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**THE IMPACT OF LEVELED LITERACY KITS ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND
SCHOOL-TO-HOME CONNECTIONS: STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

In
Curriculum & Instruction

by
Donna Atwood

Approved by

Dr. Kimberly McFall, Committee Chairperson

Dr. Edna Meisel, Committee Co-Chairperson

Dr. Barbara O'Byrne, Committee Member

Dr. Stephanie Burdette, Committee Member

Marshall University

May 2023

Approval of Thesis/Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of Donna Atwood, affirm that the dissertation, *The Impact of Leveled Literacy Kits on Family Engagement and School-to-Home Connections: Stakeholders' Perceptions*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Curriculum and Instruction department and the College of Education and Professional Development. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.


Kimberly McFall (Feb 21, 2023 22:08 GMT+1)

Dr. Kimberly McFall, Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Chairperson

Feb 21, 2023

Date


Edna Meisel (Feb 22, 2023 17:54 EST)

Dr. Edna Meisel, Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Member

Feb 22, 2023

Date


Barbara O'Byrne

Dr. Barbara O'Byrne, Department of Literacy Education
Committee Member

Feb 23, 2023

Date


Dr. Stephanie Burdette

Dr. Stephanie Burdette, West Virginia State University
External Member

Feb 23, 2023

Date

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Abstract

Many caregivers do not have materials at home to read with their student that is on the student's reading level. Educators do not always have the appropriate materials to send home to each student on their reading level. The goal for caregivers is to feel confident in having resources at home to help their students, educators, and caregivers to engage in literacy-focused family engagement and to have a school-home connection. However, based on multiple studies, many students read below grade level, and schools struggle with literacy-focused family engagement and making school-home connections. This study aimed to determine the impact of leveled literacy kits on family engagement and school-to-home connections from the stakeholders' perceptions. To help with this determination, the study examined stakeholders' perceptions of their experience with the leveled literacy kits and the procedures for checking them in and out. The study also examined caregivers' perceptions after checking out a leveled literacy kit on engagement with the school and confidence in reading with their student. After data collection, the leveled literacy kits were found to be an effective resource tool for literacy-focused family engagement and making school-to-home connections.

Keywords: literacy-focused family engagement, leveled literacy kits, caregiver

Chapter 1: Introduction

Data indicates that elementary school students across West Virginia (WV) struggle to read on grade level. According to the WV 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, 70% of fourth graders read at a basic or below basic reading level (NAEP, 2019). Improving family literacy engagement and working with the schools is one way to support students reading below grade level (Conderman & Short, 2018).

The West Virginia Family Engagement Center (WVFEC) is a statewide organization in WV that provides support services, programming, highly qualified professional development, and resources to 100 schools in WV. The WVFEC is supported by the partnership between the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) and The EdVenture Group, Inc., a nonprofit whose goal is to empower schools and communities to build a more diverse, equitable, and just future for our youth. The WVFEC aims to provide training and assistance to schools identified by state education agencies (SEA) and local education agencies (LEA) as low literacy-achieving schools. In WV, over half of the K-3 students are from low socioeconomic status families (44,483 out of 81,273 K- 3 students) (WVDE, 2022). A sub-goal of WVFEC is to improve literacy and provide interventions that ensure WV remains on track in closing the literacy achievement gap (WVFEC, 2018). The funding for the WVFEC is provided through the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement.

The WVFEC implemented the *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level-Up)* program through the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement grant funding (WVFEC, 2018). The impact of the *Level-Up* program on caregivers and educators is the focus of this dissertation study.

Statement of the Problem

Within rural communities, Hull and Schultz (2002, as cited in Franzak et al., 2019) found that “research has spoken clearly about a frequent disconnect between in-and out-of-school literacies” (p. 13). The perceptions of literacy in the community and educators' perceptions can often differ. Resources and strategies need to be shared with educators and caregivers to close this gap in the perception of literacy outside of school and in the community (Franzak et al., 2019). Family engagement in elementary schools contain challenges that keep the school-to-home connection from occurring. The challenges have been difficult for educators. Caregivers can lack confidence in working with their student at home (Swain & Cara, 2019). Caregivers can also struggle with feeling comfortable and knowledgeable to talk to school staff about literacy. Educators lack tangible resources to give caregivers to build their confidence and knowledge in literacy while working with their student at home.

The problem is that educators and caregivers struggle to have access to reading material for children, such as level-appropriate books in the home or school libraries (International Literacy Association, 2020). A school library may only allow students to check out one book at a time. If the child chooses a book on his/her own, the book may not be on his/her reading level. If the book is not on the student's reading level, the student could struggle to read the book and reach a level of frustration. Students reading difficult books at home can develop negative attitudes toward reading, leading to low performance in the classroom (Feazell, 2004). Children in rural areas, such as WV, have limited educational activities and resources for children at home (Philips et al., 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The WVFECC developed and implemented the *Level-Up* program in ten elementary schools in nine counties in WV. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the procedure of providing leveled literacy kits for student caregivers. The study also investigated how leveled literacy kits in the Level-Up program influence stakeholders' perceptions of literacy-focused family engagement and building the school-to-home connection. Also, because this was the first use of these literacy kits, this study provided a pilot study for the *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level Up)* implemented for the first time in ten elementary schools in WV by Family Engagement Specialists provided by WVFECC (The EdVenture Group, 2022).

Rationale of the Study

There are some programs currently existing in WV to address children's lack of reading materials. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library program provides quality books in birth to age five homes but not necessarily on the child's reading level. For example, a five-year-old would receive a book on a kindergarten reading level, but the student may be reading at a different level. The student could become frustrated if the book is not on the student's independent level. When a student is frustrated, it can lead to the student shutting down and continuing their lack of reading development. Read Aloud WV provides books of interest to students in the schools who participate in the program. These books serve the purpose of students being interested in reading but not building the students' reading skills with something on the student's reading level. The Leaders of Literacy Campaign, and Ready. Read. Write. West Virginia. from the WVDE provides online tools to caregivers and educators. However, not every residential area in WV has

access to reliable broadband (Kelley & Sisneros, 2020). Website links to programs and resources can also be challenging to store and locate at the time of need.

The *Level-Up* program filled a gap for caregivers to help their student at home and provided a resource for educators to help with the school-to-home connection. Leveled literacy kits could be a missing link between caregivers and teachers to connect school, home, and literacy-focused family engagement. This study will examine the stakeholder's perceptions of the leveled literacy kits.

Significance of the Study

While professional literature has provided ample information on family engagement in general, there is limited information about literacy-focused family engagement and lacks tangible resources educators can utilize with families. Access to leveled literacy kits could open the opportunity to bring literacy development into homes and strengthen family-school engagement. Leveled literacy kits could impact family engagement, the school-to-home connection, and the confidence and knowledge of caregivers engaging with their student in literacy at home. Benefits such as vocabulary building, oral language, and stories to stimulate and build imagination occurs when home caregivers read to children from infancy (Straub, 1999).

According to ZoomWV data, WV's 2020-2021 assessment scores showed that only 34% of students met or exceeded the literacy standards in the 3rd grade (WVDE, 2022), which indicates that 63% of students in the third grade and below in WV could benefit from access to a reading level appropriate leveled literacy kit to take home. According to the WVDE SY2021 achievement data, WV has dropped over ten percentage points in third-grade reading proficiency rate since 2019, a likely consequence of the COVID- 19 pandemic. West Virginia schools need resources and strategies to get students caught up in reading skills while engaging with families. Families can support literacy at home,

as the leveled literacy kit provide tools and resources to increase family comfort levels and help effective literacy practices. Phillips et al. (2007) state that “studies also indicate that both academic programs and out-of-school-time enrichment activities can have positive effects on the achievement of low-income children” (p. 66).

The *Level-Up* program is designed to increase family involvement, connect homes and schools, and possibly serve as a path to closing student reading achievement gaps. These desired outcomes led to the practical steps of implementing literacy programming, training for educators, and creating leveled literacy kits as resources for caregivers, all supporting the link of family engagement efforts to student learning. This study also added to existing resources for literacy school-to-home connections for educators and caregivers when a student is struggling with meeting on-level standards.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How effective was the process used to provide leveled literacy kits to student caregivers?
2. How do the leveled literacy kits influence stakeholders’ perceptions of family engagement with literacy?
3. What impact did the implementation of the leveled literacy kits have on stakeholders’ perceptions of the school-home connection?

Operational Definitions

For this study, the following operational definitions were used:

Family Engagement – The way families are engaged in-school experiences. Family engagement can be an event, a performance, or a type of communication where the family is

engaged. For this study, family engagement with the leveled literacy kits includes engagement with the student and caregiver.

Caregivers – Due to the evolving family situations in the home, the adult playing a guardian role in a student's life may not be a parent. It may be an aunt, grandparent, foster parent, or sibling. Caregivers in this study are anyone the student would benefit from being engaged with the school that takes care of them.

Educators – Any adult who works at the school is an educator. Educators instruct students and families. They can be a social worker, counselor, teacher, librarian, or administrators at the school.

Student - A student in this study pertains to a child learning from an adult at home or school. Some children are being cared for by caregivers that are not their parents. The student maybe not be a caregiver's child.

Perceptions - Thoughts, ideas, and feelings of stakeholders involved in the leveled literacy kits.

Family Literacy Program – A family literacy program focused on literacy and bringing interaction between educators and caregivers.

On-Level Books – Books that have been identified by the text readability. Based on the Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient™ (Pioneer Valley Books, 2021), the books in the leveled literacy kits are identified as levels A through M for this study. Educators used the conversion charts to match the student with a leveled literacy kit.

Leveled Literacy Kit – Each kit includes six on-level reading books, three activities, and a resource document. The kits leveled A-C also have magnetic alphabet letters.

Lead Educator- A reading specialist, librarian, or educator with a literacy background that leads the *Level-Up* program at the school.

Delimitations of the Study

This study examined educators and caregivers utilizing leveled literacy kits at home. The ten elementary schools were in WV counties for the 2022-2023 school year. Only elementary schools participating in the WVFEC schools were included. Each lead educator had a literacy educational background, such as a classroom teacher, librarian, or Title I reading teacher. The lead educator stored and oversaw the distribution of the leveled literacy kits. The lead educator was given a check-in/check-out document to keep track of signing leveled literacy kits in and out. Educator interviews included one lead educator from each of the WVFEC's ten elementary schools. Data gathered was only from WVFEC schools and one lead educator at each school for the 2022-2023 school year. Surveys were collected and completed only by the caregivers who checked out the leveled literacy kits and participated in the activities with their student.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter presents the existing literature on family engagement, the benefits of family engagement, and how schools connect to families. Literature around literacy-focused family engagement and available strategies, resources, and literacy programs were also compiled. This chapter includes information about *Level-Up*'s program and leading partners, the West Virginia Family Engagement Center (WVFEC) and The EdVenture Group. Literature was examined on multiple topics due to the project's scope. Family engagement, school-to-home connections, and existing literacy-focused family engagement programs support the need for a literacy resource to build caregiver confidence, engagement, and relationships.

Family Engagement

A shift in the literature has occurred from family involvement to family engagement (Mapp et al., 2022). The family involvement approach is when schools lead with their mouths, identify projects, and tell caregivers how they can contribute, and the goal is to serve clients. A family engagement approach in a school strives to listen with their ears and listen to caregivers, and the goal is to gain a partnership (Hammond & Ferlazzo, 2009). According to researcher Ferrara (2011), engagement is a richer connection between home and school than just involvement. Schools need to be educated on these shifts and compare approaches to shift to more engagement with families vs. just involvement.

Throughout the years, there have been different definitions in the family engagement literature because of the widespread viewpoints on family engagement in schools. McWayne et al. (2016) state that “family engagement is typically conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses a wide range of parental behavior both at home and at school that indirectly and directly supports children’s education and learning” (p. 2). Despain’s et al. (2018)

definition of family engagement is. “Engagement is a shared collaborative approach that considers the multidimensional aspects of home and school and goes beyond a single school year” (p. 236). Family engagement can include communication, tips, newsletters, events, and resources. Each component is most beneficial if it builds skills for the family to go beyond just one event or school year. Every family engagement definition aims to involve families in their student’s education. The most recent definition comes from Dr. Mapp et al.’s. (2022), text *Everyone Wins!* “A full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development, from birth through college and career” (p.16).

Despain et al. (2018) divided parent engagement into two categories: school-based and home-based types of engagement. “School-based engagement activities include attending parent-teacher conferences, assisting with classroom activities or parties, and attending PTO or PTA meetings. Home-based engagement activities include helping with homework, discussing school matters, and supporting grade-level skills” (p. 238). School- and home-based types of engagement engage families and the school to build connections. In elementary schools, there is more school-based type of engagement.

History of Family Engagement Policies

Family engagement has slowly been made essential or featured in Federal Legislation in several bills and policies, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Family engagement has not always been seen as a necessary part to include in education. Family engagement in schools was a key component of Sections 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, Perkins V: Strengthening Career, and the WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The previous policies mentioned

above set the framework for inquiries into parent involvement in future programs. Investigations led to questions about family engagement in supporting schools and learning and have helped shape programs such as No Child Left Behind in 2001 and the most recent ESSA in 2015 (Evans & Radina, 2014). One goal of ESSA is that schools have an outreach to all parents and family members. Schools should also involve parents and families in planning and implementing programs and activities (Morita-Mullaney, 2021).

Education policy has started to include the importance of school-to-home connection in school goals. As family engagement has evolved, acts such as the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has included family engagement. IDEA (2004) stated the importance of schools connecting with families. IDEA (2004) consists of a Response to Intervention (RtI) to help students struggling in school and provide services to struggling students. The RtI program is a tiered intervention that also includes a connection to families to have success. The relationships between family and school support can positively impact children's academic success (Simone et al., 2019, p.282). IDEA also notes that "family members are experts on their students and should be involved in decision-making that affects their students, and both schools and home environments are connected to their success. Recognizing families are experts when it comes to the families' student is critical to children's academic growth, specifically literacy (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). The Technical Education for the 21st Century Act of 2018 also included family engagement as a goal (Simone et al., 2019).

Benefits of Family Engagement

Schools working with caregivers can lead to improved outcomes for students. One benefit of family engagement is improved academic performance (Hall, 2020). Other benefits include more motivated students, reduced negative behavior, and decreased dropout rates.

Schools can also improve their attendance rates when they increase family engagement. Schools and families working together lead to efficiency in communication, trust building, and raising the school's expectations, which improves student performance (Bachman et al., 2021). Jeynes (2007) also found that parental involvement positively impacts students' academic achievement. Families asking questions, communicating, and working with the schools are positive ways to engage families. Findings from Ascher and Maguire (2007) also suggest that using practices such as support for families, college access, and workshops from college application raised the percentage of students who went on to higher education among students with low reading and math scores.

The motivation of students is another benefit of family engagement. Improved motivation from family engagement in students can also lead to improved academic performance. According to Gin et al. (2021), “parental support in student engagement is associated with better behavior at school and greater motivation towards learning. To achieve this support, efforts should be directed toward attaining practical cooperation between parents and school” (p. 1091). When students have a caregiver involved who keeps them accountable, they are more motivated to do well in school. Hall (2020) stated that “students are aware of their families’ involvement in their learning and want their families’ input” (p.11). Hall also included that “family involvement is incredibly motivating for students and encourages a harder work ethic and buy-in for students” (p.11).

