

# Reviewing School District and Caregiver Engagement: Toward Building Capacity to Serve English Learners

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Article abstract

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## ***Reviewing School District and Caregiver Engagement: Toward Building Capacity to Serve English Learners***

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### *Abstract*

The authors conducted a comprehensive literature review of school district partnerships with caregivers of English Learners (ELs) to inform this project design. This literature review addresses the following research question: What are the needs of caregivers of ELs in K-12 schools, and how are school partnerships supporting these caregivers? This literature review will address these gaps and overcoming EL caregiver underrepresentation from a comprehensive review of 21 articles. Initial findings revealed 26 initial codes. These initial codes were collapsed thematically to form six focused codes discussed in these results: *defining caregiver engagement, history and context, preparation needed, implementation strategies, path forward, and impact*. These six focused codes were further collapsed into past, current, and future implications.

**Keywords:** English Learner, caregiver, school districts, partnerships

The overarching purpose of this funded United States Department of Education, National Professional Development grant *English Learner Instruction: Building Capacity Through Design*, which served as the precipice for this literature review, is to increase English Learner (EL) instructional capacity in two, high-need school districts, engage caregivers in supporting ELs, and improve ELs' achievement and self-efficacy. The term English Learners signifies students whose native language is different from the language used in instruction in their schools (Vogt, 2020). Through this grant funding, teachers will participate in professional development (PD) through a master's in literacy program, focusing on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and become certified in both literacy and ESOL. During this PD, teachers will work with the researchers to give formative feedback on what they are learning and which of these elements could be helpful in creating a course for caregivers. The inclusive term caregiver (see Ottoboni, 2007; Schwartz, 1999) is used throughout in addition to parent and family to encompass the parent, family, and community member engagement supporting EL education. Based on formative feedback in the design-based research (DBR) phase of the grant, a course will be designed, and caregivers of EL students will take this course to learn how to best support their students.

In South Carolina (SC), the context of this project, 6% of students are ELs (NCES, 2019). During school year 2021-2022, 54% of ELs in the state met progress toward the

English proficiency state target (SC DoE, 2022). Looking at the changes on the National Assessment of Education Progress in reading and mathematics from 2009 to 2017 (U.S. DoE, 2022), SC was one of 14 states experiencing five points or higher decrease in ELs proficient in mathematics from 2009 to 2017. SC had a decrease of -8.7 points. In reading, SC was one of four states with the highest decrease in points with a decrease of -5.3 points. SC is now a *destination state* for Latino immigrants: “States where the foreign-born population grew at or above twice the national rate between 2000 and 2009” (Terrazas, 2011). As a destination state, SC has a shortage of teachers to prepare these students and lacks other community resources for ELs and their families (Held et al., 2018). In addition to teaching support, EL students benefit from community support, including that of their caregivers (PIQE, 2019; Quijochó & Daoud, 2006).

EL caregivers often want to be more involved in their students’ education, but feel excluded (Quijochó & Daoud, 2006). This desire is often neglected due to teacher and administrative misconceptions that these caregivers do not want to be included. In addition, caregiver engagement can be limited due to challenges such as language barriers, time limitations, work schedules, etc. (PIQE, 2019). This literature review will address the following research question: What are the needs of caregivers of ELs in K-12 schools and how are school partnerships supporting these caregivers? The authors will describe a comprehensive literature review of school district partnerships with caregivers of ELs. We will use the findings from this comprehensive literature review to analyze how they will inform the caregiver course in this grant and the potential of these findings for this project overall as well as research more broadly.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

The approach of the project necessitating this literature review reflects a social cognitive perspective. The social cognitive view of learning is based on three reciprocal features: a person, their behavior, and the environment (Schunk, 2020). Sociocognitive theory includes cognitive concepts, such as self-efficacy or the belief in one’s own capabilities for learning. Self-efficacy is grounded in sociocognitive work from Bandura (1977). Further, the important concept of self-efficacy from the sociocognitive viewpoint is instrumental as a component of cognition that predicts behavior impacting the educational environment for both teachers and students (Eun, 2019). An important concern in the learning of ELs is how they view self-efficacy as it not only tells how capable they feel toward their learning but connects to how they will respond to academic difficulties and learning outcomes and how much they will use learning strategies (Deng & Trainin, 2020). Self-efficacy is pertinent to teachers as well as students, with self-efficacy influencing “teachers’ activities, effort, and persistence with students” (Schunk, 2020, p. 157). However, this self-efficacy is not a purely cognitive function, as sociocognitive theory acknowledges that these cognitive processes are influenced by human interaction in social contexts (Harare, 2016). Thus, this project tracks the impact on self-efficacy for teachers, students, and caregivers as they participate in the relative project courses.

Much second language research views language learning as a purely cognitive function (Atkinson, 2002). However, Atkinson (2002) encourages more research that connects the cognitive and social development of second language learning. The social context of language is fundamental to both its existence and development. Input and output for language cycles between cognitive and social spheres. However, much of language

development research emphasizes the cognitive aspects, isolating language from its sociocultural context; thus, research on language use within the environment it occurs is a keen element of study needed. Both teacher and student caregivers are important members of this interaction and in need of study. As language is both a cognitive and social process of development, ELs need support both at school from their teachers, but also at home from the caregivers.

More recent work linking this social and cognitive capacity building includes frameworks such as the dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Bergman, 2019; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), with the goal of improved outcomes for students and schools, building relationships between communities and educators. This framework suggests that such relational building must include the capacity of both families and educators in “4C” areas: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. These areas include both social entities, such as connections, but also cognitive elements such as capabilities or skills, cognition, and confidence or self-efficacy.

