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PARENT ADVOCACY FOR LITERACY INTERVENTION: A CASE STUDY OF MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation Proposal
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Literacy, Language, and Culture

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by
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August 2024

Accepted by:

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Dr. Cynthia Deaton
Dr. Lindsey Rowe
Dr. Lisa Aker

ABSTRACT

While systems of support are used in schools to assist students' academic growth, parents are not always informed of the support process or the academic goals set for their child (RTI Action Network, n.d.; Troisi, 2014; Weingarten et al., 2020). In the aftermath of the pandemic, students present a wide variety of academic needs (Lewis et al., 2021; Maldonado & De Witte, 2020), underscoring the importance of parent advocacy. In situations where a student needs additional supports, such as literacy intervention, the parent may become the child's best advocate (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Using a multiple case study design, the purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and experiences of four parents who advocated for their children's literacy needs by finding resources outside of school. Children of these parents were all male students with speech-language and literacy difficulties who received individualized literacy tutoring at a university reading clinic. Parents in this study told their personal and unique stories through interview responses, non-verbal behavior during interviews, and submission of documents selected to represent advocacy efforts.

Findings illustrate limitations to the general communication process offered by the school, privileges that influenced parents' abilities to advocate, and reflections of various roles. Based on these findings, this research presents an innovative model of the factors that influence parent advocacy, which builds from relevant literature and existing theoretical frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This study presents implications for

parents navigating through the advocacy process and for schools to use effective ways of communicating and providing resources to families.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the four parents who participated in this study, and to all parent advocates who work tirelessly each day to ensure their children have everything they deserve.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so humbled by the support system I have had around me the past four years. To Dr. C. C. Bates, you were an integral part of my decision to choose Clemson for my doctoral program. Watching you work with students in the center is truly inspiring, and I can only hope to have the knowledge you possess and the ability to convey it to others. I cannot thank you enough for the support you've shown me during my program here as an advisor, mentor, and someone I look up to. I've learned a great deal from observing, working, and writing with you, as well as all the nuggets of information you have passed down to me along the way.

Maryann McBride, you have been a huge support to me during my time at Clemson. I always felt like I could come to you to talk or to get advice, and I've learned a great deal from you about literacy intervention. You have always had my back through everything I've accomplished during my program.

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Dr. Lindsey Rowe and Lisa Aker, thank you for the feedback and support you have given on my dissertation. I value your knowledge and expertise and am honored to have you both on my committee.

Last but certainly not least, to my parents who have supported me in all aspects of my life. Mom, you are always there when I need you. Thank you for helping me realize what I am capable of. You encouraged me to pursue a doctoral degree and have always inspired me to work hard. Dad, you always made me laugh when I needed it, and gave me advice when I asked for it. Thank you for always being available to watch Fisher at a moment's notice when I was busy. Mom and Dad, what an honor to be the next Dr. Malloy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Even with high-quality classroom instruction, an expected 20% of students will need additional literacy intervention (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). These students are considered "at-risk" for reading difficulty (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023, p. 80) and fall further behind their grade level peers amidst growing interest for one-size-fits-all literacy curricula (National Education Policy Center [NEPC], 2020). This phenomenon has particular relevance following the COVID-19 pandemic, when students received varied instruction in terms of modality, quality, and consistency. Since the pandemic, researchers have predicted that students will present an increasing range of ability levels in the classroom (Lewis et al., 2021; Maldonado & De Witte, 2020).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) ensures a free and appropriate education to students with a disability affecting their academic performance (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). The number of students served under IDEA drastically increased after the pandemic, from 7.2 million students the previous year to 7.3 million served during the 2021–2022 school year. In that same year, students with specific learning disabilities were the largest group served under IDEA, at 32% (NCES, 2023). According to the NCES, a specific learning disability is "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think,

speak, read, write [or] spell" (NCES, 2023). The second largest group served under the IDEA were students with speech-language impairments, at 19% (NCES, 2023). The overall percentage of students served under IDEA has increased since the pandemic. Students who do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify for tiered interventions through MTSS. The next section discusses the use of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in U.S. schools to assist students with academic or behavioral needs.

Background

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

To provide early intervention, U.S. schools use a prevention and remediation framework formerly referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI uses multi-leveled tiers of support, with each level of intervention increasing in frequency and intensity. While RTI focuses on academic concerns, a separate framework, referred to as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), centers around behavioral concerns. An issue with these frameworks is that they "are often delivered in 'silos'" (Eagle et al., 2015, p. 161). Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a newer term introduced through legislation in 2015 as part of the Every Student Success Act (ESSA), which shifted the focus from special education to addressing the needs of all children (Schaffer, 2022). MTSS essentially merges the RTI and PBIS frameworks and is based on the idea that academic and behavioral issues are interconnected. An MTSS model adopts a wider lens to prevent academic, behavioral, and social-emotional issues. The term MTSS will be used throughout this study to reference multi-tiered frameworks.

Particularly after the pandemic, students who require additional literacy support have a wide range of instructional needs (Lewis et al., 2021; Maldonado & De Witte, 2020). Thus, each student who goes through the MTSS process should be handled as a unique case. All 50 states have invested in MTSS with the intent to identify and provide interventions to students who are not meeting benchmarks (I-MTSS Research Network, 2024). To classify students who have academic concerns, schools rely on screening tools approved by their state. For example, in South Carolina, 80% of school districts have used one of the four approved assessments: iReady Diagnostic (24 districts), MAP Reading Fluency (20 districts), Fastbridge (nine districts), and STAR Early Literacy with CBM (eight districts; SCDE, 2023). These types of assessments are commonly referred to as universal screeners. In 2023, universal screeners revealed that two fifths, or 40%, of students were at risk for reading difficulty and referred for further testing (SCDE, 2023). This number is alarmingly higher than the 20% of students expected to have literacy difficulties (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). As a result, South Carolina districts are required to create and submit MTSS protocols, which are publicly available through the SCDE *MTSS Annual Report* (2023). The SCDE recommends that any additional funding should be used for required MTSS literacy screenings (SCDE, 2023).

Students who represent the lowest 15%–25% of readers at a school are identified as at-risk for reading difficulties (Bates, 2019). Districts are required to provide these students with tiered, evidence-based intervention and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and the student's progress (SCDE, 2023). As part of the

MTSS model, students are served under multiple levels of support, from Tier 1 (least intensive) to Tier 3 (most intensive). Tier 1 instruction refers to the instruction given in the general classroom to all students. Students are only assessed for learning difficulties after they have received high-quality instruction in the general classroom using a core reading program adopted by the school or district (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). If a student is not making adequate progress in Tier 1, they may be referred for additional interventions provided in Tiers 2 or 3. Tier 2 intervention is generally provided in a small group setting and is for any student who needs more targeted instruction. This creates a unique opportunity for students who do not need an Individualized Education Program (IEP) but still need academic support in addition to Tier 1.

Progress monitoring assessments are an essential component of the MTSS framework, as they determine whether students are responding to intervention. It is expected that the smallest percentage of students, around 5%, will require Tier 3 intervention (Weingarten et al., 2020). Tier 3 intervention is given in a one-on-one setting and students are monitored more frequently. Students who require Tier 3 intervention may also be assessed for and diagnosed with a learning disability (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Students with a diagnosis are eligible for accommodations through an IEP, guaranteeing related services to meet their specific needs.

Issues with Using the MTSS Framework

Students may not receive the literacy supports they need within the MTSS framework for a several reasons. Some of these reasons include lack of funding or varied use of assessment criteria between schools when placing students in interventions

(Gartland & Strosnider, 2020). For example, universal screeners only show whether students are making adequate progress with Tier 1 instruction. They do not always reveal the complex processing issues contributing to a students' reading or writing difficulties. Due to these reasons, students may be over- or under-identified for intervention services. To ensure appropriate placement of students, Gartland and Strosnider (2020) suggest a number of quality interventions followed by a more comprehensive evaluation.

Multi-tiered frameworks rely on early identification of students, preferably in kindergarten or first grade, before they experience significant literacy difficulty. However, a study conducted in 2008 found that universal screenings falsely identified many students for Tier 2 instruction (Catts et al., 2015). Accuracy of universal screenings are determined by two levels: sensitivity (correctly predicting students who will have a reading disability) and specificity (correctly predicting who will not have a reading disability) (Catts et al., 2015). Screening assessments with a sensitivity level of 90% or greater and a specificity level of 80% or greater are considered acceptable (Catts et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2003). Consequently, results from universal screenings do not provide all the information needed and are not reliable for every student. With increasingly varied academic needs following the pandemic and the complexities of literacy acquisition, students are even more susceptible to reading difficulties and lack of early supports. In these situations, a parent can be the child's most important advocate (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Problem Statement

In addition to providing tiered, evidence-based intervention, districts are required to notify parents of students at risk for literacy difficulties and to provide them with resources to assist and support learning at home (SCDE, 2023). Yet, parents in one study reported a lack of understanding around MTSS and the academic goals set for their child (Troisi, 2014). These findings support the implication that schools do not always work collaboratively with families during the MTSS process, particularly in the first tiers of intervention (Weingarten et al., 2020). Parents may be unaware that their child is falling behind, and they may not know of resources to help them. Research is needed to understand how parents respond to a lack of communication within the school setting. In some cases, parents are inclined to advocate for their child by finding them support outside of the school setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and subsequent experiences of four parents' decisions to advocate outside of the school setting. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What motivates parents to seek assistance for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context?
2. What do parents experience when advocating for their child's literacy needs?

Parents involved in this study had children who needed literacy support in addition to Tier 1 instruction. Their children did not qualify for an IEP in reading or writing but most

of them had an IEP for a diagnosed speech-language disorder. Additionally, all four parents had students with speech-language needs contributing to literacy difficulty.

Research on parent advocacy largely involves activism regarding rights and accommodations outlined in a child's IEP (Besnoy et al., 2015; Boshoff et al., 2016; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004; Wright & Taylor, 2014). For example, parent advocacy research discusses successful strategies for parents to follow as they advocate for their child's IEP needs (Crozier, 1999; Duquette et al., 2011; Holcomb-McCoy & Bryan, 2010; Matthews et al., 2011). However, current discussions of parent advocacy do not consider that parents are advocates for their children's academic or behavioral needs regardless of IEP status. This research highlights a specific group of parent advocates whose children had unmet literacy needs without an IEP or diagnosed reading disorder. Nonetheless, the researcher-designed model used in this study can be used to discuss contributing factors of advocacy for all parents.

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks Used in This Study

This study is grounded in Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) work on parent involvement, Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The literature suggests that high levels of parent involvement are indicators of student achievement, including achievement test scores (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Craft, 2003). Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2005) offer a model that features predictors of parent involvement, specifically the parent's motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations from the school or teacher, and perceived life contexts.

Concepts such as the ones discussed in Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) can also be used to discuss parent advocacy. Thus, influenced by the current literature on parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), a researcher-designed model was used for the purposes of this study to discuss the contributing factors of parent advocacy in various settings. This model was additionally influenced by concepts of autonomy and relatedness, situated within the environmental context (Ryan & Deci, 2020). These concepts were used to support the factors contributing to the parents' advocacy experience.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory situated the experience of the parent within four ecological systems. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory was a helpful framework to situate parent advocacy in multiple settings in which the current model of parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) is limited. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the influence of the social environment in four main ecological systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The relevant literature and theory discussed above were used in the current study through data collection, analysis, and discussion of findings. In addition, a researcher-designed model adds to the current literature by offering a new framework to discuss contributing factors of parent advocacy beyond the immediate settings.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study employed a multiple case study design and included four separate cases, with each case focusing on the parent of a child who presented literacy difficulties

in grades K–2. Children of parent participants attended three different public elementary schools in a southeastern state between 2020 and 2023. Parents were purposefully selected because they were motivated to advocate for their child by seeking support outside of the school setting. Although children were involved in the selection process, this study focuses on the experience of their parents. To ease confusion, participants will be referred to as *parents* throughout the course of this paper. Parents engaged in three semi-structured interviews to discuss the nuances of advocating beyond the school setting. Interview transcripts were open-coded and then collapsed into pattern codes (Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2014). Video recordings of interviews were coded and analyzed separately to better understand parents' non-verbal behaviors towards when discussing certain topics. To corroborate parent's interview responses, documents were collected throughout the study. In addition to parents' advocacy efforts, documents supported themes that emerged from codes during data analysis. Themes emerged from cross analysis that highlighted the similarities and patterns from all four parent's experiences.

Population of Interest

The population of interest for this research involved parents whose children did not require an IEP for reading but did need additional literacy support. Prior to their advocacy efforts, parents in this research all had children in the primary grades who were falling behind their grade-level peers in reading. All four parents had male children with speech-language difficulties that contributed to literacy learning in some way. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children of the parents in this study received varied instruction.

Due to these factors, parents in this study contacted a university reading clinic in a southeastern state to seek additional literacy instruction for their child after school.

Significance of the Study

This study addressed a gap in the literature by highlighting a subset of parents who are under-researched in the current literature on parent advocacy. The parents in this study had children who did not necessarily need an IEP for reading but did need more literacy support than they were receiving in the school setting. This study added to the existing literature (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) by proposing a model to describe the contributing factors of parent advocacy. The model drew from Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2005) work on parent involvement, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, and Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory. This researcher-designed model can be used by schools and for future research to better understand the motivating factors of parent advocacy. Results from this study have particular significance for schools to collaborate more effectively with parents when identifying students who need intervention within an MTSS framework.

Definitions of Terms

Advocacy Expectation

Advocacy expectation is a term that emerged from the literature on parent advocacy (Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Rosetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004) that refers to an ongoing debate regarding whether it is the school's or parent's job to advocate for children's needs.

IDEA/IDEIA

IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, originally passed in 1990 as the Americans with Disabilities Act, was reauthorized in 2004. IDEIA is used in some literature as an acronym standing for Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act. For the purposes of this research, IDEA is used to maintain consistency.

MTSS

MTSS refers to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Compared to Response to Intervention (RTI), MTSS is a broader term that merges academic, behavioral, and social support systems for all students. Similar to RTI frameworks, MTSS uses a three-tiered system, with Tier 1 being the least intensive and Tier 3 being the most intensive level of support.

Parent(s)

While family dynamics vary by household, the term parent(s) is used for the purposes of this study to reflect existing language in parent involvement and parent advocacy research.

Parent Advocacy

Advocacy can be described as "speaking and acting on behalf of another person or group of people to help address their preferences, strengths, and needs" (Rossetti et al., 2021, p. 439). For this research, advocacy is defined as any behavior or action beyond the general requirement of parents as required by the school.

Parent Advocacy, Micro level

Advocacy at the micro level focuses on the individual child and their needs.

Parent Advocacy, Macro level

Advocacy at the macro level generally goes beyond the individual child and is focused on promoting larger changes or fixing inequities on behalf of a group.

Parent Involvement

According to the literature, an involved parent engages in home-based activities such as helping with homework, attending school events, or communicating with the classroom teacher(s) regarding the child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Green and colleagues (2007) describe two categories of involvement: *home-based involvement* and *school-based involvement*.

Parent Motivation

For the purposes of this study, a parent's motivation to advocate refers to their impetus to act on behalf of their child's needs.

RTI

RTI refers to Response to Intervention, a prevention and remediation framework with the intention of screening for and preventing reading or math difficulties. RTI provides increasingly intense levels of academic interventions and assessment (Byrd, 2011).

Speech-Language Impairment (SLI)

By definition, a speech-language impairment is "a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance" (NCES, 2023).

Tier 1 Instruction

Tier 1 instruction is high quality, research-based instruction given to all students in the general classroom.

Tier 2 Instruction

Tier 2 is considered intervention and can be given in the general classroom or outside of the classroom. Tier 2 interventions may be given in a small group setting to provide instruction on a target skill.

Tier 3 Instruction

Tier 3 interventions are intensive, individualized instruction for students who require the most academic support. When most effective, Tier 3 intervention is implemented by a trained professional in a one-to-one setting (Slavin et al., 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

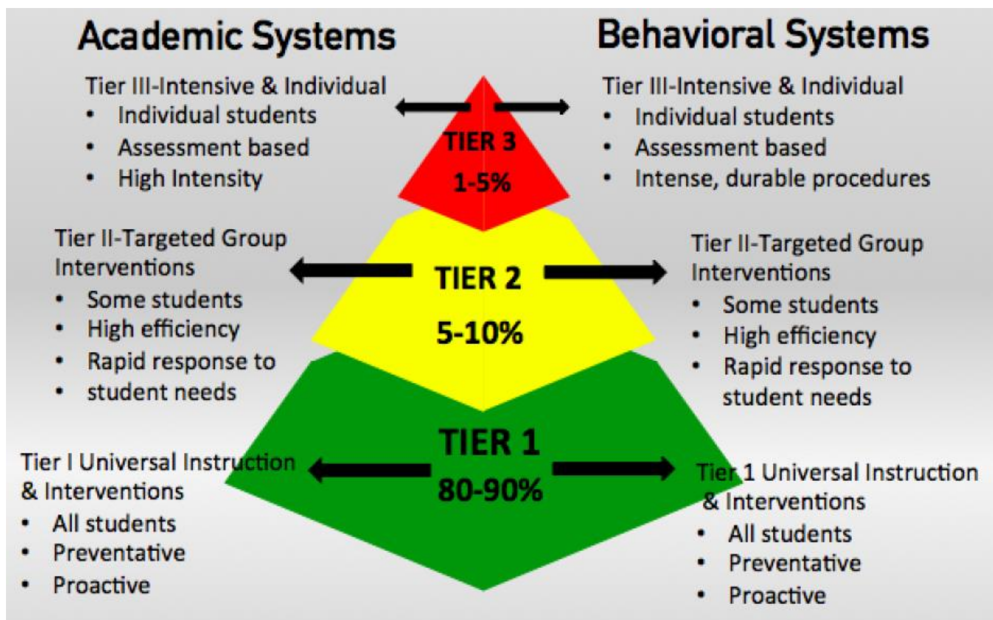
LITERATURE REVIEW

Current literature discusses a beneficial relationship between parent involvement and student outcomes (Anderson & Minke, 2007), as well as the value of parent advocacy within educational settings. Rarely is this discussion focused on the experience of advocacy from the parents' perspective. It is of particular interest in this study to understand the perception of parent advocates whose children are presenting literacy difficulties in the classroom. These children may require Tier 2 or 3 literacy intervention but may not require a diagnosis or IEP. It is a concern that these students are falling behind during a critical time of literacy development and acquisition. This review of the literature starts with a more detailed discussion of the MTSS framework and how it affects literacy instruction for students with literacy difficulties as well as students with diagnosed speech-language impairments. This review then discusses the theoretical framework used in this study as well as the relevant literature and existing theory that support the framework used.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Prior to the current implementation of MTSS, students had been experiencing reading difficulties for years without proper intervention (Lyon et al., 2001). This situation developed because federal law previously required that "schools determine eligibility for special education under the classification of specific learning disability using the ability-achievement discrepancy criterion" (Gartland & Strosnider, 2020, p.

196). Often, students in need of early intervention had to wait until this discrepancy appeared in the testing results. Due to this delay, students may not have received the services they needed until third or fourth grade (Leonard et al., 2019). MTSS defies traditional approaches to education that previously denied students the services they needed without a diagnosis. With successful implementation, students should receive intervention services as early as kindergarten. MTSS uniquely merges general and special education, giving students with significant learning needs access to services regardless of their disability status (Weingarten et al., 2020). A visual model of MTSS is shown in Figure 2.1 with Tier 1 intervention at the bottom of the pyramid and Tier 3 intervention at the top.



Note. From *The South Carolina Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Early Literacy Development & Reading* (p. 10) by South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), 2020, (https://ed.sc.gov/instruction/early-learning-and-literacy/multi-tiered-system-of-supports-mtss/sc-dyslexia-handbook/south-carolina-dyslexia-handbook/). In the public domain.

Figure 2.1

SC Multi-Tiers of Instruction and Behavior Model

The pyramid shape visually represents the number of students expected to receive each level of intervention as well as the increasing level of intensity as students move up in tiers. The following sections will describe what should be expected in each tiered level within the MTSS framework, with a particular focus on literacy instruction.

Tier 1 Intervention

According to Loftus-Rattan et al. (2023), MTSS is "built upon the idea that prevention is preferable to remediation" (p. 79). Consequently, there is an increasing need to improve Tier 1 instructional practices. Now more than ever, schools are focused on implementing practices that work. Tier 1 involves high-quality, evidence-based instruction and periodic universal screenings given to all students. Some of the ways schools implement high-quality instruction is by using data-based decision making and evidence-based practices (EBPs).

Data-Based Decision Making

The South Carolina MTSS model (SCMTSS) uses four measures to identify students for tiered interventions, each serving a different purpose within the problem-solving model: universal screenings, diagnostic assessments, progress monitoring, and outcome assessments (SCDE, 2022). As a part of Tier 1 intervention, all students are assessed using universal screenings three times per school year. Universal screenings are described as "brief and quick to grade," standardized, and "used to identify whether students are at, above, or below benchmark" (SCDE, 2022, p. 20). Loftus-Rattan and colleagues (2023) described universal screenings as "brief indicators of overall

knowledge, skill, performance, or needs" (p. 81). Universal screenings tell teachers whether there could be a potential learning issue.

Diagnostic assessments are given to students who are not meeting benchmarks, as they are more extensive than a universal screening. Diagnostic assessments focus on one area, identify a deficit skill, and are used to form intervention groups (SCDE, 2022). Progress monitoring requires a cycle of teaching, testing, regrouping, and assessing (SCDE, 2022). Progress monitoring assessments are given between benchmarks "to determine the effectiveness of instruction and interventions on a regular basis" (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023, p. 82). Students are then monitored on a regular basis and subsequent data are reviewed frequently to ensure the length of time students are kept in interventions is appropriate. Finally, outcome assessments align to standards and give the ability to compare districts and schools across the state. Outcome assessments are summative and not useful for making instructional adjustments (SCDE, 2022).

While the use of data-based decision making has become "a ubiquitous part of policy and school reform efforts," we know little about how teachers are using data to group students or plan for instruction (Park & Datnow, 2017, p. 281). In fact, Loveless (2013) claimed the use of data for instructional decisions can lead to a rise in ability groupings, particularly for elementary grades. For example, universal screenings used in Tier 1 settings do not provide a complete overview of a child's literacy skills, nor do they always align with classroom instruction (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023). Yet, schools rely on these universal screenings to determine whether students will need Tier 2 or 3 intervention.

Evidence-Based Practices

Federal laws (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; IDEA, 2004) have influenced a push towards the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) for instruction implemented within MTSS frameworks. Efficient use of evidence-based Tier 1 reading instruction is critical to "meeting a diverse range of student learning needs" (Swanson et al., 2017, p. 1639). The use of programs supported by strong research is said to have a higher chance of effectiveness (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2011). EBPs are described in the literature as follows:

> [T]he peer-reviewed research uses sound experimental or quasi-experimental design, there is detailed information available about the participants and procedures used in the research, the research includes rigorous data analysis (including effect sizes), and replication of positive outcomes are present in the research (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023, p. 84).

Success of the MTSS framework is contingent on high-quality Tier 1 instruction and a safe environment that recognizes students' well-being. Within the literature, high-quality instruction involves EBP's and a social-emotional learning component. Thus, school-wide practices should promote positive and appropriate behaviors (Swanson et al., 2017). Compared with older models of RTI, this framework is designed to equally weight academic success and social-emotional well-being.

Tier 2 Intervention

When MTSS meetings occur, all students are discussed, but students who are considered for Tier 2 or 3 intervention are discussed in more detail. MTSS discussions

are separate from IEP meetings, where students receive special education services related to a diagnosis. Rather, MTSS conversations involve initial concerns and identification of students within a grade level who may need additional support. For those who qualify, Tier 2 provides targeted, small group, evidence-based intervention to a predicted 15% of students (Figure 2.1). Students should be receiving Tier 2 interventions in addition to Tier 1 instruction, rather than in place of Tier 1. Researchers examining the effectiveness of Tier 2 interventions found positive outcomes when intervention was provided in "small groups of three to five students, delivered for 30-40 minutes three to five times per week, and was designed to target very specific skills" (Loftus-Rattan, 2023, p. 81). For example, a Tier 2 intervention might provide instruction that explicitly targets reading fluency, rather than providing students with extra reading time (Burns et al., 2005).