When a student has a caregiver invested in their journey, schools see more motivated students who increase their academic performance and reduce negative behavior. Negative behaviors of students at school can become a problem for the school staff and caregivers. Students who are uninterested, not motivated, or struggling can cause interruptions in the

classroom. A more positive approach is investigating ways to increase parent engagement in schools. Sheldon and Epstein's (2002) study showed that “student behavior and schools’ responses may improve if schools implement varied, high-quality family and community involvement activities” (p. 22). More positive interactions with caregivers during family and community involvement activities can reduce the number of behavior problems. When students have fewer behavior problems and are more motivated, a decrease in dropout rates can occur (Sheldon & Epstein, 2022). The caregiver's role in a student’s schoolwork positively benefits the student. Gen et al.'s (2021) study supported that having an open dialog between family and teachers could help address students' learning problems and dropout rates (p. 1090). Gen et al. (2001) also suggested that family engagement activities at the school would engage students more with academics. Epstein and Sheldon's (2002) “exploratory study suggests that elementary schools that are interested in improving or maintaining good attendance will benefit from taking a comprehensive approach that includes students, educators, parents, and community partners” (p. 315). Epstein and Sheldon’s (2002) data also suggested the following activities improved attendance: awards to students, communications with families, school contacts for families, workshops for parents, after-school programs, referrals of students to counselors, and truant offices, and home visits

Schools Connecting with Families

For family engagement to occur, the school must connect with the home and families. Connections with families take time, support, and trust. Moll (2019) used data from conducting home visits using the Parent-Teacher Home Visit (PTHV) model. Moll saw a partnership built between caregivers and educators that led to mind-shift changes and the ability to work together to support student outcomes. When educators connect with families’ educators' practices can

shift too. Humphrey and Squires (2011) studied structured conversations between caregivers and educators in the Achievement for All (AfA) program. These open dialogs with caregivers improved family engagement and provided more time to listen to caregivers and higher levels of appreciation. Communication is vital when building a school-to-home connection.

When school-to-home connections are made, it can lead to a better climate and culture for educators, allowing more educators to stay at the school. Allensworth, Pnisciak, and Mazzero (2009) studied different factors that caused educators to leave Chicago Public Schools. Through survey collection from educators, educators are more likely to stay if they have families' support and trust.

Caregivers need to feel comfortable and welcomed in schools to communicate openly between school and home. Open communication in family engagement leads to sharing learning at-home ideas with families that could help educate caregivers and build their confidence in working with their student (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). Building caregivers' confidence to work with their student is key to family engagement success. Jenson and Minke (2017) add that family engagement should occur and be communicated through multiple different types of engagement and modes. Communication through various methods makes it possible to reach more caregivers than just using one mode to create a school-to-home connection.

Challenges of Family Engagement

Family engagement has several challenges that educators and caregivers must overcome. One challenge is the different mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes toward family engagement (Mapp et al., 2022). Teachers and caregivers can have different attitudes toward family engagement because of past experiences and other internal and external factors. Educators can have different perceptions than caregivers about family engagement. The findings of Reynolds et al. (2015)

(cited from DeSpain et al., 2018) showed an example of educators' and caregivers' different perceptions, "educators felt that caregivers were not interested or engaged in student learning and that any involvement was due solely to their efforts to encourage parental engagement" (p. 237). Another example of two-sided perceptions is that caregivers perceive that the school only holds compliance-based family engagement events (Morita-Mullaney, 2021). Many assumptions can be made about caregivers' attitudes from other parties involved. Another hypothesis is that educators only call home when there is an issue or concern (DeSpain et al., 2018, p.237). These attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets are a challenge to overcome to build trust with families. Often, different perceptions were due to how educators or caregivers understood family engagement. According to Liang et al. (2020), "findings revealed mothers' understandings and definitions of "family engagement" varied. Some mothers considered taking their children to school as a form of family engagement, while others believed actively being in their children's classroom and helping the teacher was parental involvement. Still, others defined it as spending quality time with their children at home" (p. 59). These attitudes from previous experiences can be brought to family engagement programs and school communication.

Other challenges are caregivers and educators needing to be on the same page with school policies and teaching philosophies and the availability of educators and families to communicate and engage. Communication can be difficult when caregivers don't follow school policies and have different classroom philosophies. Sometimes families also felt their opinions were not considered in the schools. According to Liang et al. (2020), "our research suggests family involvement and engagement can be affected by several internal and external factors, such as busy schedules, resource levels, school dynamics, sense of community, or language

barriers, among others” (p. 73). Liang et al. also discussed that family engagement sometimes does not occur because of conflicting schedules and high demands of activities.

Transportation and costs can be a challenge for families being engaged in schools. Educators and families from six different schools participated in 20 focus groups; barriers such as transportation surfaced through the focus groups. Access to a vehicle, the ability to drive, and fuel costs can be a challenge for families to be engaged in schools. Volunteering at a school requires background checks that take time, and supporting the school can be costly to families (Baker et al., 2016).

Being exposed to minimal training on family engagement is a challenge for educators. Also, families needing to be exposed to solid examples of family engagement is another challenge (Mapp et al., 2022). Family engagement isn't reflected in many standards for pre-service programs or West Virginia (WV) Teaching Professional Standards, so it isn't a high priority for some programs. According to the National Survey of Colleges and Universities Preparing Educators for Family Engagement (2021), one of the key findings from their surveys from 42 different states, “A full 55% of department heads believe that their education candidates are a little less or much less prepared for family engagement in comparison to other subjects” (Caspe, 2021, p. 6). The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) developed a Listing of Professional Standards that family engagement is found. In the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, family engagement is only aligned with standards 1b and 1c (NAFSCE, 2022). The WV Teaching Professional Standards only align with family engagement in Standards 5 and 5F (WVDE, 2022). The lack of standards coverage of family engagement is a challenge for schools and pre-service education programs to spend time in quality training for family engagement.

Overcoming Challenges

Overcoming barriers can start with educators and caregivers engaging together. Schools can support educators' and caregivers' engagement collaboratively, such as by working on academic and behavioral goals together (Hall, 2020). Educators and caregivers working on a literacy goal together can bring success to students' academic growth. Liang et al. (2020) provided that educators and caregivers need to engage when sharing information and that educators need to provide training opportunities for caregivers to help the student academically. When a caregiver shares information about their student with an educator, an increase in growth can occur. For educators and caregivers to engage together effectively, reasonable communication procedures need to be implemented for educators and caregivers to build working relationships together (Arce, S. 2019). For educators to know how to work on these goals and engage effectively with families, training and professional development need to be provided on family engagement and best practices for caregivers and educators to be on the same page regarding family engagement and its importance.

An assessment of needs from the community and school is recommended. The assessments should address the barriers to family engagement for staff and caregivers to engage and plan effective family engagement for the school. The strategies or programs to improve family engagement and communication should be developed based on what the families, students, and educators need. When the interventions are created without understanding all participants, there can be miscommunication and unengaged participants, which will have adverse effects on all sides (Jenson & Minke, 2017). Lawson (2003) also had similar findings that "similar problems can occur when parents attempt to develop interventions without fully understanding the needs and preferences of teachers" (p.183). Lastly, for parents and educators

to engage together, “it is important for schools to reach out to parents and support them in ways that are developmentally appropriate for their students” (Lawson, 2003, p.185). An assessment of needs can help a school know the best way to reach out to families appropriate to the school’s community. Caregivers expressing their expectations and what they want for their students would be helpful for communication between educators and caregivers. This engagement would make educators feel valued and help all stakeholders be on the same page (Mahmood,2013).

Dr. Mapp et al. (2022) list several recommendations after a thorough review of recent professional literature the authors completed. Recommendation one is to cultivate relationships of trust and respect intentionally. This can be done through collaboration and partnership between educators and caregivers. Recommendation two is to start family engagement early in the year. Family engagement needs to start young through college and career readiness. Recommendation three is to communicate continuously and clearly. Information needs to be two-way, accessible, and knowledge of what students are learning. Recommendation four is for schools to focus on equity. All families must be provided the necessary resources and the chance to share power to work towards educational equity. Recommendation five addresses providing professional development to all educators, including family engagement courses for pre-service programs. The last suggestion is to extend networks and partnerships through family leadership programs, community networks, and outside resources to help support the school and families (Mapp et al., 2022).

Types of Family Engagement

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) refer to Epstein's prior work in 1995 and 2000 on six types of school involvement. The six types of school involvement can increase collaboration when implementing the following activities. Type 1 includes parenting or helping all families establish

home environments to support children as students. Families need that support to know home routines and environments for student success. Type 1 can be done through tips in newsletters or parenting workshops. Type 2 pertains to communicating or designing effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication forms. Effective communication needs to be implemented through multiple types of platforms. This can occur through flyers, online media, and phone calls home. Type 3 states that family engagement includes volunteering, recruiting, and organizing families to help the school and support students. A signup sheet at events or a needs survey can be created for families to sign up to volunteer. Volunteering helps give families ownership of the school and makes them feel welcome to enter the building. Type 4 is learning at home or providing families with information and ideas to help students with homework. Educators can share resources and assign tasks to help provide ideas for caregivers to work with their students at home. Type 5 involves parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders. Having a community group that meets at the school allows families and communities to help make decisions and feel connected to the school. Lastly, type 6 states that collaborating with the community or identifying and integrating resources and services from the community strengthens schools, students, and families. “Schools with comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships address all six types of involvement through activities directed toward specific goals and student outcomes” (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002, pp. 5-6).

One example of family engagement is supporting families with technology (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). Through this need of technology, family engagement can occur with communication and opportunities for trust and relationship building. Communication through several platforms can be a good connection for educators and caregivers if they know how to utilize and access it. In today's society, social media platforms are an excellent way to

communicate with caregivers, but it is important to offer training on how to use them. Angrist et al. (2020) created a low-tech intervention during the Covid-19 pandemic to improve parent engagement and reduce innumeracy. Through text messaging, family's weekly math problems, and 15-20 min phone calls to provide support, motivation, and accountability. However, schools can't assume that all families can access technology devices. Schools can have a check-out system to loan out technology devices for families to utilize for communication and a tool to work on academics outside school. Schools can also offer internet before and after school on campus or in the parking lot for families (Gerzel-Short & Conderman (2019). Schools can provide lists of free internet sites in the community for students and families to complete projects together (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). Reaching out to families through technology is an example to help enhance open communication. Open communication with caregivers can be accomplished through updated school webpages and apps like Schoology, Live Grades, and Blackboard to keep caregivers informed. Educators should update caregivers' assignments, rubrics, and grades to utilize these platforms effectively (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019).

Parent-teacher conferences are another way to provide open communication and share strategies to work at home with the student to strengthen the school-to-home connection. Liang's (2020) findings provided that "parent-teacher conferences give parents the opportunities to talk about children's learning, and teachers will often share insights on the types of progress they observe children making in the classroom" (p. 79). For family engagement strategies to be effective, educators should receive in-service training that leads to positive attitudes about families and engagement efforts and teaches training that includes communication strategies that support positive family interactions (Jenson & Minke, 2017). Training educators will allow for more effective parent-teacher conferences and communication.

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Literacy and Low-SES and Rural Communities

Low- Socioeconomic Status (Low-SES) pertains to individuals with either low education or income. Low-SES and rural communities need family engagement and improvement in literacy development through family literacy programs. According to Grabmeier (2019), "the low-SES population of students hears about 30 million fewer words by age three compared to privileged backgrounds" (paras. 16). This population of caregivers needs training from schools and support to help them feel confident to engage with their student to read and have these conversations to help build oral language. Phillips et al. (2007) found that "studies indicated that academic programs and out-of-school time enrichment activities can have positive effects on the achievement of low-income children" (p. 66). These activities help build that school-to-home connection with out-of-school learning.

One reason why low-SES and rural communities need increased family engagement and literacy development is because of the disconnect that can be found in these communities between families and schools. Within rural communities, Hull and Schultz (2002), as cited in

Franzak et al. (2019), found that “research has spoken clearly about a frequent disconnect between in-and out-of-school literacies” (p. 13). How the community and educators view literacy and family engagement are different. Franzak et al. (2019) found that additional resources and strategies must be shared with educators and caregivers to close the gap in the perception of literacy outside of school and in the community. One different approach used with low SES that Gerzel-Short and Conderman (2019) found to be productive was having open communication with caregivers to provide learning at-home ideas and other texts at home when needed.

In low-SES and rural populations, educators need to be careful not to overload caregivers. Fikrat-Wevers et al. (2021) found that “it is plausible that overloading these parents with a broad range of activities that aim to stimulate a variety of skills and that require parents to alternate between receiving trainers at home and going to school might be asking too much of them” (p. 597). Caregivers of Low-SES need to be provided with streamlined interventions that are simple and easy to implement to be effective.

Literacy Focused Family Engagement

Literacy-focused family engagement supports families’ funds of knowledge and motivation to work with their students’ reading skills. Literacy family engagement programs can benefit families and students. According to the Ohio State Department of Education, “effectively engaging families and communities around student literacy can increase students' reading and writing skills” (Ohio Department of Education, 2019, p.1). Doyle and Zhang (2011) state that “studies suggest that family literacy programs involving caregivers can result in positive effects on children’s language and literacy development” (p. 223).

Literacy can be implemented with family engagement in various ways. Smith (2020) found that family engagement can occur with literacy when caregivers participate in experiences

where learning materials are provided to help build academic skills. The learning materials build confidence in caregivers to work with their students at home, making it more likely that they will engage with their students. Learning materials can be paired activities and letter manipulatives with a text that helps the caregiver engage with their student.

Another strategy to combine literacy and family engagement is providing experiences where families interact with books. Interactions with books can improve academic abilities, precisely literacy skills (Smith, 2020). Families interacting with books can also build confidence and lead to motivation in reading for students and caregivers. Providing families opportunities to access texts is crucial for involving caregivers in literacy. One way to give caregivers access to texts is to have textbooks placed at the local library and other family settings in the community if a family needs one (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). Families need access to texts to engage with their students and build confidence in their literacy skills.

Family nights can also be a strategy a school supports for family engagement. Baquedano-Lopez et al. (2013), cited by Morita-Mullaney (2001), shared that family nights are where caregivers come to the school to learn best practices in literacy and take them home to continue working on literacy skills. With a focus on literacy, the hope is that they will take what they learn home to have the confidence to do it with the student. It also allows the caregiver to feel comfortable in the school and around staff to voice thoughts and concerns. Family nights are also when educators give caregivers daily tasks they can do with their students, such as reading with them (Morita-Mullaney, 2021).

The Ohio Department of Education (2019) suggests many family engagement strategies, such as inviting families to the school to observe how reading and writing skills are taught in the classroom. Inviting families helps them feel welcomed and comfortable and shows their student

that they care. Schools should provide families with information about their child's performance in reading and writing on reports and between midterms (Ohio Department of Education, 2019). Newsletters can also be helpful for educators to include articles on literacy topics. Another way for families to be involved in connecting with the school is to volunteer as a guest reader. High school and college students and senior citizens are often eager to volunteer in classrooms (Ohio Department of Education, 2019).

Extended Day Camps can help engage families with academic skills through professional development for their educators. Simone et al. (2019) study included Extended Day camps that provided instruction in the classroom for 4 hours a day and professional learning for educators during the camps. After three years of the program, Simone et al. (2019) found that family engagement was missing in their literacy program. The program then added two professional education training days on family engagement with literacy and improving camp experiences with families. To increase family engagement in the extended camp, they provided books that caregivers and students could choose from. In 2018 each family took home an average of 25 books to keep (Simone et al., 2019).

Benefits of Reading at Home

When it comes to the activities that are completed at home about literacy, Swain, and Cara (2019), found that “the most commonly reported parental literacy activity was shared reading with their child, and 70% of parents testified to doing this every day” (p. 446). One way to increase caregivers' confidence in working with their student at home is by focusing on reading at home to improve literacy development. Carefully reading to and with their student at home has many benefits for both the students and the caregiver (Swain & Cara, 2019). Neyer et al. (2021) shared that when books are in the house, they can be used by multiple children and

caregivers to learn. Reading at home also enriches vocabulary, language, and experiences, such as mediating at home to several other advantages. Books can also be suitable for mediating between relationships with family members at home to avoid conflict and teach emotional and social lessons.

Vocabulary and language development of the student is a benefit of reading at home. Vocabulary and language development expands when students open and engage with a book. The million-word gap is the gap that compares children who have been read to and children who have not been read to before age 5. The million-word gap was re-examined in 2019 by Ohio State University, “based on these calculations, here’s how many words kids would have heard by the time they were five years old: Never read to, 4,662 words; 1-2 times per week, 63,570 words; 3-5 times per week, 169,520 words; daily, 296,660 words; and five books a day, 1,483,300 words” (Grabmeirer, 2019, paras. 13). Fikrat-Wevers, et al., (2021), “found that it appears that exposing low- SES children to the rich language input of books enables them to enhance their skills such as vocabulary knowledge and story comprehension” (p. 597).