### *Method*

This study is a systematic literature review, a design that follows research question(s) and an explicit approach of analysis when discussing scholarship (Khan et al., 2003). Our research question was the following: What are the needs of caregivers of English Learners in K-12 schools and how are school partnerships supporting these caregivers? The analysis entailed specific inclusion and exclusion criteria and documentation of our research process. We searched five data bases including: Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, ERIC. Our search terms included variations of partnerships/collaboration, schools, and multilingual/English Learner caregivers/families/parents, and we focused on scholarship specifically related to a K-12 setting. We did not exclude dates and included peer-reviewed research articles in our search of these databases. We reviewed 21 articles, see Table 1, inclusive of studies, theoretical papers, reports, practitioner articles, and literature reviews. This research ranged in dates from 2008 to 2020.

Data analysis was qualitative in nature. We worked individually to find emergent initial codes and then discussed coding until 100% inter-rater agreement was reached. For example, we met and went through each article discussing any discrepancies in initial coding by going back to the article in question until there was agreement. These initial codes were drawn by going line by line through each text and describing them as actions and events relevant to our research question. We collapsed similar initial codes used to create focused codes, which led to theoretical codes, or conclusions developed from analyzing relationships between the focused codes (coding categories from Charmaz, 2014).

Table 1  
*Literature Review Matrix*

Study	Purpose	Design	Context
Baird (2015)	Examines 31 studies regarding parent involvement with EL families	Literature Review	USA
Chen et al. (2008)	Shares a professional development project that focuses on ELL learning and includes strategies for parental involvement	Qualitative Study	USA
Coady (2019)	Examines research for parental involvement and three models, with a focus on rural multilingual family engagement from the perspective of the teacher.	Literature Review	USA
Davis et al. (2019)	Analyzes early childhood multilingual children and digital technologies in education and policies for adoption.	Qualitative Case Study	New Zealand
Georgis et al. (2014)	Studies a Transition Support Program with refugees and how through involvement with a cultural broker and community organizations they created parent engagement and inclusive practices.	Qualitative Study	Canada
Goldin et al. (2017)	Examines a field-based program that pairs pre-service teachers with parents to determine the actual practices that inform teacher-family partnerships.	Report	USA
González et al. (2016)	Reports challenges and consequences of family separation and reunification during immigration and school involvement with mental health services, teacher development, school-caregiver partnerships, and relationships	Literature Review	USA
He et al. (2018)	Discusses a partnership program that provided educational support through a two-generation approach, providing adult education and a children's curriculum	Study	USA
Housel (2020)	Addresses barriers to creating school- and community-based activities and how schools and immigrant families can build successful collaborations	Essay	USA
Kyzar & Jimerson (2018)	Relays how a school strengthened school and family partnerships by transitioning from a compliance-based approach to a partnership-based approach	Theoretical Article	USA
Lawson & Alameda-Lawson (2012)	Focuses on the outcomes from Latino parents involved in school and community-based partnership	Qualitative Study	USA
López et al. (2001)	Studies migrant parental involvement in schools and how successful policies can benefit migrant families as well as other marginalized groups	Qualitative Study	USA
Louie & Davis-Welton (2016)	Describes a family literacy project with K-6 children, their families, and teachers to create bilingual picture books about personal or cultural stories from family members	Study	USA
McKenna & Millen (2013)	Examines the development of a parent voice, parent presence, and parent engagement model and its influence the school-family partnership	Qualitative Study	USA
Mendoza (2016)	Reports reading strategies, approaches, and resources from K-3 teachers of ELLs that support reading development outside the classroom to develop literary proficiency and caregiver support	Qualitative Study	USA
Mendoza (2017)	Summarizes how teachers strengthen home-school partnerships with caregivers to support K-3 ELLs reading strategies and achievement	Literature Review	USA
Mogge et al. (2017)	Relays a partnership between an urban public school and local immigrant families	Qualitative Study	USA
Roessingh (2011)	Portrays a dual-language book project in an elementary school to build language, culture, and identity	Practitioner Article	Canada
Schecter & Ippolito (2008)	Examines a literacy initiative project for linguistically diverse parents/caregivers and their children	Ethnographic Study	Canada

Shim (2018)	Discusses the teacher and ELL parent interactions and obstacles to successful partnerships.	Qualitative Study	USA
Vera et al. (2012)	Portrays the barriers and facilitators of parent involvement with EL parents in four elementary school districts	Qualitative Study	USA

### Results

Initial findings revealed 26 initial codes; the frequency of their coding in references is described in Figure 1. These initial codes were collapsed thematically to form six focused codes, shown in Table 2, and discussed in these results: *defining caregiver engagement*, *history and context*, *preparation needed*, *implementation strategies*, *path forward*, and *impact*. These six focused codes were further collapsed into past, current, and future implications, which are elaborated in the discussion.

#### Defining Caregiver Engagement

The focused code *defining caregiver engagement* was collapsed from the following four focused codes: *assessment data*, *one-way versus reciprocal engagement*, *definition of school and community partnerships*, and *types of caregiver engagement*. Kyzar and Jimerson (2018) in a theoretical article discussed two key steps of the defining of caregiver engagement, assessing and defining it. Regarding assessing caregiver engagement, Kyzar and Jimerson (2018) suggested typical survey instruments to gauge participants; however, they also included interview or focus groups of caregivers with a focus on representing underrepresented voices in delivering this assessment. Further, they emphasized not just the instrument used but how it is used, suggesting partners in the school district use these tools to engage the caregivers and employ strategies to enact that voice and remove barriers.

