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Exploring the Impact of Educator Preparation on the Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Nevada Educators

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Effective family engagement is a critical component of student success, yet educators often report low preparation in this area (Mickie Rops Consulting LLC, 2021). This study examined the impact of state-mandated in-service coursework on these efficacy beliefs to better understand how professional development shapes teacher capacity to collaborate with families.

Purpose of the Study

To evaluate the impact of state-mandated educator preparation coursework, the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center conducted a mixed-methods study of Nevada educators. Utilizing the Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Educators (FEEB-E) instrument (Bachman, 2023), this research sought to measure changes in teacher confidence for engaging families and identify specific curriculum components that drive professional growth. This report provides a high-level synthesis of quantitative efficacy data and a broad collection of qualitative feedback from across the state.

Main Questions

- (1) Do educators' family engagement efficacy beliefs increase as a result of completing a state-mandated educator preparation course?
- (2) Do these changes differ across demographic groups or in different treatment settings (university vs. job-embedded)?

Sample

Surveys were distributed to over 12,000 provisional teachers in Nevada, a state unique in requiring a family engagement course, yet the study faced challenges with response rates and attrition. While the initial distribution yielded 692 pre-test and 786 post-test responses, strict longitudinal matching requirements resulted in a final sample of 161 educators (76 treatment, 85 control). This low match rate suggests a potential volunteer bias, where the remaining participants likely possess higher initial interest or resilience than the broader population. Consequently, the sample may skew toward educators who are already more motivated or more administratively organized, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to the average, less-engaged provisional teacher.

Key Quantitative Insights

Despite the methodological challenges of matching longitudinal data over time, the quantitative results provide statistically significant evidence of growth:

Greatest Growth in “Partnering.” The study found a significant main effect of time on efficacy growth. The “Partnering” domain, initially the weakest area for respondents, showed the greatest improvement, suggesting the coursework is successfully targeting the most critical skill gaps.

Effect of Setting. Educators enrolled in university-based course settings yielded the highest efficacy gains compared to K-12 school district embedded professional development.

Targeted Support Needed. A decline in efficacy was noted among male and late-career educators post-treatment. This suggests that these populations may require differentiated approaches to remain relevant.

Key Qualitative Insights:

While the matched quantitative sample was limited by attrition, a much larger volume of qualitative feedback was collected. Educators provided clear, actionable insights into the learning experience:

Key Strengths of the Course

Practical Learning Activities. Educators consistently valued hands-on activities, including reflection exercises, case studies, role-play, and collaborative discussions with peers. These components allowed participants to examine their current practices, learn from real-world scenarios, and share strategies with colleagues. Many noted that the activities increased confidence and readiness to implement family engagement approaches in their own settings.

Developing Family Engagement Plans. Participants appreciated opportunities to design inclusive, strengths-based family engagement plans. Creating individualized plans helped them identify areas for growth, set clear goals, and strengthen approaches for partnering with caregivers. Educators reported that these plans gave them concrete tools to apply immediately in their work.

Two-Way Communication Strategies. One of the most helpful areas of the course was learning strategies to build consistent, open communication with families. Educators gained tools such as surveys, newsletters, digital platforms, and structured

conversation strategies that foster more frequent and meaningful dialogue. Many noted that these practices helped them build trust and deepen their relationships with families.

Shifts in Mindset and Perspective. The course supported a shift in understanding the educator's role in family engagement. Participants reported increased recognition of the need to initiate communication, listen to parents as equal partners, and adopt a strengths-based approach. These shifts contributed to more equitable, collaborative, and culturally responsive engagement practices.

Understanding Family Diversity. Educators valued learning about the diversity of family structures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural perspectives. This content helped them challenge assumptions, better understand students' contexts, and engage families with greater empathy and cultural awareness.

Areas for Improvement

Participants recommended several enhancements to strengthen the course:

More Implementation Strategies and Realistic Scenarios. Educators requested additional case studies, role-play opportunities, and peer discussions, particularly with more complex or challenging real-life scenarios.

Content on Navigating Barriers. Many educators expressed the need for strategies to address school-level barriers, including limited administrative support, inconsistent systems, and difficulty engaging families who are harder to reach.

Relevance to Roles, Grades, and School Context. Participants requested adaptations for secondary educators, rural schools, Title I populations, and special education contexts. Some noted that assignments were difficult to complete when their role was outside the traditional classroom.

Course Structure and Technical Improvements. Feedback included offering the course in person, embedding it within professional development time, reducing busywork, updating older content, and lowering cost.

Concerns About the Requirement. A small number of experienced educators felt the course should not be required for licensure and expressed frustration about mandatory completion despite extensive prior experience.