Reading at home also gives caregivers time to interact and engage with the student, which has many benefits. According to Bennett et al. (2018), “during the adult-child interaction, while reading a book together, the family spends quality time as they read and complete activities. Family engagement with literacy does not have to be difficult, and building a genuine partnership between caregivers and students is essential” (p.243). It is important to note that Smith (2020) discovered “that parents must interact with and encourage their children to read” during the process of engaging with the text for benefits to occur (p.18).

One problem that tends to happen when reading at home that researcher Smith (2020) discovered is that “parents often read to their children when they are young. Still, as children

age, this declined” (p.17). Families need to be encouraged to keep reading to their student for literacy growth and shared experiences with them.

Literacy Resources for Families

Many resources can be used at home to guide literacy development. Reading books for interests and on the child’s level is beneficial at home. Fountas and Pinnell developed an approach that featured leveled texts. Pioneer Valley books use the Fountas and Pinnell literacy system to level the books the company provides. Literacy activities and lesson exemplars accompanying texts are good resources at home to help guide the caregiver.

Reading on Level Books

Reading on-level books at home is one example of a literacy resource. Texts can be categorized on three different levels, a student's independent, instructional, or frustration level. Authors Leslie and Caldwell (2017) of the *Qualitative Reading Inventory* cited Fisher et al. (2012) on measuring a text level using readability formulas. “The readability formulas provide a general and very rough estimate of text difficulty level because many other components contribute to the complexity of a text” (p. 17). When a student reads a text on their grade level, a teacher can find a student's independent, instructional, or frustration level by reading for one minute. The frustration level is less than 90% oral reading accuracy and less than 70% comprehension proficiency (Leslie & Caldwell, 2017). Frustration-level reading does not improve oral reading fluency and could lead to negative feelings about reading. Itler (2017) “suggests that poor readers cannot automatically comprehend the meaning of words from context because they are overly dependent on the text, which makes it difficult to understand what they read” (p. 147). Students need to have access to instructional material on their reading level not to get frustrated when reading with a caregiver. As cited by Stange (2013), “Most of the research

related to levels of reading difficulty began with Betts (1946). Betts noted that maximum learning begins at the level of instruction where children are challenged intellectually” (p.111). Stange (2013) also stated that “research shows that it is important for children to read the right books at the right level to achieve the greatest growth in word knowledge, fluency, and reading skills, and not risk falling behind their classmates” (p.111).

Fountas and Pinnell Level

One resource that is available to level texts is Fountas and Pinnell. Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell founded a literacy system for PreK through sixth grade. Fountas and Pinnell's text levels were first introduced in 1996. The levels are also called Guided Reading Levels or F & P Levels (Fountas & Pinnell Literacy, 2022). The gradient text level they provide is leveled from A to Z. Fountas & Pinnell gradient levels A to Z can easily be converted from grade level and Lexile levels for a teacher to identify the text level for a student quickly.

Pioneer Valley Books

Pioneer Valley Books is a book publisher that provides texts intended for grades PreK-sixth. The book publisher was founded in 1998 and, in 2007, merged with Pioneer Valley Educational Press and Literacy Footprints. Pioneer Valley Books provided a chart that easily converts Guided Reading Levels A to Z to accelerated reading and grade levels (Pioneer Valley Books, 2021). Educators have been trained to use the leveled conversion charts, but caregivers find it challenging to know what level their student is reading on.

Family Literacy Programs

Several literacy family resources already exist in schools. *Read With Me*, *Dolly Parton Imagination Library*, and the *Extended Day Learning Tool Kit* are a few that families already have access to.

Read With Me

Read with Me is a program established by Families in Schools, Building Partnerships for Student Success, in Los Angeles, California (CA). *Read with Me* provides a rotating selection of books and lessons for caregivers to use in the home with their students. The lessons help caregivers feel confident and be able to work on literacy activities from home. Educators receive a 2-hour workshop on the literacy family program to implement it effectively.

Smith (2020) states that literacy programs like *Read with Me*, should “provide parents with the tools needed to assist their children as they learn to read; this includes access to high-interest reading materials in multiple languages and reading levels, teacher-supported at-home literacy strategies, and encouragement for both parents and children as they work to develop the literacy practices in their homes” (p. 18).

Dolly Parton Imagination Library

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library program (DPIL) (2022) provides quality books in homes to students up to age five. The program was founded in 1995 by Dolly Parton. In 2003 the program had already donated over one million books to homes. Neyer et al. (2021) found from the current evaluation “that DPIL books delivered to the home hold a place of importance for the family and that pride in the books may be representing the importance families and children are placing on literacy and reading, which may play a part in academic success and staying in school” (p. 75). DPIL provides books for the home environment for families. Fikrat-Wevers, et al., (2021) also indicates that “investing in a stimulating home environment using family literacy programs can positively affect the literacy development of children from low-SES families, particularly in the short term” (p. 596). Two gaps the DPIL does leave are that the books are age-

appropriate but not necessarily reading-level appropriate. The second gap is that books for students ages five and eight are not provided.

Online Tool Kits

Extended Day Learning Tool Kits from the Literacy Leaders Campaign with the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) is a caregiver resource. The Extended Day Learning Tool Kit is a virtual resource tool developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Kelley and Sisneros (2020), “When schools move into remote learning environments — in response to a pandemic, natural disaster, or other unforeseen circumstance — the importance of internet access and the disproportionate impacts of a lack of access are exacerbated, and thrust into the spotlight” (p. 1.). Schools should not assume everyone has internet access (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019).

The Extended Day Learning Tool Kit is under the assumption that caregivers have internet access. Rural communities are disadvantaged regarding digital resource tools like the Extend Day Learning Tool Kits. The lack of local broadband, the inability to afford internet, and the lack of devices to connect are three digital divides in rural homes (Kelley & Sisneros, 2022). Students and caregivers affected by these digital divides would not have access to the online tool kits.

“Another way for parents to participate in literacy at home with their children is through the use of literacy bags, sent home by the teacher, that contains books children would probably not be able to read on their own and/or activities that the child can complete with an adult” (Bennett et al., 2017, p. 243). Literacy family programs according to Swain and Cara (2019), “benefit families when they teach specific methods for improving literacy. By the end of the programs, parents had a greater understanding of school literacies and the strategies used in the

classroom. By replicating some of these, parents ensured a more consistent and cohesive approach to teaching literacy between the two settings” (p. 451).

Read Aloud WV

Read Aloud West Virginia encourages community members and families to go into schools and read aloud to the students. The program provides books that interest students in the schools that participate in the program. According to Read Aloud WV (2023), the program's mission is to “motivate children to WANT to read because motivation is the critical first step in developing any skill. We work to change the literacy culture of West Virginia by keeping reading material in the hands and on the minds of our state’s children”.

Pairing Activities

Lesson plan exemplars are tools to send home as a family engagement strategy with caregivers. Lesson plan exemplars are general activities in that caregivers can participate and guide their student with a general text. The lesson plan exemplars were designed to pair with any text and work on developmental literacy skills, specifically comprehension. According to Smith's (2020) findings, “approximately 25% of the study’s participants indicated they felt unprepared to assist their children with literacy; some stated they felt what they did to assist was wrong or they were confused by the information sent home by the schools” (p.18). Hall (2020) also shares study findings that “many families work with teachers on behavior-based goals in classrooms, but not on academic-based goals. Families are more comfortable helping a teacher with a behavior-based goal. They are not as comfortable working on academic-based goals because families view the teacher as the expert in that area” (p.1). Caregivers need guidance and confidence building to feel prepared to assist their students with literacy. Smith's (2020) findings included those caregivers must be ready to support to help their students as their reading levels

grow. Educators can provide support through different level books, virtual meetings, training, tips, and strategies sent home or at conferences. These materials must meet the student's ability levels (Smith, 2022, p. 19). Lesson plan exemplars are another way to support caregivers in providing grade-level instruction.

Lesson plan exemplars are ways to build communication and confidence for the parent to view themselves as being able to support academics at home. When families work with their students at home, they can see them grow academically, increasing family engagement (Hall, 2020, p.11). Working with their student more frequently also improves confidence in the caregiver. Swain and Cara (2019) saw “a significant increase in parents’ confidence, which enabled them to offer better support to their child with homework, and parents also improved their understanding of how reading (including the use of phonics) is taught at school” (p. 452). The activities provided should be easy to follow and engaging to students. Liang (2020) suggests play-based learning activities when developing lesson plan exemplars for caregivers. Liang found that one of the best ways caregivers learn is to play and interact with their students. Lesson plan exemplars should be play-based but consider “less is more” when working with caregivers and students at home (Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021, p. 596). Less is more helps not overwhelm the caregiver or the student and enjoy time together.

Background to the Level-Up Program

West Virginia Family Engagement Center (WVFEC)

The WVFEC sponsored the *Level-Up* Literacy Program. The WVFEC is a center created from a federal grant awarded by the United States Department of Education for a five-year project. The EdVenture Group and the WVDE partnered to implement the WVFEC in 100 WV schools and focused on building more robust family engagement. According to the WVFEC

proposal, the goal of the program is to “provide much-needed support services through all-inclusive, multifaceted programming including school-based wellness services, mental health services, financial and career planning, social skills, and social competency training, mentoring, family resource centers, parenting programs, recreation, and cultural enrichment, academic support, and school retention and dropout prevention” (p. 24).

The EdVenture Group is a non-profit headquartered in Morgantown, WV. The non-profit creates customized solutions to educational challenges through innovation consulting, professional development, and high-quality research and evaluation. Along with the non-profit’s partners, The EdVenture Group helps schools in WV and the region reimagine what education can be (The EdVenture Group, 2022).

The EdVenture Group provided Family Engagement Specialists to go out into the counties to collect data and help improve family engagement in schools. Over five years, 100 schools would be worked with, 25 each year, and completed as cohorts. Each cohort of 25 schools would be provided a Family Engagement Specialist to work with during the school year, professional development for three leaders in their school to kick off their school year, and data gathered through interviews of staff and family leaders in their schools. At the kick-off event, teams of three from each school have time to work through the collected data and create an action plan for the school year to spend on implementation and professional development funds provided by the WVFEF (U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2018).

The WVDE identified the 100 schools and LEAs determined by ESSA Comprehensive and Support and Improvement Identified Schools. According to the grant narrative, “within Elementary and Middle Schools, this selection criteria would be based upon academic

achievement, academic progress, English Language proficiency, school level potential leadership capacity, and student success” (p. 29). These 100 schools were the lowest-performing schools in WV.

Core Beliefs

The EdVenture Group and WVFECC developed the *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level-Up)* project, aligned with the WVDE core beliefs. The WVDE developed core beliefs of the organization's school, community, and engagement for WV schools. WVDE Family, School, and Community Engagement Core Beliefs are divided into five core beliefs. These five beliefs helped shape the goals of the *Level-Up* family literacy program. The beliefs are:

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want to see them succeed.
2. All parents can support their children’s learning.
3. When parents are equipped with accurate, relevant, and timely information, they are correctly positioned to partner with and support their children’s education.
4. Parents and school staff should be equal partners with support from the community,
5. The responsibility for building positive, productive relationships between school and home rests primarily with the school staff, especially school and county leaders (WVDE).

Framework

These five core beliefs helped *Level-Up* staff, educators, and families find common ground on the program's purpose. The framework adopted for the WVFECC is the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, designed by Mapp and Bergman (2019). The framework also aligns with the core beliefs of the discussed programs. The Dual Capacity-

Building Framework is used as the main building block in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is the most current federal policy in education and is about building relationships of trust and respect between schools and families to share a commitment to working toward achievement goals (Simone et al., 2019). The Framework sets a guide for schools and families to follow when working on the common goal of engagement.

Mapp and Bergmans' (2019) framework begins with the challenges of family engagement. The challenges educators face when it comes to family engagement are that they need to be made aware of examples of family engagement, have only received minimal training, and may have developed deficit mindsets through past experiences. The challenges for families are that they have yet to be exposed to examples of family engagement, and they may have had past negative experiences with schools. Another challenge for caregivers is that they may not feel invited into a welcoming environment to express their feelings.

To overcome these challenges, schools and families need to work together through planning and implementing family engagement. Schools and families can do this by working through the Framework conditions. The essential conditions to overcome the challenges of family engagement in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework model are the process and the organization's needs that offer guidance on building and sustaining partnerships in family engagement. When building family engagement at school and home, the process must be relational, linked to learning and development, culturally responsive, and collaborative. The organizational conditions when planning family engagement in schools and homes are systemic, integrated, and sustained for effective implementation. The policy and program goals in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework model focus on educators' and families' capabilities, connections,

needs, and confidence. The conditions and focus areas must be considered when planning each school's programming and goals for family engagement.

In Mapp and Bergmans' (2019) framework, the outcomes can be positive when the challenges of family engagement are aligned with effective conditions. The capacity outcomes include educators who connect family engagement learning and development and engage with families to create welcoming environments. Families have multiple roles in the family engagement process. The roles include co-creators, supporters, encouragers, monitors, advocates, and models. When the challenges are met with essential conditions and programs are aligned with the correct goals, the primary outcome of effective partnerships that support students and school improvement will be accomplished (Mapp & Bergman, 2019).

Mapp et al. (2002) Dual Capacity Framework was used to train educators on family engagement, school-to-home connections, and best practices for a foundation for the *Level-Up* program. The definition that guides *Level-Up's* leveled literacy kits goals of family engagement was provided by Cline (2021), WVDE Coordinator of Student Support and Well-Being, who said it is “the systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including the planning, development, and evaluation of such activities, programs, and systems” (Cline, 2021). When family engagement is built, it must carry over from the school into the home and build lasting habits for each family to build each student's development, learning, and wellness. Engaging families and educators together allow a team to be built to support each student and make the school-to-home connection.

Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level-Up)

Level-Up is a program developed by The EdVenture Group to meet the academic support of ten elementary schools out of the 100 WVFEC schools. “In WV, the literacy and numeracy achievement priorities are focused on closing the achievement gap and ensuring all students are on target for grade-level expectations in literacy and numeracy with particular emphasis on students with disabilities (SWDs), English language learners (ELLs), students with low-SES, and race/ethnicity” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2018, p. 30). The EdVenture Group’s *Level-Up* project provided schools with capacity-building resources to support literacy development. The project includes educator and family evaluation on family engagement and literacy, training, family-facing grade-level reading leveled literacy kits, and structured literacy-focused family engagement events. The primary intervention supported by the *Level-Up* project is developing and delivering 13 take-home leveled literacy kits that families can check out from school when families need supplemental literacy resources.

Participating educators attended training sessions to enhance knowledge of effective family engagement and literacy practice and interacted with the leveled literacy kits to ensure adequate understanding and use. Following training, each school held a literacy event where families were introduced to the leveled literacy kits and received a demonstration on how to use the leveled literacy kits at home properly. Leader educators from participating sites met quarterly in cohorts to give insight into their perceptions of *Level-Up* and any additional needed technical assistance.

Level-Up’s project’s target population is low-SES students and families, affecting 44,483 out of 81,273 K- 3 students (over half of WV families) in WV (WVDE, 2022). *Level-Up*

provided extended learning programming for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Elementary schools were selected from the 100 schools because of their lower SES status and students' reading levels. “Children from low-SES households tend to score lower on measures of early literacy upon school entry than do their higher SES peers” (Chatterji, 2006, as cited in Burris et al., 2019). *Level-Up* included sites from nine selected counties in WV. The average proficiency reading level across the sites is under 35 percent. Two counties in which the project served represented the state's top 10% of low-SES Enrollment. One county has a below 25% reading proficiency (WVDE ZoomWV Data, 2021). All counties served through the project have a proficiency reading level of under 35%. Five counties are identified as Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS).

Four goals of the *Level-Up* program were developed.

1. Caregivers will be confident when engaging with their students with the leveled literacy kits.
2. School-to-home connections will be made.
3. Educators and caregivers will view leveled literacy kits as a resource at home.
4. One hundred (100) low-SES families will utilize and engage with literacy resources. The outcome will be measured by check-in/check-out documents and sign-in sheets at the literacy events.

This study investigated Goals 1, 2, and 3 of the *Level-Up* program. Surveys, check-in and out documents, and lead educator interviews were used to analyze the leveled literacy kits. The goals gave information about using leveled literacy kits to build school-to-home connections, family engagement, and access to leveled books to read at home.