Building on assessing feedback from those supporting ELs, it is important how their engagement is defined and that this engagement is a reciprocal relationship rather than a deliverable from one side. Baird (2015), in a systematic literature review of culturally and linguistically diverse parent engagement, discussed that traditional caregiver engagement has been thought of in terms of what she defined as “the greatest hits” (p. 168). These greatest hits of caregiver engagement included “specific, observable practices” (Baird, 2015, p. 168) that parents might be seen doing at home or at school but this caregiver engagement may be less concrete or obvious. In fact, several studies described a need to move beyond “greatest hits” or one-way caregiver engagement, largely defined by school-initiated directives, such as a literacy night at school (Baird, 2015; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Lawson & Almeda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2001). While these practices are not to be condemned, they do not reflect the holistic partnership needed, one that includes caregiver initiatives. Baird (2015, p. 169) described the distinction by stating caregiver engagement should be “less defined by activities or practices and more focused on dynamic processes.”

Baird (2015) defined three types of caregiver engagement: between families and schools, parents or caregivers and their children, and interaction among families. We focus here on engagement between caregivers and schools. By engagement, we follow what research has suggested of this term, meaning involvement and support in EL education and that this relationship should be reciprocal between both schools and caregivers (Baird, 2015; Shim, 2018). It should be acknowledged, as do Georgis et al. (2014) in their



ethnographic case study of a transition support program with refugees, that this engagement is impacted by social, cultural, economic, and political factors. For instance, they found culture impacted readiness to participate in school activities; Chinese Americans were more likely to exhibit engagement at home whereas European Americans were eager to volunteer in school-based activities. Regarding economics, lower-income caregivers were seen as needing resources from schools whereas those with higher incomes were more likely to be viewed as having contributions to the schools. However, González et al. (2016), in their examination of challenges and consequences of family separation and reunification during immigration for K-12 students, suggested caregiver engagement requires schools take on responsibility: “Rather than blaming parents and other caregivers for nonparticipation, these schools look inward, assume responsibility, and work with families to remove the barriers to integration with schools” (p. 221). Caregiver engagement goes beyond just family actions to support their ELs, it also involves voice, that they have opinions about their students’ education and that this voice is received by the schools (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

There are many types of caregiver engagement. Georgis et al. (2014) described that the most recognized types of caregiver engagement include school activities, such as volunteering and parent-teacher conferences, and home-based activities, such as help with homework. However, they encouraged this term to be expanded to include fewer tangible actions such as learning to work together to support students and sharing information to help ELs. Too narrow a definition of caregiver engagement tends to exclude particularly low-income parents who may face additional barriers to traditional participation in schools such as volunteering. González et al. (2016) suggested that this expanded definition of caregiver engagement may require more resources from schools such as bilingual staff who can initiate communication with caregivers as to how to remove barriers to their engagement and may include strategies such as holding meetings when caregivers have time to come and being inclusive of bilingual homework that increases caregiver access. Also needed may be workshops for parents or connecting caregivers with local businesses to connect them with material needs. Other types of engagement may include increasing caregiver awareness of school policies and procedures and increasing opportunities for caregivers to gain skills that may help to meet their material needs, such as obtaining income outside of agricultural work as found in Lopez et al. (2001), a qualitative study focused on migrant parent involvement.

### *History and Context*

There is a rich *history and context* informing caregiver engagement for ELs, which is the focused code formed from four initial codes from the research literature: *history of caregiver engagement*, *disparity of resources*, *theoretical construct*, and *setting of caregiver courses*. The rich *history of caregiver engagement* comes across in this literature review as this was the sixth most referenced initial code out of 26 initial codes (see Figure 1 for count of initial code references). This research on caregiver engagement and education began in the late 1980s, starting with whether their engagement was impactful and evolving more recently to how to account for this involvement and relevant sociocultural influences (McKenna & Millen, 2013). In fact, Baird (2015) suggested that in the United States, caregiver engagement in student education has reached the level of a cultural norm. This norm has translated into legislation in the United State with several

pieces requiring that schools enact plans to involve parents (Baird, 2015; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Mendoza, 2016): Goal 2000: Educate America Act (1994), two authorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, the Improving America's Schools Act (1994), and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002).

However, this legislation has not always been supported with means to enact its implementation. Chen et al. (2008), in a qualitative study of two cohorts of teachers, found teachers had little training regarding their increasing populations of EL students even though their academic performance tended to lag that of their peers. In fact, the initial code *disparity of resources* included discussion by McKenna and Millen (2013) in a study examining the development of parent voice, presence, and engagement model and its influence the school-family partnership. They found that parents understood the disparity of resources between school districts. A point of advocacy for their students was understanding the “challenges faced by schools with limited resources” (p. 32).

In addition to how to communicate with parents as required by legislation, teachers need to understand context of legislation that may be impacting caregivers of ELs. For example, González et al. (2016) discussed that one out of every four students in the U.S. comes from a background of immigration and those students of immigrant families is the fastest growing segment of children in the U.S. (Vera et al., 2012; He et al., 2018). Caregivers of these students are facing multiple challenges related to legislation in the U.S., such as family separation, reunification, or issues with documentation (González et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2001). Thus, to help prepare teachers for this complex engagement, Housel (2020), discussed steps such as encoding caregiver engagement in state standards, such as efforts in New York, and a need for teacher development programs to become more community focused. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012), in an ethnographic study Latino parents involved in school and community-based partnership, advocated for cultural brokers to help navigate these connections between policy, government, profession, community, and education.