Tier 2 intervention should include targeted and focused instruction, many opportunities to practice skills, and immediate feedback (Harlacher & Merrell, 2010; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023). Although students' progress is monitored regularly, it is unclear exactly how often teachers and interventionists are required to implement progress monitoring or analyze data from their results (Gartland & Strosnider, 2020). For students receiving Tier 2 interventions, it is suggested that progress monitoring should occur between twice a week and once a month, depending on the level of risk (Hosp et al., 2016; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023; Riley-Tillman et al., 2013).

Tier 2 interventions use a standard treatment protocol, meaning that students are grouped based on a general area of need (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023). Students are then given instruction from a standardized intervention program, which is generally highly

scripted. This allows for schools to utilize more staff to teach Tier 2 interventions, from paraprofessionals or classroom aides to tutors or librarians. When interventions are heavily scripted, they can be taught by those without rigorous training or extensive background knowledge in the curriculum (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023; Marchand-Martella et. al., 2007).

Tier 3 Intervention

Tier 3 interventions provide the highest level of intensity for students who are not responding adequately to Tier 1 or Tier 2 instruction. These students may be performing significantly below grade-level expectations and may need special education services (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023). Five percent of students are expected to require Tier 3 interventions for "severe, persistent learning and behavioral needs'' (Weingarten et al., 2020, p. 124). Progress monitoring for students in Tier 3 is intended to occur more frequently than in Tier 2.

Tier 3 interventions are designed to meet individual student needs. Loftus-Rattan and colleagues (2023) gave an example of what individualized planning may look like at the Tier 3 level:

> [I]f a student was in a Tier 2 intervention group with a focus on building decoding skills (i.e., sounding out words) and did not make progress in that intervention, we would want to understand what specific sub-skills (e.g., long vowel sounds) are challenging the student that can be more specifically targeted in Tier 3. (p. 81)

Due to the specificity of instruction, research implies that one-on-one instruction is most effective in improving reading performance (Slavin et al., 2011). In addition to a one-on-one setting, Tier 3 intervention can be intensified by providing the instruction more frequently. For example, if a student was receiving Tier 2 intervention three days a week, services might increase to five days a week after transitioning to Tier 3. Loftus-Rattan and colleagues (2023) suggested that Tier 3 interventions should be provided by interventionists "with higher levels of expertise" (p. 81). The goal of MTSS is to provide quality instruction to all students in the Tier 1 setting, leaving Tier 3 intervention for the few students who present the most serious difficulties.

MTSS and Literacy Instruction in South Carolina

In their report, the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) prioritized five main components of effective early reading instruction (Grades K–3): phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Likewise, reading instruction in South Carolina should include "the five essential components of reading" (SCDE, 2020). The *South Carolina Dyslexia Handbook* also states that students benefit from instruction that follows consistent routines, gives students frequent opportunities to practice skills, and is in alignment with the *SC College- and Career-Ready ELA Standards* for each grade level (SCDE, 2020). The handbook also describes high-quality instruction as using systematic and explicit strategies (SCDE, 2020). Systematic instruction means that "phonemes, phonics, and morphology are taught in a logical order beginning with more simple concepts and skills and moving to more complex ones" (SCDE, 2020). Explicit instruction involves clear objectives for learning, demonstrations of the skill,

opportunities for the student to practice with feedback from the teacher, and time to practice skills independently (SCDE, 2020).

Prescriptive Curricula

The MTSS model predicts that "when students receive high-quality, research-based instruction, students should be able to make appropriate gains" (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Loftus-Rattan et al., 2023). According to Slavin and colleagues (2011), high-quality instruction over the course of several years is needed to see these effects. There is no expectation that brief, intensive tutoring will put the students permanently on track with their grade-level peers. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, new legislation has been adopted regarding early literacy instruction that requires schools to implement programs that promote a lock-step scope and sequence (NEPC, 2020). Based on recommendations from the NRP (2000), systematic phonics instruction has been included in the Common Core Initiatives. Since then, more core reading programs involve basal readers with "tightly scripted teacher's editions and student workbooks" (Ward et al., 2022, p. 90). Teachers are expected to move through these programs with fidelity, meaning "moving through the prescriptive lessons and activities in a lock-step manner" (Ward et al., 2022, p. 90). Not only do these types of programs limit students' time to work with authentic texts, but they also make it more difficult for teachers to meet students' individualized needs. Most literacy programs used in Tier 1 settings rely on systematic skill instruction taught mainly in whole-group settings (NEPC, 2020).

In addition to the issue of highly prescriptive curricula, teachers are also overwhelmed with implementing them (Leonard et al., 2019). Teachers have reported

finding it difficult to teach every component of these newly legislated reading programs within the allotted 90 minutes (Leonard et al., 2019). They additionally reported difficulty deciphering which components of the reading program to prioritize when time was a barrier, leading to inconsistent instructional practice. Teachers in one study reported the task of following reading programs with fidelity "impossible" despite advice from their schools to implement the program as directed (Leonard et al., 2019, p. 114).

Speech-Language Impairments and Literacy Learning

Some students have other factors that contribute to their difficulty with literacy learning, such as a diagnosed speech-language impairment (SLI), a specific category of diagnosis that falls under developmental language disorders (DLD; Georgan et al., 2023). By definition, SLI is "a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance" (NCES, 2023, Figure 2). Of all U.S. students who received services under the IDEA during the 2021–2022 school year, 19% had SLI, making it the second largest disability type served under IDEA for that year (NCES, 2023).

With the latest push for EBPs and high-quality literacy instruction, an awareness of the connection between early language disorders and literacy learning has increased (Ervin, 2001). SLI diagnoses make up the majority of students with DLDs and are at an increased risk of having reading difficulties (Catts et al., 2002; Snowling et al., 2000). The relative strengths of a students' speech and language processing may be different for each student. Gillon and colleagues (2020) described that some students, for example, might need scaffolding to articulate letter names and sounds or read words aloud. Others

might need support to strengthen their phonological working memory "to enhance their phoneme awareness and word learning, given the unique contribution of phonological working memory to speech accuracy" (Gillon et al., 2020, p. 358). The nuances of each student's SLI diagnosis are important to understanding how they learn literacy.

One step to increase identification of students with speech and/or literacy difficulties is to incorporate measurements of oral language to existing MTSS frameworks. Aside from phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge, oral language is not generally included in universal screeners (Adlof, 2020). Direct measurements of oral language skills used in universal screeners and in progress monitoring assessments would increase identification for students with SLIs who are likely to have difficulty with reading comprehension (Adlof, 2020).

Parents and MTSS

It is important to acknowledge that family dynamics vary by household, meaning a child's caregiver may include, but is not limited to, their mother and/or father. It is a reality that many students are primarily cared for by other family members or relatives. For the purposes of this paper, the terms *families* and *parent(s)* are used interchangeably and reflect the language of the current literature. Within the current literature on parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), it is unclear how involved parents are within each stage of the MTSS process. As mentioned earlier, MTSS is designed to merge general and special education so that students have access to services with or without a diagnosis. Since the passing of IDEA (2004), schools are required to notify parents of decisions related to special education

services. It would seem reasonable, then, for parents to be involved from the start of the MTSS process. However, since schools within their respective districts are asked to create MTSS plans (SCDE, 2023), it is likely that these plans vary between schools, districts, and states. Along with its general procedures, the ways in which schools involve parents during the MTSS process are likely varied as well.

Current literature is rich with descriptions of parent involvement, including ways of engaging in educational activities as well as parents' roles and perceptions about involvement. Examples of parent involvement include attending events or conferences (school-based involvement) or helping with homework (home-based involvement) (Green et al., 2007). In addition to attending conferences, school-based involvement behaviors include meeting with the teacher or observing in the child's classroom (Green et al., 2007). In contrast, home-based involvement behaviors are between the child and parent, take place outside of school, and are related to the child's learning. Positive and productive relationships between schools and families benefit more than the student's educational trajectory. In fact, literature suggests that high levels of parent involvement lead to higher job satisfaction for teachers and higher levels of self-efficacy for parents (Kashima et al., 2009).

Predictors of Parent Involvement

Research shows several variables contributing to the level of productivity, positivity, and overall benefit of parent-teacher interactions (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Green et al., 2007; Kelly, 2001). Green and colleagues (2007) found that both home- and school-based involvement were influenced by positive relationships with teachers. One

characteristic of these positive relationships were general or specific invitations from the school or child's teacher. A welcoming school climate can be perceived as a general invitation to participate, attend, or otherwise become involved. In comparison, specific invitations are described as "distinct requests" from the teacher, such as requesting the parent to chaperone a field trip or observe in their child's classroom (Anderson & Minke, 2007, p. 313). In one study, specific invitations from teachers had the largest effect on parent involvement and the "greatest potential for control by individual teachers" (Anderson & Minke, 2007, p. 315).

One unique aspect of positive interactions between teachers and parents in Kelly's (2001) study were that they occurred face-to-face. Kelly (2001) found that when parents interacted with teachers in person, such as to observe a lesson, it greatly influenced their level of involvement. The ability to observe lessons not only helped improve communication between the teacher and parent, but also encouraged the parent to participate with reading activities at home. Parents from Kelly's (2001) study reported "a greater sense of self-efficacy for helping their child at home" when they had the opportunity to observe at the school (p. 42). Relationships in which teachers specifically invited parents to be partners improved parents' involvement in their child's educational experiences (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Green et al., 2007; Kelly, 2001).

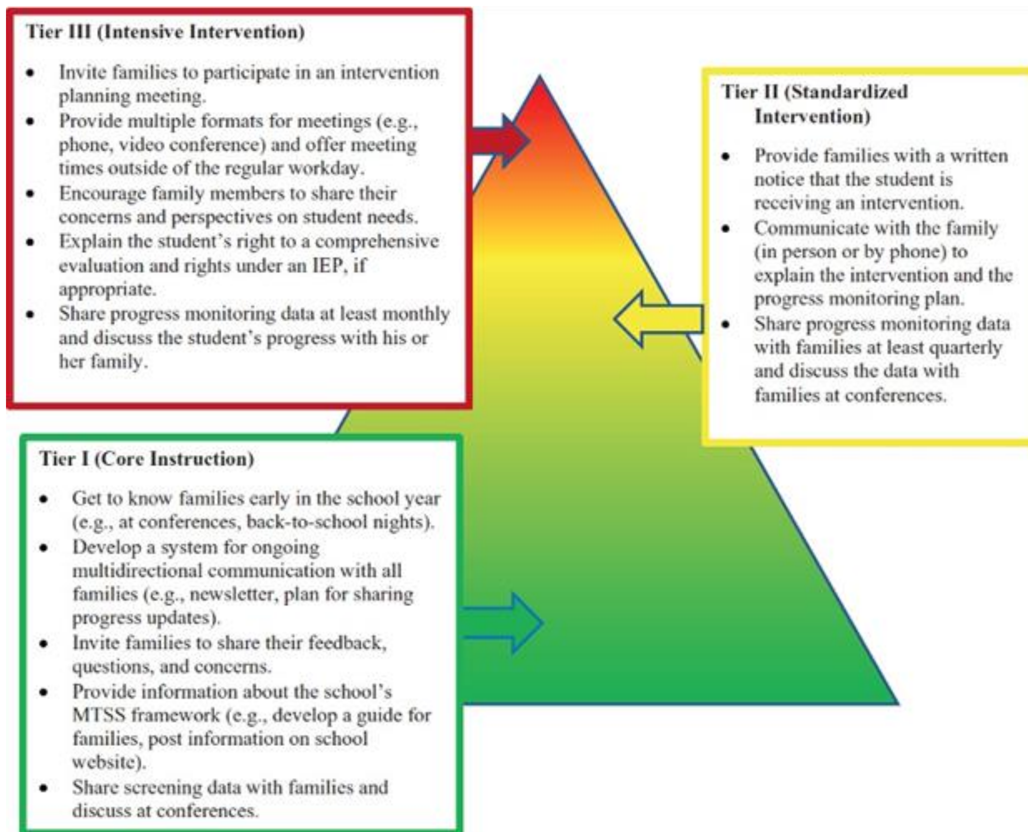
Parents' Knowledge of MTSS

A major component of the MTSS framework is an emphasis on family, school, and community partnerships. However, preliminary research showed that while some parents were familiar with the term MTSS, they lacked understanding about how it

related to their child's education (Troisi, 2014). Specifically, parents were not aware of the academic and behavioral goals set for their child (Troisi, 2014). Parents from this survey reported an overall dissatisfaction with the level of communication at the child's school (Troisi, 2014). Generally speaking, parents may lack understanding of the difference between MTSS and special education (Troisi, 2014; Weingarten et al., 2020). Additionally, parents are not always aware of how they can request an initial evaluation under IDEA (Weingarten et al., 2020). Schools are required to provide parents with information such as MTSS terminology, an overview of the tiered interventions, and any changes the school makes related to the process (RTI Action Network, n.d.). However, this type of information may be posted on the school's website or conveyed through a written pamphlet and is not required to be delivered in person (Weingarten et al., 2020). This implies that parents who see this information do not have the opportunity to clarify meanings with teachers in-person. In other cases, this information may be overlooked.

Role of Parents in MTSS

Since the implementation of MTSS across the U.S., literature has grown with suggestions related to family-school partnerships when implementing tiered interventions. Weingarten and colleagues (2020) shares recommendations for partnering with families within each level of the MTSS process, shown in Figure 2.2.



Note. From "Better Together: Using MTSS as a Structure for Building School–Family Partnerships," by Z. Weingarten, R. Zumeta Edmonds, and S. Arden, 2020, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *53*(2), p. 125 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920937733). Copyright 2020 by the authors. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 2.2

Practices to Support School-to-Family Partnerships Across the Tiers of MTSS

As evident in Figure 2.2, a clear discrepancy exists between the expected level of parent involvement in Tier 1 and Tier 3 of the MTSS process. During Tier 1, the model suggests developing a system for multidirectional communication with families. According to Weingarten and colleagues (2020), multidirectional communication "means that information flows back and forth between families and school personnel and that all participants can initiate communication" (p. 126). However, examples from the model to support this suggestion (e.g., newsletter, plan for sharing progress updates) describe one-

directional communication. For example, sharing progress updates through a written report does not initiate multidirectional conversation between teacher and parent. In comparison, prioritizing face-to-face communications with the parent could ensure the information is received and understood.

Another issue with the suggestions in Figure 2.2 is that parents are not given specific invitations to attend in-person meetings until students have a need for Tier 3 intervention. Therefore, schools and families are not necessarily collaborating around the student's academic or behavioral needs until Tier 3. Research shows that when family-school partnerships were successful, they had collaborative components (Christenson & Carlson, 2005). For example, schools and families engaged in joint progress monitoring and focused on specific and measurable goals for the student. In these collaborative partnerships, the parents were seen as helpful to the child's learning progress (Christenson & Carlson, 2005; Kashima et al., 2009). Rather than waiting until students need intensive supports, collaborative efforts should be established at the start of MTSS. According to McLeskey and colleagues (2017), spending the time to discuss and interpret data with families is a much more valuable practice than sending the information in written form.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Research previously assumed that parents' decisions to become involved related mostly to their skills and competencies (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). For example, a parent who works as a wildlife biologist may be more likely to volunteer for a field trip to the zoo. However, more recent research suggests that several variables

contribute to a parents' level of involvement. Likewise, certain variables serve as barriers to a parent's involvement. Williams and Sánchez (2013) identified time and financial resources, in large part due to employment demands, as examples of such barriers. Williams and Sánchez (2013) suggested that parents who lack the resources to help their child academically have more difficulty being involved in their education. In addition to employment or family demands, parents may have had their own negative experiences in schools that influence decisions to be involved (Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

Parent Advocacy

An involved parent is active and engaged at school or home in the capacity to which they are available or willing. Advocacy is different from involvement because it requires the parent to take actions that extend beyond the general requirements of overseeing homework or attending conferences. Rosetti and colleagues (2021) defined advocacy as "speaking and acting on behalf of another person or group of people to help address their preferences, strengths, and needs" (p. 439). According to Wright and Taylor (2014), advocacy can be categorized at the micro or macro level. At the micro level, parents' efforts to advocate are focused on the individual child, such as when advocating for improved services within the school. At the macro level, "the personal becomes political" and "advocacy becomes activism" (Wright & Taylor, 2014, p. 594). Advocacy can take place at the school or elsewhere, such as at medical clinics or at social events (Wright & Taylor, 2014). Thus, current definitions of advocacy widen the settings in which efforts may occur.

Motivations for Parents to Advocate

According to literature on parent involvement, parents who believed they were knowledgeable themselves were more comfortable asking for help (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). These parents asked others in the family to help, asked the child for more information from school, or sought additional help themselves (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Wang and colleagues (2004) found that one reason parents advocated within the school setting was because they were dissatisfied with the quality of their child's education. Parents from this particular study advocated for their children who had diagnosed disabilities, expressing "a denial of services or perceived failure [by the school] to provide an appropriate education [to their children]" (Wang et al., 2004, p. 149). Parents reported dissatisfaction not only with the services their child received but with individual service providers as well, expressing frustration that led to additional stress in their lives (Wang et al., 2004). One parent reported feeling "betrayed by the educational system" after being asked to sign an IEP without a meeting beforehand (Wang et al., 2004, p. 150). Another parent from Wang and colleagues (2014) study commented that system provisions not only affected their child but weighed on their family's quality of life. These circumstances led parents in this study to advocate within the school setting.

According to Wright and Taylor (2014), a parents' decision to advocate is dependent on their level of self-efficacy. Consistent with the research on parent involvement, parents must have the knowledge and belief in their own ability to serve as

effective advocates. More research is needed to explain the parent advocate's experience working towards high levels of knowledge and self-efficacy.

Advocacy Expectation

The *advocacy expectation* resulted from the implementation of IDEA (2004) which required parents' participation in meetings related to their child's education. However, parents reported "effort beyond participation," leading to the idea of the advocacy expectation (Rossetti et al., 2021, p. 438). The advocacy expectation refers to the assumption that the responsibility to advocate lies with the parent. Although parents have been labeled as natural advocates (McCammon et al., 2018), the advocacy expectation assumes that all parents have the time, energy, skill, and knowledge to dedicate to the cause. Some researchers consider the advocacy expectation unreasonable, suggesting that it promotes cultural dissonance and "situat[es] some parents at a disadvantage" (Rossetti et al., 2021, p. 439).

Barriers and Challenges to Advocate

Wright and Taylor (2014) assert that parents with higher income have the necessary funds to pay for services their child might need, whereas parents with a lower income must defer to the services provided by the school. Limited financial resources restrict the freedom parents have to pursue other services outside of school. Rossetti and colleagues (2021) added that parents with higher income tend to use jargon or refer to published knowledge about disabilities when communicating with teachers or school professionals. Using similar verbiage makes it easier for parents to communicate with

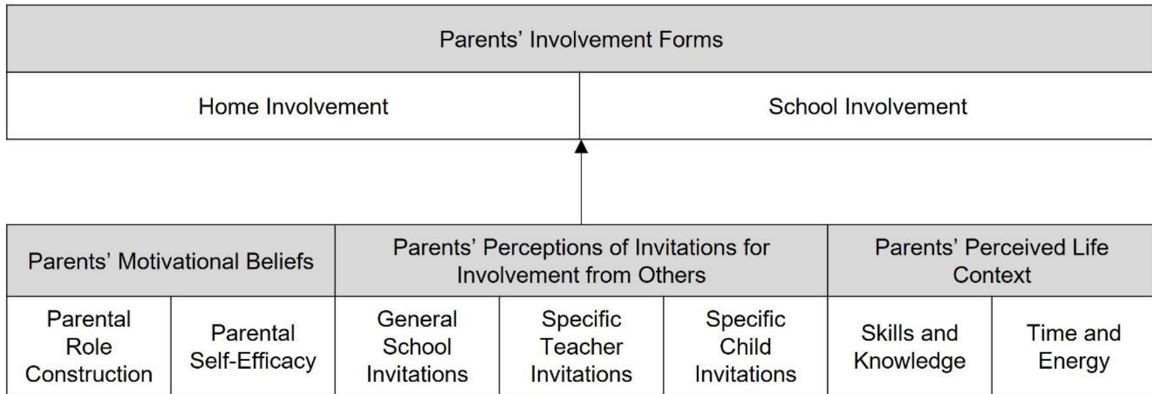
their child's school and generally leads to more successful advocacy (Rossetti et al., 2021).

In addition to a general lack of funds, many parents are compelled to prioritize basic needs in their family, making it challenging to supplement their child's educational expenses (Dunst et al., 1994). Similarly, logistical issues such as work schedules limit families' availability for meetings during school hours. Harry and colleagues (1995) found that schools tend to use written documents to communicate information that include professional terminology, which deters some parents from reciprocating with in-person conversation. While written documents can be easier and more efficient for communication, the professional terminology they contain can be intimidating for parents, creating challenges in a parent's effort to advocate.

Theoretical Framework

An Existing Theory of Parent Involvement

A well-established model (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) provides a framework to discuss parent involvement within the home and school setting. This model features several *predictors* of a parent's decision to become involved (Figure 2.3). A parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations from others, and perceived life contexts essentially predict high or low levels of parent involvement (Green et al., 2007). In the following section, each of these predictors of parent involvement are discussed.



Note. From "Parents' Motivations for Involvement in Children's Education: An Empirical Test of a Theoretical Model of Parental Involvement," by C. L. Green, J. M. Walker, K. V. Hoover-Dempsey, and H. M. Sandler, 2007, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(3), p. 533 (https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.532). Copyright 2007 by American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 2.3

Level 1 of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement

Parents' Motivational Beliefs

A parent's motivational beliefs are dictated by their perceived role construction and level of self-efficacy (Figure 2.3). Role construction "incorporates parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their child's education" (Green et al., 2007, p. 532). Self-efficacy is the belief that a parent can "act in ways that will produce desired outcomes" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 108). Parents must believe they can be helpful to participate in home- or school-based involvement activities. Together, role construction and self-efficacy motivate decisions to become involved.

Role Construction

Researchers imply that while role construction consists of existing beliefs, parents are also influenced by the social environment (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Role

construction is “shaped by the expectations of individuals and groups important to the parent about the parent’s responsibilities relevant to the child’s schooling” (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Parents may be influenced by expectations of themselves and opinions from others about how they should be involved as a parent, or how children should be raised. Since role construction is shaped by experiences, it can be influenced by positive or negative interactions and is subject to change over time. Williams and Sánchez (2013) found that some parents avoided school-based involvement activities due to their own negative experiences interacting within the school setting. Comparatively, descriptions of role construction imply that positive interactions can increase parent involvement, or even reverse the effects of previous negative experiences. Role construction influences motivation, which contributes to higher levels of involvement at school or home.

Self-Efficacy

The second predictor of parent involvement is the parent’s level of self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to produce a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The concept of self-efficacy suggests that parents create realistic goals for themselves based on their level of confidence in achieving that goal. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parents report higher or lower levels of self-efficacy which influence how persistent they are towards their respective goals towards involvement. Similar to role construction, self-efficacy is socially constructed because it is influenced by experiences and interactions with others. Thus, an involved parent with

high levels of self-efficacy believes they will be successful in their efforts to support their child's learning (Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Perceptions of Invitations

Parents are more likely to become involved when they receive specific invitations to participate from the child's teacher or school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kelly, 2001). Therefore, specific invitations should suggest that the parent's participation is "welcome, valuable, and expected by the school and its members" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 110). While strong levels of role construction and self-efficacy precede high levels of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), specific invitations help to motivate parents who appear more passive. Parents who perceive invitations from the teacher in a positive light are more involved as a result (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

Perceived Life Contexts

Perceived life contexts serve as a third major predictor of involvement in Green and colleagues' (2007) model of parent involvement. According to the model, a parent's skill, knowledge, time, and energy are indicators of a perceived life contexts and influence decisions to be involved. If a parent believes they have the skill and knowledge to help with a specific task, such as a homework problem, they are more likely to involve themselves in that task (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Similarly, parents are involved when they have the time and energy to devote to a task. Parents' perceived level of skills, knowledge, time, and energy related to their child's education motivate their decisions to be involved.