Most past research studies focused on family engagement in general, with only a few on literacy-focused family engagement. Several literacy programs exist for families to be engaged in. Still, they need to provide tangible resources educators can utilize to give caregivers to engage at home with on-level reading material. There are limited studies on leveled literacy kits and students having leveled reading texts at home.

To implement a successful literacy-focused family engagement program, determining stakeholders' perceptions of the leveled literacy kits are essential for future program planning. Building school-to-home connections and gaining caregivers' confidence are crucial to student outcomes. Leveled literacy kits could be a resource that fills a gap between stakeholders.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter introduces the methods used to examine the implementation and perceptions of leveled literacy kits, family engagement, and school-to-home connection. The use of interviews of the lead educators at each school and the open-ended questions on the survey from caregiver participants of the leveled literacy kits were analyzed. This chapter discusses the research design, population and participants, instrumentation, and data collection procedures. Finally, this chapter discusses the analysis methods. The principal investigator sent a formal request for data to the Director of the West Virginia Family Engagement Center (WVFEC). It was approved by President Dr. Lydotta Taylor of The EdVenture Group. Marshall University's Institutional Research department forwarded this request for necessary action.

Intervention

Thirteen leveled literacy kits were provided to each school for caregivers to check out. The leveled literacy kits were purchased with funds from WVFEC. Caregivers could keep leveled literacy kits checked out for up to three weeks. Materials of the leveled literacy kits included three to four activities, six leveled books, and a resource pamphlet curated by the researcher, an EdVenture Group Program Manager, and WVFEC Family Engagement Specialist. The activities created by the researcher could be utilized with any chosen text to support and build an experience between the caregiver and student while building literacy development skills. Each leveled literacy kit was assigned one of thirteen reading levels (A-M) based on the Fountas and Pinnell text level gradient (Heinemann, 2020) and included six Pioneer Valley-leveled books that follow Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient™ (Pioneer Valley Books, 2021) (See APPENDIX C for the adjusted chart). To support early education literacy, leveled literacy kits for groups A-C consisted of a complete set of alphabet letters to target letter and

word building. The leveled literacy kits were intended for PreK- 3rd grade but could benefit 4th and 5th-grade students if they read below grade level. Each leveled literacy kit provided a pamphlet for further resources, curated by the researcher, available through outside programs after the leveled literacy kits were returned.

The leveled literacy kits were stored in individual tote bags in a central location in the school with a sign-in/out document. Each lead educator designated a process for checking out the leveled literacy kits. Some schools kept the leveled literacy kits in the library, and some schools store leveled literacy kits in the office. Each school made its decision based on the school and staff needs.

Population and Participants

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) identified 100 schools that needed support for improvement, as determined by Every Student Succeeds Act Comprehensive and Support and Improvement Identified Schools guidelines. According to the Statewide Family Engagement Center's grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement (2018) for the *Level-Up* project, "within Elementary and Middle Schools, this selection criteria would be based upon academic achievement, academic progress, English Language proficiency, school level potential leadership capacity, and student success" (p. 29). These 100 schools were the lowest-performing schools in West Virginia (WV). Thirty-two schools were identified as Elementary schools with students on the kindergarten-third grade reading level. Through an application process, ten schools applied for the *Level-Up* program. The ten elementary schools that applied were selected to be in the WVFEC project for this study sample. WVFEC Family Engagement Specialists also previously worked with these ten schools

and believed these schools were ready to implement this pilot program to examine the effectiveness of the leveled literacy kits.

The lead educators were K-5th grade teachers, reading specialists, or administrators. Lead educators scheduled the staff training, made decisions on the procedures of the leveled literacy kits, and reported findings to the researcher. Student participants were readers on a K-2nd grade reading level who attended the selected ten schools. Students participated in the leveled literacy kits with their caregiver. Also, in the ten selected schools, caregivers were adults taking care of students reading on K-2nd grade reading level. Caregivers and students checked the leveled literacy kits in and out of the school. The researcher played a role in developing the *Level-Up* programs, leveled literacy kits, and educator training. The researcher also participated in the interview, collected the interview data, and supported lead educators in the procedures of the leveled literacy kits.

Target Population

Level-Up's programs' target population is low-SES and rural students and families. Low-SES student population of WV consists of 44,483 out of 81,273 K- 3-grade students (over half of WV families in schools) in WV (WVDE, 2022). “Children from lower SES households tend to score lower on measures of early literacy upon school entry than do their higher SES peers” (Chatterji, 2006, as cited in Burris et al., 2019). The average proficiency reading level across the region is under 35 percent. Two of the nine counties of which this study served represent the state's top 10% of low-SES Enrollment. One county has a below 25% reading proficiency. Five counties included in the study are Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) (WVDE, 2022). Across WV, according to the 3rd grade WV Summative Assessment administered in 2021 and published by the WVDE (West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, 2022), the state-wide

literacy proficiency rate was 33.58%. The state ranged from 14%-52% proficiency. Compared to 2019 scores, ten percentage points dropped in literacy proficiency, from 44% to 33%. It is necessary to consider the probable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the drop in data (West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, 2022).

The participants examined in this study were stakeholders of the elementary schools, including student caregivers and lead educators. Each participating school had one lead educator that led the school's procedures for the leveled literacy kits and participated in the lead educator interviews. The schools examined were elementary schools in WV that were enrolled in the WVFECC. The population of the school participants consisted of schools in low-SES and rural areas in WV. The schools were identified by their low reading achievement data and willingness to commit to the program. Each school and county signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to show their commitment to the program and the approval of data collection for this study.

Research Design

A mixed-methods study was originally planned that included qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. After data collection, the quantitative data showed inconclusive results, leading the research design to pivot to a fully qualitative study. This study employed Thematic Analysis that allows a researcher to construct themes from patterns found in the qualitative data in order to report an interpretation of the data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The research design followed inductive methods to code for themes from the qualitative data. According to Glaser and Strauss's (1967), inductive reasoning is referred to as a "*bottom-up*" approach to knowing in which the researcher uses particular observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied. Inductive reasoning usually leads to inductive methods of data collection where the researcher (1) systematically observes the phenomena under

investigation, (2) searches for patterns or themes in the observations, and (3) develops a generalization from the analysis of those themes. So, the researcher proceeds from specific observations to general statements — a type of discovery approach to knowing” (p.5).

This qualitative study was conducted with the approval of the Instruction Review Board (IRB) permission at Marshall University. Qualitative methods, through interviews and surveys, provided the data of the educators' voices concerning the leveled literacy kits. The Likert scale items and survey analysis provided descriptive data of student grade levels, number of kits checked in and out, and overall trends of student caregivers' perceptions of school-to-home connections and the leveled literacy kits. The stakeholders' perceptions of the leveled literacy kits, family engagement, and the school-to-home connection were also explored. This study's primary focus was to analyze the process of providing leveled literacy kits to student caregivers. The use of interviews with the lead educator at each school and the open-ended questions on the survey from caregiver participants of the leveled literacy kits were also analyzed as a focus of this study by coding common themes of the transcripts. Another focus of this study investigated how the leveled literacy kits influenced stakeholders' perceptions of family engagement with literacy and the school-to-home connection.

This study was a pilot study for the *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level Up)* implemented for the first time in ten elementary schools in WV by Family Engagement Specialists provided by WVFEC (The EdVenture Group, 2022). *Level-Up* is a pilot program that planned to implement and make changes to the procedures of the leveled literacy kits based on the program's findings. The *Level-Up* program had three outcomes it focused on. The first outcome was building confidence in caregivers to work with their student on leveled material about literacy. The second outcome was providing a resource for caregivers and educators to

support literacy-focused family engagement at home. The last outcome of the program is to build school-to-home connections between caregivers. The *Level-Up* program also provided training at a literacy family engagement event to caregivers on the leveled literacy kits at each school. The training allowed time to review each material in the leveled literacy kits with caregivers.

Instrumentation

A pilot study to establish the survey and interview questions were conducted by the researcher along with the WVFECC co-director and a Family Engagement Specialist. A draft of the survey and interview questions were emailed for review. Next, a meeting was held virtually through Microsoft Teams. After corrections, another draft was emailed, and final notes were made.

A survey was created to analyze caregivers' perceptions of how the Level Up Family Literacy Program affected caregivers' perceptions of family literacy engagement and school-to-home connections. Also, interviews were conducted to receive feedback from the lead educators in the school implementing the leveled literacy kits on what is working and not working with the leveled literacy kits and the school-to-home connection. Data was also provided from the check-in and check-out documents to support the return rate of survey data.

Survey

The survey Likert scales were intended to analyze caregiver perceptions of family engagement in students' literacy and connections with the school in selected elementary schools after implementing leveled literacy kits. The current survey was adapted from two existing survey tools: literacy, family engagement perceptions, and school-based family engagement.

One survey tool used to create this study's survey was the Parent and School Survey (PASS) (Ringenberger et al., 2005). According to the Ohio State University work published by

Boone et al. (2016), The PASS survey was identified as a Free, and Public Domain used to measure family involvement in their children's education (Ringenbuerger et al., 2005). This survey was selected because it was administered to caregivers and measured beliefs and behaviors from different parent engagement barriers. Nine out of the twenty-four statements on the PASS survey influenced this study's survey because of the focus on literacy engagement and not general family engagement. Four additional comments were added to the Likert scale to gain insight into the caregiver's perception of utilizing the leveled literacy kits.

Another tool that influenced the current survey was the Measuring Parent Perceptions of Family-School Engagement Survey (Schueler et al., 2017). The survey was developed to measure school-based family engagement. It was chosen because of its focus on perceptions of family engagement in the school to give insight into communication with the school and educators. Schueler et al. (2017) survey provided in the endnotes of the study that the survey tool could be used freely. Four out of seven statements on the Measuring Parents Perceptions of Family School Engagement Survey influenced the current survey. The statements were chosen because the statements focused on literacy and elementary-age students. Two check-all that apply questions were added to gather more information about the leveled literacy kits.

Caregivers filled out a survey through a Quick Response (QR) code provided when they checked out the leveled literacy kit, and when it was returned, they filled out a survey through a QR code provided. The check-in and check-out document was used as a tool for each lead educator to update the researcher to examine how often leveled literacy kits were utilized at each school. The caregiver names remained confidential as the survey remained anonymous.

Two open-ended questions were added to the caregiver survey data to gather more data on the leveled literacy kits. These questions were, Why did you check out the leveled literacy

kit? And, Please provide any ideas for support to help your student at home. The check-in and check-out document contained columns for caregivers' names, students' names, grades, kit level, and dates for check-in and out of the leveled literacy kit.

Interviews

The researcher led lead educator interviews using the WVFECC *Level-Up* program's focus group questions. The WVFECC's interview protocol questions influenced these interview questions. The WVFECC's interview questions were developed by The EdVenture Group's Family Engagement Specialists and then were evaluated by an external evaluator. A few adjustments to the original questions focused on literacy and the *Level-Up* project. Questions 1-4 were adjusted to add the focus area of literacy. Questions 5-8 were added to the interview questions. How have you successfully gotten families to use the leveled literacy kits? What can be improved? What other ideas do you have that could be done to support literacy at home? Have caregivers given any comments when checking leveled literacy kits in and out? How have the leveled literacy kits changed your communication with stakeholders? Questions 5-8 were also added to the interview to gain thoughts and feedback from the lead educator on how the procedures and leveled literacy kits were progressing in their schools. The lead educator interviews were individually conducted during the 2022-2023 school year. Interviews were conducted with eight interview questions after verbal consent was given.

Check-in/check-out Documents

Check-out and in documents were provided to each school to track who and when each leveled literacy kit was checked out and back in. During interviews, an update of the document was collected, and at the end of the collection.

Level-Up Program Procedures

Each school was contacted in August to commit to the *Level-Up* program through a signed, Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). After commitment, a lead educator was identified at each school to participate in the *Level-Up* program, and the lead educator selected a day for educators to be trained. Data collection began in October at the beginning of the school year and was collected electronically.

The Family Engagement Specialist (FES) at each of the ten participating schools then ordered the materials for the leveled literacy kits and assembled the leveled literacy kits in one central location. The training was provided to each educator participating in the leveled literacy kits about the leveled literacy kits. The leveled literacy kits were delivered to the school on the training day by the FES, and the lead educator set them up in a central location to be utilized. Conversion charts developed by the researcher were given to each educator at the training to convert which reading level the student was reading based on their formative reading assessment programs to provide caregivers with what level literacy kit to check out.

The lead educator arranged a literacy event at the school for caregivers to receive information about the leveled literacy kits. The lead educator and educators trained caregivers on the leveled literacy kits during the family engagement nights. After the literacy event, educators could utilize the leveled literacy kits as a resource for caregivers to check out when needed at home.

Data Collection Procedures

Caregivers filled out the survey when returning the leveled literacy kit. The survey was imported into Qualtrics to provide data electronically. Each caregiver who checked out a leveled literacy kit completed a survey when the leveled literacy kits were checked back in.

One lead educator from each school was asked to participate in an individual virtual interview. Individual interviews were conducted on an online tool, Zoom, to discuss the implementation of the *Level-Up* program and how often the leveled literacy kits were utilized at their schools. The researcher led the interviews utilizing the interview questions. The interviews were recorded using the app Otter.ai. The app transcribed the interviews, and the researcher organized the interviews in folders that were stored on the app. The app also records audio recordings of each interview. The researcher reviewed the audio recordings and adjusted the transcripts accordingly when the transcript was interpreted incorrectly through voice recognition. Each transcript was coded, and the themes that emerged were summarized from each lead educator interview by the researcher.

Data Sources for Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question 1. Was the process used to provide leveled literacy kits to students' caregivers effective?

Qualitative inductive methods were used to collect and code lead educator perceptions in individual interviews to examine the educator's perceptions of the effectiveness of the leveled literacy kits (Lodico et al., 2006). Caregiver sign-in data were also collected anonymously to investigate the frequency of using the leveled literacy kits to support the effectiveness of the process. Caregivers were also asked open-ended response questions after utilizing the leveled literacy kits. The researcher coded and examined answers for emerging themes.

Research Question 2. How did the leveled literacy kits influence stakeholders' perceptions of family engagement with literacy?

Student caregivers provided survey data after the leveled literacy kits were utilized to provide data for this analysis. The survey's Likert Scale ordinal responses were originally

planned to be analyzed using percentages and the Chi-Square statistical test. After data collection occurred, the data frequencies for the Chi-Square statistical test did not provide enough expected values. Therefore, descriptive statistics of overall trends of caregivers' responses were then analyzed. Data from lead educator interviews were also analyzed to provide insight into other stakeholders' perceptions of how the leveled literacy kits influenced family engagement with literacy.

Research Question 3. What impact did the implementation of the leveled literacy kits have on stakeholders' perceptions of the school-home connection?

Student caregivers provided survey data after the leveled literacy kits were utilized to provide data for this analysis. The survey's Likert Scale ordinal responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics of overall trends of caregivers' responses. Data from lead educator interviews were also analyzed to provide insight into other stakeholders' perceptions of how the leveled literacy kits influenced the school-home connection. Inductive methods were used to collect and code lead educator perceptions from the lead educators' interviews. The qualitative interview data were coded and examined for common themes.

Limitations

Caregivers checked out leveled literacy kits to engage with their students. There was no control over how long the leveled literacy kits were checked out. The training provided for educators and caregivers and the number of participants were out of the program's control of how many would participate. Each lead educator at each selected school decided upon the check-in and check-out procedure for the leveled literacy kits. There was only one leveled literacy kit per reading level. If two caregivers needed the same leveled literacy kit, one had to wait until it was returned. The educator determines the student's reading level, which matches students with the

leveled literacy kit. Communication must happen between the educator and the caregiver to assess the level of the leveled literacy kit the caregiver should utilize.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Data

In this chapter, information gathered from caregivers and lead educators are analyzed and presented through each research question. This study examined the impact of leveled literacy kits on family engagement and school-to-home connections from the stakeholders' perceptions. Leveled literacy kits were implemented through The EdVenture Group's *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level Up)* program in ten West Virginia Family Engagement Center's (WVFEC) elementary schools focusing on the perceptions of caregivers' and lead educators of the use of leveled literacy kits, communication, and confidence of caregivers working with their student. This chapter presents the individual interview questions, analysis of lead educator responses to the questions, and the analysis of caregiver responses from the leveled literacy kit checkout and check-in survey data are part of this data analysis.

