more involved?
5. What motivates you to be involved in your child's education? What is holding you back from being more involved?
6. What do you think a child needs in order to be ready for life after high school? What skills or characteristics will help them be successful in college or in a career?
7. How have you and the school helped to prepare your child to be college and career ready?
8. Do you believe that students need to be emotionally ready for what comes after high school? What types of traits would a student demonstrate if they were emotionally ready?
9. Who is responsible to teaching a child those traits? How can families and schools work together to teach those traits?



10. Why do you participate in school activities? Who benefits?
11. How could the school involve parents more in their child's education?
12. How do you view your child's school? Do you, as a parent, feel welcomed there?
13. Tell me about a time you had a negative interaction with your child's school? How did this make you feel? Did this influence your ability to become involved in the future?
14. Tell me about a time you had a positive interaction with your child's school? How did this make you feel? Did this influence your ability to become involved in the future?
15. How can parents and schools better understand that needs of students after high school?

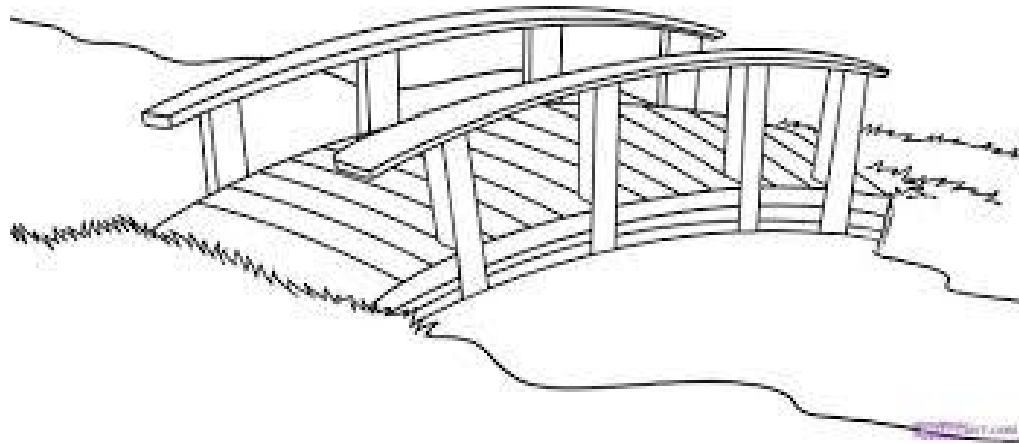
Demographic information: Gender, age range, ethnicity

## Appendix D

### Graphic Elicitation for Parents/Guardians

#### Graphic Elicitation

This bridge represents a partnership between families and schools. When thinking about your child's education, what types of characteristics, actions, and/or connections help to create a partnership to prepare your child for college and careers? Draw or list those items to create a "bridged partnership".



## Appendix E

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

2/25/2018

Gmail - Rowan University eIRB: Study Approved



Tarah Pearson <pearson.tarah@gmail.com>

#### Rowan University eIRB: Study Approved

1 message

eIRB@rowan.edu <eIRB@rowan.edu>  
Reply-To: eIRB@rowan.edu  
To: pearson.tarah@gmail.com

Sat, Feb 25, 2017 at 9:24 AM



\*\* This is an auto-generated email. Please do not reply to this email message.  
The originating e-mail account is not monitored.  
If you have questions, please contact your local IRB office \*\*

**DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier:**  
FWA00007111

**IRB Chair Person:** Harriet Hartman

**IRB Director:** Sreekant Murthy

**Effective Date:** 2/23/2017

#### eIRB Notice of Approval

##### STUDY PROFILE

**Study ID:** Pro2016001454

**Title:** Active Parental Involvement and College and Career Readiness: A Qualitative Study

**Principal Investigator:** Barbara Williams

**Study Coordinator:**

**Co-Investigator(s):** Tarah Pearson

**Other Study Staff:** There are no items to display

**Sponsor:** There are no items to display

**Approval Cycle:** Twelve Months

**Risk Determination:** Minimal Risk

**Device Determination:** Not Applicable

**Review Type:** Expedited **Expedited Category:** 6  
7 **Exempt Category:** There are no items to display

**Subjects:** 40 **Specimens:** 0 **Records:**

##### CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

**Submission Type:** Research  
Protocol/Study

**Submission Status:** Approved

**Approval Date:** 2/23/2017

**Expiration Date:** 2/22/2018

**Pregnancy**

**Pediatric**

**Prisoner**

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=71565bbbf4&jsver=IEEFJ798Mlwen.&view=pt&q=eirb&search=query&th=15a75a860d90f780&siml=15a75a...> 1/3

2/25/2018

Gmail - Rowan University eIRB: Study Approved

<b>Code:</b>	No Pregnant Women as Subjects	<b>Code:</b>	No Children As Subjects	<b>Code:</b>	No Prisoners As Subjects
<b>Protocol:</b>	Interview Protocol	<b>Consent:</b>	There are no items to display	<b>Recruitment Materials:</b>	Email Mailings to parents-guardians2.docx

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**\* Study Performance Sites:**

There are no items to display

North Branch Hunterdon County Library  
North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District  
Phillipsburg Regional High School

65 Halstead St, Clinton, NJ 08809  
1445 Rt 31 Annandale, NJ 08801  
445 Marshall Street Phillipsburg, NJ 08865

---

**ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
2. **Continuing Review:** Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
3. **Expiration of IRB Approval:** If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: **All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.**
4. **Amendments/Modifications/Revisions:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
5. **Unanticipated Problems:** Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>
6. **Protocol Deviations and Violations :** Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>
7. **Consent/Assent:** The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. **Completion of Study:** Notify the IRB when your study has been stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor or the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. **Letter Comments:** *There are no additional comments.*

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:** This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipient(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.