Influences of Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT), labeled “a broad theory of human development and wellness,” assumes that people desire growth and connection (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1). With supportive conditions, people have “inherent motivational propensities” to learn and grow in their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1). While Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler’s (1995, 1997) work on parent involvement considered motivational beliefs, SDT assists in understanding how these motivational beliefs influence a parents’ experience. According to SDT, a person is motivated to make decisions that are influenced by their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Autonomy

Autonomy involves a person’s sense of initiative and ownership to take action (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to SDT, people are motivated by interest or value. Thus, autonomy can be fueled by different forms of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. SDT recognizes that the “most intentional behaviors are multiply motivated” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 3). Intrinsic motivation describes when a person’s actions are done “for their own sake,” seemingly for interest or enjoyment. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is more controlled, and actions are influenced by external pressures. According to SDT, people who are more autonomous are more intrinsically motivated to act. Discussion of SDT, specifically about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, generally focus on the student and their motivation towards instructional tasks. However, discussions of motivation in the current study will focus on parent advocates.

Competence

A perception of competence concerns the feeling of mastery in the sense that one can succeed and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to SDT, a feeling of competence is best satisfied in environments that offer support. Since the notion of competence has such close similarity to the concept of self-efficacy (Green et al., 2007), it was not necessary to use both terms in the current study. Thus, self-efficacy was the chosen term for purposes of this research.

Relatedness

The concept of relatedness is indicated by the degree to which the individual senses belonging and connection (Ryan & Deci, 2020). People are affected by the social environment, whether it is proximal (family or school) or distal (cultural value or economic system) (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Where there are obstacles to any of the three psychological needs of SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), an individual's ability to act or advocate is diminished (Ryan & Deci, 2020). All three concepts are dependent on a supportive environment. Thus, relationships between schools and families are an integral part of the social context influencing a parents' motivation to be involved. With the current model of parent involvement (Green et al., 2007), only the home and school settings are mentioned. In terms of advocacy, however, some parents are driven to move beyond these settings to seek additional support for their child. In this sense, parents' decisions to become involved can evolve into decisions to advocate.

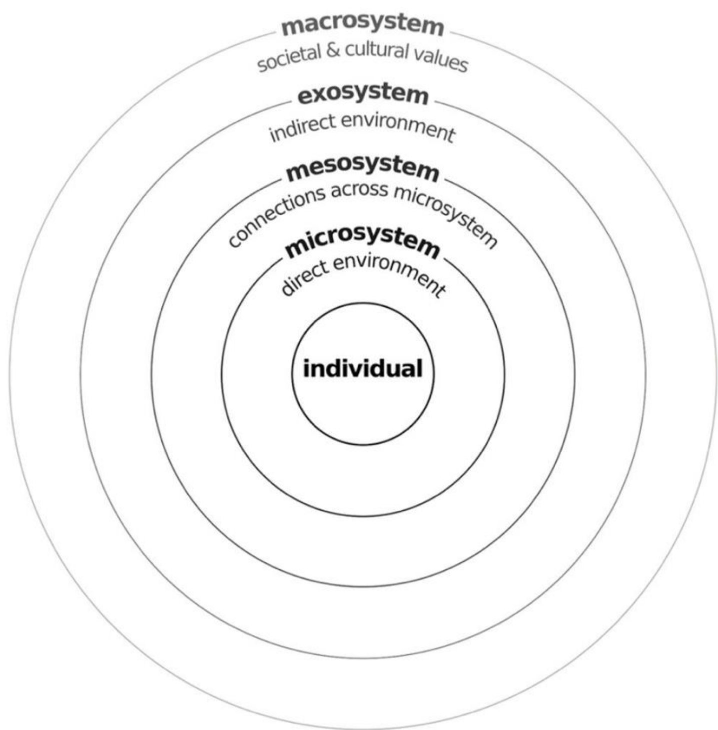
Parent Motivations to Advocate Within an Ecological Systems Theory

While there are several existing definitions of motivation and theories surrounding motivation, this research intends to define motivation as it relates to parent advocacy. For the purposes of this research, a parent's motivation is defined as the impetus to act on behalf of their child, specifically pertaining to their literacy development and needs.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory describes the influence of social environments on human development. This model consists of four environmental systems—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem—each impacting the developing person in different ways. As seen in Figure 2.4, each ecological system is nested within the next "like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). Ecological systems theory involves a "principle of interconnectedness" that applies not only within settings but "with equal force and consequence to linkages between settings" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 7).

At the center of the model is the individual, known as the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ecological environments extend beyond the developing person themselves and the immediate situation affecting that person. Figure 2.4 displays a visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's model.



Note. From "Operationalizing Relevance in Physics Education: Using a Systems View to Expand our Conception of Making Physics Relevant," by A. Nair and V. Sawtelle, 2019, *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, *15*(2), Article 020121 (https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.15.020121). CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.4

Visual Representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Model

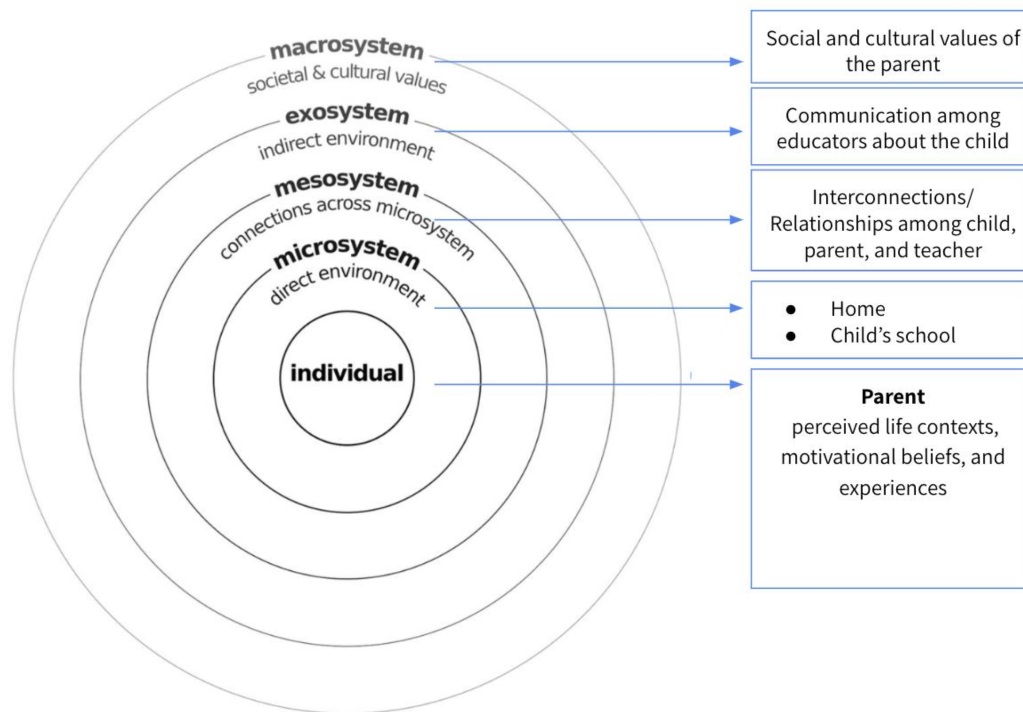
The microsystem is defined as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined a setting as a place where people can "readily engage in face-to-face interaction" with others; for example, at home, daycare, the child's school, and so forth (p. 22). The activities, roles, and interpersonal connections related to the developing person represent the building blocks of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While the microsystem involves the direct settings of the environment, an understanding of the mesosystem requires "looking beyond single

settings to the relations between them" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). These relations are often described as intersetting connections and refer to the connections made between adults in a given setting.

In both the microsystem and mesosystem, the developing person actively participates. However, this changes in the exosystem, where "the person's development is affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). Finally, the macrosystem takes the developing person's social and cultural influences into account for the previous three levels of the ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that while the physical settings a person enters tend to appear similar, between cultural groups they are distinctly different. Each culture creates a "blueprint for the organization of every type of setting," and these blueprints change based on behavior and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 4).

The Parent at the Center of Bronfenbrenner's Model

For the purposes of this study, the parent will be positioned at the center of the model and will represent the developing person. Within each level of the ecological environment, the parent is developing skills as an advocate for their child's individual literacy needs. A visual representation of this model, with the parent at the center, can be seen in Figure 2.5.



Note. Adapted from "Operationalizing Relevance in Physics Education: Using a Systems View to Expand our Conception of Making Physics Relevant," by A. Nair and V. Sawtelle, 2019, *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, *15*(2), Article 020121 (https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.15.020121). CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.5

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Model with Parent at the Center

With the parent as the focus of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, it is easier to frame parent within an ecological systems model. In the context of this study, the parent (their physical being) falls in the individual circle of the model along with their perceived life contexts, motivational beliefs, and experiences (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005)

Microsystem. A parent is involved in various roles within the immediate settings of the microsystem. These roles include parent and caregiver at their child's home and school. A parent is motivated to act based on their perceived level of time and energy (life context), role construction and self-efficacy (motivational beliefs), and their

experiences. In addition, lived experiences are influenced by an individual's sense of autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Efforts to advocate begin in the immediate settings of the microsystem (home or school) but also extend beyond those settings, as they involve connecting with other adults and entering new settings. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model is an avenue to explore the ways in which parent advocacy extends beyond the direct settings of the microsystem.

Mesosystem. The mesosystem involves the parent as an active participant, such as when spending time at the child's school. When the parent enters a new setting, interconnections of various types are formed. The most common type of interconnection is multisetting participation, where the parent engages in activities in more than one setting—for example, at home and at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Another type of interconnection involves the transmission of messages from one setting to the other with the intent of "providing specific information to a person in the other setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 210). This type of communication can occur face-to-face, by phone, through a written document, or indirectly through "chains in the social network" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 210). This type of communication, called intersetting communications, can be one-sided or multidirectional.

Exosystem. The exosystem consists of events that do not actively involve the developing person but still affect them. In the context of this study, this happens when school staff meet during MTSS without the parent physically present. Although the parent is not invited to these meetings that occur in the school day, the decisions made

during those meetings affect the child and the parent. These MTSS meetings are different from IEP meetings, where parents are required to attend.

Macrosystem. The macrosystem refers to the larger cultural context, including societal and cultural values that contribute to a parent's decisions or actions. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model allows the researcher to extend parent advocacy beyond the immediate settings. The current study suggests that parent motivations and decisions related to advocacy involve the societal and cultural influences of the macrosystem.

A Researcher-Designed Model of Parent Advocacy

After a review of the literature, it was evident that parent involvement was more thoroughly discussed in the literature than parent advocacy. While the current model of parent involvement (Green et al., 2007) has been referenced throughout the literature as a reliable model in predicting parent involvement, a similar model does not exist for parent advocacy. Nonetheless, variables used in the current model of parent involvement (Green et al., 2007) can also be used to understand and discuss parent advocacy. Therefore, I developed a model for this current study to provide a theoretical framework in understanding the factors contributing to parent advocacy (Figure 2.6). The model in (Figure 2.6) is referenced throughout this study as the researcher-designed model. Offering an essential piece that is missing from the current literature, this model helped to answer the research questions for this study about parent advocacy. While the current study focused on a small subset of four parent advocates with similar characteristics, this model can be used to discuss the general population of parents in future research studies.

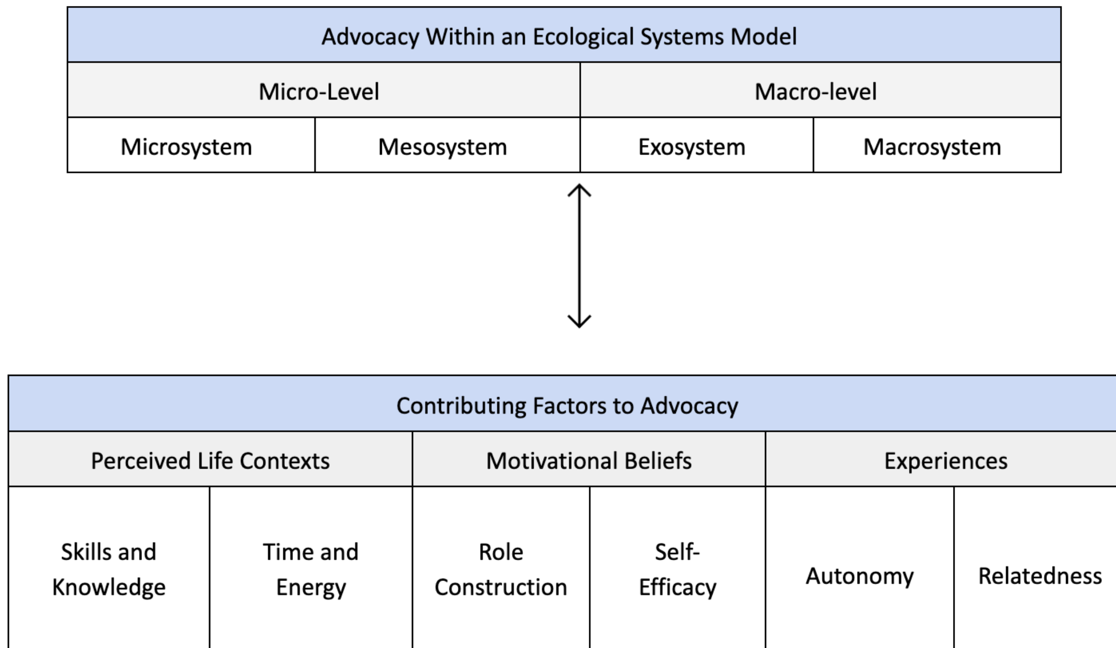


Figure 2.6

Researcher-Designed Model of Parent Advocacy

The bottom section of the model (Figure 2.6) describes contributing factors to parent advocacy, some of which drew from Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) work on parent involvement. For example, shown under the term *perceived life contexts* are parents' reported skills and knowledge, and available time and energy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents' *motivational beliefs* involve their perceived role construction and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Finally, pertaining to the parents' experience with advocacy are concepts of autonomy and relatedness, which draw from self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci, 2020). SDT is a motivational theory, situating a person's behaviors along a trajectory of extrinsically motivated to

intrinsically motivated behaviors. For the purposes of this study, and to help answer the research questions, autonomy and relatedness are thought to influence the parents' experiences. Thus, autonomy and relatedness are under the term *experiences* in the model (Figure 2.6). SDT was a helpful theoretical framework for connecting parents' motivational influences to their experience with advocacy in this study.

As shown in the top section of the model (Figure 2.6), parent advocacy is situated at the micro and macro levels (Wright and Taylor, 2014) within each of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems. It is important to distinguish that Wright and Taylor's (2014) work is specifically related to parent advocacy, whereas Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work involves the ecological systems in which advocacy takes place in the context of this study. While each body of literature contains similar verbiage (micro, macro), they serve two very distinct purposes within their respective bodies of literature.

A point of difference in this researcher-designed model (Figure 2.6) from Hoover-Dempsey's (2005) model (Figure 2.3) is the terminology that labels the concepts at the bottom section of the model. An empirical test of Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) theoretical model predicts whether levels of involvement increase or decrease based on variables such as parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations from others, and perceived life contexts (Green et al., 2007). These variables are labeled in Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) model as *predictors* of advocacy. In contrast, the current study is a qualitative description of parent advocacy. Thus, the researcher designed model (Figure 2.6) labels these concepts as *contributing factors to advocacy.* Another point of difference with Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues' (2005) model is the

arrow separating the top and bottom sections. In the researcher-designed model, boundaries are heuristic, meaning that concepts from either section of the model influence each other.

Conclusions

The purpose of Chapter Two was to review the current literature on the MTSS framework, predictors of parent involvement, and the literature on parent advocacy. The chapter included information related to South Carolina's procedures with MTSS and requirements for districts in the state. Literature on parent involvement and advocacy included influences and barriers to each concept. Finally, the chapter discussed the theoretical framework and introduced a researcher-designed model to provide a theoretical framework of parent advocacy for purposes of this research. Chapter Three will detail the methodology of the multiple-case study design used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the motivations and experiences of four parents who advocated for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context. The topic of parent advocacy in relation to children's literacy needs, particularly from a parent's perspective, is missing in current research. Weingarten and colleagues (2020) provided a visual depiction of an ideal MTSS framework in which parents are involved at different levels at each tier. During the MTSS process, parents might be informed about when and how their child is identified as needing additional academic support. While parents may be sent home written documents, they may not be asked to collaborate with teachers and interventionists about their child's academic goals until their child reaches Tier 3.

The literature on parent involvement is extensive in describing parent motivations, decisions, and actions (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kelly, 2001). Less is known about decision making and motivational beliefs related to parent advocacy. The current study sought to capture these experiences of four parent advocates who, for various reasons, decided to look for literacy support for their child outside of the school setting. A multiple case study design answered the following research questions:

1. What motivates parents to seek assistance for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context?
2. What do parents experience when advocating for their child's literacy needs?

The current study was predisposed to unique contextual factors, positionality of the researcher, and means of participant selection.

Context of the Study

The four parents in this study brought their children to the same university reading clinic in a southeastern state. This clinic serves the state by providing training and ongoing development to interventionists in participating districts who work with first-grade students experiencing the most difficulty with literacy (Bates, 2019). Ongoing professional development for teachers and teacher leaders is funded through a state grant. Literacy trainers who work for the university clinic provide demonstration lessons using one-way glass technology. This technology allows video and audio of lessons to be broadcast to teachers across the state for professional learning purposes. The technology was also conducive for faculty and graduate students at the reading clinic to provide literacy intervention to children from local elementary schools. While the center is not primarily set up as a tutoring service, literacy intervention is provided as a free service and is therefore based on the availability of the clinic faculty. Parents found the university reading clinic in different ways, such as through their connections to the university, which makes their situations unique. The experiences described in this study were also unique because of the time and energy required of parents. For example, parents transported their children to and from the university after school hours. Thus, parents had flexible work schedules that allowed for time to be dedicated to matters such as transportation.

Positionality

Prior to my graduate studies, I taught elementary school, primarily first and second grade. When analyzing data as a grade-level team at the beginning of each year, it was evident that many students started the school year one to two grade levels behind in reading. Realizing that many students would present difficulty with the literacy curriculum in the general classroom setting, I became passionate about studying literacy instruction to help the students in my class that were having the most difficulty with reading and writing. During my teaching career, I enrolled in literacy intervention training through non-degree graduate courses. I have continued to study reading theory in my doctoral program through cognate courses.

As a part of my graduate assistantship, I have continued to teach literacy intervention through the university reading clinic to students in local schools. As a result of this opportunity, I became acquainted with the four parents who were selected as participants for my study. Interactions at the clinic helped me develop relationships with the parents, and in turn, they were willing to participate in my study. Thus, I served two roles in the study as an interventionist in the clinic and as a researcher. Relationships with parent participants may have influenced the ways in which they responded to interview questions. For example, parents were asked about their experience at the university clinic, in which parents were generally positive. Parents were willing to be frank about their interactions within the school setting, including conversations with their child's teacher and other school personnel.

As a former teacher, I discussed student progress with parents using benchmark assessments mandated by the school. However, my interactions with parents as a graduate assistant at the clinic were different. In the clinic setting, parents had the opportunity to watch their child's literacy lessons through a one-way glass. This technology helped to create unique opportunities to communicate about what the parents observed during lessons. Upon reflecting on my experience as a graduate research assistant, I began to wonder more about what motivated these parents to bring their child to a reading clinic outside of the school setting. My experiences at the clinic and curiosities about parents' ways of advocating influenced the current study.

As a researcher with prior relationships with the parents, it was necessary to attend to my biases that arose during data collection and analysis due. It was also necessary to attend to any biases that arose from my prior teaching and research experiences. One way I attended to these biases was to reflect upon my reactions to what parents said during interviews and how I interpreted their responses through my memos and codes. While I recognized the need to consider the relationships I developed with parents prior to the study, these relationships served as a strength. Parents had a positive experience taking their children to the university reading clinic, which likely made them more willing to participate in the study. Through our interactions at the university clinic, I was able to build trust with the parents, which made them more candid with me in interviews. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also led to a more conversational experience than a formality.

Research Design

While parents are strong advocates for their children every day, the topic is generally under-researched and is limited to parents who advocate for their children's IEP rights. Since the current study elicits the voices of four parent advocates, case study was an appropriate method to allow for rich descriptions of each case (Yin, 2014). In addition to its descriptive nature, a rigorous case study uses theory to gather and analyze data, making it different from other qualitative methods (Yin, 2014). In the current study, Hoover-Dempsey's (2005) work on parent involvement and Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory (SDT) informed collection of interview data. Wright and Taylor's (2014) work on parent advocacy and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory guided cross-case analysis and discussion.

All case studies are bounded by parameters that delineate the context of the study. This study was bounded by the following participant inclusion factors: target population, location, and time.

Target Population

- Four parent advocates participated in the study, with each parent representing a single case. Three of the parents were female, and one was male.
- Parents all had male children in kindergarten, first or second grade who did not respond adequately to Tier 1 instruction and had speech-language difficulties affecting their literacy learning.

Location

- All four parents sought outside resources at a university reading clinic in the Southeast that provided free literacy intervention to their children.

Time

- Parents brought their children to the university reading clinic between 2020 and 2023, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Children of these parents received their intervention through the clinic outside of school hours.

While one participant would have been powerful, a multiple case study featuring four parent advocates enabled themes and patterns to emerge through cross-case analysis. While all parents had a similar experience of finding a university-based reading clinic, each parent described unique motivations and experiences doing so. This study sought to analyze these experiences from the parent's perspective, adding a valuable piece to the current field of advocacy, specifically for parents with children who have literacy difficulties.

Preliminary Study

During my graduate assistantship, I realized that several students coming to the clinic for literacy lessons also had speech-language needs. The connection between speech-language impairments (SLI) and literacy learning became of interest to my research. I analyzed a data set from the 2016–2017 school year using variables such as SLI and sex as indicators of whether a student successfully completed a literacy intervention. These data were retrieved from the International Data Evaluation Center (IDEC) and were collected from teachers across a southeastern state reporting beginning

and end of program assessment scores for students who received literacy intervention in first grade. Literacy intervention was provided in the classroom (Tier 2) or by a reading interventionist in a one-on-one setting (Tier 3), depending on the school's MTSS procedures. The goal of the intervention, provided for 30 minutes each day, was to accelerate progress for the lowest readers and writers in 20 weeks or fewer. Whether or not a student was chosen for intervention was dependent on the number of trained interventionists and the evaluation criteria at the school. The lowest-scoring children received intervention in the fall semester, and the next lowest group received intervention in the spring.

A logistic regression model was used through JMP (software package) to investigate the student's likelihood of successfully completing a literacy intervention program. Whether or not the student's program was successful was determined by the level of progress shown by reading level, which was assessed at the beginning and end of the program. Students who scored within the average range of first-grade students by the end of the program had achieved accelerated progress and had successfully completed the intervention. Variables such as SLI and sex were analyzed as factors in determining the likelihood of whether a student was able to successfully complete the program. Students in the program who also had an SLI had difficulties with articulation or language.

Results from JMP showed a *p*-value of (0.0265), meaning there was a statistically significant difference in the likelihood of successfully completing literacy intervention between students with and without SLI. Of the students who received literacy intervention and had SLI, 61% did not successfully complete the program

(Appendix A). These results indicate that students without SLI had a significantly higher chance of successfully completing literacy intervention compared to students with SLI. Of the group of first graders with SLI who received literacy intervention, 65% were male (Appendix B). Although sex did not have a significant influence on whether a student completed literacy intervention, sex was a significant variable within the subset of students with SLI. Of those served under the IDEA during the 2021–2022 school year, students with SLI were the second-highest group served (NCES, 2023). Trends in these data and supporting research (NCES, 2023) underpinned the purposeful selection of parents who participated in this study.