Participants

The school administration selected one lead educator from each of the ten WVFEC schools to lead the *Level-Up* program and leveled literacy kits. The lead educators were identified as K-5th grade teachers, reading specialists, or administrators. Caregiver participants were any adult caring for a student reading on a K-2nd reading level in the ten WVFEC elementary schools. Examples of caregivers were parents, guardians, foster parents, older siblings, or grandparents. The caregiver participants who participated in the survey utilized the leveled literacy kits at home with their student.

Instrumentation

IRB was approved before data collection began (see APPENDIX A). The interview tool for lead educators at each school consisted of eight questions. The interview tool was developed from the WVFEC focus group interview tool to align with this study's three research questions.

The interview questions provided a deeper understanding of communication, literacy-focused family engagement, and the procedures of the leveled literacy kits. Interview Questions 3 and 5 provided data on how to provide leveled literacy kits to caregivers. Interview Question 7 gave insight from the educator into any comments caregivers communicated to them when returning the leveled literacy kits. Questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 provide information on how the leveled literacy kits impacted the school-to-home connection.

Data from caregivers were collected through surveys to determine caregiver perceptions of literacy-focused family engagement, the leveled literacy kits, and their school-to-home connections made with the school. There were three major categories totaling seven questions on the survey tool for caregivers. The first section contained questions on demographics that asked about the grade the student was in. This section also discussed what level kit the caregiver checked out. The second section had three Likert rating scale questions with a scale of 1-5, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions and statements contained information about caregivers' perceptions of the school's environment, confidence level, and communication with educators. The third section consisted of two opened-ended questions for qualitative data addressing why the caregiver checked out the leveled literacy kits. The third section also asked if any other supports at home were needed for literacy.

Data was also collected using a sign-out log document. The sign-out log document recorded caregiver names, dates of check-in and check-out of leveled literacy kits, and the school's name. The lead educator summarized this information before presenting it to the researcher to preserve the anonymity of the caregiver participants.

Data Collection

The researcher of this study held the role of the program manager of the *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home (Level-Up)* project. The researcher's role as program manager included training educators, developing the leveled literacy kits, and collecting the data for this study.

Interviews with seven out of ten lead educators were completed in December 2022. Seven lead educators were available from the ten schools participating in this pilot study that introduced the literacy kits for the first time in these schools. The lead educators were contacted by email and phone to set up the interviews. Three individual interviews were not able to be conducted due to scheduling conflicts. The three schools took more time than expected to set up the *Level-Up* program because of missed phone calls and late email correspondence, which was then outside the data collection window. Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the interviews due to the location of lead educators and time constraints. Otter.ai app was used to record and transcribe the interviews. Permission was gained from lead educators to record before the interview began by copying and pasting the verbal consent in the chat on the Microsoft Teams platform. The researcher also asked the lead educators to read the consent to continue.

When a lead educator had questions about consent, the researcher provided answers. This procedure was followed per the IRB protocol and followed the interview protocol questions that IRB approved (See Appendix A). The researcher listened to audio recordings of each interview to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts that Otter.ai generated. With this verification process, there were a few misinterpretations in the interview transcripts that required adjusting by the researcher. The interview responses were then analyzed by the researcher for common themes to answer the study's research questions.

Data was also collected from caregivers using an online or paper survey distributed to caregivers who checked out leveled literacy kits. Ten elementary schools in nine West Virginia (WV) counties enrolled in the *Level-Up* program to receive leveled literacy kits. Three elementary schools did not receive their leveled literacy kits during the data collection window. Seven of the schools had leveled-literacy kits delivered and educators trained. Four schools of the seven were trained in person. Three schools were trained virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform. In the data collection window, five of the WVFECE elementary schools had caregivers check out leveled literacy kits. Of the 42 leveled literacy kits checked out, 22 have been checked back in. Of the 22 kits checked back in, 13 surveys were returned with a return rate of 59%. Of the 13 returned surveys, ten participants fully completed the survey. This yielded ten surveys containing usable data for a return rate of 45%. The survey was distributed from October 2022-January 2023.

Data Presentation

Qualitative methods were used to collect and code lead educator perceptions from the lead educators' interviews. The qualitative interview data were coded and examined for emerging themes. For the caregiver survey data, initially, it was decided to consider the Likert scale data as quantitative and use percentages and the Chi-Square statistical test for analysis. However, after data collection occurred, not enough data were collected from the ten usable surveys to provide the minimal expected values for the Chi-Square tests. Therefore, the survey data were analyzed using qualitative techniques to note overall caregiver response trends. Caregiver sign-in data was also collected anonymously to investigate the frequency of caregiver participants' use of the leveled literacy kits. The data and analysis are presented in a way that is

organized by the interview and survey questions and how they relate to the study’s research questions.

Analysis of Demographic Data

The following information describes caregiver demographic data. Demographic data included the grade level of the caregiver’s student and what level kit was checked out for the student. This data was gathered from Questions 1 and 2 on the survey that caregivers returned after checking out the leveled literacy kit. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the 13 caregivers who responded to the survey after checking out a leveled literacy kit.

Table 1

Caregiver Demographics: Number of Caregivers’ Students in Each Grade

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Caregivers who did not Respond to Question 1
<u>Number of Caregivers’ Students in Each Grade</u>	4	4	3	0	0	0	2

The caregivers who checked out the leveled literacy kits had students in five of the 10 *Level-Up* program schools. Two of the schools that have leveled literacy kits available have yet to have any kits checked out. Three schools did not receive their leveled literacy kits during the data collection window. Eleven caregiver participants who checked out literacy kits filled out grade-level information. Four of these caregiver participants had students in kindergarten. Four of these caregiver participants had students in first-grade. Three of these caregiver participants had students in second grade. No leveled literacy kits were checked out to work with students in grades 3, 4, or 5.

Table 2

Caregiver Demographics: Number of Level of Literacy Kits Checked Out

Level of Literacy Kit	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	Number of Caregivers who did not Respond to Question 2
Number of Level of Literacy Kits Checked Out	1	3	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 2 shows the level of the literacy kits that eleven out of thirteen caregiver participants checked out. The level was recommended to caregiver participants by educators who were trained on the conversion chart created by the researcher to match a leveled literacy kit level with each students' reading level. Levels B and D both had the most leveled literacy kits checked out, with three each. Two leveled literacy kits checked out were on the C level. Levels A, E, and G had one leveled literacy kit checked out. Levels F, H, I, J, K, L, and M did not have any leveled literacy kits checked out.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1. Was the process used to provide leveled literacy kits to students' caregivers effective?

The following data from interview questions 2, 3, 5, and 6 led to the emerging themes of how to get information out to caregivers, the location of storage of the leveled literacy kits, the checkout and in process, the survey collection procedure, and gaps identified in the process.

Interview Question 2. *What is your school currently doing around literacy and family engagement? What are the benefits of the leveled literacy kits as a resource?*

Based on the responses to Question 2, Lead Educators 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 could identify literacy-focused engagement, including book fair nights, book stations, literacy night events, virtual family reading meetings, and the One Book program. Lead Educators 2 and 7 identified events that needed to be literacy-focused family engagement, such as fall balls or monthly parent trainings. Lead Educator 1 spoke to events being back in person, “it's nice that COVID, I don't want to say it's over. But you know, that like the school is open now, and we can have people back in.” Lead Educator 4 spoke about family engagement, “So we are very good at family engagement. I like to think our families come to a lot of things.”

Lead Educators 1, 2, and 4 provided benefits of the leveled literacy kits they had experienced. Lead Educator 1 shared that caregivers and students are reading together, students are excited to check out more leveled literacy kits, and an increase in reading practice. Lead Educator 1 shared about one caregiver who checked out the kit for her student, “her daughter excels, and now she doesn't necessarily struggle in reading, but reading is not her favorite. And so, her mom is always looking for ways to increase, you know, reading practice, and so I said, you know, there's gonna come a time when I am going to run out, you know, because I've she felt like right in between like a couple of kits. And so I gave her the lower one to start with. She had the other kit right now. And so I told her I said, you know, if you continue to want to check out the kit, it's fine, but there are going to continue to get harder. I said, so you know, they just will require a little more guidance and assistance and she was like it's fine.” Sitting down together to read together and the leveled literacy kits having several books in the kit are benefits Lead Educator 2 shared. Lead Educator 2 also shared, “I think this instance is going to be

something that kind of benefits the kids and parents, and I like that it has more than one book. It's just not one book where they've read it; they're finished. No, you know, you've got different books in here you can read. It's not much, taking it back and forth as much. You know, they'll be able to keep this for a little while and read the book.” Lead Educator 4 included, “one I think is nice because it just gives, like you said, level-specific books for families. So, you know, kids like to read sometimes, but maybe they don't have books that match their reading levels. So just to have something like that available.” Lead Educators 3, 5, 6, and 7 shared that they didn't see enough leveled literacy kits checked out to share benefits.

Interview Question 3. *How has your school made families aware of the leveled literacy kits available at the school?*

All seven lead educator participants interviewed provided ways families were aware of leveled literacy kits. Lead Educators 2, 5, and 6 shared that the school's in-person event showcasing the leveled literacy kits was canceled. The researcher suggested in the interviews that the lead educators could plan a virtual Facebook to remedy these cancellations. During the virtual session lead educators can relay information to caregivers so the schools can get the leveled literacy kits in homes. Lead educators made families aware of leveled literacy kits at in-person events or virtual meetings on Facebook instead of waiting for the in-person event. Information was also put on Class Dojo, Facebook, newsletters, and Remind platforms.

Lead Educator 1 set up a table at the school's parent-teacher conference with a sign that said, “Ask me about *Level-Up* Literacy Kits.” Then the sign was transferred to the school office for caregivers to see when they visit the school office. Lead Educator 1 shared, “So it's kind of neat, but they check them out of the office like we keep the kits in the office, and they see that sign, and we've had a couple of people ask about that and then check them out from that.” The

researcher then suggested that other lead educators put a sign in their office to showcase leveled literacy kits. Several schools asked for a flyer they could send home and post on platforms with information for caregivers to see about the leveled literacy kits (NOTE: In response to a request for a flyer with information for caregivers on the leveled literacy kits, the researcher made one and sent it out to schools to share through email.) Lead Educator 3 sent information home on the back of the school menu to reach caregivers. Lead Educator 3 shared, “parents rely heavily on the back of our menu. Even though we put things on Dojo and our social media page, we still have families without internet access. So that traditional, you know, snail mail paper in the folder that seems to work well for the remainder.”

Interview Question 5. How have you successfully gotten families to use the leveled literacy kits? What can be improved?

Lead Educators 1 and 2 shared that keeping the leveled literacy kits in the office was successful for easy access because an adult was always in the office to assist with checking out the kits. Lead Educator 1 stated, “So you know when we were originally planning like how are we going to debut them, but who's going to be in charge of taking them out? Where are we going to store them? So, we have like this extra classroom that, say, the office, so it's kind of divided into like a three-part space. And so it's like part conference area part, like Zen, calming space and then this other like kind of storage space and so like oh we can house them in there and then that's all great, but it's not near the office. It's not accessible, you know, like, who's going to go in there every day to take a kid to check them out? And so that's why we ended up housing them in the office.” The adult assisting with the checkout of the kits was able to check back in leveled literacy kits. Lead Educator 4 shared that showcasing the leveled literacy kits at the parent-teacher nights was successful because of the number of caregivers who attended their table to ask

about them. The lead educator offered a wait list for caregivers if the kit level was checked out because several caregivers wanted to check out the same leveled kits.

All lead educators gave feedback on improvements that could be made, including not using a QR code to scan for surveys. Lead Educator 1 shared, " I don't know if there's a way for me to see if they're scanning that QR code and doing them." The researcher could not identify who scanned QR codes or completed surveys because of a lack of identifying information on caregiver surveys. The researcher suggested to the lead educator, "do you think anyone would have time when they come back to shoot a ClassDojo or Facebook message of either the QR code or the survey link and say thanks for checking this out? If you haven't filled this out, would you mind filling this out for feedback?" Lead educators agreed with this idea the researcher suggested. IRB approved the change of the survey protocol to include survey links and paper survey options. All lead educators requested a paper copy or the survey link to send out through their message platforms because Lead Educator 1 stated, "if I send a picture of the QR code, that's nice, but they aren't the best with devices." Lead Educator 2 also shared, "Neither one of them [caregivers] know a lot about the use of QR codes." To receive more surveys, Lead Educator 4 shared an idea during an educator training that the lead educator would create a checklist for the items in the literacy kit for caregivers to remember what goes back in it. Lead Educator 4 stated in the interview, "I don't know if they got to the survey part because I put their little checklist inside, and they were supposed to sign it. And then, right underneath the signature, it said remember to do your survey. And I don't think any of them signed if they didn't check off what they returned. But I didn't see any signatures. I'm hoping that some surveys made their way back. I might have to highlight it next time the bags go out to try to get them to do them."

Lead Educators 1 and 4 thought finding the correct level for some students to send home with them was challenging, especially if using Lexile levels. Lead Educator 4 “found it difficult to match up some of the kids with the proper bag because we use Acadians or Dibble, and some of those kids like it will give you a Lexile score, but it just didn't seem accurate or something. I don't know really what was going on with that. So, we tried to make our best-educated guess. But then I was kind of like I worried that some of these might be too easy for the kids.” The researcher suggested finding the student's words per minute instead of Lexile level in the conversion chart to select kits for students accurately.

Lead Educator 3 found it hard to “sell the kits” for caregivers to check them out. When asked why, the lead educator’s response was, “but so many of our parents struggle with literacy themselves; they're not motivated to do it, probably from their own deficit, is my assumption, which is sad. How do you help your kid learn how to read if you're not literate?” The researcher suggested giving leveled literacy kits out to students at their independent level instead of their instructional level. This would make the student feel confident to read to the caregiver without the caregiver needing to support the student. Lead Educator 4 also shared, “it's tricky too, I think, to market it sometimes. Because I want to make sure I really explain what it is and why it's a useful kind of thing.” Lead educator discussions show that finding the perfect time to share information with caregivers was a challenge.

Lead Educators 4 and 7 shared that levels E-M needed to be checked out. Lead Educator 4 shared, “So I haven't been able to get too many of the higher levels set out yet, but then we have like a waitlist for the ABC D bags.” When asked why Lead Educator 4 shared that older students may feel embarrassed to use them. Lead Educators 5 and 6 shared that they were waiting for the perfect time to introduce them to caregivers, and no one had yet used the leveled

literacy kits. Lead Educator 2 shared a concern about utilizing many of the leveled literacy kits because the school size is small. The school might not have as many students in need of the leveled literacy kits or the opportunities to check them out. The researcher asked, “so, for K through 2, how many students do you think you have?” Lead Educator 2 shared that the school has 14 students in K-2 grades.

Lead Educator 7 shared that the school had caregivers come to the school or event to check out, which is why only a few had been checked out. Lead Educator 5 shared, “I don't want to let them out yet until everybody knows about them and knows what they are and the importance of making sure they come back, right.” Lead Educator 6 also shared, “the biggest thing, so we're going to make sure we get them back. So, we're going to have a talk to the families when they come in for our first literacy night.” The other lead educator shared that time and transportation are reasons for caregivers not to come and check out the kits at the school. The researcher also suggested changing up the procedure for leveled literacy kits to go home with students instead of caregivers coming to the school to check out the kits because Lead Educator 7 stated, “think that's the biggest thing is that caregivers have to actually come here themselves and get it and then bring it back themselves.” A follow-up email from Lead Educator 7 showed that the lead educator sent all leveled literacy kits home with students, and they were all checked out.

Interview Question 6. *What other ideas do you have that could be done to support literacy at home?*

Lead Educator 5 shared no other ideas. Lead Educators 1, 3, and 4 shared concerns about reaching caregivers who need to be reading with their students, getting families to support literacy at home, and making more books available for home use. Lead Educators, 6 and 7

identified grades 3-5 not wanting to read and/or having access to virtual books at home that they enjoy reading. Lead Educator 7 stated, "I've noticed that especially older ones, do not want to read, you know, unless it's online, and I really hate that. But I mean, it is what it is. They like to use [the reading app] Epic. It's like one of their favorite things to do, but you can't do it after school unless the parent pays for it."

