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Strengthening the Home and School Partnership: An Improvement Plan to Educate Parents on Child Development and School Initiatives

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**Strengthening the Home and School Partnership:
An Improvement Plan to Educate Parents on Child Development and School Initiatives**

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

This school improvement plan considers the implementation of a parent education program. Following the review of literature that proves the significance of parental involvement to increase academic achievement and improve social-emotional development, a needs assessment was established that displays a lack of parental understanding on new education initiatives and child development. With the addition of a parent education component, the home and school partnership will be strengthened ultimately increasing student achievement, improving student behavior, alleviating teacher burnout, and improving overall education.

Keywords: Parent Education, Parental Involvement, School and Home Partnership, Student Achievement, Student Behavior, Social-Emotional Development, Teacher Burnout

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Strengthening the Home and School Partnership:

An Improvement Plan to Educate Parents on Child Development and School Initiatives

Parents play a vital role in child development and academic achievement when they are involved in schools and their child's learning (Lemessa, et al., 2023). The relationship between the classroom teacher and parents contribute greatly to successful parent involvement, but classroom teachers are overburdened when the parent relationship is stressful due to possible academically or behaviorally challenged students (Farmer, 2020). Parental involvement encompasses several definitions in the parent-education world leaving confusion and unclear parameters for parents regarding involvement versus engagement (Wilder, 2014). While parents desire to be involved in their child's education, many parents do not understand the various components of child development and proven strategies to improve behavior and academics (Meilani, et al., 2023). The problem, therefore, lies in clearly defining the best practices for parent involvement and engagement to promote academic achievement, child development progression, improved behaviors, and positive school-family partnerships for the sake of students, teachers, and families.

This school improvement plan provides parents within the Christian elementary school a systematic process that educates and empowers them to activate research-based educational engagement with their children. Parents will learn how to promote all aspects of child development through daily living strategies within the home via interactions with a parent trainer, other parents, and ultimately, their children. While positive communication between teachers and parents must still occur and the current success of parental involvement in various school functions will still be encouraged, specific components of child development and

parenting strategies will be presented through parent training classes, informational newsletters, and curriculum workshops.

The literature review that supports this school improvement plan included articles from Google Scholar and the DeWitt Library of Northwestern College of Iowa. Each article was identified as peer-reviewed and was published in a scholarly journal within a ten-year period ending in 2023. The inclusion criteria for each article contained topics related to parental involvement in schools, parent engagement with children, parent intervention programs, and parent-teacher relationships within the early childhood and elementary school years. Initially, the author intended to consider studies conducted within the United States; however, studies from other countries that investigated academic achievement and parental involvement are worth reviewing as well. While some articles pertained to overall academic achievement, other articles related to specific areas of child development such as social-emotional, physical, sensory, literacy, and math; thus, these articles are included due to their relevance.

Principle findings from published research demonstrate a significant increase in academic achievement and child development progression when schools and families work together. Yet, parents lack understanding of child development despite parents' desire to support their child's success. The proposed school improvement plan will provide in-depth child-development knowledge for parents and promote improved behaviors and increased academic gains through experiences and interventions practiced within the home. Parents will gain a greater understanding of child development and become better engaged with classroom teachers and the mission and vision of our school.

The literature review will focus on integral themes identified in the research. First, the literature review will highlight the positive effects of parental involvement leading into the

various types and settings of parental involvement. Next, the review will display the benefits of home and school partnerships. Finally, the review will describe the positive effects of parent interventions designed to promote educational and developmental gains for children, families, and schools.

Review of the Literature

Impacts of Parental Involvement

Extensive research states that parental involvement in schools yields positive results in student attitudes, student behavior, and student achievement. Research dates to at least 1985 with Joyce Epstein reporting from survey data of 613 fifth graders that students indicate more positive attitudes toward school and better homework routines when parents are more involved in their child's education (Epstein, 1985). Epstein reports that reading scores significantly improved when teachers encouraged parental involvement. While there are many forms of parental involvement in education, Cosso, et al. in 2022, sought to determine how parental involvement interventions affect student outcomes. Through their meta-analysis and quantitative research, they revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between parental involvement interventions and all categories of student outcomes including math, literacy, and non-academic outcomes, specifically noted as behavioral and social-emotional skills (Cosso, et al., 2022).