Adding to this history and context of caregiver engagement, this is an area that is heavily theorized. For example, as we coded for *theoretical construct* in the research, this became the fourth most referenced initial code. These theories included theories germane to families of sociocultural, ecological, political, and economic thinking. Sociocultural theories were important in understanding the language and culture families bring to schools (Chen et al., 2008; Coady, 2019; Schecter & Ippolito, 2008). Ecological theories such as the Arena Framework (Davis et al., 2019) and systems theories (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018) helped analyze the many layers of the educational system, particularly caregiver, students, and their interactions. Political theories such as Post-Colonial Theory (Shim, 2018) and Critical Race Theory (CRT; McKenna & Millen, 2013), specifically counterstorying within CRT (Baird, 2015; Goldin et al., 2017), helped researchers push back upon dominant paradigms of caregiver engagement such as the greatest hits described previously. Goldin et al. (2017) examined a field-based program that paired pre-service teachers with parents to determine the actual practices informing teacher-family partnerships. They used counterstorying to build upon funds of knowledge, a sociocultural theory often used in the literature (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016; Mogge et al., 2017) to discuss the assets students bring from home that can be built upon at school, to suggest that in addition to acknowledging these funds, teachers may need to push back upon dominant paradigms so that marginalized persons have the agency to use these assets. Economic



lenses were brought with paradigms such as Community Cultural Wealth (He et al., 2018; Housel, 2020). We identified this theory as economic not for its emphasis on money, but for its emphasis on capital, which could be linguistic, familial, social, or any other assets (see Bourdieu, 2002). This theory allowed researchers such as Housel (2020) to acknowledge resources typically undervalued and use them as a form of resistance, also similar to CRT and ideals from counterstorying. Many of these theories had in common that they allowed for the complex interaction of layers of culture or systems, as the interaction between schools and caregivers is multidimensional and needs acknowledgement of intersecting layers. In this way, this theorizing aligned for the more bidirectional relationship with caregivers called for in the preceding definition of caregiver engagement.

Entering this historical and theoretical background is the *setting of caregiver courses*, a frequent element included in the building of caregiver engagement (Coady, 2019; He et al., 2018; Housel, 2020; Shim, 2018). These courses meet different needs from the rising level of need for caregiver engagement of ELs in rural areas (Coady, 2019; Shim, 2018) to the priority to address current needs of adults in the area (He et al., 2018). Common among many of these courses is the call for them to be bidirectional as discussed in the preceding definition, but also to think about the access to these courses (Housel, 2020). Do caregivers have childcare to get to these courses? Are they accessible at a time when they can meet outside of work, etc.? Research such as Coady (2019), which focused on rural EL caregiver engagement from the perspective of the teacher, reminds vested partners that focus on caregiver engagement has largely been centered upon metro areas and monolingual caregivers, so thinking about these settings is a crucial starting point in designing these courses.

### *Preparation Needed*

The focused code *preparation needed* was comprised of five initial codes: *personnel needed*, *teacher development*, *potential caregiver course topics*, *online learning*, and *state standards*. There was a noticeable demarcation in these initial codes between those referenced frequently and seldom. We begin with those heavily mentioned and then address those that may deserve more attention. *Personnel needed*, *teacher development*, and *potential caregiver course topics* were all in the top ten most frequently referenced of the 26 initial codes. This count builds upon and affirms the previous discussion under the focused code *history and context* discussing the history of limited training in school districts regarding the rising populations of EL students. The initial code *personnel needed* expands upon this theme however by discussing that it is not just teachers responsible for encouraging caregiver engagement, though they, of course, are instrumental. Davis et al. (2019), in a qualitative study of early childhood, discussed multiple other partners including nurses, community members, and librarians. Other studies, such as Georgis et al. (2014), suggested inclusion of community agencies, especially those meeting immigrant needs. González et al. (2016) discussed the potential need of mental health services as at times underrepresented persons such as Latinos seek these services less than other ethnic/racial groups. Yet another personnel needed to further caregiver engagement is trained interpreters (Housel, 2020). Institutes of higher education may be brought in not just to train teachers, but to help with adult education needs of the EL caregivers (Lopez et al., 2001). Often a dedicated position is needed such as a cultural broker as termed by

Georgis et al. (2014) or a parent liaison (He et al., 2018) who helps to negotiate the communication between these multidimensional counterparts who are all working to further caregiver engagement for the growth of EL students.

Regarding *teacher development*, research found many teachers unprepared to address linguistic diversity in their classrooms, with a further lack of preparation on how best to involve caregivers of these students (Coady, 2019; Davis et al., 2019; Goldin et al., 2017; Mendoza, 2016, 2017). However, developing teachers on caregiver engagement can make a difference. For instance, Chen et al. (2008) saw gains in teachers moving from contacting student caregivers only for concerns to reaching out to many student parents, and they noted a change in an increase in teachers who visited student homes, impacting instruction by helping teachers to understand their students on a deeper level and connect instruction to student background knowledge. Without this attention to teacher development on how to involve caregivers, research found that schools often “privilege the social and cultural capital of children of higher socioeconomic status and value their prior knowledge positioning them as having significant advantage” (Goldin et al, 2017, p. 192). This teacher development may include coursework (Chen et al., 2008; Goldin et al, 2017) or professional development in schools (González et al., 2016; Mendoza, 2016). Activities for teachers to develop this attention to caregivers included helping teachers learn specific protocols such as Sheltered Instruction (Chen et al., 2008), using digital resources (Davis et al., 2019), developing specific case examples (Goldin et al., 2017), discussing the definition of both family and family engagement for ELs (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018), examining resources and activities that help increase caregiver engagement (Mendoza, 2016), learning how to approach and garner caregiver participation (Mendoza, 2017), and learning about caregivers’ home language and culture (Mogge et al., 2017).