Methodological Note

The final matched sample ($N = 161$) was impacted by high attrition typical of longitudinal educator studies. To mitigate this in future cycles, we recommend exploring retrospective pretest designs. This would allow the Nevada Department of Education to capture growth data more efficiently while reducing the burden on participating educators.

Conclusion

The data confirms that Nevada's mandated coursework is a catalyst for increasing teacher confidence, particularly in the vital area of school-family partnerships. Educators described the Family Engagement Course as practical, informative, and reflective, providing strategies that significantly strengthened their ability to partner with families. While participants identified areas for improvement, particularly around implementation, contextual relevance, and systemic barriers, the feedback indicates that the course has a meaningful and positive impact on educators' understanding and practice of family engagement.

Reference Material: Summary with Quotes

Question 1: What parts of the course were helpful in improving your ability to engage with families?

A. Practical Learning Activities

Educators found hands-on activities—such as reflection exercises, case studies, role-plays, asset mapping, and peer discussions—especially valuable. These activities helped them examine their current practices, learn from colleagues, and apply realistic strategies for engaging families.

“I feel like my courses were very thorough and provided a lot of examples and allowed us to do breakout groups to discuss how we can engage with families accordingly. I also feel like we did a lot of group discussion so hearing everybody’s ideas really helped me become successful.”

“Building a family engagement activity that can actually be implemented.”

“The actual case studies and real life situation were helpful.”

B. Developing Family Engagement Plans

Participants appreciated learning how to design inclusive, strengths-based family engagement plans. Creating their own plans provided structure, clarity, and readiness to implement improved practices in their classrooms.

“Learning how to create inclusive family engagement plans and how to involve families as equal partners gave me practical tools to strengthen relationships and support student learning.”

“I had to create my own plan of action to make improvements to what I already do. I feel these plans have made me better prepared to implement effective parental involvement.”

C. Learning Effective Strategies for Two-Way Communication with Families

Educators identified two-way communication as one of the most impactful elements of the course. They gained concrete strategies and tools (surveys, digital platforms, newsletters) to strengthen ongoing communication, build trust, and foster meaningful school–family relationships.

“One of the most helpful parts of the Family Engagement course for me as a teacher was learning effective strategies for building two-way communication with families.”

“I learned practical strategies for creating more open, consistent dialogue with families, including using tools like family surveys, newsletters, and digital platforms that allow for regular check-ins.”

“I appreciate how detailed was the course in providing steps to deepen my relationship with my student’s families. It makes my upcoming school year exciting knowing that, I am more equipped to foster a harmonious relationship with my student’s families.”

“The family engagement course helped me improve the way I connect with families by teaching me how to build strong relationships and communicate clearly. I learned to listen, share important information in simple ways, and respect each family’s background and strengths. The course also showed me how to work as a team with parents to support their child’s learning and behavior.”

D. Shifting Perspectives on Family Engagement

The course helped shift participants’ mindsets about their role in family engagement. Educators reported increased understanding of their responsibility in initiating communication, viewing families as equal partners, and using a strengths-based approach in their interactions.

- On Educator’s role

“The class really helped open my eyes to how important it is for me to communicate with families. Even as an art teacher I can help families feel safer in our school community.”

“The course made me realize that it is my job to initiate the communication between school and home. It also inspired me to reach out to parents more often than just what is the bare minimum.”

- Seeing families as partners, not just receivers

“The course emphasized the importance of listening to parents’ perspectives, not just informing them about student progress, and this shift in mindset helped me create more meaningful relationships with families.”

- Being strengths-based

“Focus on a family’s strengths helped me shift my mindset for communication with families.”

E. Understanding the diversity within families; socio-economic/cultural

Educators appreciated content that encouraged them to reflect on the diversity within families, including socioeconomic and cultural factors, and how these elements can influence family engagement.

Educators valued learning about the diverse family structures, socioeconomic contexts, and cultural backgrounds represented in their schools. This content expanded their awareness and underscored the importance of avoiding assumptions and practicing culturally responsive engagement.

“This course helped me understand that families are diverse, and it’s important to avoid assumptions. Not every family consists of a mom, dad, son, and daughter.”

“Being reminded of how our diverse backgrounds have a massive influence on the way we talk, think, act, etc, and it’s important to recognize that and approach our students and their families with zero bias and prejudice.”

F. Not Helpful

A subset of participants, often those with extensive experience, felt the course was redundant.

However, even among veteran educators, some considered it a useful refresher that provided new ideas or reminders of best practices.

“I have been in education for 36 years in all roles from teacher, principal, program specialist. I have developed excellent parent involvement skills. I will say each class I took new ideas back to my classroom.”

Q2: What could make this course better?