Yang and Chen (2023) conducted a meta-analysis of thirteen studies related to writing ability over a period of twenty-five years from 1996-2021. In this quantitative meta-analysis, Yang and Chen (2023) discovered statistically significant results that correlated parental involvement with student writing ability. The authors also recognized that as students increased in grade level, the impact of parental involvement on writing ability decreased, therefore, Yang and Chen (2023) propose that the preschool and elementary years yield the greatest effect on writing ability through parental involvement.

Moon, Larke, and James (2022), conducted a quantitative study utilizing questionnaires and data for 4,785 fourth grade students and 4,820 eighth grade students from the TIMSS (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*) 2015 U.S. national public-use data set. This research identified that parental influence greatly affected mathematic achievement scores for both elementary and middle school students in this data group. Wilder (2014) conducted a meta-synthesis of nine peer-reviewed research articles containing the key term “parental involvement. Similarly, Wilder identified a strong positive correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement. Both studies revealed that the positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement reaches across all grade levels and ethnicities.

In addition, Gonzalez and Koford (2019) highlighted that parental involvement impacted all subject areas including reading, math, science, and social studies. In this study, the researchers conducted a seventeen-year longitudinal data study of 600 Kentucky elementary public schools. They examined parent volunteer hours and academic achievement. Their quantitative research of the state’s report cards revealed that parental involvement impacted all subject areas. Overall, their study revealed that students rose from lower achievement categories to higher achievement categories in relation to the number of parent volunteer hours.

Types and Settings of Parental Involvement

While Gonzalez and Koford’s longitudinal research (2019) collected data on the number of parent volunteer hours in a school, other studies within the last five years have described parental involvement occurring in the home *and* the school producing positive results for students. According to Barger, et al. (2019) and Lemessa, et al. (2023), there are various degrees of parental involvement that take place in the home and school such as providing advice,

assisting with homework, engaging in educational conversation, responding to school communications, and participating in educational activities. Lemessa, et al. (2023) studied academic test scores in relation to parental attitude and involvement in education, and Barger, et al. (2019) included the social-emotional development of children along with academic achievement as it correlates with parental involvement.

Utilizing semi-structured questionnaires from 292 households and numeric academic achievement scores from four schools in Ethiopia, Lemessa, et al. (2023) selected students from fifth grade to eighth grade to find if parental involvement patterns differ from early childhood and elementary school years. They recognized that parental involvement is typically higher in the younger years; therefore, they provided semi-structured questionnaires to parents in grades five through eight, and they analyzed test scores of these same students (Lemessa, et al., 2023). Parent questionnaires combined with student test scores confirmed that *both* types of involvement, home *and* school, combined to yield the highest results on academic achievement. Interestingly, gender of the parent and the student along with age of the parent(s) held no significant correlation on student performance while socioeconomic status provided a strong correlation. Therefore, the authors encouraged leaders to create equitable opportunities for parental involvement in schools *and* home regardless of family income.

Focusing on social-emotional development along with academic achievement, Barger, et al. (2019) sought to determine the relationship between various types of involvement and students' social-emotional adjustment in addition to academic adjustment related to achievement, engagement, and motivation. These researchers identified various types of school-based parent involvement that include attending school events, participating in conferences, volunteering in the school, and making governing decisions with school leaders and parent teacher organizations.

They also described home-based involvement as educational discussions and encouragement within the home, homework assistance, and cognitive stimulation such as reading together, visiting the library, taking museum trips, etc. The findings of this longitudinal literature analysis study from preschool through grade 12 students found that involvement of families in the school *and* the home are both critical factors to students' well-being in social-emotional adjustment, non-delinquent behaviors, and academic achievement. One highlight of their research was that homework assistance within the home did not prove effective for student achievement, while the other types of parental involvement in the home, produced positive results for social development and academic achievement. They noted specific types of parental involvement seemed to depend on the age of the child. Cognitive stimulation activities took place more often with younger children, while discussion and encouragement in the home took place more often with older children. Nonetheless, parental involvement practices through school involvement and home activities promoted better achievement and social adjustment overall no matter the age of the child.