Research Question 2. How did the leveled literacy kits influence stakeholders' perceptions of family engagement with literacy?

The following data was gathered from the caregiver survey questions. The data led to the emerging themes of caregivers' perspective of current literacy-focused family engagement, benefits of the leveled literacy kits, the contents of the leveled literacy kits, caregivers' confidence, and a discussion on the leveled literacy kits not utilized.

Table 3 presents the data from the Likert scale sub-sections of Question 3 on the caregiver survey from the caregiver participants who checked out leveled literacy kits and fully completed the survey.

Table 3*Caregiver Perceptions of Communication with the School*

Survey Statements	Caregiver Participant Response Frequencies					
	Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Welcoming School	10	0	0	0	1	9
2. Attended literacy activity	10	1	0	3	1	5
3. School provided information	10	0	0	2	1	7
4. Confidence in communicating to school	10	0	1	0	1	8
5. School has enough time for concerns	10	0	0	2	0	8
6. Confident in explaining difficult ideas	10	0	0	0	2	8
7. Activities can help engage when reading	10	0	0	0	2	8
8. I know where to get extra resources	10	0	0	2	0	8

Table 3 shows the caregivers' perceptions on communication and engagement with the school. The caregiver could rate strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree on the eight statements. Table 3 shows 10 out of 13 caregivers' responses to Question 3. Three caregivers did not respond. Nine out of the ten caregiver participants have attended a literacy event in the past and feel like the school their students attend have a welcoming environment. One of the ten caregiver participants have never participated in a literacy event before. Two

caregiver participants selected neutral for getting information about leveled literacy kits. Eight caregiver participants did receive information about leveled literacy kits. Nine caregiver participants feel confident when communicating with schools. One caregiver participant does not feel confident communicating with schools. Eight caregivers' participants feel like the school has time for their concerns. Two caregiver participants selected neutral concerning if their schools take the time to address their concerns. When it comes to engaging with their student in reading, all ten caregiver participants selected they feel confident explaining difficult ideas and engaging in activities with reading. Eight of the caregiver participants know where to get extra resources, and two selected neutral on the statement.

Table 4 presents the data from the Likert scale sub-sections of Question 4 on the caregiver survey from the caregiver participants who checked out leveled literacy kits and fully completed the survey.

Table 4

Caregiver Confidence in working with their student in literacy

Survey Statements	Caregiver Participant Response Frequencies					
	Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9 Want more books in the house	10	0	0	0	3	7
10 Want to read daily	10	0	0	0	2	8
11 Aware of more resources	10	0	0	1	1	8
12. Feels confident	10	0	0	0	3	7
13 Confident using activities	10	0	0	2	1	7

Table 4 describes how caregiver participants felt about their confidence in working with their students in literacy and/or with the leveled-literacy kits. The caregiver could rate strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree on the five statements. All ten participants agreed they would like to read daily with their student. Ten caregiver participants want more books in their homes. Ten caregiver participants also feel confident working with their student. Nine caregiver participants know about other resources, and one caregiver selected neutral. Two caregiver participants chose neutral with feeling confident using the paired activities in the leveled literacy kits. Eight caregiver participants agreed they felt confident using the paired activities.

Table 5 presents the data from the Likert scale sub-sections of Question 5 on the caregiver survey from the caregiver participants who checked out leveled literacy kits and fully completed the survey.

Table 5

Caregiver Perceptions of Leveled Literacy Kits

Caregiver Participant Response Frequencies						
Survey Statements	Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. Easy to use	10	0	0	0	3	7
15. Enjoyable	10	0	0	0	3	7
16. Easy to read	10	0	0	0	2	8
17. Confident talk to teacher about kit	10	0	0	1	1	8
18. Check out a future kit	10	0	0	0	2	8

Table 5 shows the information on caregivers' perceptions of the leveled literacy kits they checked out and utilized. All ten participants agreed that the leveled literacy kits were enjoyable

and easy to use. All ten participants also agreed that their student felt the books were easy to read. Nine caregiver participants agreed they could communicate with an educator about the leveled literacy kit. One caregiver participant selected neutral when communicating with an educator about the leveled literacy kit. Ten caregivers would check out the leveled literacy kits again.

Research Question 3. What impact did implementing the leveled literacy kits have on stakeholders' perceptions of the school-to-home connection?

The following data was gathered from interview questions 1, 4, 7, and 8. Also, the open-ended questions number 6 and 7 on the caregiver survey. The data led to the emerging themes of existing positive communication in the schools, academic progress communication, gaps that are occurring in communication, caregivers' confidence in communicating with educators about the leveled literacy kits, and the school-to-home connection that was built.

Interview Question 1. *How has your school shown communication between school educators and families? What could be improved upon?*

All lead educators shared that the schools communicate to caregivers one-on-one and through mass communications. Most families are communicated through platforms such as Class Dojo, Facebook, One-Call messages, texts, and the Remind app. Flyers and monthly and weekly newsletters are also utilized to reach families who are off electronics or need the internet. Lead Educator 4 shared, "We've actually seen a pretty good increase in communication because some families are much better at texting versus calling kind of thing" now that they are using more messaging platforms.

Lead Educator 6 shared that communication was good and that "it's finally getting back to normal after COVID, and it just feels kind of nice to just get back to regular life." Lead

Educators 1, 3, and 4 stated they needed to improve on the population not reached by social media platforms. Lead Educator 1 said, “I mean, there's always room for improvement because, you know, so I guess that we have like, I think, 155 families that are on Dojo, but then we have seven families who are not, and even though I sent home a paper newsletter. I feel like we send home a memo for everything.” Lead Educator 3 shared that caregivers aren’t always responding to messages.

“Dojo is the most common mode of communication from teacher to home. Some classes have, like, classes have 100% of parents on there. Most have in the 90s. So, we've got the majority of families on Dojo, whether they check those messages or not. It isn't always the most accurate representation of communication, but we know that we're pushing the messages out. We just don't know, like they don't always respond to us with any message.” Lead Educator 4 also shared concern about messages not being responded to. The researcher asked if it was due to lack of internet or being able to read. Lead Educator 4 replied, “um, no, it could be that they are kind of busy. I think they have they're able to read perfectly fine. I think it just comes down to certain things that they'll respond to. And then other things, not so much. So, if it's fun things, they'll probably respond, but if it's anything about, you know, behavior or absences or anything like that, it gets a little trickier to reach them.” Lead Educator 4 also shared that their school struggles to keep phone numbers up to date in their programs due to caregivers getting new phone numbers and not updating the school with the information.

***Interview Question 4.** What has your school done well in sharing academic progress in literacy with families? What could be improved?*

Lead Educators 1 and 4 utilize communication through the Class Dojo platform to communicate academic progress with caregivers. Lead Educators 1, 5, 6, and 7 rely on sending

reports home to caregivers. Lead Educators 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 communicate academic progress at parent-teacher conferences and training.

Lead Educator 5 shared a concern with communication because “education is not as cared for in the community, so parents aren’t too concerned.” Lead Educator 4 had the same problem “the educational thing is not as cared about, so I think sometimes you have our students who have lower reading levels, and the parents aren’t too concerned about that kind of thing.” Lead Educator 4 utilizes Class Dojo, but educators don’t always receive a response from caregivers.

Interview Question 7. Have caregivers given any comments when checking leveled kits in and out?

Not all lead educators could speak to caregivers when leveled literacy kits were checked in and out. When asked interview Question 7, Lead Educator 3 stated, "I don't know, but I think that I think they came back the day I was out, a day we thought I was having surgery, and thankfully that got next. I think that they came back the day that I wasn't here because I came back, and they're just magically in the office." Lead Educator 1 shared that in a Class Dojo message, “a caregiver said, “Hey, so what's is really in that bag? Can we have another one after?” And so, then I was like, Oh my gosh, yes.” Lead Educator 4 had a student share that they “read them really quickly.”

Interview Question 8. How have the literacy kits changed your communication with stakeholders?

Lead Educators 2,3,4,5 and 6 have yet to interact with stakeholders to answer Question 8. The researcher asked Lead Educator 4, “did any of them ask how maybe their child was doing at school or anything?” Lead Educator 4 replied, “they did not.” Lead Educator 4 also stated, "I

haven't talked to any parents about what they thought of them because the students brought them in. So the students brought them back. So, [the] parents didn't give them to me.” Lead Educator 1 shared that talking about leveled literacy kits helped communicate with caregivers of kindergarten students because they are new to the school and tend to be shyer. Lead Educator 1 also stated that “it was nice to be able to talk to those kindergarten caregivers who didn't come here last year, whom we don't know that well” when they stopped by the leveled literacy kit table at the school event. Lead Educator 7 discussed a caregiver of a preschooler that generally wouldn't communicate with. Lead Educator 7 talked with the preschooler's caregiver about letter titles and learning how to read. Lead Educator 7 stated, “So yeah, yeah, I would say yeah, it has opened more conversation like that.”

Opened-ended Question 6 Caregiver Survey. Why did you check out the literacy kit?

Nine out of thirteen caregiver participants provided feedback on the Question 6 open-ended question. Question 6 sought reasons why a caregiver checked out a leveled literacy kit. Three caregiver participants shared that they were encouraged by the school or the kits were offered by the student's teacher. One caregiver shared that the student's principal offered the program, and her daughter can always use the extra practice in reading. Another caregiver participant stated, “my children love reading, and I also want to help them develop literacy skills.” One caregiver participant provided, “was ask[ed] to try it and see if I like [the kit].” Another caregiver participant wanted “a different selection of books to read at home.” And “We read daily” was a response from a caregiver participant. Another response was, “to help my child become a better reader and give me support in helping him.”

Opened-ended Question 7 Caregiver Survey. Please provide any other ways you would like support at home.

Three of the 13 caregiver participants that filled out a survey completed Questions 7. One caregiver stated he/she would like more books to read at home available to them. Another caregiver stated that monthly activities sent home would be great. The third caregiver noted he/she would like more hands-on activities to share with his/her student.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Implications

This chapter restates the purpose of the study, the participants, and the methods used to collect data for this study. A summary of the data is provided and organized by each research question. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study are found at the end of this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to determine the impact of leveled literacy kits on family engagement and school-to-home connections from the stakeholders' perceptions. The perceptions of caregivers that checked in and out the leveled literacy kits and lead educators in ten elementary schools in West Virginia (WV) perceptions were studied. Caregivers' perceptions of the leveled literacy kits, confidence level, and effective procedure of checking out and in were collected. The study also examined educators' perceptions of the process of the leveled literacy kits. Leveled literacy kits were also examined as a tool for improved literacy communication with caregivers.

The data gathered supported the following research questions.

1. Was the process used to provide leveled literacy kits to student caregivers effective?
2. How do the leveled literacy kits influence stakeholders' perceptions of family engagement with literacy?
3. What impact did the implementation of the leveled literacy kits have on stakeholders' perceptions of the school-home connection?

Participants

The study's stakeholder population consists of lead educators and caregivers at ten West Virginia Family Engagement Center (WVFEC) elementary schools in WV. The sample of

educators interviewed consisted of one lead educator from each of the seven schools. Interview data were collected at a virtual video meeting on Microsoft Teams. Caregivers that participated had a student at one of the ten participating schools. The caregivers who completed the survey checked a leveled literacy out and back in.

Methods

This is the first time the The EdVenture Group and the WV FEC developed literacy kits for schools. This research provides a pilot study for this *Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home Program* developed and led by The EdVenture Group and the WV FEC. The data collection tools were lead educator interviews, caregiver surveys, and check-out/in documents. The methods contained a qualitative analysis of lead educator interviews, trends in Likert scale responses, and opened ended questions from the caregiver survey. Survey data was collected through QR codes, paper, and survey links. Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams. Based on data collected during interviews, modifications were made to the leveled-literacy kits to improve procedures and strategies.

Data from interviews and open-ended questions were collected using an inductive analysis approach. The data collected from lead educators and caregivers was coded and emerging themes were summarized. The following themes emerged from the data findings organized around each research question.

Conclusions and Discussions

Data collected from interviews with seven lead educators produced the following themes. Caregiver surveys also provided data to support the following themes to answer each research question.

Research Question 1- Process of Leveled Literacy Kits

Research Question 1 stated, “was the process used to provide leveled literacy kits to students’ caregivers effective?”

The process used to provide literacy kits to student caregivers did have gaps in it that were not effective. These gaps were found in getting information to caregivers, the storage location of leveled literacy kits, and the check-out and check-in process. After feedback from lead educators and caregivers, as a team, schools were able to find an effective process to use in future projects. Not all processes will work the same in every school. Participants and schools need to be considered when interventions are developed (Jenson & Minke, 2017). A suggestion for future programs is to remain flexible in the process to meet the needs of each community and school.

Getting information out to caregivers. Some things worked for getting information out to the caregivers, and some improvements are needed. Some of the things that worked were that lead educators could set up tables at family engagement events for the leveled literacy kits. Lead educators reported they sent information to caregivers about the leveled literacy kits in newsletters, social media, and fliers. Hine (2022) also had success, “sending short notes when a student overcomes a challenge in the classroom to goal-oriented home visits conducted by teams of school staff. These informative school communications could reinforce positive interactions between the home and school” (p.180). A few lead educators emailed the researcher and asked for a flyer to be created that gives caregiver information about the leveled literacy kits, and that was sent out in some schools and seemed helpful to lead educators [see Appendix C].

Another way to get the information out to caregivers was in conversations with caregivers. Lead educators brought up information about the leveled literacy kits when lead

educators were able to meet with caregivers in person. An example is when caregiver volunteers are at a school; the lead educators could show the volunteer the leveled literacy kits and see if they would like to check one out. Some improvements could be made. Caregivers reported 80% were provided information about the leveled literacy kits. Caregivers reported that 20% had leveled literacy kits sent home with the student. These leveled literacy kits should have a letter or flyer in the leveled literacy kit if the caregivers was not able to attend an information meeting on the leveled literacy kits. Bortherson & Hoffman (2020) also suggests “appropriately consider whether parenting newsletters may be of use in reaching a particular audience, combining with another educational approach or delivering via a new technology” (p.17). Getting information pushed out about the leveled literacy kits was a key element in making caregivers aware of the leveled literacy kits.

Location of storage. The initial storage area of leveled literacy kits was an issue at some sites. Lead educators reported they decided to store the leveled literacy kits in the office because it took more staff to go and get the leveled literacy kits from another classroom or storage closet. Some lead educators had initially had them in book nooks, Title 1 classrooms, or extra closet spaces. When the lead educator realized the additional staff it would take to get the leveled literacy kits checked out, most lead educators decided to store the kits in the office where there would always be an adult to check them out and in. The office is also a convenient location to communicate with caregivers about the leveled literacy kits because the office is the most frequent place for caregivers to be at the school. The storage area of the leveled literacy kits needed to be in a location that was accessible to staff members that could support the checking-out and checking-in process.

Check-out process. Some processes succeeded in the checkout process, and some needed improvement. A few successes were that the caregivers agreed they felt welcomed in the school to check the leveled literacy kits out according to the caregiver survey. Most lead educators put the check-out and check-in documents in the office with the leveled literacy kits. Some lead educators reported having leveled literacy kits checked out at family engagement events which were successful for the caregivers. Lead educators recommended starting a waiting list for leveled literacy kits already checked out at a specific level. When the leveled literacy kits were checked back in, the lead educator would call the next caregiver on the wait list for that level.

A few improvements in the check-out process were reported during the interviews by lead educators. Lead educators reported that caregivers wanted to avoid coming to the school to check the leveled literacy kits out. This could be because of time constraints, transportation, or desire to. Baker et al. (2016) also found transportation challenging when working with families. These challenges led to students checking the leveled literacy kits out, which lost a communication opportunity directly with the caregiver. The researcher and lead educators decided to send leveled literacy kits home with students instead of caregivers coming to check out the leveled literacy kits. Some smaller populated schools started with one grade level and worked their way through each student, sending them home. Other lead educators reported sending them home with students who needed extra support. Several benefits and gaps in the check-out process were gathered from the data.