In addition to developing teachers, possible topics that need to be addressed to further school and caregiver relationships arose beyond those just needed for teachers. For example, González et al. (2016) discussed the need to help caregivers navigate the educational and socioeconomic systems in the United States and how to work within those systems. Such topics about the U.S. educational system that need further exploration include opportunities for college and application to those institutions as well as resources available in local educational agencies, such as interpreters and parent-teacher organizations. Further, immigrant students and families may need support navigating trauma, including separation and reunification issues. Families may also benefit from services such as food drives or helping older citizens. Some ways to outreach to these families may include holding resource fairs, in which community resources are advertised, including legal services, which may be needed for families facing immigration issues. Another important topic is combatting isolation these families may feel by providing opportunities for them to connect and socialize (Lawson & Almeda-Lawson, 2012). Lopez et al. (2001) also found a need to provide for caregiver self-improvement pursuing topics such as general education development (GED) or English as a Second Language (ESL), U.S. citizenship, or access to trade courses. On a more instructional level, Louie and Davis-Welton (2016), in an article discussing family literacy and K-6 students, advocated for caregivers to share personal and cultural stories, which with teacher assistance were used as bilingual picture book resources in the classroom. This work builds on previous literature such as Cummins et al. (2006) suggesting educators build a curriculum for multilingual students that utilizes the resources of their community. Further, Mendoza

(2017) noted that both teachers and families may benefit from discussing cultural mismatches, such as one culture valuing eye contact while another viewing this as a sign of disrespect so that these might not interfere with learning or be misinterpreted. These course topics may need to incorporate “cross-generational” topics and strategies as Schechter and Ippolito (2008, p. 169) discussed accounting for multiple age groups of students, across three schools, grades K-8. This study provided instruction for both caregivers and their students that was at times intergenerational as well as independent. For example, caregivers and students spent time reading together, but parents also attended information sessions independently while students worked on activities such as homework or activities with their peers. When possible, this independent work of caregivers and students aligned thematically.

*Online learning* and *state standards* were both initial codes that were grouped in the focused code *preparation needed*, but that were given little attention in the research, falling in the bottom half of frequency of references for initial coding. *Online learning* was an initial code that was surprisingly absent from the literature. Davis et al. (2019) is a study that may shed light on why technology was seemingly underrepresented in the relationships between school districts and caregivers as interaction between education and digital tools is complex, an ecosystem with key stakeholders being teachers and caregivers (p. 1321). This use of digital tools from early childhood can be confusing, with outcomes being positive or negative depending on the use of the tools, with positive literacy and learning outcomes but negative effects, such as spending too much time in front of screens, remaining a concern. Thus, teachers and parents expressed a need for guidance in supporting ELs with digital tools. This effort is needed as an e-portfolio, for example, showed benefits such as improving communication with caregivers and inviting their increased participation. Benefits for the students, particularly if they used their home languages in the e-portfolio, included increased agency and reflection. Other positive advantages for ELs using digital tools included increasing contact with family who may remain in other countries (González et al., 2017) and increased participation in school functions (Housel, 2020).

In addition to online learning, state standards may be an area that needs further attention, especially with regards to building capacity between caregivers, school districts, and their ELs. In the research included in this review, only one article discussed state standards that specifically accounted for caregivers. Housel (2020), in an essay discussing how to build successful collaborations with schools and immigrant families, discussed the New York state standards and their specificity that teachers should work with community members to build a cohesive culture and help parents participate in their children’s education. Thus, more preparation may be needed by states in their standards to address capacity building between school districts and the caregivers of students.

### *Implementation Strategies*

The focused code *implementation strategies* comprised the following five initial codes: *barriers to caregiver engagement*, *creating welcoming environments*, *caregiver voice*, *assets of caregivers*, and *caregiver and teacher communication strategies*. *Barriers to caregiver engagement* was the second most frequently coded initial code, suggesting the reason implementation strategies are needed in districts is to better build relationships with caregivers whereas the rest of these initial codes were not frequently coded, but each

significant as a step toward being more inclusive of caregivers and their potential to support ELs in school districts. The barriers caregivers face include limited teacher time, caregiver work schedules, lack of means of transportation, language barriers, differences in culture, misunderstanding of school systems, feeling overwhelmed navigating available resources, limited experience with formal educational systems, layoffs and downsizing in community organizations, fears of deportations or speaking up, and the resulting stress from these compounding factors (Chen et al., 2008; Georgis et al., 2014; Housel, 2020; Lawson & Almeda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2001; Shim, 2018).

There is no one, simple step that can be taken by school districts to alleviate these barriers, but instead, school districts need a holistic approach to providing for caregivers of ELs. The remaining initial codes in this focused code speak to steps that school districts may take. School districts should work toward *creating welcoming environments* for caregivers of ELs. This environment often begins outside of schools by enlisting community organizations that can help caregivers navigate school expectations, regulations, and cultural values (Housel, 2020). These environments should acknowledge caregiver stressors, provide resources for overcoming language barriers such as interpreters and translation services, and work to override assumptions of a lack of interest or involvement in their students' education. This implementation outside of school does not stop at enlisting community organizations but may go beyond school hours as well by allowing for longer time frames for parent-teacher conferences, recognizing cultural events of these caregivers, and meeting the demands on their time by providing resources such as childcare, food, and transportation at school events. This welcoming environment is not limited to the physical elements, as Lopez et al. (2001, p. 272) found that the important factor was an environment that provoked open dialogue, which could be accomplished with both "physical and attitudinal" factors. For example, considering the room one is meeting in with parents, their comfort level, the dress of the participants, and the way the conversation flows are all important factors when conferencing between caregivers and school representatives.

McKenna and Millen (2013) defined an important element in implementing relationships between school districts and caregivers: acknowledging *caregiver voice*. They defined this voice, "the right and opportunity for parents and caregivers to express their understandings about their child(ren)'s and families' everyday lives and educational experiences in and out of school" (p. 17). They used concept mapping in their qualitative study to analyze current narrow conceptions of caregiver voice to try and provide new models. One area of caregiver involvement that was underutilized and caregivers felt was needed was sharing information about their students to build stronger teacher-child relationships in the classroom. Parents suggested that this information, though needed, may not be readily shared unless teachers asked. Three vital areas for asking caregivers about their students included: student potential, behaviors and needs, and academic concerns. Further noted was the importance of teachers holding high expectations for these caregivers' students. However, though caregivers thought the detail they provided highly relevant, they described the current level of information they were asked to provide as basic and being involved at school less than they wanted to be. Also, some common practices may be unintentionally dismissive or even insulting to these caregivers as one parent discussed how offended they were by having to sign a contract related to home practices. They took this as a sign of deficit thinking, as if they were not already providing these basic

needs and that it was not acknowledging their frequent practices of providing well beyond their children's necessities.