Wilder (2014), mentioned earlier in this review, noted that homework assistance was not an effective parental involvement strategy in his qualitative meta-synthesis evaluating the link between parental involvement and K-12 academic achievement, but concluded that the greatest parental involvement strategy came from parents holding high expectations for their children. The author highlighted that children tend to possess similar attitudes and beliefs as their parents; therefore, high expectations from parents are vital for academic achievement (Wilder, 2014).

Finally, considering various types of parental involvement, researchers Cyr, et al. (2022) conducted a literature meta-analysis defining perceptions or beliefs of parent involvement. They reviewed 22 pieces of research pertaining to parental involvement and five historical overviews

on the same subject. They concluded that parental involvement falls under three beliefs that can either help or hinder successful parental involvement for students. According to Cyr, et al. (2022), each belief must be considered by leaders as they encourage optimum parental involvement at homes and at school. The first belief, *educators know best*, places the school as the center focus. This logic allows parental involvement; however, it typically only invites parents into schools at limited times and under certain conditions such as required conferences and school meetings. Parents are encouraged to serve as volunteers but leave the academics up to the educators. The second belief or perception, *parents know best*, places the student as the center, and this logic describes parents as the primary decision-makers for education, keeping educators and institutions at a distance. The third belief, *parents as partners*, places educators and parents working together as a team to maintain similar values and improve education together. Cyr, et al. (2022) utilized this meta-analysis research to encourage leaders to consider the optimum type of parental involvement for the best education for students and their families.

Impacts of School and Home Partnership

Hill and Reimer (2022) proved that a home and school partnership can successfully exist from their research based on the necessity of partnering during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fifty-six technology directors participated in a survey providing their perceptions of the online learning partnerships between homes and schools during the shutdown of schools. Survey results revealed that open communication between the schools and homes was a critical factor in this partnership.

Dávila, et al. (2022) also proved the effects of a successful home and school partnership related to language and literacy development of young children. While most research related to parent and school partnerships is quantitative, Dávila, et al. (2022) conducted a descriptive qualitative study comprised of families with rising kindergartners from a marginalized

community in the southern United States. Through a virtual weekly conference, facilitators and families participated in a program called Gulf Coast Story @ Home where they connected and discussed stories that were read together, prepared meals together, and captured photos and videos together of various educational activities throughout their week. This research revealed that these families desired a connection and wanted to become partners in their children's education even though they were marginalized. It also proved that the students' language and literacy development along with social-emotional development strengthened when the families and educators worked together through daily life activities such as cooking.

In contrast, however, as this work has signified the importance of home and school partnerships, researchers have also pointed out various challenges. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) provided an update to their 2011 research project regarding barriers of parental involvement in schools. Using eleven primary schools in the United Kingdom, a qualitative research study revealed improvements that schools have made in partnering with parents. From a semi-structured interview process with school leaders, the researchers identified that these schools now have policies in place that encourage parental involvement. They have also implemented new technologies that enhance school-parent communication. Overall, the commitment to parental involvement has increased since the previous research project. Yet, with these improvements, the authors determined that parent expectations have evolved over time, demanding more communication and placing more burdens on teachers and schools. Similarly, Hill and Reimer (2022) noted in their research that with the benefits of technology, continuous communication with families has added new stressors to educators already struggling with increased demands. In light of these studies, it is impossible to ignore the fact that teachers are leaving the profession due to job stressors which according to Farmer (2020), include parental

expectations with negative parental involvement. While there are other factors prompting educators to walk away, Farmer's (2020) research concludes that negative parent relationships directly affect teachers disconnecting from their work.

Parental Influence on Children's Development

Parenting styles influence children's development, specifically social-emotional development. Four research articles signified the impact of parenting style on the adjustment and behavior in children, executive functioning skills, and self-regulation skills (Kok, et al., 2022; Perry, et al., 2018; Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020; Williams & Berthelson, 2017). Kok, et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative longitudinal study related to self-regulation, inhibitory control, working memory in children, and parenting styles with 717 three and four-year-old children from the Netherlands. The researchers collected saliva samples from infants to determine cortisol stress responses, and at ages three and four, self-regulation tasks were assessed in relation to maternal parenting. Through data collection and coding observational behaviors such as inhibition, working memory, sustained attention, and impulse control, the researchers revealed that parenting style significantly impacts self-regulation behaviors in young children (Kok, et al., 2022).