Check-in process. The check-in process was a learning curve for schools. Many students brought the leveled literacy kits back in person instead of the caregiver bringing them back in, which led to no communication with caregivers. During educator training, a few schools

developed and added a check-off list in the leveled literacy kits to help caregivers remember what goes back in the leveled literacy kit before checking back in. No leveled literacy kits were returned with missing materials, although the line provided to sign when the survey was filled out was not signed on in any of the leveled literacy kits that were coming back in. Highlighting the signature line moving forward was reported as an idea to help remind caregivers. To help improve the amount of leveled literacy kits checked out and back in, the idea of incentives was brought up with a few lead educators. One incentive idea was a “brag tag” one school uses that students can earn to put on a key chain.

When caregivers signed the leveled literacy kit back in, they were given a resource document for more resources to utilize at home. With a lack of caregivers signing the leveled literacy kits back in and students returning them, resource documents needed to be handed out. Caregivers gave feedback that not all agreed they knew more resources were available at home to help their student learn how to read after using a leveled literacy kit. Better access to the resource sheet would be more effective. Lead educators gave them out when a leveled literacy kit was turned back in, but the caregivers are missing an opportunity of receiving more resources when the student checks the kit back in. Data collected from lead educators gave information on what worked and didn't in the check-in process.

Survey collection. Survey collection started out slowly but then improved. Only two surveys had been filled out at the beginning of data collection during lead educator interviews. One challenge was not knowing which caregivers had filled out the survey because the survey was conducted anonymously. After interviewing several lead educators and discussing the survey collection process, a paper copy and a link to the survey were added to the survey collection process instead of just utilizing a QR code. The researcher, the project manager, also

discussed with lead educators about sending an electronic message through the Class Dojo or Remind app thanking the caregivers for returning the leveled literacy kit and asking the caregiver to complete the survey. Thirteen surveys were completed at the end of data collection. More caregivers filled out the survey when the survey link was sent out as a follow-up message from the lead educator. When the lead educator followed up with the caregiver and had an open dialog about the survey, more surveys were filled out. Arce, S. (2019) also found that open dialog with caregivers helped build working relationships with caregivers. No paper copies of the survey were filled out. Even though the survey process started with a low response, the lead educators were able to support new strategies to have more surveys completed.

Gaps. Leveled literacy kits had never been deployed in the ten WVFE elementary schools before, which caused some gaps in the process. One gap was getting information to the caregivers about the leveled literacy kits. A few of the schools had an event planned. The lead educators were going to showcase the leveled literacy kits, and then the event was canceled. When the event was canceled, the leveled literacy kits were never available to caregivers because the caregivers needed to be informed about them. When interviewing lead educators, the researcher suggested sending flyers home to educate the caregivers on the leveled literacy kits or posting a video recording on their social media pages giving information about them. Lead educators whose events were canceled didn't record a video to post on the school's social media page. Open communication through social media platforms could benefit the leveled literacy kits (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). After flyers were sent home with schools that had canceled family engagement events, leveled literacy kits were checked out. Lead educators also reported concern about not getting the leveled literacy kits returned because of previous experiences with

sending items home. This concern led some lead educators not to push the leveled literacy kits into homes. Several leveled literacy kits have not been returned after the three-week window.

The demographics of the caregiver students who checked out the leveled literacy kits were all in kindergarten through second grade. Also, only the leveled literacy kits ranging from A- G were checked out. A lead educator reported she thought her 4th and 5th graders, who are at the reading level of kindergarten through second grade, could be embarrassed to check out a leveled literacy kit. A concern is how to reach the 3rd- 5th graders reading on a kindergarten through the second-grade level and how to reach out to them to improve their reading level.

During interview collection with lead educators and email correspondence, improvements were made to the leveled literacy kits and the process. Lead educators reported that the conversion chart was sometimes challenging to identify reading levels, especially for kindergarten and first-grade students. This is because Lexile scores read beginner reading (BR) for students in this age range, and students in these grades still need words per minute (WPM) data. Although all caregivers reported that their student read the books with only a little assistance, which would mean they were identified correctly for the leveled literacy kit they checked out. Kindergarten through the beginning of first-grade levels would need to be identified through teacher recommendation instead of using the conversion chart. This study identified gaps in the procedure of the leveled literacy kit for future projects.

Research Question 2-Caregiver Perceptions of Family Engagement.

Research Question 2 stated, “how did the leveled literacy kits influence stakeholders’ perceptions of family engagement with literacy?”

Leveled literacy kits were a tool that caregivers felt confident working with their student. After utilizing the leveled literacy kits, caregivers enjoyed the contents in the leveled literacy kits. Lead educators saw many benefits in the leveled literacy kits.

Current literacy-focused family engagement. Schools are doing a good job of providing literacy-focused family engagement events for caregivers. Lead educators reported that literacy-focused family engagement is already occurring in some schools. The recent literacy-focused engagement influences the stakeholder's perceptions of family engagement with literacy. The 2022-2023 school year is the first "normal year" since the Covid pandemic affected the regular school day. Some lead educators were happy to report that in-person events were back, and caregivers could be welcomed into the schools. This has created a positive effect in turnouts for literacy-focused family engagement events. The lead educators reported that this year they had had book stations, back fair nights, and families celebrating family literacy month by taking and posting pictures of them reading with their students, Read Across Literacy nights, and virtual family reading time. One school shared about the One Book Program they were bringing to their school to connect caregivers with their students more and county-wide book readings to involve the community. Even though each school has had literacy-focused family engagement opportunities, only 60% of the caregivers who checked out a leveled literacy kit and returned a survey agreed that they had attended an event this school year. Not all caregivers participate in literacy-focused family engagement, even though it occurs in schools. Fikrat- Weyers et al. (2021) found that sometimes caregivers are overloaded with activities and information to attend events.

Benefits of leveled literacy kits. Lead educators and caregivers of the leveled literacy kits identified several benefits. From their perception, lead educators and caregivers shared several

advantages of the leveled literacy kits. Caregivers and lead educators reported that the books in the leveled literacy kits provided opportunities for time for the caregiver to read with their student. Opportunities to read with their students and engage with a text can improve academic abilities and confidence (Smith, 2020). Caregivers said that their student was engaged with the text and that the student was eager to check out another leveled literacy kit. One lead educator liked that the leveled literacy kits provided more than one book at a time to go home. Another benefit lead educators reported was that the leveled literacy kits provided caregivers with something for the student to read that was on the student's reading level. A few lead educators did not see any benefits directly because there were not enough leveled literacy kits checked out, or they had no communication with the caregivers. Even though a few lead educators didn't have an opportunity to see the benefits of the leveled literacy kits, several could.

Contents in the leveled literacy kits. The contents of the leveled literacy kits were viewed as effective. Caregivers shared their perceptions of the leveled literacy kits in the survey. All caregivers agreed they felt confident using the leveled books and pairing activities with their students. After using the leveled literacy kit, the caregivers also decided that doing activities at home with their students could help their student engage more with reading. The family engagement that occurs when students are engaged more in reading improves the student's motivation and performance (Bachman et al., 2021). Most caregivers knew where to go for more resources after checking the leveled literacy kits back in if they needed more support at home. Some caregivers felt this way even without receiving the resource document in the leveled literacy kit. Although not all caregivers agreed, more resources may be needed in the home for caregivers to work with their students. Some caregivers reported that they would like more books available to bring home. Some caregivers also reported that monthly activities with their student

at home or more hands-on activities would be beneficial, too. All caregivers reported that the leveled literacy kit was easy to use. Most of the caregivers said that their student enjoyed doing the leveled literacy kit activities at home with their caregivers. The contents of the leveled literacy kits were successful.

Confidence. The caregivers shared their perception of their level of confidence with literacy family engagement after using the leveled literacy kit. All caregivers felt confident explaining difficult things to their students with the items in the leveled literacy kits. Most caregivers felt confident communicating about the leveled literacy kits with educators. Caregivers also felt educators had enough time to talk if the caregiver had concerns with the leveled literacy kits. Caregivers reported that they had confidence in working with their student but also wanted more books to be in their house. After using the leveled literacy kits, caregivers would also like to plan to read with their student daily. Most caregivers also reported feeling confident helping their students learn how to read after using leveled literacy kits. The activities in the leveled literacy kit make them feel secure working with their student. Overall, the leveled literacy kits did give caregivers confidence in many areas.

Leveled literacy kits were not utilized. There were some reasons why more leveled literacy kits should have been checked out. During the interview, lead educators reported their perception of leveled literacy kits and literacy family engagement. Some lead educators said they were having difficulty “selling” the leveled literacy kits and having caregivers come and check them out. One challenge was that some of the caregivers struggled with literacy themselves. Lead educators reported that caregivers might not want to check them out because of their deficits. The researcher provided in the interviews a recommendation of letting families check out leveled literacy kits that are lower reading level than the student so the student could read to the

caregiver without the caregiver having to support them. Even though there were reasons why not as many leveled literacy kits were checked out, all caregivers who completed a survey reported that they would check out another level literacy kit in the future. There were several reasons why leveled literacy kits were not checked out, but the ones that were checked out received positive feedback.

Research Question 3-Perceptions of School-Home Connections

Research Question 3 stated, “what impact did the implementation of the leveled literacy kits have on stakeholders’ perceptions of the school-home connection?”

There were not many conversations between caregivers and lead educators, but the conversations that lead educators did have with caregivers were with caregivers’ that educators wouldn’t usually have the opportunity to communicate with. Leveled literacy kits were good resources for building school-to-home connections.

Positive Existing Communication. All schools already had communication strategies in place. Most lead educators felt their existing communication strategies were effective with caregivers. One lead educator even noted that it was a positive outcome of Covid when the schools were in a situation where they had to connect remotely. Schools’ platforms currently used to communicate with caregivers are Class Dojo, Facebook, One call text and phone calls, and Remind App. Educators also send home newsletters for families, not on social media platforms, and one school shared that they have monthly parent training that they communicate with caregivers. Communication strategies are already being utilized in the seven WVFEC schools.

Academic progress communication. Schools communicate academic progress in some ways to caregivers. Lead educators reported sending home academic progress information to

caregivers through Class Dojo, report cards, and assessment reports to communicate with caregivers. Parent-teacher conferences and Student Assistant Team (SAT) meetings are other ways lead educators reported they share academic progress. Egan & Miller (2019) also found when communicating with caregivers that “free communication applications (apps) such as ClassDojo (www.classdojo.com) provide the opportunity for educators to communicate with parents one-on-one or to an entire group of parents with ease. ClassDojo is compatible with iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, or any computer, and it allows educators to share pictures and classroom progress or to easily promote events. Parents can individually message teachers, receive notifications, and track their children’s behavior instantly” (p.42).

Caregivers needed to know what level their student read on and needed support matching up what leveled literacy kit to check out. This provided information for what level their student is reading on currently. Reading through the books with the student gave caregivers an idea of whether the student was struggling. Lead educators did report there are some caregivers whom educators don’t get responses from when attempting to communicate with them about their student’s academic progress. In some areas, lead educators reported a lack of caregiver interest in their student’s academic progress. Academic progress communication is occurring in school, but there are some gaps. Keeping an open dialog with caregivers between educators can help address some communication gaps (Gen et al.'s, 2021).

Communication gaps. Lead educators identified a few gaps in communication strategies. It is challenging for educators to communicate with caregivers who need to be signed up for the social media platforms the school utilizes. One school stated the challenge of not all caregivers having access to the internet to communicate fluidly. According to Liang et al. (2020), “our research suggests family involvement and engagement can be affected by several internal

and external factors, such as busy schedules, resource levels, school dynamics, sense of community, or language barriers, among others” (p. 73). Liang et al. also discussed that family engagement sometimes does not occur because of conflicting schedules and high demands of activities. Liang et al. findings could explain the communication gaps the educators and caregivers were having with the leveled literacy kits. Another gap that the lead educators reported was a struggle with caregivers that don’t prioritize academics from their perception. The communication gaps were viewed from the lead educator’s perception. Mapp et al. (2022) stated the same challenge of different mindsets and perceptions in family engagement.

Confidence in communication with leveled literacy kits. Leveled literacy kits helped caregivers confidently discuss their student’s literacy needs about the leveled literacy kits. Most caregivers felt confident communicating about the leveled literacy kits with educators. The caregiver’s confident communication is an example of family engagement beyond just involvement (Ferrara 2011). also felt like educators had enough time to talk to them about any concerns with the leveled literacy kits. The leveled literacy kits were easy for caregivers to communicate with educators about. Still, lead educators didn’t report many times that caregivers did share with them about the leveled literacy kits. Educators and caregivers need more opportunities to communicate about the leveled literacy kits after the leveled literacy kits are checked back in. Open communication in family engagement leads to sharing learning at-home ideas with families that could help educate caregivers and build their confidence in working with their student (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019).

School-to-home connection. The leveled literacy kits led to communication and discussions that lead educators would not usually have with caregivers. Smith et al. (2022) also had similar findings with family engagement interventions that “indicated that family–school

engagement interventions significantly influenced joining and parent–teacher communication” (p.286). Not all communication was in person with the leveled literacy kits; some caregivers reached out through Class Dojo to discuss the availability of the level literacy kits or information about them. Communication occurred when caregivers checked out leveled literacy kits at family engagement events. Lead educators reported communicating with caregivers at events they may not have normally shared with before. Lead educators also said communication occurred when they asked if a caregiver wanted to check out a leveled literacy kit. One challenge was difficulty communicating with caregivers when they weren’t checking them back in; their student was. Communication opportunities improved when lead educators followed up with caregivers when the leveled literacy kits were checked back to complete a survey. Hine (2022) found that “communication across schools and families can act as a valuable system to strengthen relationships between educators and students’ families” (p.180).

A few lead educators did not have any contact with caregivers during the process of the leveled literacy kits. Leveled literacy kits can be a tool to support school-to-home connections if both caregivers and educators make the effort.

Implications

1. The process of implementing leveled literacy is evolving.

Out of the ten schools, the needs of each community were very different. A needs-based survey before implementing leveled literacy kits could help decide the procedure for effectively checking out the leveled literacy kits (Jenson & Minke, 2017). The best location for leveled literacy kits is in the school office, where a staff member can assist a caregiver or answer any questions. The number of leveled literacy kits checked could have been higher. If schools are looking for more leveled literacy kits to be checked out,

more information needs to go out to caregivers to make them aware of the leveled literacy kits. Giving caregivers information about the leveled literacy kits is effective at in-person events but doesn't have to occur in that setting. Sending home flyers to caregivers or with the leveled literacy kit can also work to get the information out to more families. Checking the leveled literacy kits out was most successful at events at the school, even though this only reached caregivers who attended the event. Another successful way to get the leveled literacy kit at home is to send them home with students with an information flyer for caregivers to read instructions on the leveled literacy kits and do the leveled literacy kits together before sending them back with the student. The check-back-in process went well, with students bringing them back in. The conversion charts for educators to identify what leveled literacy kit a caregiver should check out were helpful. A few educators were concerned about what level to give kindergarten through first-grade students because there are fewer assessment data collected on kindergarten through first-grade students. In that case, educators should start with the lowest leveled literacy kit to avoid frustration and follow up with the caregiver to check in for any extra support.

2. Leveled literacy kits can build school-to-home connections between educators and caregivers.

Schools must inform caregivers about the leveled literacy kits to build the school-to-home connection. The most effective strategy to get information out to caregivers was to send a flyer home, newsletters, or social media posts instead of holding showcasing events for caregivers to learn about the leveled literacy kits. The events did open communication with caregivers whom educators wouldn't usually get the chance to build

connections with, but only reached caregivers who came to the events. There is a missed communication opportunity when caregivers don't check the leveled literacy kits themselves. It's important to reach out and follow up with caregivers (Lawson, 2003). It did work well for educators to follow up with a Class Dojo or Remind App message when the leveled literacy kit was checked back in to communicate with caregivers. Caregivers feel confident to talk to educators about the leveled literacy kits and feel welcome in the schools to check them out. Smith (2020) had similar findings on confidence with the *Read with Me* program that utilized lessons and activities for caregivers to engage with their student. This trust is essential to school-to-home connections. There was a gap in communication with caregivers who don't respond to educators when contacted through phone, email, or a platform. Caregivers should be asked from their perception why they are not communicating back. This study only gathered the lead educator's perception of the communication gap.