Other resources that may not be utilized to their full potential were coded under *assets of caregivers*. He et al. (2018), in a study using interviews, observations, and reflections of a program providing ESL classes for Hispanic parents in a local school district, identified five forms of cultural capital used: "linguistic capital, navigational capital, social capital, familial capital, and aspirational capital" (p. 72). Linguistic capital focused on using the participants' home language. Navigational capital referred to their willingness to navigate the course objectives and material together. Social and familial capital referred to the social networks, such as family, that helped participants complete the course in the study. Lastly, aspirational capital was what motivated the participants and instructors to participate and complete the course.

To effectively use caregiver voice and assets, the code *caregiver and teacher communication strategies* suggests ways teachers and caregivers might more effectively communicate to support ELs. This training starts with teacher education programs as the majority do not actively address how teachers can learn from caregivers to build their knowledge of EL cultural resources (He et al., 2018). Thus, He et al. (2018) specifically addressed how future teachers could tap into parent communication via parent-teacher conferences to gain knowledge about the capital ELs bring to school. These conferences are too often dominated by what is occurring at school, missing the opportunity to know the child outside of school. This case example entailed more than just readings, as student teachers completed a simulation of a parent-teacher conference. They included the following five skills for more effective teacher and caregiver communication: appreciating the EL, helping the caregiver understand EL's work from a teacher perspective, asking questions that value the caregiver as their EL expert, determining resources the family brings to education, and elaborating next steps. Other research showed the importance of understanding EL capital through home visits (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018); however, sometimes these home visits are not manageable when considering teacher time and class load. Thus, as an alternative, teachers could include questionnaires exploring student assets. Other strategies include not just communicating with caregivers when something negative happens but initiating regular communication such as a three to one rule where one positive call is made for every three that are not. Further, teachers used family literacy projects to learn more about caregiver and student resources (Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016). Roessingh (2011), in a practitioner article, outlined a book project used to increase caregiver involvement at school. Whatever strategies used, research recommends teachers have a plan for caregiver relationship building and tapping into EL capital as many teachers note this is an area where growth is needed (Mendoza, 2016; Shim, 2018).

### *Path Forward*

The focused code *path forward* embodied six initial codes: *goal of partnership*, *need for empathy*, *need for school and community partnerships*, *need for EL caregiver engagement*, *gaps in research*, and *sustainability*. These codes paint a picture of the path forward in research for developing partnerships between K-12 school districts and caregivers that addresses needs, fills gaps, and creates sustainability. To first consider the *path forward* in this research, it is helpful to envision the goal, which was described in the initial code *goal of partnership*. This code described goals of decreasing misunderstandings



between school districts and caregivers and increasing trust; caregiver voice, agency, and knowledge of educational systems; empathy for caregivers; inclusion of cultural resources; and ultimately EL learning (Housel, 2020; Schechter & Ippolito, 2008). This need was apparent from research suggesting an assumption of disinterest in caregivers and feelings of isolation from caregivers (Housel, 2020) in the codes *need for empathy* and *need for school and community partnerships*. The *need for EL caregiver engagement* showed that caregiver participation of ELs is often perceived as “lower and of different quality” (Mendoza, 2017, p. 7) than those whose first language is English likely due in part to these assumptions and their resulting influence (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Mendoza, 2017). Other “invisible” caregiver engagement such as checking homework and being involved in student reading should be acknowledged (Housel, 2020, p. 188). Addressing *gaps in the research* should seek to describe unique ways these caregivers are engaging with their students, defining what is considered caregiver engagement and who is aligning to these definitions, analyzing how this involvement influences school outcomes, and delving into specific contextual factors such as the impacts of immigration (Baird, 2015; González et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2001). Further, research should interview not just the stakeholders in schools but the caregivers themselves (Mendoza, 2016). Not only is more research needed, but this research must include *sustainability*. This initial code reflected the difficulty of sustaining research to increase school and caregiver capacity. For example, Schechter and Ippolito (2008), in an ethnographic study over four years, discussed that engagement of caregivers requires multiple factors, such as multilingual materials and volunteers, that have associated costs that will require “institutional and infrastructural support” (p. 178).

### *Impact*

The focused code *impact* included the following two initial codes: *family engagement and student outcomes* and *caregiver and teacher outcomes*. The research consistently discussed the correlation between caregiver engagement and higher student outcomes, including grades, but also including other factors such as student attitude toward school and attendance (Baird, 2015; Chen et al., 2008; Coady, 2019; Georgis et al., 2014; González et al., 2016; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Lawson & Almeda-Lawson, 2012; Lopez et al., 2001; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016; Mendoza, 2016, 2017; Mogge et al., 2017; Schechter & Ippolito, 2008; Shim, 2018). Similarly, teachers experienced positive benefits from increased caregiver engagement. For example, Chen et al. (2008) reported as teachers reached out with positive phone calls to interact more with caregivers, they were able to feed that communication back into their curriculum, using cultural capital to align with content. Furthermore, González et al. (2016) found that teachers raised their expectations of students, in this study Latino students. In addition to teachers and students, the caregivers found benefits outside of their student growth. For instance, Lawson and Almeda-Lawson (2012) found that from the school and community partnerships of the study, caregivers reported increased trust and cohesion with members in the community, thus overcoming the isolation many caregivers report as a barrier to engagement. In addition, this goodwill often extended beyond the school as caregivers improved the social environment as they extended activities into their local neighborhoods. This extension mainly came from parents sharing and extending outreach to their neighbors inviting them to activities and looking out for one another.