Perry, et al. (2018) also conducted a longitudinal study related to similar qualities studied by Kok, et al. (2022). Perry, et al. (2018) studied child behavior, maternal parenting style, emotional regulation, inhibitory control, academic productivity, social skills, and emotional problems in school from 422 children and their mothers over a period of eight years, at various developmental stages. Their study involved longitudinal data, multi-method techniques, and multi-reporter measurements and revealed that when parents modeled proper self-regulation skills for their children in the younger years, those children were better adjusted and

demonstrated progress academically and socially while also demonstrating fewer social and academic problems in their adjustments into adolescence (Perry, et al., 2018).

Similarly, another study revealing the significance of parenting styles on children's self-regulation skills over time was conducted in Australia on 4007 children in a longitudinal quantitative data analysis (Williams & Berthelson, 2017). Parenting practices of both mothers and fathers were evaluated in conjunction with the children's emotional and attentional regulation at ages two and three along with their pro-social behaviors in school at ages six and seven. These authors found that positive parenting with warmth made significant indirect contributions to positive social development in the later years and influenced self-regulation positively in the early years (Williams & Berthelson, 2017).

A slightly different study researching child development, specifically behavior, cognitive functioning, and parenting styles, dealt with parental influence and technology with children (Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020). In Thailand, 291 participants ages six months to six years were part of a quantitative longitudinal analysis examining screen exposure was the intervention studied along with cognitive functioning, parenting styles, and behavioral outcomes. Parent reports provided the information for the various screen time exposures. Behavior checklists were measured along with parenting styles and cognitive functioning tasks. From this in-depth and complex study, the authors revealed that preschool and school-related behavior problems increased with higher screen exposure in the toddler and early childhood years (Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020). They also identified that positive parental behaviors are not present with high amounts of screen time; however, when screen time is limited along with authoritative parenting styles toward children, behavior problems are lower and cognitive functioning skills are higher (Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020). This specific data led the

researchers to recommend that the American Academy of Pediatrics and other official organizations highlight these findings with the importance of avoiding and/or limiting screen exposure for young children (Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020).

Again, related to parenting styles and student executive functioning skills, Hughes and Devine (2019) conducted a 13-month study with 117 preschool children and parents from England. Using observations, questionnaires, and cognitive test scores, they determined through quantitative data analysis that parent-child interactions can negatively *or* positively affect children's executive functioning skills. Negative parenting styles, such as criticism and control, were associated with negative executive functioning skills whereas parental scaffolding with positive interactions between the parent and child revealed a positive effect with opposite outcomes. These authors also found that negative parent-child interactions were typically associated with low executive functioning skills in the parents. This finding supports that parents may benefit from parent education classes to enhance their own parenting and executive functioning for the sake of their children and their development (Hughes & Devine, 2019).

Impacts of Parent Education for Students, Families, and Schools

Lastly, recent research provides insight into the benefits of parent education classes for students, families, and schools. Some of the research is focused on pure academics while others are focused on the social-emotional aspects of child development and strengthening the family unit along with increasing student achievement. Three research projects that focused on academics included the study of math achievement with parent training, parents' understanding and education about sensory development in children, and the importance of parent training with language development (Slusser, et al., 2019; Sri Martini Meilanie, et al., 2023; van der Pluijm, et al., 2019).

Slusser, et al. (2019) observed 143 diverse preschool children along with their parents from either Middletown, Connecticut, or San Jose, California for the first phase of their longitudinal quantitative study. During phase one, Slusser, et al. (2019) tested number word knowledge, approximate number sense acuity, and receptive vocabulary. One year later, 86 of the 143 children participated in assessments related to early math ability while their parents completed questionnaires related to demographics and educational backgrounds. At the conclusion of the two research phases, Slusser, et al. (2019) reported that parent education significantly correlated with student math achievement. These findings suggest that simultaneous education for both parents and children can elevate math achievement and parent understanding.