University Reading Clinic

Children of parents who participated in this study received literacy instruction at a university-based reading clinic, which is not the same as traditional literacy intervention they would receive at school. For example, the services children received at the clinic was dependent on the schedules of the clinic faculty as well as the children's parents. Children were generally seen 2-3 times a week, and the length of their overall program depended on the child's individualized literacy needs. Additionally, the clinic provided a unique opportunity for children because they were able to attend in their kindergarten, first, or second grade years. Assessments given to children at the beginning and end of the program included measures of word recognition, concepts of print, ability to hear and record sounds, text level, and knowledge of reading and written vocabulary. The length of each child's program at the clinic was not limited by academic calendars or other

school-related requirements. Demographic information collected on the children who attended the clinic in the past 4 years are found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Children

Child	Gender	School	Grade during intervention	Race	Primary Language	Speech-language needs	IEP status	Speech services received
Child 1 (James)	M	Mt. Everest Primary	1	W	English	Formal, Articulation disorder	Y	In school
Child 2 (Jefferson)	M	Pineview Elem	1	W	English	Informal, stuttering	N	Did not qualify
Child 3 (Hayden)	M	Cedar Creek Elem	K	W	English	Formal, Articulation disorder	Y	In school & private
Child 4 (David)	M	Pineview Elem	2	B	English	Formal, Articulation disorder	Y	In school & private

Participant Selection and Recruitment

According to Ravitch and Carl (2019), purposeful sampling provides the reader with "detailed accounts of specific populations and locations" (p. 128). A goal of this study was to highlight parents who advocated for children with literacy difficulties. Parents were selected for this study because "they have had a certain experience" (Ravitch & Carl, 2019, p. 128), in this case, finding a university reading clinic outside of the school setting. Additionally, parents were selected because they had male children

with speech and language difficulties that affected their literacy learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The criteria of participant selection made this group of parents and their experiences unique. The demographics of parent who participated in this study are provided in Table 3.2 in the same order as their children are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.2

Demographics of Parent Participants

Name of parent (pseudonym)	Gender	Race	Primary language	Highest degree achieved	Occupation
Parent 1 (Aaron)	M	W	English	Bachelor's degree	Sports editor
Parent 2 (Jessica)	F	W	English	Master's degree	Career advisor at a university
Parent 3 (Anita)	F	W	English	Bachelor's degree	Teacher
Parent 4 (Natalie)	F	B	English	Master's degree	Screenwriter

Following IRB approval, parents were recruited via email and invited to participate in the study. The recruitment emails included information about the purpose of the research and expectations for participating in the study, which included three recorded interviews and use of documents. All four parents agreed to participate through email correspondences and verbally agreed to be recorded in interviews. Additionally, parents agreed to allow for existing documents to be used by the researcher for the study. Interviews were scheduled at a time and place that fit the parents' schedule and were

conducted over the course of a month on campus, at public libraries, or at their home. Documents were collected through email, text messaging, or in person at interviews.

Data Sources and Collection

Data sources included interviews, observations of interview recordings, and documents. Parents participated in three semi-structured interviews, each focusing on a different topic of parent advocacy. Questions were influenced by relevant literature (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) and theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) situated within a researcher-designed model of parent advocacy. Interview questions specifically related to contributing factors to parent advocacy, including the parents perceived life contexts, motivational beliefs, and experiences. The use of data informed by relevant literature and theory was intentional in establishing theoretical validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Prior to the first interview, parents were read an interview script (Appendix C) with information related to the current study. Parents were asked to verbally agree to being recorded during interviews and to the use of documents for the study. Interviews were recorded using Zoom and Otter.ai to obtain videos, audio recordings, and transcriptions. After each interview, the audio was played through Otter.ai to edit transcripts for accuracy. Otter.ai uses AI meeting assistant to transcribe meetings in real time, record audio, and provide automated summaries of recorded meetings. Otter.ai learns topic-related vocabulary over time to aid with accuracy of interview transcriptions. The following subsections describe how each interview protocol was designed using a theoretical framework.

Interview 1

Interview 1 focused on questions related to the parents' perceived life contexts, a major motivator in decisions to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Similarly, these factors contributed to parent advocacy as revealed during Interview 1. The contributing factors related to perceived life contexts were the parents' skill, knowledge, time and energy dedicated towards advocacy. Since perceived life contexts influenced motivational beliefs in this study, questions from Interview 1 helped to address the following research question, *what motivates parents to seek assistance for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context?* Interview 1 questions are found in Appendix D.

Interview 2

Consistent with the current literature on parent involvement (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), it is likely that a parents' motivational beliefs also influence advocacy. Therefore, it was important to address the concept of role construction and self-efficacy during Interview 2. In this study, parents were asked to describe their role as parents and advocates, including a description of what those roles involved. Similarly, self-efficacy is a major factor in making decisions, creating goals, and displaying persistence when working towards those goals (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In this study, parents discussed their self-efficacy or confidence in their roles as parents and advocates in and outside of the school setting. Discussion with participants around role construction and self-efficacy also addressed research question 1 and are found in Appendix E.

Interview 3

The role of the social environment is influential to a person's lived experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Thus, two concepts from Ryan and Deci's (2020) SDT, autonomy and relatedness, were described as contributing factors to parent advocacy. Autonomy, or a person's motivation to act on their own volition, was an important part of the advocacy experience described in this study. Relatedness, or a person's sense of belonging, was equally vital as parents relied on friends, family, and other educators for support or advice. Questions for this interview were designed around these concepts of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2020) and addressed research question 2, *what do parents experience when advocating for their child's literacy needs?* Questions from Interview 3 questions are provided in Appendix F.

Questions for semi-structured interviews were grounded in relevant literature (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) and theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Contributing factors to advocacy identified from relevant literature and theory are displayed in the researcher-designed model, which was used as a guide in planning interview questions for this study. Table 3.3 displays how contributing factors to parent advocacy from the model are addressed in the research questions and interview questions of the study.

Table 3.3

Contributing Factors to Advocacy Addressed Through Interviews and Research Questions

Contributing Factors to Advocacy		Research question that addresses predictor	Interview question that addresses predictor
Perceived Life Contexts	Skills/Knowledge	RQ2	AD1, AD2, AD3, AD4, AD5, AD6, AD7
	Time/Energy	RQ2	AD8
Motivational Beliefs	Role Construction	RQ1	AE1, AE2, AE4, AE6, AE7
	Self-Efficacy	RQ1	AE2, AE3, AE5, AE6, AE7
Experiences	Autonomy	RQ1, RQ2	AF1, AF3, AF5, AF6, AF8, AF10, AF11, AF13
	Relatedness	RQ1, RQ2	AF1, AF2, AF3, AF4, AF5, AF6, AF7, AF8, AF9, AF11, AF12, AF14

Note. The information in the right-hand column refers to the interview questions in the appendices. For example, Appendix D, Question 1, is coded *AD1*.

As shown in Table 3.3, some contributing factors applied to a larger set of interview questions (skills/knowledge, autonomy, relatedness). Other contributors, such as time/energy, only required one question.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was used as a theoretical framework to analyze data from interviews and observations of non-verbal behaviors. During interviews, participants referred to multiple settings, such as the home or school. These direct settings represent the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework. All four participants entered a new setting when they brought their children to the

university reading clinic, or to a private speech therapist outside of school. Entering new settings established new connections within the mesosystem. Connections maintained or established within the mesosystem also referred to relationships with other adults in a given setting. For example, parents interacted with their child's teacher at the school, or had a connection to the university through a colleague. In reference to the exosystem, parents referenced events that occurred without the parent present, such as when the child was tested in the school setting. Finaly, parents were influenced to act based on their social and cultural values characterized by the macrosystem.

Observations of Non-Verbal Behaviors

Non-verbal communication is defined as "the exchange of information through nonlinguistic signs: gestures, which are more or less conscious, and body language, more or less unconscious" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 276). Interviews were recorded for the researcher to observe participants' non-verbal behaviors. One goal of these observations was to determine whether the participant's verbal responses confirmed or contradicted their body language. Technology was a helpful tool to re-play the interview recordings at a separate time and to view participant reactions to various topics. Observation of this type "suggests the capturing of 'reality'" in a way that the researcher might otherwise have limited capacity to interpret (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000, p. 696). Observations of the participants' non-verbal behavior strengthened data collection by obtaining a "complete record of what was seen and heard" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 174). At the time of the semi-structured interviews, the focus of the researcher was on creating an atmosphere akin to informal conversation. This included providing follow-up

questions and clarifying the participant's message. In other words, little time was available to "attend to and record all nonverbal manifestations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 276). In addition to viewing the video recordings, coding and analysis was also done separately.

Documents

As part of the experience at the university reading clinic, parents observed their child's literacy lessons in-person. When they felt it was appropriate, parents shared documents with the researcher as a means of communication between the child's school and the university clinic. These documents supported the parents' efforts to advocate. Parents shared copies of assessments from the school, reading levels from the teacher, or other documents related to speech services. Documents provided details from the child's school, such as evaluation criteria, test scores, reading levels, or information about literacy interventions. Parents also mentioned correspondences with other adults who were a part of their experience with advocacy.

According to Yin (2014), the most important use of documents is "to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 107). Collection of documents was unobtrusive because parents already had the documents or gave them to the researcher at the time of their child's university-based literacy intervention (Yin, 2014). Documents were used to corroborate parents' responses to interviews and body language observed through video recordings. Multiple documents were collected from each parent participant and are referenced chronologically as part of the descriptions of each case in

the following chapter. Documents collected throughout the study are listed in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted in person and were also recorded via Zoom. Zoom was used to obtain video for observational purposes, while Otter.ai was used to obtain accurate transcriptions. Following each interview, transcriptions were reviewed and edited for accuracy and then uploaded to Atlas.ti for coding and analysis. Atlas.ti is a tool that facilitates analysis of qualitative data by organizing text data from interviews in one place. Video recordings of each interview were uploaded to Dedoose for coding and analysis of video excerpts. Dedoose software allows the researcher to code directly on video transcripts using timestamps. Contributing factors to advocacy outlined in the researcher-designed model were accounted for in the coding process because the interview protocol was designed from relevant literature and theory (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Interview questions directly related to the researcher-designed model and were thus influenced by a theoretical framework. This framework (Table 3.3) influenced codes, code groups, and themes that emerged from data analysis.

Coding Process

As a first level of analysis, interviews were open-coded (Yin, 2014) using Atlas.ti software. Codes were assigned to “initially summarize segments of data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 236). This type of coding was a purposeful choice for this study to “remain open to all possible theoretical directions suggested by [the researcher’s] interpretation of the data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 115). Open coding also allowed the researcher to reflect deeply on and

take ownership of data from each case (Saldaña, 2021). Based on feedback from a committee member reviewer, codes were revised for specificity so that clear definitions could be created for each initial code. In doing so, some codes were collapsed into a single code and the codebook was refined. Throughout this initial level of coding, the researcher engaged in multiple reads of the same interview to ensure codes were accurately labeled and defined. During multiple reads, interview excerpts were re-coded as needed. It was necessary to attend to biases during the coding process by discussing them with a committee member reviewer. A final codebook can be found in Appendix H. As a second cycle method, codes were collapsed into a smaller number of categories or patterns (Saldaña, 2021). Again, a committee member reviewer reviewed all category labels and descriptions to ensure they were clearly defined and delineated from one another. After these categories were created, patterns were identified among the categories to help the researcher summarize data into "more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 236).

Cross-Case Analysis

Patterns from coding data helped to identify emergent themes, which were reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Internal homogeneity concerned the coherence of individual themes, and external heterogeneity concerned the differences among the themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Homogeneity and heterogeneity were also established through multiple reads of codes and discussions with a committee member. Data from each parent's interviews were cross analyzed to explore themes that unified individual cases. Themes were identified using supporting data from code groups

created in Atlas.ti. Themes were then discussed using the researcher-designed model, including the contributing factors to advocacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2020) and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

Observations of Video Recordings

Video recordings of interviews were uploaded to Dedoose software for coding. The process used for coding the videos was the same process used for coding interview transcripts. Initially, videos were open coded so that the researcher could note specific non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions, whole body movements, gestures, or manipulation of objects (Saldaña, 2021). Observations of video recordings "better guarantees the confirmability and trustworthiness of findings and potentially leads to stronger outcomes" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 63). The ability to re-play video recordings also gave the researcher an opportunity to "shop-talk" with a committee member about interpretations of non-verbal behaviors (Saldaña, 2021, p. 63). In these discussions, the researcher and peer reviewer came to a consensus about each participant's non-verbal behaviors and whether they confirmed or contradicted their verbal responses. Examples of how video recordings were coded and analyzed are found in 0, including a description of the non-verbal behavior and the researcher's interpretation of that behavior.

Peer Reviewers

Peer debriefing is a technique useful in establishing credibility by "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer" in a manner that explores "aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Using a peer reviewer allowed the researcher to examine and adjust working

hypotheses about the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After initial codes were established, a peer was asked to review codes for meaning. This peer reviewer was familiar with terminology specific to the codes used in this study due to her teaching experience and current graduate coursework. As an unbiased peer outside of the research study, the peer reviewer provided feedback and challenged assumptions and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and was asked to provide feedback on themes and hypotheses that emerged through initial coding. This peer debriefer was informed of the researcher's personal biases and personal relationships with parents participating in the study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness was essential to ensuring that findings from this study were worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher must carry out a study that can be replicated in similar contexts (consistency), have applicable findings (applicability), and an objective stance (neutrality) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of interpretations and findings was established in this study through prolonged engagement with participants, thick descriptions of cases, organization of data, and triangulation. In addition, personal biases were attended to during data analysis.

Prolonged Engagement

Relationships with participants demonstrate that "the interests of the respondents will be honored as much as those of the investigator" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303). Trusting relationships were established with parents prior to the study at the university reading clinic. The researcher interacted with parents multiple times a week about their child's reading and writing behaviors. Over a period of months, prolonged engagement

was established with parents and served as a beneficial part of the current study. Parents were willing to be vulnerable in sharing details of their experiences and motivations to advocate for their children.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described trust as "a developmental process" that builds over time and contributes to credible findings (p. 303). Thus, part of establishing credibility occurred prior to the study, as the researcher developed relationships with parents at the university clinic. Additionally, credibility was established by using a case study protocol and providing detailed descriptions of cases (Yin, 2014). A sample size of four parent advocates allowed for close analysis of the data and a greater level of detail in each individual case. Thick descriptions and a thorough cross-analysis of data established credibility and helped the audience relate to each parent's experience (Yin, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that there is no credibility without dependability, which ensures findings are consistent with the data collected. The researcher established dependability by using a case study protocol, which is "essential" for multiple-case studies (Yin, 2014, p. 84). Structured interview protocols helped maintain consistent procedures and organization of data (see protocols in Appendix C through Appendix F).

Triangulation was established through multiple sources of data and served as another form of credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). Data from each single source, including interview transcripts, video recordings, and documents, were used to corroborate findings from other sources. For example, a parent's response to an interview question was confirmed through non-verbal behaviors or documents.

A reflexive journal was maintained as a means of documenting all processes related to data collection and analysis, including reflections on developing insights and "methodological decisions and accompanying rationales" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327). This journal also served as a place to record information and reflections on transcripts and videos and served as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checking

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that member checking is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). After editing interviews for accuracy, transcripts were sent to parent participants via email. Parents were given the opportunity to review transcripts to "confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Parents were asked to send any edits or clarifications to the researcher. Allowing participants to react to the data conveyed intentionality, which prevented biases from the researcher.

Conclusion

The purpose of Chapter Three was to describe the methodology used for this study, including the researcher's rationale, theoretical framework, coding strategies, and ways of establishing trustworthiness. Chapter Four provides the personal accounts of four parents who participated in this case. Each case is unique to the parent's social and environmental constructs, motivational beliefs, and unique experiences. Rich narratives align themselves with case study research and are provided as the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter Four is to describe four parents' experiences advocating for their child's literacy needs by finding a university reading clinic for intervention and to describe common themes that emerged across cases. Parents were selected for this study because they all had male children with speech-language needs that affected their literacy learning. In addition, parents had to navigate inconsistencies with their children's instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Limited information exists in the research to explain how children with a speech-language impairment (SLI) respond to literacy instruction (Gillon et al., 2020). Research suggests, however, that students with a developmental language disorder such as SLI are at greater risk of having literacy difficulties (Catts et al., 2002; Georgan et al., 2023). A preliminary study revealed that students who had SLI were less likely to successfully complete a literacy intervention program (see Chapter Three). This preliminary study also found that more male students had SLI compared to their female peers. Due to these findings, sex and SLI were variables that influenced participant selection for the current study. Thus, parents selected for this study had male children with SLI.

Although there are similarities in the structure of these cases, as evidenced by the subheadings within this chapter, each parent's experience and motivations to advocate were unique. Each case is retold using the parent's own words during three separate semi-structured interviews. A detailed account of each parent's experience is an

important characteristic of case study research (Yin, 2014) and for parent advocacy research. This chapter includes the personal accounts of Aaron, Jessica, Anita, and Natalie, told in chronological order. Pseudonyms are used to conceal all names, including the parents, their children, other adults, schools or locations. Thes parent's stories are supported by data from interview coding, observations of video recordings, and documents, which are referenced throughout. Additionally, interview transcripts and video excerpts are referenced with relevant timestamps. Documents are also referenced with a complete list of documents collected from each participant in Appendix G. The codebook used to write individual cases for this chapter can be referenced in Appendix H. Following these individual cases, themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis are presented.

Individual Cases

Participant 1: Aaron

Background. Aaron is a sports editor for a journal in a southeastern state. He is the father of two sons who both received speech therapy as a school service. James, the older son, has received speech services since preschool. These services were offered through the elementary school James would attend in first grade. Aaron discussed these services with the researcher through email correspondence (Appendix G, Document 1). James had an IEP for an articulation disorder, which interfered with his ability to pronounce certain sounds and blend them in sequence. James additionally had an IEP for occupational therapy concerning his pencil grip but has since completed those goals.

James was home-schooled for most of his 4K year until he returned to in-person learning at the start of first grade.

James attended Mt. Everest Primary, whose student body is 74.1% White, 13.5% Black, 0.9% Asian or Asian Pacific Islander, 5.4% Hispanic/Latino, and 0.2% American (state website). According to the state website for James's school, 39.8% of students met or exceeded expectations from statewide testing in the 2018–2019 school year. Mt. Everest Primary offers free and reduced lunch to all students. Aaron's role at the school included attending report card conferences, open house nights, awards days, and field days (Appendix G, Document 1).

Observing Reading and Speech Behaviors at Home. James virtually attended kindergarten for a brief time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aaron said the following about James's virtual learning experience:

> Yeah, we weren't comfortable yet going back into the classroom setting, just with all the uncertainty and so we started the school year virtual. We probably got 2 weeks in and it was just a miserable experience. It was just complete dread from James, and then us doing it with him, too. It was just like pulling teeth and then it just felt a bit like an unhealthy feeling. That's when we were like, okay, why don't we try to do this on our own. (Interview 3 transcript, 5:10)

When talking about this experience, Aaron nodded his head, as if to emphasize the difficulty of the situation, particularly when saying "it just felt a bit like an unhealthy feeling" (Interview 3 video, 5:10). After this realization, Aaron and his wife decided to

seek accreditation to home-school their two children. Although the overall experience was positive for the family, Aaron described the limitations he and his wife faced while homeschooling James:

> We just didn't do a great job with the reading part. I think. I think other things went smoothly, but I don't think we were able to teach the reading part very well. So he was really behind on that. (Interview 1 transcript, 1:40)

Aaron discussed how tough it was to get reports from the school about James's lack of progress and to watch him struggle at home (Interview 1). Specifically, he noticed that James would attempt to articulate sounds but was not able to put them together (Interview 1). In reference to James's reading needs, Aaron thought, "Okay, this [was] probably beyond [their] purview," and the biggest thing to realize was they "couldn't do it on [their] own" (Interview 1 transcript, 8:03). After that conversation, Aaron and his wife decided to seek outside resources to support James.

Navigating at the School Level. Aaron's decision to look for outside support was confirmed by the reports he was getting from school. He mentioned an assessment done at the beginning of first grade that showed "a pretty big deficiency" in James's reading progress (Interview 1 transcript, 3:00; Appendix G, Document 2). Aaron described it as "disappointing" to hear that James was not able to do what his classmates were doing (Interview 2 transcript, 6:30). When reflecting on viewing these reports from school, Aaron fidgeted with his hands and tapped his foot (Interview 1 video, 3:00). The school generally informed Aaron of James's progress through these types of "numeric systems"

and other documents that reported his reading level (Interview 1 transcript, 5:31; Appendix G, Documents 2–3). During the interview, Aaron was shown a graphic of an MTSS framework that explained basic terminology and the general process. Then he was asked about his familiarity with the MTSS process, to which Aaron replied, “I was not familiar. Not familiar with it” (Interview 1 transcript, 4:50).

Regarding his perceived role and level of involvement in James’s school, Aaron commented:

> I want to lean on the schools as much as [I] can, just because, you know, they’re the professionals at it, and they’ve gone through college, learning how to do all this stuff, where I would be sort of winging it, I guess. (Interview 2 transcript, 0:38)

As if to place emphasis on the term, Aaron raised his eyebrows on the phrase “winging it” (Interview 2 video, 0:38). Although virtual learning was difficult, Aaron felt “fairly capable” helping James with homework (Interview 2 transcript, 1:32). Aaron explained, “If we are given some directive, like ‘Hey, work on this,’ or ‘Read with your kids or something,’ definitely do that. But never stray too far from that” (Interview 2 transcript, 0:28). By noting that he never “stray[ed] too far” from the teachers’ direction, Aaron set boundaries around his role and the teacher’s role. Anything beyond general involvement activities, such as homework or reading with James, was where [Aaron] “[felt] like [his] capabilities [were] low” (Interview 2 transcript, 1:32). Aaron viewed the teachers and school staff as professionals who had a different role than he did as a parent supporting the teacher’s direction.

Although Aaron supported the school with assignments that were sent home, he also talked about a time when he and his wife disagreed with a decision made by the school principal. At the start of first grade, the principal at Mt. Everest suggested that James repeat 1 more year in kindergarten. Aaron and his wife did not consider this as a viable option, commenting that the offer was "roundly rejected" (Interview 3 transcript, 9:03). When Aaron reflected on this conversation with the principal, he shook his head and looked down at the table (Interview 3 video, 9:03). Aaron said that James's school did not refer them to a tutoring service or provide them with resources as a primary solution. Since repeating kindergarten was the only suggestion from the school, Aaron felt obligated to seek help outside the school setting.