3. Other options should be available to share information when QR codes are used.

When collecting data with caregivers in rural West Virginia, having multiple data gathering options was useful. Internet is a challenge in some areas to get the QR code or survey link to work. A paper copy is more useful in those areas. The QR code was difficult to send out in messages when caregivers were reading it on their phones and didn't have an accessible way to open the QR code. Not all caregivers knew what to do with the QR code either. Allen and Marlar (2016) warn that even though using QR codes is quick and easy, there are also some limitations to consider. Therefore, they recommend using different survey methods to reach diverse study participants. This proved helpful for this study as more responses were returned by sending a message to caregivers with a

link that sent them directly to the survey. However, the QR method should not be abandoned entirely as it provides a convenient way for participants to access and complete a survey on modern devices (Hau et al., 2013).

4. Find ways for third through fifth-grade students on a kindergarten to second-grade reading level to check out leveled literacy kits.

Leveled literacy kits were not checked out by third through fifth-grade students. One way to address this issue is to have the lead educator go to the classrooms and showcase the leveled literacy kits to the students to motivate them. This could help the students see that it is a normal, fun way to learn to read. Another strategy is to send the leveled literacy kits home when Student Assistance Team (SAT) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings occur; the leveled literacy kits can go home with the caregiver at the meeting as a resource to utilize at home. As Stange (2013) discussed, it's important for students to have material that isn't on their frustration level for the student not to be frustrated with their caregiver (p.111). Having leveled material for students who have an IEP or are struggling is helpful for caregivers.

5. Leveled literacy kits are a good literacy-focused family engagement strategy.

Even though all schools reported literacy-focused family engagement going on in their schools, specifically family involvement events, caregivers did not report they were going to them. The leveled literacy kits provide another way to reach caregivers for literacy-focused family engagement that do not attend school events. The books in the leveled literacy kits offered access to several books simultaneously. The contents in the leveled literacy kits also provided engaged time between the caregiver and student to read text on the student's level. The experiences between the caregiver and student provided

an interest in reading and a desire to check out another leveled literacy kit. Increased interest and motivation can lead to academic improvements (Gin et al., 2021).

6. Leveled literacy kits give caregivers confidence.

After using the leveled literacy kits, caregivers had the confidence to talk to educators about how their student were doing in school. The confidence caregivers have when talking to caregivers and working with their students leads to family engagement and open communication with caregivers (Gerzel-Short & Conderman, 2019). Caregivers were confident in teaching their students how to read at home after using the leveled literacy kits. After working through the leveled literacy kits with the student, the families desired more books in their homes. The learning materials in the leveled literacy kits did build confidence in caregivers to work with their students at home, making it more likely that they will engage with their students' more. Smith (2020) supports this by asserting that families would like access to more activities together at home. Supplying caregivers with more activities they can do at home together would increase the caregiver's confidence.

Recommendations for Further Study

- Additional literacy family engagement strategies are recommended for further study. Examining other literacy families' engagement strategies would lead to more effective ways to bring educators, families, and students together through literacy.
- Lead educators recommended further study of literacy needs of the intermediate grade level. The leveled literacy kits were not checked out by 3rd- 5th-grade students. Intermediate grades need more literacy-focused family engagement strategies and

resources to interest families and students to engage together in literacy. Educators, students, and caregivers would benefit from examining higher grade-level literacy needs.

- Further study of caregivers who do not read with their student is recommended to gather the caregiver's perception. Lead educators reported their perception of caregivers not wanting to read with their student or lacking interest in academics. A recommendation is to gather data on the caregiver's perception of why they are not reading with the students. This examination would be beneficial to share with educators to shift their mindset and understanding and to be able to reach more caregivers.
- A study of strategies to make more books available to rural communities is recommended. Several caregivers asked for more access to books from home. When the researcher trained educators on the leveled literacy kits, a few schools shared their challenge of needing a classroom library or book fairs. Examining why and how to get more books to rural books would support educators, students, and families.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704
IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

August 29, 2022

Kimberly McFall, EdD
Graduate Curriculum & Instruction

RE: IRBNet ID# 1920704-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. McFall:

Protocol Title:	[1920704-1] The Impact of Leveled Literacy Kits on Family Engagement and School to Home Connections: Stakeholders' Perceptions	
Site Location:	MUGC	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(1)&(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Donna Atwood.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Caregiver Survey

The following is the Likert Scale survey administered to student caregiver participants;

anonymous consent was included in the survey:

Directions: Please read the following questions about *Level-Up's* leveled literacy kits and answer with what best describes how much you agree with the statements. It is most helpful if you answer honestly and accurately. This information helps us plan how to make the *Level-Up* program beneficial to caregivers. Your responses will remain confidential.

Section 1: Demographics

1. What grade is your student enrolled in?

- a. PreK
- b. K
- c. 1
- d. 2
- e. 3
- f. 4
- g. 5

2. Which level kit did you use with your student?

- a.A
- b.B
- c.C
- d.D
- e.E
- f.F

g.G

h.H

i.I

j.J

k.K

l.L

m.M

n.N/A

Section 2:

3. For each statement below, circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement.

Where: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The school was welcoming to me when I checked in and out the leveled literacy kit.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have attended an activity at my student's school about leveled literacy kits.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The school provided information that helped me use the leveled literacy kits with my student.	1	2	3	4	5

4. I feel confident about how to communicate with the school about leveled literacy kits.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel like teachers or school staff at the school have enough time for my concerns about the leveled literacy kits.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel confident in explaining difficult ideas to my student when they don't understand the leveled books and activities in the leveled literacy kits.	1	2	3	4	5
7. After using the leveled literacy kit I understand that activities can help engage my student with reading.	1	2	3	4	5
8. If my student had trouble with the leveled literacy kit, I would know how to get extra help from the resources provided in the kit.	1	2	3	4	5

4. For each statement below, circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement.

Where: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. After using a leveled literacy kit, I want more children's books in our house.	1	2	3	4	5
2. After using a leveled literacy kit, I have a plan to read with my student daily.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am aware of resources available to use at home to help my student learn how to read after using a leveled literacy kit.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel confident helping my student learn how to read after using a leveled literacy kit.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Using the activities in the leveled literacy kit made me feel confident working with my student.	1	2	3	4	5

5. For each statement below, circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement.

Where: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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6. The leveled literacy kit was easy to use.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My student enjoyed doing the level literacy kit activities with me at home.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My student could read the books with only a little assistance.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel confident talking to a teacher or school staff at the school about the leveled literacy kits.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I would check out another literacy kit in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

Section 3:

6. Why did you check out the literacy kit?

7. Please provide any other ways you would like support at home to help your student.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. How has your school shown communication between school educators and families? What could be improved upon?
2. What is your school currently doing around literacy and family engagement? What are the benefits of the leveled literacy kits as a resource?
3. How has your school made families aware of the leveled literacy kits available at the school?
4. What has your school done well in sharing academic progress in literacy with families? What could be improved?
5. How have you successfully gotten families to use the leveled literacy kits? What can be improved?
6. What other ideas do you have that could be done to support literacy at home?
7. Have caregivers given any comments when checking leveled literacy kits in and out?
8. How have the literacy leveled kits changed your communication with stakeholders?

Appendix D: Sample Leveled Literacy Kit

Activities created by researcher provided in leveled literacy kits.



Writing Prompts

After reading a book have your student respond to what they read by writing.

Directions: Grab a piece of paper and let your student pick one of the writing options below.

- Invite your child to re-tell the story they just read. Write down exactly what they say. Have them read it aloud afterward. Suggest that they draw some pictures to illustrate the story.
- Create a card to send to one of the characters in the story. Provide paper and crayons or markers so children can make cards and then "sign" their names when finished.
- Create a review for the book for a friend. What was it about? Would they recommend it? Why or Why not?
- Pick one of the pictures in the book and write a story about it.
- Create a comic strip of what happened in the story and have them write a dialogue with it.



Building Words

Say It: Pick out a few words from the book before you start reading. One word at a time, have the student SAY the word out loud.

Make It: Next, have your student make the word, putting one letter at a time in the boxes below. After making the word have students use their finger and tap each box while saying the letter sound to read the word.

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Write It Last, have your student use their finger to write the word on the line below and then read the word out loud. Another option is to use separate paper and pencil.



Vocabulary

Use a piece of paper and when a student comes to a word they don't recognize when reading, have them write it down, give an example, and a non-example of the word.

Word	Example	Non-Example
<i>ex.: Glass</i>	<i>Plate</i>	<i>Piece of Paper</i>





Think Aloud

"Eavesdropping on someone's thinking"

I DO: Answer these questions out loud while you are reading.

- What do I know about this topic?
- What do I think I will learn about this topic?
- Do I understand what I just read?
- When I read this what am I imagining in my head?
- What were the most important points in this reading?
- What new information did I learn?

WE DO: Use these sentence prompters together with your student as you think aloud what you are reading

- I think this is...
- Why did...
- I picture...
- My favorite part...

YOU DO: Have your student use these sentence prompters while reading out loud to you.

- I got confused when...
- I think this is mainly about...
- I wonder if...
- This reminds me of...

Resources provided to caregivers who checked out leveled literacy kits.



Resources



WV IMAGINATION LIBRARY



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth until they begin school, no matter their family's income.



READY, SET, GO! FAMILY GUIDEBOOK



A Family's Guide to their student being ready for school. School readiness is a comprehensive approach for families, schools, and communities to work together to provide all children opportunities to succeed and become lifelong learners.



FAMILY RESOURCE NETWORK (FRN)



Family Resource Networks (FRNs) are local coalitions of people working to better meet the needs and improve services for children and families in their communities. Scan here to find your FRN.



WVU EXTENSION: PARENTING RESOURCES



Stability in all areas of your life is important. Navigate through all of life's stages with trusted advice about parenting, finances, relationships and caregiving from WVU Extension Service experts.



VROOM APP



Vroom Tips™ help you do more with your shared moments. Add learning to mealtime, bathtime, bedtime, or anytime with 1,000+ fun, free activities



Appendix E: School Materials

Conversion chart given to educators during training to assist educators in identifying which leveled literacy kit to give to each caregiver.



Level-Up: Achieving Literacy Goals at Home Conversion Chart

Fountas & Pinnell Kit Levels	Grade level	Lexile (L)	iReady Scores	DIBELS ORF (WPM)	AR
A	K, 1	25	362-479	0	0.1
B	K,1	50			0.5
C	K,1	75			1
D	K,1	100			1.2
E	1	125-175	434-536	23	1.3
F	1	175			1.4
G	1	200			1.5
H	1, 2	225-275		1.6	
I	1,2	275		47	1.7
J	2	300-350		52	1.8,1.9
K	2,3	350-400	489-560	72	2,2.1
L	2,3	400-450			2.2,2.3
M	2,3,4	450-500		87	2.5,2.6

Form each school used to check leveled literacy kits out and in on.



SIGN IN/OUT *form*



SCHOOL:	DATE:
---------	-------

NO	NAME	CHECK OUT DATE	CHECK IN DATE
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			
26			
27			
28			
29			



Sign in form used for literacy events and educator training.



SIGN IN form

ACTIVITY:	DATE:
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NO	NAME	POSITION	EMAIL ADDRESS
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
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25			
26			
27			
28			
29			

Flyer given out to schools about the program.

LEVEL-UP

LEVELED LITERACY KITS



- 13 LEVELED LITERACY KITS FOR FAMILIES TO CHECK OUT AND CHECK BACK IN
- \$500 FOR A LITERACY-FOCUSED FAMILY NIGHT
- EDUCATOR LITERACY-FOCUSED TRAINING

*Books will be purchased from Pioneer Valley Books



the EdVenturegroup®

Flyer was given out to caregivers about the program.

LEVEL-UP

LEVELED LITERACY KITS



- Ask a Teacher What Level Kit To Check Out
- Take Kit Home
- Read Through The Six Books Using The Activity Cards
- Take The Survey
- Return The Kit To School
- Ask A Teacher About More Resources

Books will be purchased from Pioneer Valley Books



the **EdVenture** group

Curriculum Vitae

Mrs. Donna Atwood
The EdVenture Group, Inc.
Program Manager
(304) 296- 9021
Email: datwood@edvgroup.org

EDUCATION

- 2020- Present MARSHALL UNIVERSITY, West Virginia
Ed. D Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Members:
Kimberly McFall, Ed.D (Chair)
Edna Meisel, Ed.D
Stephanie, Burdette, Ed.D
Barbara O'Byrne, Ph. D
Expected Dissertation Defense: May 2023
- 2010-2012 MARSHALL UNIVERSITY, West Virginia
M.A. Literacy Education
- 2006-2010 MARSHALL UNIVERSITY, West Virginia
B.A. Elementary Education,

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 2018- Present MARSHALL UNIVERSITY, West Virginia
Spring 2022, Full-time Instructor and adjunct Instructor
Graduate and Undergraduate

RELATED PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

- 2021- Present THE EDVETURE GROUP, Morgantown, West Virginia
Program Manager
- 2010- 2018 KANAWHA COUNTY SCHOOLS, Charleston, West Virginia
Teacher
Third grade elementary teacher, Reading Specialist

LICENSURE

- 2010- Permanent West Virginia
Elementary Education, K-6

2012- Permanent

West Virginia
Reading Specialist, K-Adult

PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

Regional Conference Presentation:

2021

West Virginia Reading Association Conference

Title: Planning Play-Based Instruction

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Marshall University: Spring 2018- Present

College of Education and Professional Development

Literacy Education

Department of Literacy Education: Courses taught

CIRG 636, Developmental Reading: Modern Developmental Reading is a foundation course in the masters reading program. The focus of the course is the development of teaching skills that support a scientific base to teaching reading.

CIRG 644, Literacy in the Content Area: In this course, candidates will explore the processes, interactions, and materials associated with literacy instruction and learning in the content areas through application and reflection. More specifically, candidates will consider how to connect reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visualization through the use of an instructional framework; and they will use instructional strategies designed to support learners' efforts to use language to learn across the curriculum.

CIRG 653, Literacy Acquisition: Literacy acquisition is a foundation course open to professionals whose interests require an understanding of the process involved in becoming literate.

CIRG 637, Literacy Assessment: Study and the causes of reading difficulties, diagnostic devices and techniques, and theory related to assessing literacy development.

CIRG 654, Aligning Assessment with Instruction: Experiences in analyzing diagnostic test results, preparing diagnostic reports, and selecting appropriate materials and procedures to meet specific reading needs.

CIRG 643, Teaching Struggling Readers Practicum: CIRG 643 is a practicum where struggling readers are assessed and instructed. Candidates' support is provided to assure student learning. The tutorial sessions are enriched by staffing, planning, and professional development.

CIRG 621, Current Issues and Problems in Reading: This web-based course is designed to explore problems and issues in literacy, K12, with reference to professional literature and professional practice. Participants are expected to show that they are informed of current issues in literacy. This knowledge will be demonstrated in online discussions that emphasize writing to learn. A central component of this course is an action research project that links professional practice with relevant theory.

CIRG 616, Language Structures, Spelling, Phonics, and Vocabulary: Word Study: This graduate class examines an approach to spelling instruction based on an

understanding of English orthography and the way students develop as sellers, readers, and writers.

Department of Early Education

CI 321, Curriculum and Methods in Early Childhood Education: Study of factors shaping curriculum and exploration and assessment of appropriate curriculum for young children in transition from pre-operational to concrete operational stages of development. Field experience included.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND SERVICE

International Literacy Association Member, (ILA), (2020)

Central of West Virginia Writing Project, (CWVWP), (2020-2021)

ETS Reviewing and Revising of Reading Specialists Praxis Exam, (Spring 2020)

COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

Fall 2020- Present West Virginia Writing Institute Committee, Member

Fall 2020- Present West Virginia Young Writers, Member

Fall 2020- Present Outreach Committee, Coordinator

Fall 2020- Spring 2021 Praxis Workshop Committee, Presenter

Fall 2020- Present West Virginia Writing Conference Committee, Member