Sri Martini Meilanie, et al. (2023) conducted a six-month longitudinal qualitative study in Indonesia explaining how parent knowledge relates to child development, specifically sensory development. With 32 parents of kindergartners ages four through six, these researchers utilized observations and questionnaires with a Likert scale to determine the role that parental knowledge plays in the progression of child sensory development. Their findings revealed that parental knowledge has a significant effect on children's sensory development, while parents' knowledge is affected by their own educational backgrounds (Sri Martini Meilanie, et al., 2023). Along with these findings, the researchers acknowledged that future research must include methods to increase parental understanding of sensory development and parental engagement in students' learning activities (Sri Martini Meilanie, et al., 2023).

More specifically, van der Pluijm, et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of 28 previous research articles studying effective activities and strategies for parents of low education status to help strengthen language development of their children and the most effective modes of delivery for these parents. Taking the research articles from educational and psychological

databases dated between 2000 and 2016, van der Pluijm, et al. (2019) discovered the following results:

- Activities of simply talking and playing were the most effective strategies for parents of low education status,
- the most effective delivery of parental intervention strategies involved flexibility and adaptation to family experiences, backgrounds, and natural activities that occur within the home, and
- parent training is most successful when the child is present.

Interestingly, van der Pluijm, et al. (2019) found that simply focusing on print awareness in the home through magazines, family names, recipes, cereal boxes, etc. is more beneficial than shared book reading activities with parents of low education.

Another successful intervention program for parents and academic skills with oral language development was conducted in a large northeastern city in the United States (Leech, et al., 2018). This project comprised of 36 parent-child dyads with English-speaking children ages four through five displaying no known developmental delays. Parent child conversations were tested through observation, coding, approved videotaping, and an experimental group (receiving parent intervention) and the control group (not receiving intervention). While this research only lasted for one month, the results showed a significant increase in decontextualized conversation for the group of parents who received the intervention program. This improvement in the parents also filtered down to the children improving their language and vocabulary development, significantly showing the intervention provided benefits to students, families, and ultimately education.

A current trend of technology prompted researchers to determine if remote delivered parent training will promote child well-being and academic development (Solís-Cordero, et al., 2022). Solís-Cordero, et al. (2022) systematically gathered literature that included caregiver-child dyads and studied parenting intervention programs delivered remotely rather than in-person. This qualitative research on the selected literature found remote training programs produced positive results for parents and children. However, the authors propose that in-person trainings would encourage higher motivation, increased engagement, and would most likely provide better results (Solís-Cordero, et al., 2022).

Finally, through a meta-analysis of previous research, Morris, et al., (2020) sought to determine the best practices in parent education, content that is common among quality parent programs, and specific programs that have brought success to parents, families, and schools. They found that best practices in parent education include the following:

- offering parenting skills practice directly in the moment,
- minimizing barriers to parental involvement such as the conducting of home visits and/or provide transportation,
- training and certifying leaders of the program,
- conducting an in-house evaluation of the program,
- and utilizing a rigorous evaluation history to continue improvements where needed (Morris, et al., 2020).

The authors also recognized that common content throughout successful programs included:

- emotion, socialization, and communication,
- the minimizing of harsh parenting,
- fostering parent-child interactions that are nurturing and responsive,

- strengthening the family-child relationships,
- providing consistent discipline,
- teaching about child and adolescent development, and
- encouraging self-care for parents (Morris, et al., 2020).

In summary, this review of literature from peer-reviewed sources proves the significance of parental involvement in education, the necessity for home and school partnerships, and the benefits of parent education programs for students, families, and schools. To date, there is no research found that contradicts these necessities other than the specific finding that homework assistance does not support true academic achievement (Barger, et al., 2019 & Wilder, 2014). Cosso, et al. (2022) acknowledged, however, these homework assistance findings were not found in their research, yet they highlight the need for schools to implement parent interventions in early grades for overall academic and non-academic success. Knowing the need for parental involvement, partnerships, and interventions, the Pennsylvania Department of Education emphasizes these findings in their standards for family and community engagement which are listed below:

- Standard 1: Connect families to community resources that support their goals, interests, and needs.
- Standard 2: Build partnerships with families that are strengths-based, authentic, reciprocal, and respectful.
- Standard 3: Partner with families to identify information, resources, and strategies to support them in their roles as teachers, models, encouragers, monitors, leaders, and advocates as they support their child's learning and development.