Bridging the Gap Between School and Outside Resources. After the conversation with the principal and conversations with his wife, Aaron began "poking around" for tutoring services, and came across a learning center in the area through an internet search (Interview 2 transcript, 5:56). Aaron recalled paying for an evaluation with James but not moving forward with the service. Then, he asked around for advice:

> I have a lot of friends who are teachers that mainly have older kids, I guess we have some who have elementary aged ones, in our group of friends. I think we asked around with them a little bit as well. (Interview 2 transcript, 9:04)

Aaron remembered recalling someone he knew (Bailee) from his sports editing career who had a connection to the university. He remembered a logo on Bailee's email

signature that referenced a reading intervention. Aaron described how easy it was to get in touch with Bailee because of their previous relationship:

> Yeah, I just got really lucky because I had a connection through Bailee. I've known her since she was in high school. When I was at the paper reporting on her, she was an athlete. And she coaches at [school name] now and we'll email every now and then about stuff. I just remembered seeing the logo on her email signature, and that was right when we were kind of trying to poke around figuring out about tutors and stuff. And I was like, you know, Bailee has something. And I just went back and looked at my email, and I was like, oh, yeah, I should look into this. And I emailed Bailee and said "Hey, what's the deal with this reading [intervention]?" So it was the ultimate luck out sort of situation. (Interview 1 transcript, 9:46)

Aaron looked up and smiled as he remembered the situation he referred to as "dumb luck" (Interview 2 video, 5:56). Bailee worked as a graduate assistant at the time and put Aaron in contact with the director of the university reading clinic. Aaron was invited to take James for an evaluation at the university, where he attended lessons with a trained teacher online. James's lessons were provided through Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Actively Engaging with Outside Resources. Aaron described the process of online learning this time around as "very smooth and easy" (Interview 1 transcript, 10:58). Supplies for James's lessons were mailed to Aaron's house, and after a few times

of logging on to Zoom, James learned to do it himself. Aaron's role was to stay close by in case James needed something but not interfere with the lesson. Due to the virtual nature of the lessons, Aaron did not spend time traveling to and from the university. Aside from helping James with some connection issues from time to time with Zoom, Aaron said that his role required little effort on his part (Interview 1 transcript, 10:58). When asked about his opinion of James's literacy progress from the virtual lessons, Aaron said, "I was just blown away by the whole thing. I can go on and on, about how amazing it was. It was incredible to watch how fast it happened, too" (Interview 1 transcript, 10:16). When asked about what he learned in order to advocate effectively for James, Aaron replied that he learned a willingness to admit when you need help. In Aaron's words, "We had to just be willing to sort of accept that, hey, we don't really know what we're doing, and not be afraid to reach out and ask" (Interview 2 transcript, 9:56). Aaron described the process of advocating as "fulfilling a duty" as a parent (Interview 2 transcript, 11:10).

Aaron reflected on his experience and said his motivation for contacting the university reading clinic was the conversation he had with James's school principal. Aaron referred to the news as a "gut punch," that led him to say, "Okay, we've got to do something" (Interview 2 transcript, 12:11). Aaron took some of the blame for James' reading difficulties:

> It was kind of a blow and it felt like we just didn't do good enough during that virtual year, which was hard because, again, like kind of how I was

> saying about trusting the teachers and us not being trained. We tried, and it didn't work. (Interview 2 transcript, 12:15)

Advocacy Now. Aaron reflected on his experience advocating for James by reaching out to Bailee and getting in touch with the university reading clinic. He brought James's most recent state assessment scores to the last interview, and had the following reaction:

> Just how much his reading and his math have grown over the last couple of years, because it's a pretty, pretty, amazing leap he's made. He made significant gains, compared to his peers, where he ranks kind of percentile wise, from just the beginning. And then what he did with [teacher at university reading clinic] and everything. It's just, you know, a nice source of pride. (Interview 3 transcript, 11:16)

At the end of the interview, Aaron talked about how he continued to monitor James's progress, and that he was on "standby" and ready to advocate for James when he needed it (Interview 3 transcript, 9:46). Aaron nodded in agreement when describing advocacy as "an inherent sort of thing" to do "whatever is best for your child and try to get [them] the best help possible" (Interview 3 transcript and video, 8:00). He ended the interview by saying that if he were to give another parent advice, he would encourage them to put themselves out there and seek outside resources for their child (Interview 3).

Participant 2: Jessica

Background. Jessica is mother to two sons and works as a career advisor at a southeastern university. She attained her master's degree in higher education and

administration. Her younger son, Jefferson, attended the university reading clinic for in-person lessons his first grade year. Jefferson stuttered at times and had been evaluated for speech-language services. However, Jefferson did not qualify for services due to his self-correction rate (Appendix G, Document 1). Therefore, Jefferson did not have an IEP for any speech-related needs. Jessica stated that Jefferson was evaluated during the summer of 2023 and now had a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD) and a handwriting disability. Jefferson will have a 504 plan at the start of his third grade year to receive accommodations for his ADD, including preferential seating and extra time on assessments (Appendix G, Document 1).

Since kindergarten, Jefferson attended Pineview Elementary, with a student population of 68% White, 10.6% Black, 8.9% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.4% Hispanic/Latino, and 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native students, according to the state website. The school offered free lunch to all students since the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, free lunch was offered to those who qualified (Appendix G, Document 1). Out of 609 schools in the state, Pineview Elementary ranked 17th in reading proficiency, according to the school's report card. According to Jessica, meetings with teachers were not required at Pineview, but parents could request them as needed (Appendix G, Document 1. Jessica did not recall Jefferson's kindergarten teacher offering up a meeting until April of that year. She met with Jefferson's first grade teacher twice, in the fall and spring.

Observing Reading and Speech Behaviors at Home. Jefferson attended Pineview Elementary in person since kindergarten. Although Jefferson's preschool year

happened during the pandemic, Jessica did not think this weighed heavily on Jefferson's instruction. However, things changed at the end of Jefferson's kindergarten year, when the teacher called a meeting to recommend a summer camp to help him catch up with his reading and writing. Jessica left that meeting with the following thoughts:

> I was like, oh gosh, what have I not done? You know, then I thought back to his preschool year, which was [during] COVID, the year before. And so I'm thinking, 'Oh, my gosh, what did I not do?' Maybe I should've done more. And so you think of all these things I should have done, or we didn't do, or what I thought we did. And that's maybe a failure or like, oh, my gosh, what did I not do, you know? (Interview 2 transcript, 5:30)

In the quote above, Jessica appeared shocked by the news that Jefferson needed extra help, clutching her chest as she reflected, "What did I not do?" (Interview 2 video, 5:30). Jessica reflected on how different her two sons were when it came to reading. Jessica had previously assumed that Jefferson might be like her older son, who enjoyed reading and "wouldn't put [books] down" (Interview 1 transcript, 9:22). Jessica described how different it is to read with Jefferson at home:

> He would always say, 'No mama, you do it. No mama, you read it, or I'm tired, or I can't see that, or whatever it was.' His attitude towards reading…I knew that it was different from his brother who was all about reading books. You know, wouldn't put them down, and [Jefferson] was just not that way. (Interview 1 transcript, 9:22)

Jessica shook her head as she talked about Jefferson's reading behaviors at home (Interview 1 video, 9:22). When asked about how capable she felt helping Jefferson, Jessica said she felt capable in helping explain the material sent home for Jefferson to complete. However, she felt less confident about having Jefferson sit down and do the work. Jessica explained, "I had to turn off the TV and get [Jefferson] to sit down and say 'You have to do this. Let's do this.' That [was] probably the hardest part" (Interview 2 transcript, 4:24). Once Jessica observed these avoidance behaviors towards reading, she admitted it would be a "challenge" to find out what exactly Jefferson needed to help with his reading (Interview 1 transcript, 9:22). She insisted that Jefferson would benefit the most from an outside tutor who could work with him individually.

Navigating at the School Level. Jessica described the conversation she had with Jefferson's teacher at the end of his kindergarten year:

> Well, I think initially, when Jefferson's reading issues were brought up, it was at the very end of the school year. *And I had no idea that he was struggling* [emphasis added]. And here, I go in, and here's the reading specialist and his teacher. And it's the end of April. And they're like, well, Jefferson is having some issues – and I'm like, 'What?' Because at home, he was, you know, we were reading and doing things. (Interview 2 transcript, 5:30)

Jessica's non-verbal behaviors became more animated during this quote, shown by her gesturing, nodding, pointing towards her chest, and even hitting her legs for emphasis (Interview 2 video, 5:30). The school said that Jefferson was "right there on the

bubble” but was still “struggling with some words and some sounds” (Interview 1 transcript, 1:30; Appendix G, Document 3). The school recommended Jefferson to a speech pathologist, but ultimately Jefferson did not quality for services due to a high self-correction rate.

Jessica attributed the surprise of Jefferson’s reading issues to the hardships of a teacher’s job, and the aftermath of the pandemic. She noted that the school was likely “still trying to figure out exactly where all the kids were” (Interview 1 transcript, 1:30). Jessica gestured with her hands when talking about the teacher’s job:

> [Teachers] are limited in in exactly what they can do, you know, individually for each child and they have a whole classroom full of students, and as far as being able to identify learning or other disabilities that might affect their reading. (Interview 1 transcript and video, 11:49)

Jessica was shown a graphic of basic MTSS terminology and processes. When asked about her familiarity with MTSS, Jessica said that while she had not heard of the abbreviation, she did understand that teachers met during the school day to discuss students. While she was informed of the general MTSS process, Jessica was not informed of “anything specific, like ‘This is how we do it.’” (Interview 1 transcript, 5:20)

Bridging the Gap Between School and Outside Resources. During the conversation in April of kindergarten, Jefferson’s teacher recommended a summer camp.

Jessica knew this would not work for their family as they already made plans for the next few months (Interview 1). Jessica recalls her reaction to the school's offer:

> So, I thought, let me try to figure out, you know, what else can I do? There's got to be some other ways that I can help him besides this one camp that [the school] was offering for free to all parents. (Interview 1 transcript, 1:30)

Jessica reflected on her own experience growing up and having access to a tutor when she needed it, and she wanted the same opportunity for Jefferson. Jessica was willing to pay for private tutoring, and she thought Jefferson would benefit from one-on-one instruction (Interview 1). Jessica thought of what she could do on her own to help Jefferson:

> You know, I'm not gonna just solely rely on the school or the teacher right, knowing that I'm educated. I'm limited, too, as far as specific things I can do for him. Let's go figure it out. Who can help us get this figured out? So, you know, that was my thought. (Interview 1 transcript, 13:00)

In this quote, Jessica realized that she needed to act, without the help of the school. She recognized her own abilities, her education, as well as her own limitations in her capacity to help Jefferson. When Jessica talked about being limited, she leaned forward and gestured, pointing towards herself (Interview 1 video, 13:00). Jessica further reiterated that she "didn't rely on [the school] at all [because] their only suggestion was camp [name]" (Interview 3 transcript, 17:33).

Jessica spoke about her connections to the nearby university, both as a child growing up and as a current employee. Jessica mentioned being able to utilize the tutoring services through the university for high school math (Interview 3). In her words, she was "all about trying to find help" (Interview 3 transcript, 11:36). She worked as a career advisor and thought of a friend of hers, Emma, who received her Ph.D. in literacy and was an assistant professor at the same university. Jessica thought, "I'm sure she's well connected. She has resources … if she can't help, she knows who can, you know, point me in the right direction" (Interview 1 transcript, 10:19).

Jessica reached out to Emma through email (Appendix G, Document 2) and asked for recommendations and to talk to someone about Jefferson's reading and writing needs. Emma connected Jessica with the university reading clinic, where Jefferson was evaluated for reading services. Jessica was motivated to take Jefferson to the university for individual lessons, saying to the staff at the clinic, "I'm flexible, you just tell me when" (Interview 3 transcript, 13:26). After these evaluations, Jessica proceeded to take Jefferson to the university 3 days a week for in-person lessons while she watched behind a one-way glass.

Actively Engaging with Outside Resources. Although these lessons helped Jefferson's reading and writing, Jessica acknowledged the level of time and energy it took to ensure Jefferson made it to his lessons. As Jessica explained:

> That's time consuming. As soon as [he] jumped off the bus, I had to drag him into the car and say, "Let's go," and sometimes that was a fight about

trying to get to campus, and parking, and driving, you know? Yeah, but you just got to do it. (Interview 1 transcript, 13:43)

Jessica leaned over in her chair and rolled her eyes, as if to imitate Jefferson as she dragged him out of the car to get to campus for the lessons (Interview 1 video, 13:43). She also talked about being more insistent on following through with reading at home. Jessica clapped each word emphatically as she said, “from that point, I’m just like, every single day, ‘Okay, let’s go read, let’s read, let’s do something. Let’s make sure we get our homework out.’” (Interview 2 transcript, 5:30). Jessica reiterated the importance of making sure Jefferson was putting in the work, even though he did not necessarily love reading at the time.

Advocacy Now. Although it was hard work, Jessica reported in her last interview that Jefferson’s test scores went up 16 points from the end of first grade (Interview 3). Jessica smiled and laughed, almost as if she was shocked at how much he had improved from the year before (Interview 3). She did mention that he had recently been diagnosed with ADHD, and now both her sons shared that diagnosis. She reflected on how her older son’s grades improved dramatically once he got his diagnosis, and she figured that Jefferson would do the same.

Interestingly, when asked about times when she felt successful being involved in Jefferson’s education, Jessica hesitated to answer. She took a long, deep breath, looked away, and thought for a minute or so. It took Jessica a while to acknowledge the accomplishments she achieved in order to advocate for Jefferson and, in her words, “get him what he needs” (Interview 1 transcript, 13:43). Jessica recognized that she had

advantages that other parents might not, such as the flexibility in her schedule to be able to take Jefferson to and from campus after school. As Jessica reported:

> Yeah. I mean, like, like flexibility with my job, for example, I was able to do that. And, you know, some parents might not have had the flexibility, but luckily, I was able to work that out and, you know, do what I had to do. (Interview 2 transcript, 11:14)

Jessica talked about the support she had from others, particularly Emma, who made her feel like she was not alone. One of Emma's sons also had difficulty with reading. Emma assured Jessica by saying "It's not your fault…every child is different … sometimes they just need some extra help outside of the classroom" (Interview 3 transcript, 15:05). Jessica described Emma's words as "very supportive and assuring" (Interview 3 transcript, 15:05).

Jessica also reiterated the importance of her role as a parent:

> Being the parent, like, I'm it. If I can't help him, nobody else can help him. You know, teachers can only do so much in the classroom. I'm not blaming them – that's a lot to do. But I'm in charge, he's gonna learn how to read and he's gonna be successful. And my job as a parent is to make sure that happens. (Interview 3 transcript, 16:08)

Jessica acknowledged that part of her role as an advocate was being "willing to do the work," which for her, meant not solely relying on the teacher and school but also doing her part.

Participant 3: Anita

Background. Anita is a former full-time elementary school teacher and, at the time of her interviews, worked as a long-term sub at the school where her two older children attended. Anita has four children altogether, two who were under the age of five at the time of the study. Her oldest son, Hayden, had been using a private speech therapist since age 3 for an articulation disorder. Anita described that Hayden had trouble "forming sounds with his tongue" (Appendix G, Document 4). His speech services transferred to Cedar Creek Elementary, where Hayden attended since kindergarten. Hayden had an IEP for his articulatio disorder and for attention deficit disorder (ADD). However, accommodations for ADD were not added until January of Hayden's second grade year (Appendix G, Document 5).

Cedar Creek Elementary is a magnet school with a student population of 73.5% White, 12.5% Black, 5.5% two or more races, 5.1% Hispanic/Latino, and 3.4% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander. Within the school, 58% of students were at or above a proficient level for reading (state website). In March of Hayden's 3K year, COVID-19 forced a shutdown of in-person instruction. School did not resume until January of the next year, at which time Hayden enrolled and finished 4K. Anita reported that during Hayden's kindergarten year, all students were masked, and groups of students were quarantined. Hayden was not under quarantine because he had received the vaccine (Appendix G, Document 5). Anita described that her role at Hayden's school involved attending conferences or other events such as STEAM mornings or music programs. Anita said that the school held conferences once a year, but the parent could request more if needed.

Anita's experience as a parent and advocate was unique for several reasons. As a teacher and a parent who was well connected in Hayden's school, Anita knew terminology related to literacy instruction that enabled her to communicate more professionally with other teachers. She had a personal relationship with teachers at Hayden's school because they were also her colleagues. Anita's aunt is also a reading interventionist who works for a university. As a courtesy, this aunt provided private tutoring to any of her nieces and nephews who needed it. Due to this relationship with her aunt, Anita's children had unique access to individualized reading lessons at home.

Observing Reading and Speech Behaviors at Home. COVID-19 had a substantial effect on Hayden's early years of instruction and potentially on his speech and language development. Anita reflected, "I mean, he missed out on some of that language development [in school] because it stopped in March" (Interview 1 transcript, 1:49). Although she could understand what Hayden was saying, his speech needs became more apparent when he started preschool. Hayden would tell his mom that other students said he sounded "like a baby" (Interview 1 transcript, 10:12). Anita emphasized the word "baby" and shrugged her shoulders (Interview 1 video, 10:12). Anita noticed that her daughter, who is 18 months younger than Hayden, was "talking so much better than he was" (Interview 1 transcript, 10:12). Anita brought this up to Hayden's preschool teacher, who agreed that Hayden did have trouble articulating sounds. A primary care doctor

referred them to a private speech therapist who has seen Hayden since his speech-language diagnosis (Interview 1).

In addition to Hayden's speech needs, Anita had a keen sense of observation regarding his reading progress in kindergarten:

> I noticed he started the year on an A, which was fine. And then he just wasn't progressing as fast as – like, he stayed on an A and B for a while. So, I asked my aunt to work with him, because they are supposed to move pretty fast through [reading] levels in the younger grades. (Interview 1 transcript, 9:11; Appendix G, Document 1)

In the above quote, it was evident that Anita had knowledge about reading instruction that set her apart from other parents. Anita knew from her teaching background certain terminology related to reading levels (e.g., Level A, Level B) and how quickly students were expected to progress in kindergarten. Part of knowing Hayden's reading progress prompted Anita to assist with his reading assignments at home. Hayden's teacher sent home books to read "that they've read for guided reading [in class]" (Interview 2 transcript, 0:45). Anita's role was to make sure Hayden was reading the books that were sent home and to check over his "graded work" (Interview 2 transcript, 0:45). When she noticed a skill that Hayden was having trouble with, she helped him "practice those skills at home" (Interview 2 transcript, 0:45).

Navigating at the School Level. Anita had a unique perspective about the MTSS process because of her position as a teacher and parent. When asked about her familiarity with the MTSS process, Anita raised her eyebrows and gestured as she replied:

> As a parent, they do not tell you this stuff … but as a teacher, like I know, this year, we had a lot of issues because they dropped his level down to a two. So, she told me he's in Tier 3. (Interview 1 transcript, 5:43; Appendix G, Document 4)

As a teacher, Anita essentially received information that other parents did not because "the teacher knew that [she's also] a teacher" (Interview 1). Anita to describe, if she were just a parent, the information she would be given about MTSS. Anita looked down at the MTSS graphic given to her at the interview and replied, "I mean, probably none" (Interview 1 transcript and video, 7:10).

Anita had frequent communication with Hayden's teachers about his progress. If she saw something on Hayden's school report card that was of concern, she contacted the teacher through email to ask, "Is there something [Hayden] is still not understanding?" (Interview 2 transcript, 1:04; Appendix G, Document 3). Hayden's kindergarten teacher explained that he frequently dropped the ending sounds when reading (Interview 1; Appendix G, Document 3). He also read more slowly due to his issues with articulation, which caused his fluency score to drop (Interview 1; Appendix G, Document 1). Due to these errors being related to his speech, the teacher was not "counting that against him" when scoring his oral reading records (Interview 1 transcript, 7:14; Appendix G, Document 1).

Aside from his speech articulation, Hayden was on grade level in kindergarten and first grade, and this made communication with his teachers run smoothly. At the start of Hayden's second grade year, assessments reported Hayden at a Level 2, which is the equivalent of a Level B, which was where Hayden scored in kindergarten (Appendix G, Document 1). Anita described the communication with Hayden's second grade teacher that year:

> [His] second grade teacher, I had to communicate a lot with her because she dropped him down to a [level] 2… he wasn't a 2 (laughs). But a lot of that was speech. She didn't know like, they test him the second week of school, so she didn't know him yet. What his speech was … he doesn't swallow his spit good. So, she couldn't understand what he was saying. (Interview 1 transcript and video, 7:34)

Anita reacted to the news of the low reading level by feeling like she "failed him at first because he dropped so much" (Interview 2 transcript, 4:00). Anita's knowledge of her son's capabilities and influence as a teacher at Hayden's school helped her advocate for him during his second grade year. She was proactive with Hayden's teacher and advocated for him to be in two guided reading groups. She recalled the following conversation:

> I was like, if you want to put him in the below level [group], that's fine. But I also asked her to put him in the on-grade level group. So, he was in two groups, and I was like, just see if he can do it. Then that's when she started realizing, oh, he's mumbling because he's not swallowing his spit

> … so she realized, by me asking … I think helped her realize, too. He doesn't need to be in [the] below level group. (Interview 2 transcript, 5:55)

Anita's knowledge as a teacher, position as a long-term substitute teacher, and connection to her aunt influenced the ways in which she advocated for Hayden.

Bridging the Gap Between School and Outside Resources. Part of the reason Anita advocated for Hayden was to ensure he was receiving the speech services outlined in his IEP. Hayden received private speech tutoring until he started school, when these services were transferred to a speech language pathologist at the school. When the academic year started, Anita had to be persistent with the school to make sure Hayden's services were granted. Anita commented on how she handled the situation:

> I finally got him into speech … it was taking forever. And I had to really put my foot down and say like, "He already has an IEP, [so] why are you dragging your feet?" Then we found out that it was the papers and that's what was taking so long, so that was, like, I did a good job [because] he got into speech. (Interview 2 transcript, 3:20)

Anita furrowed her eyebrows as she said, "It was taking forever," and then smiled and laughed as she said, "I did a good job" (Interview 2 video, 3:20). She continued the sentiment by saying, "If I would have never emailed and called about speech, it probably would have easily been another 6 weeks" (Interview 2). When Anita started receiving reports from Hayden's school in kindergarten, she was "shocked" to find out he was in the first percentile (Interview 1). Anita knew of Hayden's speech issues, but these results confirmed how much his speech was influencing his language and literacy development.

Anita reflected, "I didn't realize all the speech that went with [language], and how it was messing up pronouns, and all of that" (Interview 1 transcript, 12:02).

When Hayden's reading was not "progressing as fast" in kindergarten, Anita discussed with his teacher what she thought of him seeing his aunt for private lessons (Interview 1 transcript, 9:11). She and the classroom teacher both agreed it would benefit Hayden. When his private reading lessons begun, Anita communicated back and forth between her aunt and his classroom teacher. She wanted to make sure her aunt was reading books with Hayden that were around the same level as what he read in school. As Anita explained:

> I would talk to [my] aunt and say, "What level are you on?" and I would text, call, or email his kindergarten teacher and I would see if they were on [the same level] to make sure they were on the same page … usually [my] aunt was a level above, but it was also one-on-one, compared to, you know, five or six kids in a group … if they weren't on the same page, I was going to have them talk so that they could see what they needed to do because they know more about it than I do. (Interview 2 transcript, 11:30)

In this quote, Anita prioritized communication with the classroom teacher and her aunt around Hayden's progress. She acknowledged how important her role was as the messenger between both parties, emphasizing phrases and gesturing as she spoke (Interview 2 video, 11:30).

Actively Engaging with Outside Resources. Anita's relationship with her aunt came with some benefits, particularly that her children were supported with literacy at

home. In addition to her aunt, Anita also had help from other family members. When Anita was busy with her other three children, her mother or husband would take Hayden to his lessons. Her aunt stayed closely connected to Hayden's reading progress, not only in kindergarten but afterwards as well. Anita described that Hayden continued to read with her aunt "every once in a while" (Interview 3 transcript, 8:15). Anita would communicate with her aunt about how Hayden was doing in reading, and in turn, her aunt would support him by helping with reading at home.

When Hayden received a low test score in second grade, Anita became concerned. She reached out to the school's reading coach to ask if she could complete an oral reading record to see how he was doing. Anita expressed to her aunt that she needed a new person to read with Hayden to really get an accurate score. In Anita's words:

> I didn't want my aunt, and I was like, I don't want you to test him. Because he knows how to read with you and you're an aunt, and you're going to be biased … even though she I know she's not. But you're a little bit … I was like, you know, his speech, you know all that. I want somebody that has never heard Hayden read. (Interview 3 transcript, 16:20)

Anita smiled and laughed as she reflected on this conversation about how her aunt could be biased. She emphasized how well her aunt knew Hayden, particularly how he read, by the way she gestured as she spoke (Interview 3 video, 16:20).

Advocacy Now. When asked about the level of time and energy spent advocating for Hayden's speech and literacy needs, Anita responded, "sadly, in public schools, a lot

of it" (Interview 1 transcript, 13:05). She continued, "The parents have to be the ones that step up and say, like, 'I want Hayden in speech'" (Interview 1 transcript, 13:05). Anita emphasized the impact advocacy had on the urgency of the school's decisions, such as getting Hayden his speech services at the beginning of each school year. She reflected back on the experience and said, "If I would've never emailed and called about speech, it probably would have easily been another 6 weeks" (Interview 2 transcript, 5:00).