A. More Implementation Strategies and Realistic Scenarios

Participants requested more real-world examples, complex case studies, role-plays, and peer-led discussions to help them apply learning more effectively in their own contexts.

“The course was informative and practical, but it could be even better with more real-life

examples or case studies, opportunities for peer collaboration, and ready-to-use templates for family engagement activities.”

B. Strategies for addressing barriers

Educators expressed a need for guidance on navigating barriers beyond their direct control, including limited administrative support, inconsistent school-wide systems, and challenges engaging hard-to-reach families.

“Focusing on school wide improvements.”

“Better ideas on how to get our schools on board”

“Reality check - a lot of the things required or expected of teachers stops with Admin. I can only do so much without risking my career and my family’s stability (because they rely on my career) if Admin is not on board, focused on, or prioritizing family engagement. I do what I can while recognizing parents and admin have a role as well.”

- Engaging “Difficult parents”

“Real world scenarios and discussions about dealing with difficult parents, largely absent parents, etc.”

C. Relevance to position, grade level, or specific school populations

Participants recommended more tailored content for different grade levels and school settings, including secondary schools, rural districts, Title I populations, and special education. Educators noted that their diverse roles require differentiated examples and applications.

- Grade level

“The course was geared towards elementary teachers. I teach high school so it was harder to find ways to incorporate the techniques.”

- School populations: Title I, Rural, Special Education

“A targeted training focused on the unique needs and dynamics of Title I school families would be incredibly valuable. Many caregivers are navigating complex, immediate challenges, such as work demands, housing insecurity, or lack of access to resources. This can impact their

ability to engage consistently in their child's education. At times, this can appear as disengagement or a lack of prioritization of K–5 learning, when in reality, it's often a reflection of survival-mode decision-making. With more training on how to approach these situations with empathy, cultural awareness, and effective communication strategies, we could foster stronger family partnerships and better support our students."

"A recognition and inclusion of rural school settings and the diversity of the roles of the students taking the class. It is difficult to create the projects and implement the learning to report in the ways requested you aren't a classroom teacher."

"When speaking about Special Education, because communication is vital to fulfilling specific goals listed on IEPs parents are a vital part of carrying through the same goals at home that are covered in school. The difficulty of properly communicating with those that do not respond is a challenge that needs more attention."

D. Technical Suggestions around Course Design

Suggestions included offering the course in person, lowering the cost, reducing busywork, shortening the overall length, and updating outdated materials.

E. Eliminating the Requirement

Some participants believed the course should not be a requirement for licensure or veteran educators.

"It does not need to be as long, and I do not believe it should be a provision on our Teacher license. As teachers, we already do everything that the course covered. It was a waste of time. I could have spent the amount of time I spent on the course doing what the course 'teaches'."

"Veteran teachers who have worked in many different school environments should not be forced to take this class. Hoops to jump through wasting precious time."

Family Engagement Survey (FEEB-E)

Please answer the following questions about your work with families at your school. The responses range from **very true of me** through **very untrue of me**. Read each statement and select the one response that most clearly represents how well the statement matches your abilities at the current time. You will receive a summary of your results upon completion of the full survey.

Part A: Collaborating for Learning

1. I am capable of assisting families in helping their children do well in school.
2. I can successfully encourage families to support their children's academics.
3. Even if a student is struggling, I am capable of helping a family engage in educational activities.
4. I am able to connect classroom learning to my students' home lives.

Part B: Communicating

5. I can communicate student progress to families in ways they understand.
6. I can confidently talk with families about concerns for struggling students.
7. I can use various communication methods to reach families.

Part C: Partnering

8. I can involve families in the school community.
9. I am capable of building connections among families.
10. I am able to incorporate families' ideas to improve my work.
11. I am able to prioritize partnering with families, even when I have a lot to do.
12. I can use data to learn how well I am engaging families in my school.
13. I can work together with families to advance common goals.
14. I can work with families to advocate for change in my school.

Part D: Honoring All Families

15. I can demonstrate respect for families who have a different culture than mine.
16. I am capable of valuing the perspectives of families of any background.
17. I can build relationships with families who are different from me.

Part E: Embracing Equity

18. I can reflect on how community history influences my relationships with families.
19. I can reflect on how social context influences my relationships with families.
20. I am able to recognize my biases when interacting with families.

Scoring

7. Very true of me
6. True of me
5. Somewhat true of me
4. Neutral
3. Somewhat untrue of me
2. Untrue of me
1. Very untrue of me

The Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Educators (FEEB-E) survey is copyrighted by Hadley F. Bachman, Ph.D., © 2023.
The survey can be accessed at the following:

Bachman, H. F. (2023). Family Engagement Efficacy Beliefs of Educators: Validating the Interpretation and Use of a New Measure [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center.
http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1679610038587067