- Standard 4: Provide intentional opportunities for families to connect and engage with each other.
- Standard 5: Support families as they develop their leadership and advocacy skills.
- Standard 6: Build partnerships with families during times of transition (PA Department of Education, n.d.).

Therefore, as educators and school leaders, we must consider the strengths and weaknesses related to parental involvement, partnerships, and parent training to develop a specific plan for improvement.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Mount Calvary Christian School is in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, a small town in the central Pennsylvania region. Elizabethtown is approximately 18 miles southeast of Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, within ten miles of Hershey, and 90 miles from Philadelphia. Located in Lancaster County, Elizabethtown borders Lebanon and Dauphin Counties which brings students from various surrounding communities. According to the United States Census Bureau (2022), the Elizabethtown, PA population stands at 11,943. Within that population, approximately 17% are ages five through eighteen, 94% are Caucasian, and 10% live in poverty. As Mount Calvary Christian School (MCCS) borders other counties, demographics could also be considered from surrounding towns also such as Palmyra, Middletown, Mount Joy, Manheim, Hershey, among a handful of others.

School Characteristics

Mount Calvary Christian School (MCCS) is accredited through the Association of Christian Schools International and the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary

and Secondary Schools. This accrediting process is systematic and examines evaluations and improvements, engaging all school constituents (ACSI, n.d.). Serving preschool through grade twelve students from a biblical worldview lens, MCCS currently enrolls 736 students. Grades preschool through grade one are educated in the church building at Main Campus, and grades six through twelve are educated in a large school building also located at Main Campus. A newly purchased and renovated elementary school less than one mile away, known as West Campus, educates grades two through five. As mentioned before, the students of MCCS reside directly in the community of Elizabethtown or in nearby communities and are transported to school by public school bussing or by their family members. The breakdowns of each community are listed below according to their assigned public school district:

- Elizabethtown Area Public School District 43%
- Donegal Public School District 10%
- Lower Dauphin Area School District 9%
- Manheim Central School District 7%
- Palmyra Area School District 6%
- Derry Township School District 5%
- Annville-Cleona Public School District 4%
- Central Dauphin School District 2%
- Hempfield Area School District 2%
- Other nearby districts >2%

Within these communities, MCCS families pay either a full tuition cost or receive partial scholarships through the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program or the Education

Improvement Tax Credit. These scholarship opportunities are provided by Pennsylvania corporations that assist in funding private school scholarships to families in need or families coming from school districts in need. Another characteristic of the school includes students identifying as the following ethnicities:

- 615 students Caucasian,
- 22 students Bi-racial Hispanic,
- 16 identify as Hispanic,
- 15 African American,
- 14 Bi-racial,
- 10 Asian or Chinese,
- 9 Bi-racial African American, and
- 3 identify as other.

School Mission & Vision

The following statements related to mission, vision, purpose/philosophy, and graduate goals provide a guide for all decisions within M CCS from the early education level to the secondary level:

Motto: Pursuing Christ. Preparing Students.

Mission: M CCS exists to partner with families to provide a quality education and encourage students to grow into faithful and mature followers of Christ.

Vision: Develop students who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; prepared to overcome the challenges of the culture with humility, boldness and spirit-filled joy while fulfilling the Great Commission.

Purpose and Philosophy: Mount Calvary Christian School partners with families to fulfill their biblical responsibility to “train up a child,” helping them become sanctified and set apart believers. As a church-based educational institution, we teach students to know and apply biblical principles and test every situation against scripture to function as confident and mature Christians today.

Graduate Goals: Upon graduation, MCCA students will be equipped for service and every good work, passionately pursuing Christ, defenders of the faith, faithful stewards, and critical and discerning thinkers (Mount Calvary Christian School, n.d.).

Elementary School Characteristics

Of the 736 enrolled students, MCCA Elementary School serves 442 students and their families from three-year-old preschool through fifth grade. Preschool through first grades, located at Main Campus, are under the guidance of the assistant elementary principal/early education director. Second through fifth grade students are located at West Campus less than one mile away under the direct guidance of the elementary principal/elementary education director. Transportation is provided to periodically bring grade levels together for special occasions and/or promote leadership opportunities for older elementary students with younger elementary students. Each grade level consists of at least three sections with some grade levels consisting of four or five sections depending on yearly enrollment rates.