Anita understood her rights as a parent and Hayden's rights and accommodations that came with his SLI diagnosis. With her knowledge, she was able to advise others as well. Anita remembered giving her neighbor advice to advocate for her son with dyslexia:

> My neighbor does not have an education background and her son, he had to have a 504 and he has dyslexia. And they had to test him. Like I'm the one that told her like, this is what you need to go into the meeting and say. As a parent, you can say, "I want my child tested," then [the school has] 60 days after you say it … but if she didn't have me, she would have just said "I'm worried about him," and then [the school would] drag their feet. (Interview 1 transcript, 14:30)

Anita stressed the phrase "I'm the one that told her," gesturing with her hands when emphasizing how important it was for her neighbor to be informed (Interview 3 video, 14:30). Anita was passionate about her rights as a parent and sought to prevent other parents from allowing schools to "drag their feet" (Interview 1 transcript, 14:30). In addition to the experience she and her neighbor had, Anita "heard some stories where it just, it takes forever [for a child] to get tested" (Interview 2 transcript, 13:00). Anita

continued that she would advise parents in the same situation to speak up and reach out to the teacher or school because they "can help you" (Interview 3 transcript, 18:57).

Participant 4: Natalie

Background. Natalie is mother to two children: an older daughter and a younger son. Natalie attained an M.Ed. in Counselor Education and previously worked in student affairs. She later left the workforce to take care of her children full time (Appendix G, Document 3). Her son David was diagnosed with an articulation disorder at age three and has since seen a private speech therapist. Natalie had David evaluated by the speech language pathologists at the elementary school prior to the start of kindergarten so that his services would transfer right away. Natalie wanted to ensure David would have "a documented history of speech and language services when he started school" (Appendix G, Document 1). For a period, David was seeing his private speech therapist and receiving services through the district offices. Natalie had discussed that these additional services from the district were a "great supplement to his existing speech work" (Appendix G, Document 1).

David attended Pineview Elementary for kindergarten through second grade, which was the same school Jefferson attended (see Participant 2: Jessica). Pineview Elementary's demographics consisted of 32% minority enrollment, and 76% of students scored at or above proficiency in reading in the most recent school report card. The school offered free lunch to all students following the pandemic. During that time, David continued to receive private speech services virtually. According to Natalie, during the pandemic his lessons "immediately continued on Zoom" (Appendix G, Document 1).

Natalie was involved at Pineview Elementary by volunteering as “room parent” each year. She also attended conferences and called additional meetings with the teacher when needed. After David’s second grade year, Natalie made the decision to transfer David to a Montessori school.

Observing Reading and Speech Behaviors at Home. Natalie said she noticed when David was very young that he had difficulty articulating certain sounds. In Natalie’s words, “[e]ven in preschool, there were no concerns about him academically, the concerns were around his speech, because people couldn’t always understand what he was saying” (Interview 1 transcript, 1:35). At first, these speech issues did not seem to influence other aspects of his academics, specifically literacy learning. In Natalie’s words, “It wasn’t like a pronounced issue. It was just like, he’s learning to read” (Interview 1 transcript, 19:01). Since kindergarten was “truncated by COVID-19,” Natalie spent that year at home with David and was close by for the assignments he was completing virtually. Under Natalie’s supervision, David “did every single assignment…every assignment from gym, math, reading, everything” (Interview 1 transcript, 15:42). Natalie said she wasn’t trying to “toot her own horn,” but needed to emphasize that the pandemic made for a “crazy time,” and it was necessary for her to be vigilant about David’s assignments (Interview 1 transcript, 15:42). Natalie was equally vigilant about communicating with his teacher through attending their virtual office hours and “talk[ing] every single day” (Interview 1 transcript, 17:18; Appendix G).

Although David was compliant when doing his schoolwork, Natalie noticed that reading was something he “avoided in a way” (Interview 3 transcript, 6:16). During that

virtual year of kindergarten, it became more apparent that reading was not one of David's strengths. Natalie recalled, "I had to send tape recordings of his readings and I could see there were struggle spaces" (Interview 1 transcript, 19:01). Natalie realized his speech was inhibiting his reading progress after observing him:

> He couldn't say the sounds, do you know what I'm saying? Like, he couldn't *say* that. It's not that he (pause) – or let me say – he couldn't *pronounce* them. It's not that he didn't know what they were supposed to be. He just couldn't say them. (Interview 1 transcript, 19:01)

Natalie took a pause before re-wording her statement and shrugged her shoulders when saying "He couldn't *say* that" (Interview 1 video, 19:01). Natalie's non-verbal behaviors suggested the realization that David's speech was making an impact on his reading trajectory.

Navigating at the School Level. When David was in first grade, Natalie commented that while he was making progress, reading still "wasn't his thing" (Interview 1 transcript, 12:02). When David started second grade, the teacher offered a reading intervention to provide more targeted instruction. Natalie admitted that she was accepting of the offer for David because of the way it was presented to her. As Natalie recalled:

> So when he got to second grade, finding out about the reading intervention, it was how it was posed to us, because of COVID, the school got additional funding to do a reading intervention. Okay. Cool to take advantage of that. I mean, that's fine. We consulted with our family of experts, because I was like, I had an internal gut feeling like, *I don't think*

> *this is what I wanted to do*, and I should have followed that. (Interview 1 transcript, 3:42, emphasis added)

When Natalie spoke about her gut feeling, she folded her hands and shook her head from side to side regretfully (Interview 1 video, 3:42). Natalie reiterated that she wanted to "figure out exactly what was happening," considering he had an articulation disorder that was affecting his literacy learning (Interview 1 transcript, 6:12). In Natalie's words:

> I think David's speech was part of the problem. Let me not say problem – part of a disconnect, because intellect is not, or ability to learn something is not … speech is not indicative of that. Do you know what I'm saying? They're two separate issues. But sometimes there can be some overlays. So, we just needed to figure out exactly what was happening. (Interview 1 transcript, 6:12)

In the above quote, Natalie implied that she needed to get to the root of the problem, instead of resorting to additional interventions. In her words, she did not want David to be continually pulled out of the classroom for additional interventions. Natalie mentioned the apparent disconnect in communication and passing of documents between grade levels at David's school. In reference to documentation of David's history with speech services, Natalie believed that his second grade teachers "had not looked at those things." (Interview 1 transcript, 6:12)

David's second grade teacher had presented the offer for reading intervention as a 12-week program, and Natalie decided to go ahead with it. After a few weeks, Natalie initiated a meeting with David's teacher to check on his progress. To her surprise, the

reading interventionist joined the teacher for the meeting. In Natalie’s words, it seemed like they “were in there definitely with an agenda” (Interview 1 transcript, 13:05). The classroom teacher and interventionist “wanted to go ahead and give him an IEP [for reading] and take him out of the intervention” (Interview 1 transcript, 9:40). Natalie recalled asking, “But how does that work? Don’t you have to go through the full intervention to decide first and have an assessment [to decide] that it’s not going to work?” (Interview 1 transcript, 9:40). Natalie refused the offer for the IEP, and decided instead to seek the help of outside experts.

Bridging the Gap between School and Outside Resources. One unique characteristic of Natalie’s story was the mention of her “family of experts” who helped provide advice when advocating for David. She frequently confided in her family for support, the majority of whom were in the field of education. As Natalie put it, she came from “a learned space” (Interview 1 transcript, 33:57). She specifically recalled going to her brother for advice, who had a degree in educational leadership. Natalie recalled that her brother mentioned the “long-lasting effects” of the pandemic, including students who had returned to school at all different levels (Interview 1 transcript, 33:57). Natalie described the conversation with her brother as a “humbling conversation” that influenced her to start researching outside resources to help with David’s reading (Interview 1 transcript, 33:57).

While Natalie described the interaction with David’s second grade teacher as “unsuccessful,” she also said the conversation led her to success when she began researching outside tutoring. After consulting with her family, Natalie recalled a phone

conversation with a teacher she knew who pointed her to the university reading clinic. As Natalie put it, “She gave [her] that little nugget of information” (Interview 2 transcript, 26:14). After researching the university reading clinic, Natalie remembered calling the program coordinator of the clinic and being “on the verge of tears” (Interview 2 transcript, 28:00). After a conversation with the program coordinator and director of the center, Natalie took David for in-person literacy lessons at the clinic.

Actively Engaging with Outside Resources. For David, the clinic setting was an environment ideal for David’s literacy learning, including the physical space as well as the staff involved. Natalie said the following about the university clinic:

> It is a respectful space. And they’re not like, if there’s – if there’s something going on, you guys are going to be honest, if you see it, but it’s also … it’s not hopeless. And I think that was a space that the school had me feeling hopeless. (Interview 2 transcript, 33:02)

In addition to the clinic environment itself, Natalie was able to observe how the individualized instruction helped David’s reading and writing growth. In her perspective, there was “something about reading with that particular format that helped with his sounds … [t]hat was the most consistent space that he had been” (Interview 1 transcript, 31:33). Additionally, Natalie attributed David’s success to the center director, including “of course, her reputation, but [also] her energy” (Interview 2 transcript, 40:01). Natalie continued that the university center staff who read with David were “passionate about what [they were] doing…so [she] felt like it was a trusting space” (Interview 2 transcript, 40:01).

Advocacy Now. Prior to finding the university center, Natalie admitted feeling "very discouraged" about how to best help David (Interview 2 transcript, 28:14). When asked how capable she felt when figuring out David's specific learning style, Natalie laughed and remarked that it "depend[ed] on the day" (Interview 2 transcript, 3:00). While Natalie felt capable finding help for David, she often asked herself, "How do [I] know what's going to be best with [my] child's learning?" (Interview 2 transcript, 3:08). She expressed a need to advocate differently considering her child was African American in a majority white school system. Natalie reflected on her family's experience in this type of system:

> We have to navigate some things differently because we're African American in the system. Like this is true. People can say that it's not but it's true. And I'm not saying that anyone is racist. What I'm saying is there's a system. And so, the system can work both ways at times that I'm going to have more of a … because I know how disproportionately black and brown children are put in these programs because that is what my family studies." (Interview 1 transcript, 9:15)

When Natalie discussed navigating things differently, she mentioned the example that an IEP for reading was not her first go-to when finding a solution to David's reading difficulties. She took time to word her statements in a way that did not place blame on the teachers working with David. Rather, Natalie felt a need to advocate for what she felt was best for her son.

When asked about the qualities she possessed as an advocate, Natalie mentioned following her gut instincts. She explained, “If it’s not the right space, it’s not the right space. If you question something in your gut, follow up as many times as you need to” (Interview 2 transcript, 12:37). Natalie also mentioned the “space of entitlement” she felt at David’s school, particularly “the stuff that people say to teachers,” which she described as “absolutely insane” (Interview 1 transcript, 22:30). Natalie was referring to the expectation that “teachers are superheroes” when in reality, “they *are* heroes, but they are also human” (Interview 1 transcript, 22:30; emphasis added). Natalie divulged that, in her opinion, teachers are overworked and schools are focused on numbers and testing (Interview 2). She followed with the following sentiment: “You just wish that everyone [would] come to the table with the child’s best interests at heart and that’s not what happens. I’m confident that I have David’s best interest at heart, so that helps me” (Interview 2 transcript, 23:44). Finaly, Natalie summarized her biggest strength as an advocate: “I feel confident in advocacy in that way because *I am relentless*, and *I will not stop* until he gets what he needs” (Interview 2 transcript, 23:44).

Natalie and the other parents in this chapter each had unique experiences and motivations with regard to advocating for their children. These individual cases demonstrated that there was much to understand about the nuances of each parent’s decisions and actions. Despite the unique nature of these cases, themes emerged through cross-case analysis that were consistent across all four parents. In the next section, two major themes are identified and discussed in connection with the coding data that support each theme.

Cross-Case Themes

Data from each single-parent case were cross-analyzed to identify themes that unified individual cases. Using a combination of process and in vivo codes, data were categorized into groups and these groups were collapsed into two major themes. The themes emerged from the coding process and were supported by data. Themes from cross-case analysis helped to answer the following research questions:

1. What motivates parents to seek assistance for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context?
2. What do parents experience when advocating for their child's literacy needs?

In the following subsections, major themes that occurred across all four cases are discussed. In addition, the sections describe the data that supported each theme, including recurring codes and categories and quotes from interview transcripts.

Theme 1: Limitations with School's Communication Systems

The first theme identified across all four cases referenced limitations with the school's communication process that motivated parents to advocate. Data revealed that schools communicated with parents through written documents, email or messaging services, or through required in-person meetings. Teachers may use messaging services, such as Class Dojo or Remind, to communicate with the parents in their class. This theme emerged through analysis of multiple codes that confirmed certain limitations within these various communication systems. Table 4.1 shows all codes associated with Theme 1 that were similar across all four parents. The examples in

Table 4.1 are excerpts from interview transcripts chosen by the researcher to highlight each code.

Table 4.1

Theme 1: Limitations in School's Communication Systems

Code/Definition	Examples
Unfamiliar with MTSS: *Parent reported they were not informed about the term MTSS or its process from their child's school*	"I was not familiar with it. Not familiar with it at all" (Aaron, Interview 1, 4:50). "I've seen this … not from the school, but from additional research" (Natalie, Interview 1, 5:34).
Lack of information about child's learning needs: *Teacher only communicated about progress through reading levels or assessments scores, but not specifically about the child's learning needs*	"I was not told anything specific about the curriculum or what they were teaching … [t]here was no formal, 'Here's an example. Here's what I recommend you do with your child.' There has never been that" (Jessica, Interview 1, 1:14). "I don't think she would have ever sent that stuff home if I wouldn't have asked for it" (Anita, Interview 2, 5:30; Appendix G, Document 4).
Blindsided: *Parent was blindsided by information given to them by the school regarding child's progress or learning needs*	"But it was like, well, we think that he needs to go get an IEP for reading. And I'm like 'Whoa, but … but I need to understand specifically, why?" (Natalie, Interview 1, 7:33). "Well, I think initially, when Jefferson's reading issues were brought up, it was at the very end of the school year. And I had no idea that he was struggling … and here I go in, and here's the reading specialist and his teacher. And it's the

Code/Definition	Examples
	end of April. And they're like, well, Jefferson is having some issues – and I'm like, what?" (Jessica, Interview 2, 5:46).
	"When the school introduced the idea of what [we] would think about him going back a year – it was just such a gut punch" (Aaron, Interview 2, 12:11).

Note. For the purposes of this table, only selected quotes were provided.

Unfamiliar with MTSS. The code *unfamiliar with MTSS* refers to the parent reporting that they did not receive any information about MTSS or its process from their child's school (see Table 4.1). During interviews, parents were asked about what the school provided them regarding information about MTSS. As shown in Table 4.1, Aaron was "[n]ot familiar with [MTSS] at all" (Interview 1, 4:50). Jessica had a little more knowledge about MTSS, saying "[the teacher] didn't call it that … [but] she did say you know, we get together and meet about certain students and groups, like the student might need this kind of help" (Interview 1, 6:15).

Anita was familiar with MTSS from her teaching background, but that "[a]s a parent, they do not tell you this stuff" (Interview 1, 5:47). If Anita had not been a teacher and closely connected with her child's school, she felt her knowledge about MTSS would have been "probably none" (Interview 1, 7:10). Natalie knew about MTSS from her own research on the subject but received no information about it from the school. As she described, "It wasn't anything that anybody talked to us about" (Interview 1, Natalie, 5:34).

Lack of Information About the Child's Learning Needs. Another code under Theme 1 was *lack of information about the child's learning needs.* All four parents described that when they met with their child's teacher, such as during report card conferences, they received state-wide assessment scores or results from "numeric system[s]" (Aaron, Interview 1, 5:31; Appendix G, Document 2). Anita described the documents that contained these types of results as "not parent-friendly at all" (Anita, Interview 3, 4:24; Appendix G, Document 2). She also described situations in which she had to ask for documents related to her child, otherwise the teacher "would've never sent that stuff home" (Anita, Interview 2, 5:30; Appendix G, Document 4). When asked about the information provided during her meetings with the classroom teacher, Jessica explained, "I was not told anything specific about the curriculum or what they were teaching…[t]here was no formal, 'Here's an example. Here's what we recommend you do with your child.' There has never been that" (Anita, Interview 1, 6:44). Natalie described that when her son returned to in-person learning following the pandemic, she was "under the assumption that he was also doing reading in class" in addition to the intervention they offered in second grade (Interview 1, 10:20). After further prompting the teacher, she realized the teacher "was not reading with him individually" (Natalie, Interview 1, 6:12). Natalie also expressed that she "had no idea" there was a reading specialist available when David was in first grade because "no one offered that" to her (Natalie, Interview 2, 35:52).

Blindsided. The lack of information from the school left all four parents to describe a feeling of *blindsidedness* during an interaction with the classroom teacher.

This code supported Theme 1 and was reinforced by interview responses that described parents feeling blindsided when they were given certain information from their child’s teacher. For example, when his son’s school presented the idea of staying back 1 more year in kindergarten, Aaron described the news as a “gut punch” (Interview 2, 12:11).

Jessica also had a meeting with her son’s teacher at the end of the year, when the teacher offered a summer camp. When Jessica found out Jefferson was “having some issues,” she “had no idea” that he was having difficulty (Interview 2, 5:30). This meeting felt different for Jessica because the teacher and reading interventionist were both there to deliver information that seemed to come “without any kind of inclination” (Interview 3, 9:56). Natalie had a similar experience when her son’s teacher offered an IEP without finishing the reading intervention to assess his progress first. For Natalie, the mention of an IEP for her son’s reading “came out of left field” (Interview 2, 39:50). Prior to getting documentation about Hayden’s test results, Anita knew “there was a problem” (Interview 1, 12:02). However, after seeing the documents, Anita commented, “I was shocked … he was in the first percentile” (Interview 1, 12:02, Appendix G, Document 2).

The first theme of this study involved limitations within the school’s communication process. As a result of these limitations, parents reported an unfamiliarity with MTSS, a lack of information from the child’s school, and a feeling of blindsidedness when hearing that their child was falling behind. These limitations from the school influenced their decisions to advocate outside of the school setting.

Theme 2: Recognizing Advantages and Privileges

The second theme that unified all four cases was related to parents' mention of advantages or privileges that helped them advocate. According to Debs and colleagues (2023), privileged parents are "those with economic, social, and educational resources to navigate school choice processes to their advantage" (p. 145). For example, parents in this study had flexible work schedules, providing them with time and availability. Parents in this study also had access to outside tutoring. Theme 2, *Recognizing Advantages and Privileges*, emerged from codes that supported all four parents' privileges, which in turn supported their advocacy efforts. Table 4.2 shows details of the codes that supported this theme and interview excerpts.

Table 4.2

Theme 2: Recognizing Advantages and Privileges

Code/Definition	Examples
Finding outside resources: *Parent decided to seek or take advantage of resources outside of the school setting*	"I'm not just gonna rely on the school or teacher, right, knowing that I'm, you know, I'm educated. I'm limited too, as far as specific things I can do for him. Let's go figure it out … who can help us get [it] figured out, so you know, that was my thought" (Jessica, Interview 1, 11:49). "I don't think they necessarily said, you need to find tutoring, or whatever. But it was just clear and obvious that something had to be done. And so that's when we started poking around" (Aaron, Interview 2, 5:56).

Code/Definition	Examples
Self-research: *Parent used technology to seek information related to topics of advocacy (i.e., private tutors)*	"Okay, we gotta do some research for potential tutors, just get out there, you know, search on the internet for resources" (Aaron, Interview 2, 4:44). "Yeah, so I didn't know about any speech place, like I just googled "speech places in [location]" (Anita, Interview 2, 12:20).
Connection to the university: *Parent knew someone who was affiliated with the university and used that to connect to the reading clinic*	"[W]orking at a university, there's got to be somebody in a subject area that's [an] expert that you can reach out to for help" (Jessica, Interview 2, 13:33). "We just kept looking around, that's kind of when I remembered like, oh, Bailee has this logo on her email signature" (Aaron, Interview 2, 5:56).

Note. For the purposes of this table, only selected quotes were provided.

Finding Outside Resources. *Finding outside resources* was a code that supported Theme 2 because access to outside resources was a privilege. The parents in this study had knowledge of outside resources and were available, willing, and able to provide for their child with those resources. All four parents had this advantage, in comparison to other parents, when deciding to advocate outside of the school setting. In Aaron's case, the school did not "necessarily [say that he] need[ed] to find tutoring … [b]ut it was clear and obvious that something had to be done" (Interview 2, 5:56). After a conversation that "didn't sit well" about James repeating kindergarten, Aaron decided instead to "look for potential tutors" (Interview 2, 4:44, 5:56). Prior to finding the

university reading clinic, Aaron mentioned paying a fee to a local learning center to evaluate James for tutoring. However, Aaron did not follow through with that service after the evaluation.

When Jessica looked for outside resources, she thought of her father, who worked in the athletic department, and remembered "utilizing their tutoring service" herself for high school math (Interview 2, 12:19). Jessica reached out to her contacts at the university and said, "Hey, I'm sure there's some sort of service or tutoring for somebody that, you know, needs some extra work or extra practice working with a child and reading" (Interview 2, 12:19). Anita recalled finding outside tutoring, in this case, with her aunt, after a conversation with Hayden's kindergarten teacher. In this conversation, Hayden's teacher "noticed he was going to speech, then, two times a week at school and doing private [speech tutoring] still, and he wasn't making [progress]" (Interview 1, 11:18). After this conversation, Anita decided Hayden "would benefit from [seeing her aunt]" (Interview 1, 11:18). For Natalie, the urge to seek outside resources came after her conversation with David's second grade teacher about the IEP in reading. Natalie recognized that the reading intervention given to David in school "[was] not working," and she needed "to get him outside resources" (Interview 2, 23:44). Natalie also reached out to her "family of experts" and other educators she knew who worked in the field of education (Interview 1, 3:42).

Self-Research. As a part of finding outside resources, all four parents engaged in *self-research*. The ability to engage in self-research was considered a privilege that gave parents an advantage when advocating for their child. When looking for tutors, Aaron

"search[ed] on the internet for resources" and found a learning center that he considered for James (Interview 2 transcript, 4:44). When Jessica began looking for private tutoring, she started with her contacts at the university. Jessica thought, "I'm sure there's some sort of service or tutoring for somebody who needs extra help and practice" (Interview 2, 12:19). When searching for private speech therapists, Anita admitted she "didn't know about any speech place, so [she] just googled 'speech places in [location]'" (Interview 2, 12:20).

Compared to the other parents in the study, Natalie referenced self-research more often. In addition to searching for outside tutors, Natalie also researched the qualifications of educators working with David. In her words, finding out about their level of education and background was "how we move through it" because her "whole family is academic" (Interview 1, 6:12). Natalie researched the director of the university reading clinic, suggesting that her reputation and research background were valuable characteristics. She also searched various literacy interventions on the internet, finding out about the different strategies each one used (Interview 1). Natalie researched for the purposes of finding resources, but also to gain knowledge about literacy educators and instruction.

Connection to the University. In addition to the ability to research and find outside sources, all four parents had some connection to the university, which aided them in finding the reading clinic. These connections made the process of finding an outside tutor easier and more convenient for these parents. Aaron found the reading clinic through a former athlete he reported on as a sports editor. He remembered, "Oh, Bailee

has this logo on her email signature" (Interview 2, 5:56). Not only did Aaron describe getting in touch with Bailee as "very easy," but he described the whole experience of finding the clinic as "dumb luck" (Interview 1, 10:58; Interview 2, 5:56). Natalie had several connections to university affiliations through her family members, but ultimately took the advice of a friend who told her to "check out" the university reading clinic (Interview 2, 26:14).