Table 2

*Initial to Focused to Theoretical Coding*

<b>Theoretical Codes</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>					
<b>Looking Back</b>	<b>Defining Caregiver engagement</b>	Assessment data	One-way v. reciprocal engagement	Definition of school and community partnerships	Types of caregiver engagement		
	<b>History and Context</b>	History of caregiver engagement	Disparity of resources	Theoretical Construct	Setting of caregiver courses		
<b>Partnering and Implementing</b>	<b>Preparation Needed</b>	Personnel needed	Teacher development	Potential caregiver course topics	Online learning	State standards	
	<b>Implementation Strategies</b>	Barriers to caregiver engagement	Creating welcoming environments	Caregiver voice	Assets of caregivers	Caregiver and teacher communication strategies	
<b>Researching</b>	<b>Path Forward</b>	Goal of partnership	Need for empathy	Need for school and community partnerships	Need for EL caregiver engagement	Gaps in research	Sustainability
	<b>Impact</b>	Family engagement and student outcomes	Caregiver and teacher outcomes				

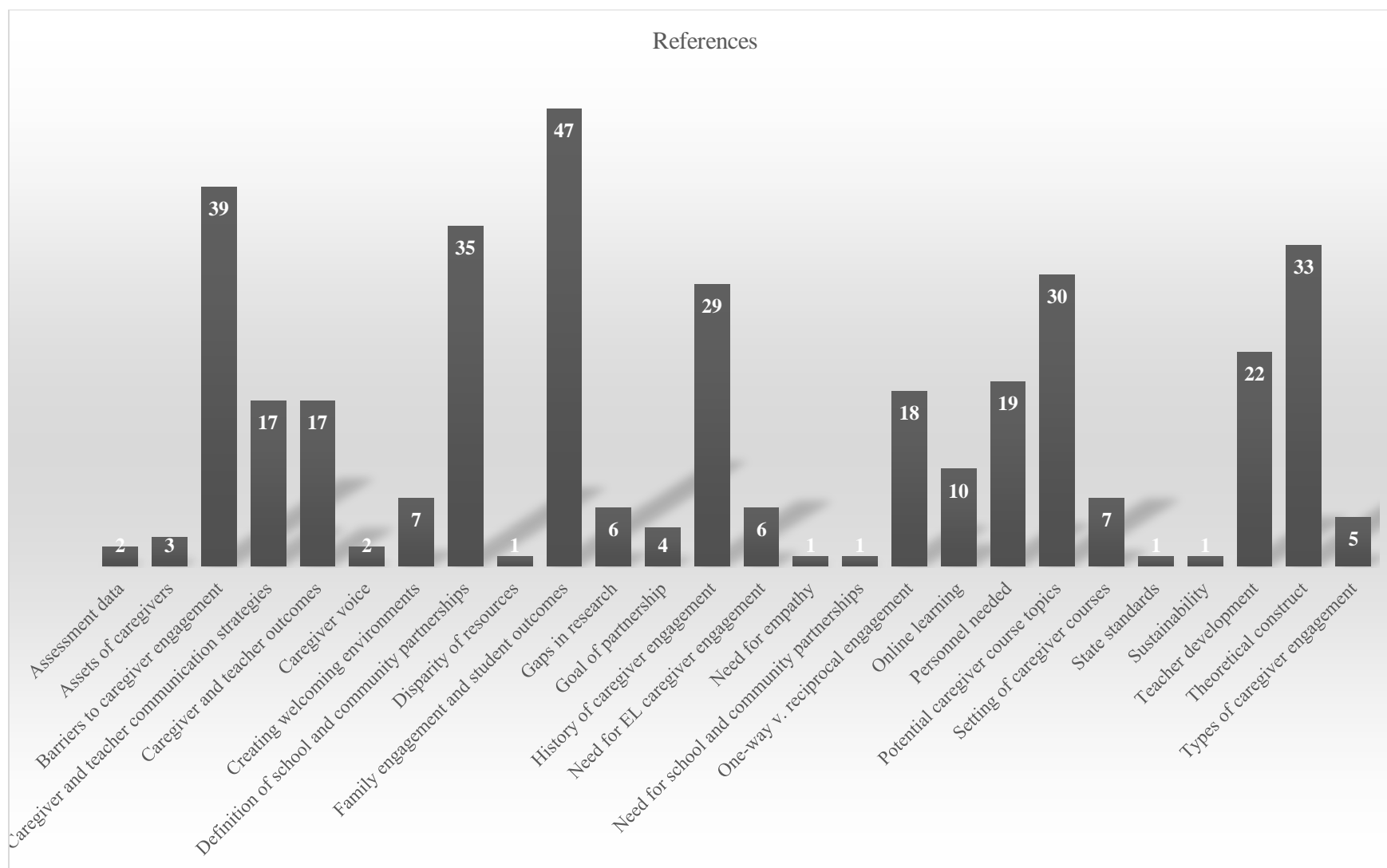


Figure 1. Reference Counts for Initial Codes

### Discussion

We discuss three emerging theoretical codes based upon thematically collapsed focused codes: *looking back*, *partnering and implementing*, and *researching*. More specifically, we apply these findings from the literature to their application in the current grant project previously described, which seeks to build district capacity to support ELs by teachers receiving PD in the form of a master's degree in literacy with a focus on ESOL and developing a course for caregivers in the school districts served.