To focus on the spiritual development of the elementary students, one week a year is set apart as a Spiritual Emphasis Week (SEW) in the fall. Approximately three weeks are set apart in the spring for an annual reading contest promoting the importance of literacy. Each year, SEW and the Annual Read-a-thon revolve around an age appropriate and engaging theme such as “Under the Sea.” During SEW, daily chapels and special activities focus on spiritual elements

within the context of the theme. During the Read-A-Thon, students and families participate in activities and special events consistent with the theme, promoting family involvement and fundraising.

Elementary Behavior Focus

Within the elementary school, behavior is focused primarily on the defined characteristics of Chargers, the M CCS school-wide mascot name. The Chargers characteristics listed in Table 1 are taught from a biblical perspective in monthly chapels from preschool through grade five and encouraged through Chargers Tickets and monthly nominations of certificate winners. Behavior concerns are addressed between teacher and student(s) or principal and student(s) through the lens of the Chargers Character Traits listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Chargers Character Traits with Corresponding Scripture

Courageous	Standing up for what is right	1 Corinthians 15:58
Humble	Seeing myself and others through God's eyes	Philippians 2:3-4
Attentive	Valuing others needs as I value my own	1 Peter 4:10
Reliable	Building a reputation of righteousness	2 Timothy 2:15
Genuine	Speaking and living in truth	Proverbs 12:22
Eager	Seeking out ways to serve God and others	Galatians 5:18
Respectful	Treating things and people appropriately	Romans 12:10
Self-disciplined	Controlling my thoughts, actions, and words	1 Thessalonians 4:11

When behavior issues need to be addressed at a deeper level - including parent involvement - a student completes an age-appropriate Chargers behavior form with their teacher and/or a

principal. A lower elementary behavior form allows the student to draw and discuss with the adult the negative behavior. After discussing the appropriate Charger Characteristics, the student is encouraged to draw and discuss the positive behavior that needs to happen in the future. The completed form is sent home to be signed by a parent and returned to school with a behavior report documented in the school management software.

Parent Involvement

MCCS parents are heavily involved in various ways throughout the school including working with students and showing support for the school through prayer, financial giving, and volunteering. All volunteers must be approved through our Volunteer in Partnership (VIP) program to participate directly with students through volunteer or supervising duties. The VIP approval process includes criminal history checks, child abuse clearances, fingerprinting, obtaining a tuberculosis test, and submitting letters of reference. Specifically within the elementary school, only VIP parents are permitted to attend field trips, assist in monitoring lunch/recess duties, and lead classroom party activities. Parents who are not VIP-approved may become involved in other capacities such as the Parents and Teachers in Christ (PTC) group. These parents meet monthly and plan various ways to assist in special school functions and ideas to support teachers and maintain positive morale among staff. Moms in Prayers, another group for family involvement, meets regularly for the purpose of praying over the staff, students, and school. Other parental involvement opportunities include mystery readers and fundraising opportunities.

Parent Communication

The school, teachers, and parents utilize various modes to communicate about classroom happenings, events, learning activities, behavior issues, and more. The numerous communication

modes are beginning to cause confusion among school staff and parents. Class Dojo is utilized at the elementary level to send announcements and messages between teacher and parent or administrator and parent. Class Dojo is also used to share photos of classroom and school happenings with a written explanation on the designated class and school stories. Besides Class Dojo, parents and teachers also communicate through email and/or routine newsletters sent digitally or in a paper copy format. Utilizing these various communication formats, details are sometimes missed or miscommunicated which calls for an improvement.