Jessica worked at the university where the reading clinic was housed and was friends with a professor in the education department. She reached out to this friend, Emma, remembering that "literacy was kind of her area" (Interview 2, 16:34). After sending an email explaining her situation, Jessica was in touch with the director of the reading clinic. Anita's association to the university was unique because her connection to the university was her aunt, who worked as a literacy trainer. In this way, Anita did not really have to research for reading tutors like she did with speech tutors. All she had to do was "ask [her] aunt to work with him" (Anita, Interview 1, 9:11).

The second major theme of this study involved recognition of parents' advantages and privileges that affected their ability to advocate. According to coding data, advantages and privileges included the ability to engage in self-research, find outside resources, and network at the university level. Advantages and privileges were an important part of the parents' experience that allowed them to advocate for their child outside of the school setting.

Conclusions

The purpose of Chapter Four was to describe the unique experiences of four parents who advocated for their children by seeking resources outside the school setting. Individual parent cases were retold using data from interview transcripts, video, and documents referenced throughout. Additionally, two major themes were presented that emerged from cross-case analysis. Discussion of these themes, *limitations with schools' communication systems* and *recognizing advantages and privileges* included explanations of major codes that were used to identify the themes. Each of the themes unified the parents' experiences and connected to the theoretical framework used in this study. In Chapter Five, individual and cross-case analysis are discussed with the research questions, literature reviewed, and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research study was to understand four parents' experiences with advocacy in obtaining literacy services for their children. To this end, a multiple-case study was conducted that elicited the voices of parent advocates. This chapter provides a discussion of findings considering the research questions that guided this study and the theory framing this study, including the researcher-designed model. The model (Figure 5.1) draws from literature on parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), parent advocacy (Wright & Taylor), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The model (Figure 5.1) is comprised of two sections. The model proposes that parents' perceived life contexts (skill, knowledge, time and energy) influence motivational beliefs. In turn, motivational beliefs influence the parents' experience with advocacy. Thus, the bottom section of the model lists contributing factors to advocacy in order from left to right. The top section situates parent advocacy at the micro and macro levels and within the ecological environment. Through data analysis, it became evident that concepts within the model in all sections influence one another. Thus, a bidirectional arrow was added to show that boundaries within the model (Figure 5.1) are heuristic. For ease of reading, contributing factors to advocacy referenced in Figure 5.1 are discussed as they appear in the model, and then discussed within an ecological systems theory.

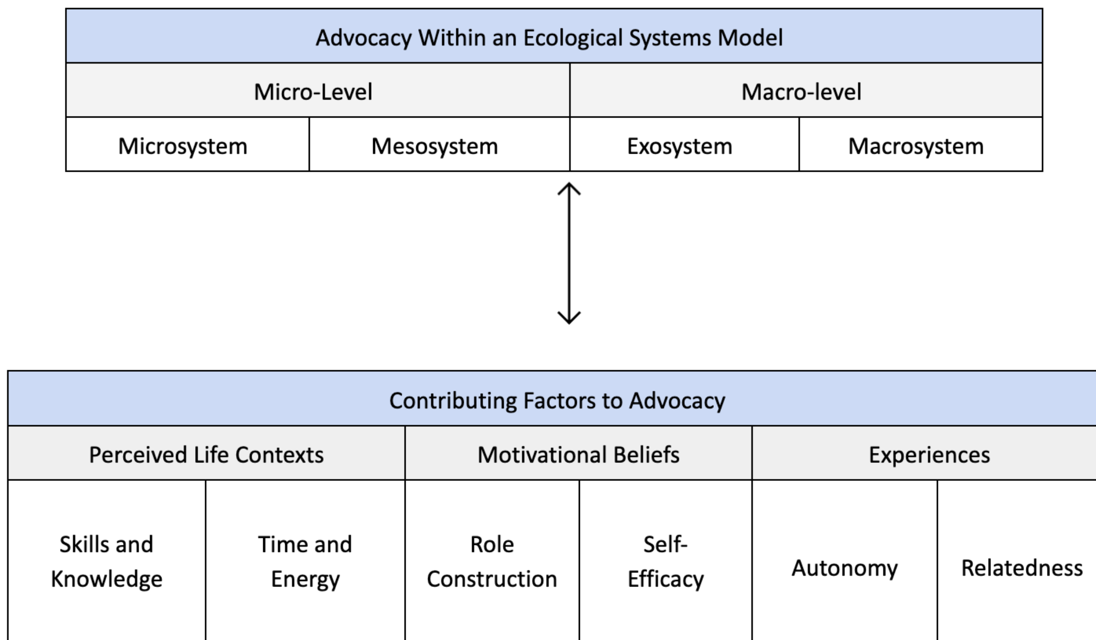


Figure 5.1

Researcher-Designed Model of Parent Advocacy

Contributing Factors to Advocacy

The first question guiding this study was *what motivates parents to seek assistance for their child's literacy needs outside of the school context?* As shown in the model of parent advocacy (Figure 5.1), perceived life contexts precede motivation. Thus, parents are motivated to advocate based in their skill, knowledge, time, and energy.

Perceived Life Contexts: Skill, Knowledge, Time, and Energy

Parents' self-perceived skills and knowledge appear to "figure heavily" in their decisions as children progress through years of schooling (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 115). Perceptions of personal skills and knowledge shape ideas about the kinds of activities in which parents are likely to participate regarding their child's education

(Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A parent might feel comfortable speaking in front of her child's class, for example, but uncomfortable helping with math homework (Green et al., 2007). Perceived life contexts are different from self-efficacy because a parent's skill or knowledge generally relates to a certain topic, whereas self-efficacy is more broad. However, a parents' perceived life contexts influence their level of self-efficacy. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, the skill, knowledge, and available time and energy described in this study are considered privileges that assist parent advocacy. This finding is consistent with the theme that emerged from the cross-case analysis, *recognizing advantages and privileges.*

Skills and Knowledge. The literature on parent involvement analyzes levels of perceived skill and knowledge for groups of parents (high socio-economic or low socio-economic) but does not divulge the skill or knowledge that motivated parents to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). In contrast, parents in this study disclosed their personal skillset and knowledge that assisted their efforts to advocate. The skills described by parents in this study included researching, coordinating, networking, or communicating. Parents used certain skills that helped them advocate for their children in the school and in new settings. For Aaron and Anita, a simple google search was the first step in advocating for their children. Aaron "search[ed] on the internet for resources," and Anita researched speech services in the area (Interview 1, 4:44). Once their children had tutoring services, both parents coordinated efforts between teachers to ensure communication was consistent between them. After Bailee, the graduate student and former athlete, "got the ball rolling," Aaron was able to coordinate lessons with teachers

at the university reading clinic (Interview 3, 6:25). Similarly, Anita managed communication between her aunt and Hayden's classroom teacher to ensure they were on the "same page" (Interview 2, 11:30). Engaging in self-research and coordinating with others were skills that helped Aaron and Anita to advocate. Their perceptions of personal skills "appear to shape their thinking" as well as their decisions made on behalf of their child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 114).

Jessica and Natalie both mentioned networking as a skill they used to advocate for their children. For Jessica, using her network meant "email[ing] out and [saying], "hey, you have an older child, what did you know?" or asking other parents "What did you do? How did you get through it?" (Interview 2, 13:59). Natalie offered a similar sentiment when she spoke about her network of sorority sisters and friends who are "all experiencing something" (Interview 1, 35:00). Parents may advocate differently "given variations in personal efficacy beliefs" about what they can do with their personal skills or knowledge (Green et al., 2007, p. 534). In this case, Jessica and Natalie felt confident networking with their known contacts, and Aaron and Anita relied on the internet for their initial search.

Parents in this study had knowledge of where to go to find outside resources and they perceived this knowledge to be a valuable resource when deciding to advocate outside of the school setting. Anita, Aaron, and Jessica knew someone educated in the field of literacy who worked at a university with a reading clinic. Knowledge of these connections made it easy for parents to reach out to several contacts to ask about tutoring services (Appendix G, Aaron, Document 4; Jessica, Document 2). Natalie and Anita had

a different level of skill and knowledge, in comparison to the other participants, that made it easier to communicate with teachers or educators. Anita was familiar with jargon related to reading instruction, such as terms for materials like "LLI" or Leveled Literacy Intervention or classroom strategies such as "guided reading" (Interview 1, 4:00; Appendix G, Documents 1-3). She also had knowledge of parent rights related to individualized education plans (IEPs). Anita used this knowledge to prevent Hayden's school from "drag[ging] their feet" about granting services at the start of each year (Interview 2, 3:30). This knowledge was helpful for Anita to feel confident advocating for Hayden's IEP rights and is consistent with the notion that parents are motivated to engage in certain activities if they believe they have the skills and knowledge to be successful (Green et al., 2007).

In addition to Natalie's network of friends, she accumulated knowledge from her "family of experts" and from her own research (Interview 1, 3:42). Natalie used this knowledge to educate herself on reading interventions, available resources, and communicate with her child's school about David. Both Anita and Natalie mentioned persistency and following through with requests to the teacher or school. According to Green and colleagues (2007), parents perceived knowledge influences persistency in working towards goals. According to Anita, persistency was necessary to getting Hayden his speech services, as the school would have likely taken "another six weeks" to grant them (Interview 2, 5:00). When asked about the skills needed to advocate, Natalie said advocacy "involves being consistent [and] following up as many times as you need to" (Interview 2, 12:37), which also demonstrates persistence. Consistent with the literature

on parent involvement (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), the parent in this study felt they could be effective advocates using relevant skills and knowledge on a certain topic. In turn, this motivated them to continue their advocacy efforts.

Time and Energy. In addition to skill and knowledge, parents' decisions to advocate were also influenced by their available amount of time and energy. According to Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (1995), parents whose jobs or life circumstances are more flexible have more time or energy to be involved. Similarly, actively involved parents have more time and energy to advocate. In this study, parents discussed the time and energy they dedicated towards advocacy. For example, Natalie dedicated a substantial amount of time advocating in the school and outside of the school setting. Natalie left the workforce to "take care of her children full time" which involved volunteering as room parent each school year (Appendix G, Document 3). She also stayed home to work with David and help with assignments during his virtual year of kindergarten. When it came to finding David an outside tutor, Natalie said she would have been willing to drive him "45 minutes to an hour" if needed (Interview 2, 12:37).

While time and access to transportation were identified as potential barriers to involvement for many parents (Gay et al., 2021), available time and access to transportation served as an advantage for Natalie. Due to her willingness to expend time and cost associated with travel, she widened the parameters of tutoring services available to David. Natalie recognized this as a privilege when she stated, "I want to make sure I say that I understand that I'm in a place of opportunity with that and sometimes, when you're advocating you don't have [that]" (Interview 2, 12:37). Consistent with the second

theme identified from study, Natalie had available time and energy because her "job or life circumstances were more flexible" (Green et al., 2007, p. 534). While Natalie is used here as an example, all four parent participants had available time and energy to pursue outside resources. Available time and energy can be viewed, for the purposes of this study, as advantages to advocacy.

Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2005) noted that variables such as time and energy may function directly as "resources that limit or enhance" the ways in which parents involve themselves (p. 115). While parents had flexible schedules that helped them have more available time, Jessica specifically mentioned time as an expense or cost. For example, she described the time it took to get Jefferson to and from his lessons as "exhausting" but something she "[had] to do to get him the help he need[ed]" (Interview 1, 13:43). Consistent with parent involvement research (Green et al., 2007, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), Jessica revealed how this impacted other family responsibilities (Interview 2). Anita remembered the amount of time she spent following up with Hayden's school about speech. She rolled her eyes when recalling the experience: "If I would have never emailed and called about speech, it probably would have easily been another 5 or 6 weeks" (Interview 2 transcript and video, 5:00). While parents had available time and energy to dedicate to advocacy, they also agreed it was time-consuming.

This multiple-case study extended previous research (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) by eliciting the voices of four parent advocates. The parents' self-assessments of perceived life contexts (skills,

knowledge, time and energy) showed the significant role these factors contributed to their decision-making processes. Perceptions of their abilities influenced the ways in which parents were inclined to advocate when it came to their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), which is why these factors are included in a model of parent advocacy (Figure 5.1).

Motivational Beliefs: Role Construction and Self-Efficacy

According to the researcher-designed model (Figure 5.1), perceived life contexts supported parents' motivational beliefs. Specifically, the model depicts that parents are motivated by their role construction and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Role Construction. Role construction encompasses parents' beliefs about child development and appropriate supporting roles in the home and at the child's school (Green et al., 2007). A parent's role construction is "subject to social influence" because it is partial to personal success and the vicarious experiences of others' success (Green et al., 2007, p. 532). Since role construction is influenced by the experiences of others, role construction is malleable. For instance, a parent's role construction can change "in response to variations to social conditions" or through persuasion of others (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 108).

The majority of parents in this study described similarities in the roles they enacted in their child's education, which included helping with homework or attending conferences with the teacher. However, there were important differences in how participants described their role construction. As described in the literature, role construction can be more or less active, depending on the parents' beliefs (Green et al.,

2007). Within the school setting, Aaron discussed a strong level of trust in the teachers at James's school. For Aaron, his role was to follow what the school directed him to do because "they are the professionals" (Interview 2, 0:38). In fact, Aaron described that his role should "never stray too far" from teacher directives (Interview 2, 0:28). Natalie, on the other hand, embodied a much more active role as an advocate in the school setting. She took on this role naturally, being that she had always "navigated the system differently because [her son is] African American" (Interview 1, 9:15). When interacting with teachers in the school, Natalie emphasized a need to choose her words carefully and initiate effective communication. In the same vein, she stressed the importance of following her gut and "following up as many times as you need to" (Interview 2, 12:27). Parents were influenced by their beliefs about "what they should do in relation to their child's education" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Consistent with the literature, an active or passive role construction does not affect a parents' ability to advocate (Green et al., 2007). While Natalie described a more active role, both Aaron and Natalie were capable and successful advocates.

Self-Efficacy. A parent's self-efficacy refers to the belief that "he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes" (Green et al., 2007, p. 533). Self-efficacy affects a parent's shaping of goals and their persistence in working towards those goals (Green et al., 2007). During Interview 2, parents were asked to describe their roles as parents and advocates and the level of confidence they felt in those roles. Parents

discussed various opinions of their role and perceived levels of self-efficacy influencing their ability to advocate.

According to the literature, self-efficacy is influenced by personal experiences of success (Green et al., 2007). Jessica and Anita reported that they felt capable with involvement activities, such as helping with homework. However, both parents questioned their confidence when they received certain news from their child's school. Anita said that a part of her "felt like [she] failed [Hayden]" when she saw his scores drop dramatically (Interview 2, 4:00). Similarly, Jessica described a feeling of "failure" when hearing that Jefferson was falling behind (Interview 2, 5:30). When asked to describe a time when she felt successful, Jessica hesitated to respond (Interview 2 video, 5:00). According to Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2005), schools "exert significant influence on parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school" (p. 109). This is consistent with the experiences of parents like Anita and Jessica who were affected by their conversations with their child's school (Theme 1). As a result of conversations these parents had regarding their child's lack of progress, Anita and Jessica blamed themselves, and in turn, their self-efficacy was affected. Parents whose experiences influence self-efficacy are more likely to ask others for help (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Negative conversations from the school, potentially due to limitations in the school's communication (Theme 1), motivated Jessica and Anita to seek help through their contacts at the university.

Experiences: Autonomy and Relatedness

A parent's sense of autonomy and relatedness influence their experiences with advocacy and are addressed in the researcher-designed model (Figure 5.1). Thus, it was necessary to address autonomy and relatedness to answer Research Question 2, *what do parents experience when advocating for their children's literacy needs?* While Ryan and Deci's (2020) work is largely geared towards students and classroom environments, concepts of autonomy and relatedness were applied to the parent's experiences in this study.

Autonomy. According to self-determination theory (SDT), autonomy refers to a person's sense of initiative and ownership to take action (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In this study, parents described a sense of autonomy to advocate on their own without the help of their child's school. For example, both Aaron and Jessica turned down solutions offered by the school and found resources on their own. Aaron and Jessica showed an urgency to seek outside help after disheartening conversations with their child's teacher. Aaron shook his head when he remembered that the school's only suggestion was to say, "Hey, what would you think about [James] going back to kindergarten?", an offer which Aaron "roundly rejected" (Interview 3, 9:03).

Similarly, Jessica ignored the school's suggestion to place Jefferson in a group summer camp because she thought he would benefit more from individualized tutoring. Jessica was autonomous with her decision to not "rely on [the school] at all" (Interview 3, 17:33). Both Aaron's and Jessica's sense of autonomy was supported by interest or value, in this case, to find resources that better suited their child's needs (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Consistent with SDT, parents were intrinsically motivated to take action and advocate outside of the school setting (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Relatedness. According to SDT, relatedness concerns the parents' sense of belonging. Additionally, relatedness contributes to autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the context of this study, parents described relatedness when they mentioned the support or advice they received from others. Jessica said that everyone she reached out or spoke to about Jefferson was "very positive and willing to help" (Interview 3, 14:18). Jessica's friend Emma shared a relatable story of her son who also needed help to catch up in reading, sharing the following sentiment: "It's not your fault … every child is different [and] sometimes they just need some extra help" (Interview 3, 15:05). Comparably, Natalie felt a sense of belonging from her community of sorority sisters, friends, or family who shared resources or gave advice. In fact, Natalie relied on the advice of experts to make decisions regarding David's literacy needs. For the parents in this study, seeking advice and support created a sense of belonging and motivated them to act autonomously when advocating for their children (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In summary, parents were driven to advocate by their perceived life contexts, motivational beliefs, and sense of autonomy and relatedness. These contributing factors are included in the researcher-designed model of parent advocacy to extend the current work on parent involvement (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) in several ways. First, in the current literature on parent involvement (Green et al., 2007), there is no framework to understand parent advocacy in a similar manner. The current model (Green et al., 2007), which is over 25 years old, has been used to report varied levels of

skill and knowledge, but the literature does not reveal the specific skills or knowledge parents utilized. The model used in this study (Figure 5.1) aids in a qualitative description of parent advocacy using its contributing factors, most of which are the same factors to predict parent involvement. In addition, the current study elicits the voices of four parent advocates who describe the specific skills and knowledge they utilized to advocate effectively for their children. Lastly, the model Figure 5.1 allows descriptions of parent advocacy to extend beyond the home and school settings. In order to extend the discussion, parent advocacy is described using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model. The following section discusses advocacy within each ecological environment, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Advocacy Within an Ecological Systems Model

Micro-Level Advocacy Within the Microsystem and Mesosystem

Micro-level advocacy refers to efforts made on behalf of the individual child, such as for improved services (Wright & Taylor, 2014). Parents in this study advocated at the micro level within the microsystem and mesosystem. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) defines the microsystem as the immediate setting containing the developing person. In the context of this study, the microsystem contains the parent and their actions or decisions concerning their child at home or in the child's school. The mesosystem refers to the relations between single settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the first two ecological systems, parents were motivated to advocate after conversations that revealed *limitations within the school's communication process*, which was identified as a major theme of this study.

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, the "linkages between settings" are of equal importance to the actions that occur in those settings" (p. 7). Yet, all four parents described an experience where these connections within the mesosystem weakened. Parents in this study reported feelings of shock or blindsidedness when hearing from the school about their child's progress. As evident in this study, parents were involved in their child's education by attending conferences, helping with homework, and initiating communication with the teacher. Natalie and Anita went far beyond these requirements to advocate by asking for additional or more effective reading services for their children. Nonetheless, connections or links between adults within the mesosystem can be strengthened or weakened (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When the relationship between teacher and parents becomes faulty, parents feel they need to pursue other options without using the school's solutions. The links between the parents and teachers in this study were weakened due to issues with communication, which led parents to establish and maintain connections through knowledgeable others in whom they confided for help and advice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Connections parents had to the university clinic aided the parents in finding outside resources. Additionally, they helped maintain existing connections to people with whom they were already friends, relatives, or colleagues. Thus, connections within the mesosystem were both strengthened and weakened at certain points during advocacy.

Macro-Level Advocacy Within the Exosystem and Macrosystem

Macro-level advocacy refers to actions that benefit not only an individual student but address larger changes or inequities (Wright & Taylor, 2014). While parents in this

study did not mention advocacy at the macro level, their advocacy efforts can be discussed within the exosystem and macrosystem. In the exosystem, events occur that involve decisions that affect the parent, even when the parent is not physically present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of this study, these events took place during the school day when teachers and staff met during MTSS. These meetings discuss all students in the grade band, but particularly students who may need additional support. MTSS meetings are generally scheduled during the school day when the teachers have their planning period. Since multiple students are discussed in one meeting, and meetings are during typical work hours, parents are not typically invited to attend. Regardless, the decisions made in these meetings affect not only the student but the parent as well, which is why they represent the exosystem. MTSS meetings that occurred within the exosystem were an important part of this study because they suggested limitations in the school's communication system and influenced a major theme of this study. Findings of this research suggest that parents lack information from the school about the decisions made or goals set for their child during MTSS. This lack of information and communication breakdown affected the parents' decisions and motivations to advocate outside of the school setting.

The macrosystem involves the social and cultural influence of the parents' decisions or actions towards advocacy (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within any culture or subculture, settings of a given kind tend to appear similar, "whereas between cultures they are distinctly different" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 4). Therefore, it was important for this research to consider the social and cultural values of parent participants. Findings

from this study suggest a connection between motivational beliefs and social and cultural beliefs. For example, role construction and self-efficacy are influenced by social norms and the influence of others (Green et al., 2007). A parent's role construction involves their beliefs about "what they are supposed to do in relation to their child's education," which is also socially constructed (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107) In this study, Aaron believed he should follow the teachers' directives and trust them as professionals (Interview 2). Social norms and influences differed for others, like Jessica, who thought it was her responsibility to supplement work that the teachers sent home so that Jefferson "gets what he needs" (Interview 2, 1:19). Jessica understood the constraints of a teacher's job and therefore felt it was her job to assume the role of advocate and find outside resources for Jefferson. The actions taken by the parents in this study show that they were in fact advocating within the exosystem and macrosystem.

Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2005) suggested that schools should frame their efforts to support parents' involvement with a broad understanding of family culture. This is particularly important for families who are "marginalized with reference to mainstream U.S. society" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 116). Natalie's social and cultural values were largely influenced by her experiences with racial inequity and the need to "navigate some things differently" in the school setting (Interview 1, 9:15). Natalie felt she had to advocate differently for David's literacy needs because students can potentially be overidentified for services in school based on race and ethnicity. In Natalie's words, "black and brown children [are] disproportionately put in [intervention] programs" (Interview 1, 9:15). Natalie's passion for advocacy was "relentless" because it

was influenced by strong social and cultural values within the macrosystem (Interview 2, 23:24).

Implications

This research supports the need for more effective communication between schools and families, both generally and in regard to the information discussed during MTSS meetings. For example, Jessica reported that meetings were not required with teachers, and Jefferson's kindergarten teacher did not offer a meeting until April (Appendix G, Document 1). Similarly, Anita reported that conferences were only held once a year, and if the parent wanted additional meetings, they were specially requested by a teacher or parent (Appendix G, Document 5). Parents in this study were involved parents and strong advocates, yet they did not receive required information from the school about MTSS. In fact, if parents did have information about MTSS, it was because they had a teaching background or researched MTSS themselves. If parents were informed about discussions regarding their children early on, they would not have reported blindsidedness at the news that their child was falling behind, as was found in this study.

Similarly, school leaders should support teachers with navigating conversations with parents about MTSS. While written information is generally preferred or suggested (Weingarten et al., 2020), in-person, multi-directional communication around MTSS would be much more effective. Schools should find ways to communicate the MTSS process with parents at the beginning of the school year, and then more frequently update the parents who have students moving up in intervention tiers. This communication

should invite parents to be involved in a collaborative way. As demonstrated in this study, some parents had a more passive role construction. Therefore, schools need to be sensitive to the various approaches parents may take when advocating for their children.