#### *Looking Back*

The theoretical code *looking back* was formed from the two focused codes: *defining caregiver engagement* and *history and context*. This code painted a picture of the past of caregiver engagement being consumed by false assumptions and unilateral support. The false assumption being that EL caregivers are disinvested in their student education, and the unilateral support dominated by school directed initiatives, leaving caregivers feeling isolated and not doing enough to overcome their disenfranchisement. Thus, this literature informs our grant project in two ways: the need for data to drive instruction and the necessity of a research design capable of allowing for reciprocal relationship development. First, the initial code *assessment data* reflected a need to overcome barriers to caregiver engagement by giving them more voice and overall basing the relationship between caregivers and school districts on data rather than assumptions. Thus, our outreach and inclusion of caregivers is based upon a continual cycle of feedback from both district stakeholders as well as the caregivers. In each course that the participating teachers take in their master's program, they will be asked to provide suggestions of what is key to their own learning regarding ELs and literacy that would help caregivers in their district, and the caregiver course will be shaped by this feedback. Similarly, the caregivers in the first phase of this project will be asked for feedback on their course topics to revise for the second phase of the grant. We will also be assessing self-efficacy for literacy practices for teachers, their students, and caregivers, thus looking at both cognitive and social components of capacity building as suggested by the dual capacity-building theory and broader sociocognitive theory previously discussed. Thus, we are hoping to build a more reciprocal relationship where both teacher and caregiver feedback impacts the capacity building to support ELs in school district. This feedback allowing us to modify elements of the project is only possible due to the design-based nature (Philippakos et al., 2021; Reinking & Bradley, 2008) of our method in the first phase of this project. In this method researchers continually look for inhibiting and enhancing factors of the intervention and make modifications based on those. Thus, this type of research may be helpful in respecting participants' voice and implementing them even in areas lacking research due to underrepresentation, such as that of EL caregivers. Thus, this finding presents an opportunity not only for this project but for future research overall to use a method capable of being more inclusive of holistic representatives of the school context.

#### *Partnering and Implementing*

The theoretical code *partnering and implementing* embodies the focused codes *preparation needed* and *implementation strategies*. Regarding the *preparation needed*, our project will take several initial codes from *preparation needed* into account. For example, two of these codes were *teacher development* and *personnel needed*, and we will address

these on multiple fronts. The teachers in the two participating school districts will each complete a master's degree in literacy with a focus on ESOL. Further, caregivers will take the caregiver course in the DBR phase of the study and give their feedback to improve this course for the second phase when another caregiver cohort will take the course. Further, other personnel, such as school administrators, give feedback in survey form each semester of the grant. Thus, this project embodies holistic inclusion of many entities reflective of the literature's emphasis that the personnel needed to support ELs is multifaceted. Furthermore, *online learning* was a code the literature suggested was underrepresented. We are addressing this as the master's program the teachers will take is an online program, and the caregiver course will have resources housed online, though they take the course face-to-face in their district. Technology is also provided in the form of iPads and internet access in their district for caregivers to overcome issues of access. Further, there are two key stakeholders of personnel to help with the project implementation: a caregiver liaison and a community advisory council. We hired a caregiver liaison to make sure they are accounting for the many voices and feedback in creating and implementing the caregiver course to speak to initial codes such as *assets of caregivers* and *caregiver voice*. In addition, we formed a community advisory council of community organization leaders in the state, from areas representing art to law, who help disseminate information as well as provide resources related to caregivers in the community. This council is composed of five members who meet regularly with the research team. For instance, they helped distribute job calls in year one to ensure that the caregiver liaison represented a diverse applicant pool, and in our first meeting, they helped the research team brainstorm needs caregivers are facing in the community and action items that the course may need to tackle. These roles and responsibilities are instructive not only for this project but for research overall to be responsive to the assets and voices of caregivers, a demonstrated need from the literature review.

Another area of partnership falls outside of the project interaction at the state level as we address the initial code *state standards*. We have included policy efforts in the grant with trips to visit legislators to advocate for ELs. The literature suggests in this code that this is needed for example at the level of state standards addressing the need to be more inclusive of caregiver engagement.

### *Researching*

The theoretical code *researching* embodies two focused codes: *path forward* and *impact*. The impact on multiple stakeholders including teachers, caregivers, and students that caregiver engagement has in school districts justifies the need for the research of this project. On our *path forward*, this project tackled many gaps in the literature such as addressing how caregiver engagement is defined and ensuring it is enacted in a reciprocal fashion to redress its current one-way instantiation. We also hope to make this research sustainable as we are continuously modifying in the DBR phase and then will replicate these findings in phase two of the grant with a single-case design. Another effort of sustainability is that these resources of the caregiver course will be housed online should districts want to replicate it for caregivers in the future. We hope this project method will serve as a model for future research on how to be inclusive and responsive to participants and address needed elements of sustainability and replication (Makel & Plucker, 2014).

### Conclusion

We began this comprehensive literature review with the following question: What are the needs of caregivers of English Learners in K-12 schools and how are school partnerships supporting these caregivers? Our theoretical code *looking back* demonstrates that in the past caregivers have been isolated from district capacity to serve ELs. Thus, our theoretical code *partnering and implementing* shows a current need to make district capacity to support ELs more multifaceted, accounting for many voices, as we have suggested with our multiple team members in our current project, including a community advisory council and a caregiver liaison. In addition, research and data collection and analysis must allow not only for listening to multiple voices, but also acting upon their feedback, which in our current project is possible through the DBR method. Finally, our theoretical code of *researching* suggests that although caregiver engagement has a high correlation with teacher and student EL success, it is underutilized, and our research is working to amend this gap. We hope that the steps we have described enacting based upon this comprehensive literature will give others ideas for how to address the problems and possibilities of the current research related to building partnerships between EL caregivers and school districts.

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