Additionally, schools should inform parents of their rights related to requesting evaluations for academic-related services. It was evident from this study that Anita's neighbor (Interview 1) was not informed of her right to request an evaluation for her son. If a student has a 504 plan, the parent should be aware of how to request further evaluations to ensure their child is receiving the most appropriate level of service as required by law. Parents have the right to request an evaluation for their child within the parameters of their state's requirements. In South Carolina, these evaluations should be granted and provided for students at public expense (SCDE, 2011). Additionally, schools are required to notify parents of their rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) annually (SCDE, 2011). These rights grant the parent to review educational records, seek amendment to these records, or file a complaint concerning alleged failures by the local educational agency or institution to comply with FERPA requirements (SCDE, 2011). Since communication emerged as a major theme, it would be beneficial for parents and schools to strengthen and improve the ways in which they interact and communicate.

Limitations

While a small sample size of four parents allowed for detailed descriptions of parent cases, it is also a limitation of this study. Findings from this study were also limited by location, as parents all lived in the same southeastern state. Stories told by

parents in this study were unique for various reasons. One reason being that parents found a university reading clinic that was not advertised to the public. Rather, parents had unique connections that helped them find the services offered through the clinic. In addition, parents had to use skills and knowledge of resources to reach out and make contact to their connections and ask about tutoring services. Although these were described as advantages or privileges in this study, they also serve as limitations because access to a university reading clinic is uncommon. In reference to the researcher-designed model, parents described advocacy at the micro level only. A study that includes parents who advocated at the macro level would be insightful to interpret how contributing factors to advocacy influence larger changes or inequities in the school system.

Recommendations for Future Research

Chapter Five has presented a synthesis of four parents' motivations and experiences to advocate for their children's literacy needs by seeking resources outside of the school setting. The study described contributing factors to advocacy that were included in a researcher-designed model and influenced by existing literature on parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2020), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This research intended to elicit the voices of four parents to reveal their unique stories, discuss advantages and privileges related to advocacy, and identify limitations within the school system. This chapter also discussed implications for parents and schools regarding advocacy rights and effective communication. Limitations of this study involved the parameters by which the study was bounded.

There are several recommendations for future research that could contribute to and extend the existing knowledge and understanding of parent advocacy. For example, this study focused solely on parent experiences and did not examine the impact of advocacy on student learning outcomes. Future research is needed to understand the implications of parent advocacy for students' literacy development and growth. Studies that investigate student outcomes and how they are influenced by parent advocacy may motivate parents to engage in advocacy efforts. Additionally, the four cases in this study were bounded by time. Therefore, a study examining the long-term effects of parent advocacy on children, families, and communities would extend this research.

Throughout the current study, parents mentioned the privileges that enabled them to better advocate for their children. However, this study did not detail the intersection of parent education level and socioeconomic status in relation to advocacy. Future research may help identify unique challenges and opportunities faced by diverse groups. One parent in this study who identified as African American raised distinctive issues in her efforts to navigate a predominantly white school system. Future research could also position race and ethnicity at the center to help illuminate how advocacy varies for individuals. Addressing these research recommendations will advance understanding about parent advocacy and its potential to impact various aspects of education.

Conclusion

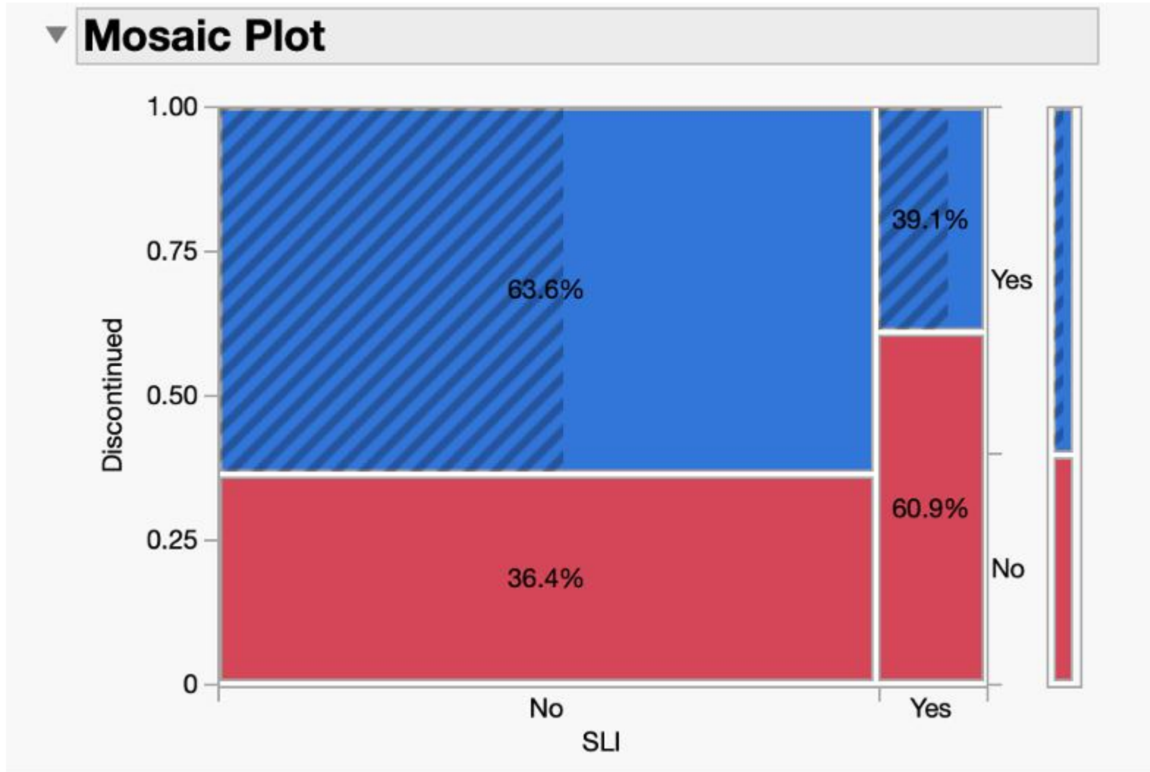
This multiple case study explored the ways in which parents navigated advocacy in various settings. The parents in this study had children who had difficulty learning to read and write in the classroom. Due to various limitations within the school system,

parents were motivated to advocate. Parents had advantages in their level of skill, knowledge, and time and energy available to dedicate to advocacy. This study presented implications for schools to communicate effectively with parents, particularly regarding information discussed during MTSS. The participants in this study provide substantiation that a parent is a child’s best advocate (Besnoy et al., 2015).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Analysis of Students by Rate of Successful Literacy Intervention



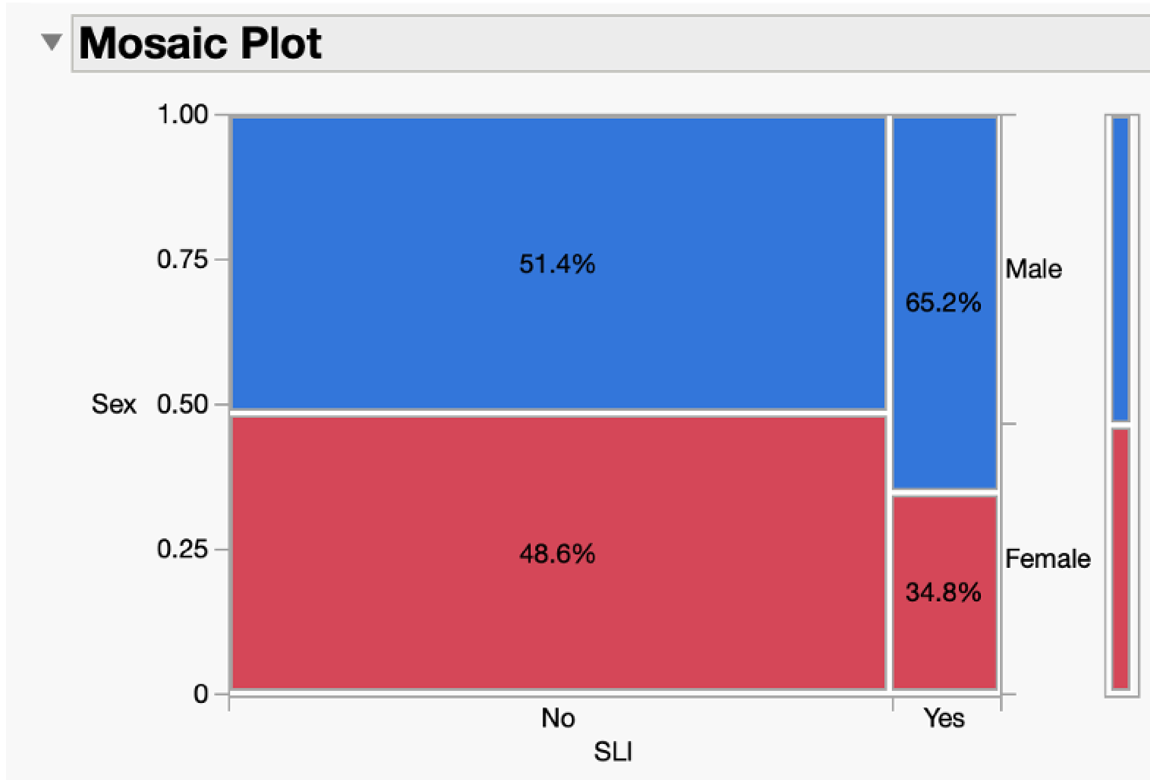
Note. This figure shows the number of students who successfully completed (discontinued from) literacy intervention with and without SLI.

Figure A-1

Analysis of Students by Rate of Successful Literacy Intervention

Appendix B

Analysis of Students with SLI by Sex



Note. This figure shows the number of male and female students with SLI.

Figure B-1

Analysis of Students of SLI by Sex

Appendix C

Interview Script

Hello (parent's name) and thank you again for participating in my research study. My research is focused on your experience and motivations advocating for your child's literacy needs outside of the school context. You were asked to participate because you advocated for your child by contacting a university reading clinic for literacy instruction. In reference to the questions you will be asked, I define parent advocacy as the impetus to act on behalf of your child.

In addition to interviews, I would like to reference documents you have brought to the university reading clinic that speak to advocacy. These are documents you brought from your child's teacher, for example, such as assessment scores, reading levels, homework, informal class assessments such as spelling assessments, documents related to speech services, or any other similar documents. In addition, these documents could include email correspondences to staff members at the university clinic. Please know that no identifying information will be shared publicly. The documents will be used for data analysis and will only be seen by me. Have you had a chance to look over the adult consent form?

I will need to audio and video record this interview for data analysis. Do I have your permission to do so? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix D

Interview 1

This interview will be discussing your knowledge and skills related to advocating for your child both in the school setting and outside.

1. What do you know about the instruction and intervention (your child) received in the classroom (K-2nd)?
2. MTSS is an acronym that stands for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. (Show graphic for reference). How familiar are you with the term "MTSS" and what it involves?
    a. Follow up question: Is this knowledge from the school/teacher, or your own research?
3. Can you describe your knowledge of your child's reading ability as it was described to you by their classroom teacher?
4. Can you talk about your knowledge of your child's reading ability based on sources outside the school setting? (your own observations, research, others' opinions you find valuable)
5. What did you need to learn to advocate for your child's literacy needs? (for example, tutoring programs, connections to university, literacy instruction in general)
6. What skills did you need and utilize as a parent and advocate when seeking support or services for your child's literacy needs?
7. Did the process of advocating increase the knowledge you had previously about what your child needs in terms of literacy?

8. Describe the level of time/energy you spent on advocating for your child both in and outside of the school.

Appendix E

Interview 2

1. How do you view your role as a parent regarding your child's academic (specifically literacy) needs?
   a. What does the role of a parent involve? (school/education setting)
2. How capable do you feel in this role as a parent? (pertaining to the items you discussed in the above question)
3. Describe times when you felt successful or unsuccessful when involving yourself in your child's education. (Helping with homework, attending report card conferences, interactions with school staff or teacher, etc.)
4. How do you view your role as a parent advocate?
   a. What does the role of a parent advocate involve?
5. How capable do you feel as an advocate for your child's literacy needs?
6. What led you to contact the university reading clinic? (more specific than "he had trouble reading") Were there certain events or instances that became the deciding point? Conversations with others?
7. What were your motivations behind the decision to get your child lessons at the university reading clinic?

Appendix F

Interview 3

Start by following up on any response from Interviews 1–2.

1. When and why did you first become concerned about your child's literacy needs?
2. How would you describe your interactions with your child's teachers? (K-2nd) Teachers can include interventionists or speech-language pathologists you have had interactions/communication with.
3. Describe your experience if/when you advocated for your child's literacy needs within the school setting. Who did you reach out or speak to? (For example, spoke to a teacher at a report card conference, reached out to a teacher via phone/email, talked to a literacy coach, interventionist, principle, etc.)
4. Is there anything that you needed from those interactions that you did not get? If so, please describe.
5. Where did you go for information when you began to advocate outside of the school setting? (If they already answered this question in Interview 1, ask them to expand—did they start by talking to family, other friends, etc.? Did they talk to the school first?)
6. What resources/tools did you use during the advocacy process?
7. Describe any person/group of people/interaction that influenced your decisions to advocate for your child's literacy needs both within the school setting and outside of the school setting.
8. Describe the process of contacting the university reading clinic. (elaborate/add)

9. Describe any support you had during your process of advocating for your child's literacy needs. (in general)
10. In what ways do you feel you are responsible for advocating on behalf of your child's literacy needs?
11. Once your child was attending the clinic for literacy lessons, did you feel it was necessary to communicate this with the child's teacher(s)/interventionists? Why or why not?
    a. What type of communication?
12. In what ways did your child's school (teachers, school staff) support you in seeking outside help for your child's literacy needs?
13. In what ways do you continue to advocate now?
14. What advice would you have for another parent in the same situation?
15. Tell me about the document you brought with you today.
16. Is there anything about the information on this document that surprised you?
17. Apart from the physical document, is there anything that confirmed the information on the document?

Appendix G

Documents

Participant	Document Number	Document Type
Aaron	Document 1	Email correspondence with researcher
Aaron	Document 2	James’ school-wide assessment results
Aaron	Document 3	James’ reading level report
Aaron	Document 4	Email correspondence with staff at university reading clinic
Jessica	Document 1	Email correspondence with researcher
Jessica	Document 2	Email correspondence with Emma
Jessica	Document 3	Jefferson’s school-wide assessment results
Anita	Document 1	Hayden’s reading level documents from teacher
Anita	Document 2	Hayden’s school-wide assessment results
Anita	Document 3	Hayden’s report card from Cedar Creek
Anita	Document 4	Letter home notifying parent of Tier 3 intervention
Anita	Document 5	Text message correspondence with researcher
Natalie	Document 1	Email correspondence with researcher
Natalie	Document 2	Text message correspondence with David’s teacher
Natalie	Document 3	Text message correspondence with researcher

Appendix H

Codebook

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
Acknowledging teacher hardships	18	*Parent acknowledged the hardships of a teachers' job, such as the time constraints, teaching children with different needs, etc.*	Perceptions of teachers
Admitting that you need help	15	*Parent was willing to admit to themselves or others that they needed support with their child's literacy needs*	Reflective
Advantage with teaching background	8	*Parent had a teaching background which assisted conversations with their child's teacher*	Advantage/Privilege
Advocating for African American student	7	*Parent felt the need to advocate specifically for their African American child in a predominately white school system*	Limitations of school system
Antecedent event	3	*An event that was the 'aha' moment that motivated the parent to advocate beyond the school setting*	Outside services
Blindsided	11	*Parent was blindsided by mention of students' progress*	Negative feelings; Limitations of school system
Committing to parenting duties	5	*Parent expressed a commitment to fulfilling essential parenting duties on*	Committing to parenting duties

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
		behalf of their child's overall wellbeing	
Connection to university	7	*Parent knew someone connected to the university which helped them find the university's reading clinic*	Advantage/Privilege; Resources
"Coordinating"	2	*Direct quote*	Skills
Disagreeing with school personnel	10	*Parent disagrees with a teacher's or school's decision related to child's interventions, IEP's, end of year decisions, etc.*	Disagreement
Disconnect in communication within the school	4	*Miscommunication of some sort between teacher and parent during the school year*	Miscommunication
Expense of time and energy		*Parent described time and energy as an expense or cost*	Resources
Expert help/advice	9	*Parent requested information or support from someone they view as an expert on a topic*	Sources of support; Advantage/Privilege
Family member is educator/resource	14	*Parent relied on a family member as point of contact during advocacy due to education background*	Sources of support; Advantage/Privilege
"Family of experts"	9	*Direct quote*	Sources of support; Advantage/Privilege
Finding outside resources	26	*Parent sought resources outside of the school setting*	Skills; Advantage/Privilege
"Failure"		*Direct quote*	Negative Feelings

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
Familiarity with people	5	*Contacting a certain person was easy because they had a prior relationship with them*	Advantage/Privilege
"Flexibility"	9	*Direct quote*	Skills
Having knowledge of rights as a parent		*Parent was knowledgeable of their rights as a parent in relation to their child's 504/IEP, testing, etc.*	Background knowledge
Impact of COVID on instruction	30	*Parent discussing how COVID influenced modalities of instruction, learning trajectories, etc.*	Impacts on learning
Knowing their child well	36	*Parent is knowledgeable about their child's personality, learning needs, reading/writing/speech ability, etc. and overall strengths and weaknesses*	Background knowledge
Lack of information about child's learning needs	12	*Teacher/school communicated progress in the form of tests & reading levels, but did not communicate specifics about classroom instruction, child's specific learning needs, why they are falling behind, etc.*	Limitations of school system
"luck"	4	*Direct quote*	Advantage/Privilege
Mention of testing	6	*Parent mentions testing (within the school) in some way*	Use of assessment/data

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
Miscommunication between teacher and parent	8	*Miscommunication occurred between parent and teacher/school regarding child's progress or academic standing*	Miscommunication
Networking with people you trust	16	*Parents used people they trusted as a point of contact when finding the university reading clinic*	Skills
Noticing student's lack of progress	5	*Parent noticed students' lack of progress with reading/speech at home*	Reflective
Other parents as a resource	4	*Parent participants sought the support/advice of other parents when seeking outside resources*	Resources
Parent acknowledging limitations	19	*Parent separates themselves from the role of an educator because they don't have the same educational background/training to teach their child*	Reflective
Parent advocates for IEP rights	2	*Parent advocated for services outlined in their IEP*	Skills
Parent advocates for student to re-take test in school	1	*Parent asked permission for their child to re-take a test due to score*	Skills; Advantage/Privilege
Parent has availability	3	*Parent describes time available for involvement activities, such as helping with homework, attending*	Advantage/Privilege; Resources

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
		events at school, volunteering, etc.	
Parent initiating communication with teacher	5	*Parent initiates informal conversation or meeting with teacher to discuss child's academic needs or progress*	Seeking communication
Parent mentions getting child tested/evaluated	3	*Parent implied having child tested or evaluated outside of the school setting*	Use of assessment/data
Parent pushing for additional services	6	*Parent requesting an additional service to support child's academic needs*	Skills
Parent acknowledging their strengths	5	*Parent acknowledging their own strengths such as their education, financial status, feelings of capability, etc. that assisted with advocacy*	Reflective
Parent's knowledge of classroom instruction	10	*Parent was knowledgeable about the literacy instruction their child was receiving in the classroom (small group, guided reading, etc.)*	Background knowledge
Parent wanting to find the cause of literacy issues	9	*Parent expresses a want or need to find the cause of their child's literacy difficulties*	Seeking the cause
Persistency		*Parent is persistent in following up with school/staff administration about child's reading or speech needs/progress*	Skills
Positive communication about student progress	4	*Parent expressed positive communication between*	Positive Feelings

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
		themselves and child's teacher or school	
Praise for the university reading clinic	8	*Parent expressed praise for the university reading clinic staff, intervention, or experience*	Positive Feelings
Qualifications of educators	8	*Parent mentioned qualifications of child's teacher/interventionist including their educational background, training, research agenda, etc.*	Perceptions of teachers
Self-research	28	*Parent researched topics such as tutoring services or reading interventions*	Skills; Advantages/Privileges
Speech affecting literacy	15	*Parent described ways in which child's speech difficulties affected literacy learning*	Impacts on learning
Support from outside educators/administrators	4	*Parent described support from educators/administrators who they knew personally (not from child's school)*	Sources of support
Teacher limitations	4	*Parent described teachers as "limited" due to job constraints (time, energy, requirements, lack of training, etc.)*	Perceptions of teachers
Teacher offers IEP	6	*Teacher offers an IEP for reading*	In-school services

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
Teacher recommending an outside resource	8	*Teacher recommended an outside tutoring resource to support child's reading*	Outside services
Teacher reports child's reading level	12	*Parent mentioned child's reading level given from teacher to communicate progress*	Use of assessment/data
Teachers as partners	3	*Parent expressed a want to act as a partner with child's teacher with the goal of supporting child's literacy needs*	Perceptions of teachers
Trusting teachers/schools' expertise	6	*Parent expressed that they support teachers/schools' expertise and decision making regarding their child*	Perceptions of teachers
Unfamiliar with MTSS	4	*Parents reported that they were not given information related to MTSS from the child's school, or had not heard of MTSS at all*	Limitations of school system
Unsuccessful communication with child's teacher	8	*Parent described communication or interaction with their child's teacher as unsuccessful because they didn't get what they needed from the conversation*	Miscommunication
Wanting the child to have one-on-one instruction	4	*Parent expressed a preference for their child to have one-on-one tutoring*	Advantage/Privilege; Resources

Code	Count	Definition	Code Group
Willingness to work with child at home	11	*Parent described a willingness to help with homework or read with child*	Involvement activities

Appendix I

Highlights from Participant Video Observations

Participant	Quote	Interview #, time stamp	Non-verbal behavior aligning with what is being said	Interpretation of actions
Aaron	"I remember him just kind of struggling, you know, watching him doing it at home and just the reports we were kind of getting from the school, which, was you know, it was tough to kind of watch and hear it. It was disappointing thinking that he wasn't able to do what his classmates were doing"	Interview 1, 6:30	Fidgeting; folding and refolding hands; tapping foot	Confirming
Aaron	"It was just the ultimate luck out sort of situation"	Interview 1, 9:46	Shakes head	Confirming
Jessica	When Jefferson's reading issues were brought up, it was at the very end of the school year. And I had no idea that he was struggling that he was in the group of kids, it may be that we're struggling, and we're on the bubble and needed extra help. And here, I go in, and here's the reading specialist and his teacher. And it's the end of April. And they're	Interview 2, 5:46	Gesturing, nodding, gesturing towards chest, hits thighs	Emphasizing

Participant	Quote	Interview #, time stamp	Non-verbal behavior aligning with what is being said	Interpretation of actions
	like, well, Jefferson is having some issues - and I'm like, what?			
Jessica	And that's maybe like a failure or like, oh, my gosh, what did I not do what you know?	Interview 2, 5:50	Clutches chest	Confirming
Anita	Sadly, in the public schools, a lot of it, the parents have to be the ones that step up and say, like, "I want Hayden in speech, I want [the school/teacher] to do this."	Interview 1, 13:05	Looks down, laughs	Emphasizing
Anita	Just seeing like, like when you see it like the other teachers never said he was below grade level. So when this teacher is coming in saying it, it like hit and I was like, there's something not right so that's when I knew that we either needed to like meet with her and other like the reading coach or the principal like Something's just not jiving here.	Interview 3, 15:00	Holds up paper, emphasis on words, gesturing with hands	Emphasizing

Participant	Quote	Interview #, time stamp	Non-verbal behavior aligning with what is being said	Interpretation of actions
Natalie	Yeah, we consulted with our family of experts, because I was like, I had internal gut feeling like, *I don't think this is what I wanted to do*, and I should have followed that (emphasis added).	Interview 1	Folds hands, shaking head from side to side	Emphasizing
Natalie	We have to navigate some things differently because we're African American in the system. Like this is true. People can say that it's not but it's true. And I'm not saying that anyone is racist. What I'm saying is there's a system. And so the system can work both ways at times that because I know how disproportionately black and brown children are put in these programs because that is what my family studies.	Interview 1, 9:15	Raises eyebrows, uses hands to gesture, nods	Emphasizing

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