Curriculum Design and Implementation

The M CCS elementary curriculum is biblically integrated and developed by educators and principals following an inquiry-based mindset. The curriculum goes through an annual systematic review process giving specific attention to one subject area per year. All academic subject areas are vertically aligned to the PA Common Core standards with lesson plans following a unified format throughout the entire school including essential questions, activating strategies, teaching strategies, and summarizing strategies. At the elementary level, the phonics and literacy curriculums utilize Sadlier, Heggerty, and Journeys, and a portion of the elementary staff is currently attending workshops related to the current science of reading research. For mathematics, M CCS recently adopted Illustrative Math to generate more critical thinking and problem solving with increased fluency in the elementary and middle school grades. A current focus of professional development learning for the M CCS staff is focused on math training. The science and social studies curriculums are developed by committees with strong integrations of STEM and reading. Lastly, the M CCS Bible curriculum, entitled The Passion for the Story, was written and developed by M CCS Bible committee teachers and leaders. It is evaluated and improved upon from data gathered on spiritual inventories provided annually to second and fifth

grade students. The Passion for the Story curriculum utilizes a method called “storying” which uses hands-on and open-ended pieces to model and allow student retelling of assigned Bible stories that connect grade level themes to the stories and characters throughout the Bible, representing the attributes of God and integral biblical doctrines.

Assessments and Achievement

Students are screened and assessed using various measures throughout the school year. Two specific standardized assessments delivered to MCCA students (kindergarten -5th grade) are the Acadience Test for Phonics and Math and the MAP Growth Assessment (kindergarten-12th grade). The MAP Growth Assessment specifically measures academic progress in math, reading, language usage, and science. Table 2 represents the percentage of students who are below or well below benchmark within their grade level and considered likely to need intervention or support according to the latest fall assessment in Acadience for reading and math:

Table 2

Acadience Percentages Below Benchmark

Grade Level	Reading	Math
K	14%	18%
1 st grade	33%	31%
2 nd grade	29%	20%
3 rd grade	18%	22%
4 th grade	24%	29%
5 th grade	31%	49%

Table 3 displays the percentage of elementary students who scored below average norms compared to other same-grade U.S. students in each subject area according to the fall testing of MAP growth assessments. Kindergarten through grade two assess in reading and math, which includes measurement and data, geometry, algebraic concepts, and numbers and operations. Grade 2 adds language usage and grades 3-5 add science in their MAP growth assessments.

Table 3

MAP Percentages Below Average

Grade Level	Math	Reading	Language Usage	Science
K	3%	13%		
1 st grade	8%	14%		
2 nd grade	24%	31%	24%	
3 rd grade	22%	20%	22%	18%
4 th grade	26%	15%	11%	17%
5 th grade	18%	11%	11%	15%

Students within the early childhood grades are monitored through informal assessments of anecdotal records, checklists, rubrics, and photo/video documentation through Seesaw, a digital learning portfolio management system. Report cards are distributed quarterly to parents with preschool and kindergarten report cards based upon mastery and progression of standards while first through fifth grade report cards are documented in traditional letter and number grade formats.

Needs Assessment

Behavior problems and academic needs are increasing, leaving teachers and parents feeling overwhelmed (Prothero, 2023; Walton 2023). Societal changes can be blamed on several factors including technology, political beliefs and divides, employment, changes in values and family structures, and more. While technology creates improvements for various parts of life, more young children have access to screens and technology creating concerns about the harms and benefits of technology and child development (Saunders & Vallance, 2017). Education is always forced to change and improve with future demands for employment, global competition, and increased information. Political beliefs push conflicts into schools. Families are more diverse and becoming busier with work demands, economy changes, and/or differences in values and beliefs (Ujifusa, 2022).

The mission statement of Mount Calvary Christian School declares that “MCCS exists to partner with families to provide a quality education and encourage students to grow into faithful and mature followers of Christ” (MCCS, n.d.). Understanding the enormous benefits that parental involvement, parental engagement, and parent interventions can bring to education and society, establishing a stronger parent component within MCCS is essential. Educating parents and providing strategies for behaviorally or academically challenged students will ease teacher and family burdens ultimately strengthening the teacher and parent relationship. Creating an intentional parent education program will lead to increased student achievement and decreased student behavior problems. The primary goal in this partnership must be the focus within the mission statement to partner with parents in providing a quality education and encouraging students to grow into faithful and mature followers of Christ. Therefore, this school improvement plan calls for a systematic parenting program including classes and informational newsletters

geared toward parenting practices for behavior and explicit instruction of topics related to child development and academics centered on biblical truths as its foundation.

School Data Analysis

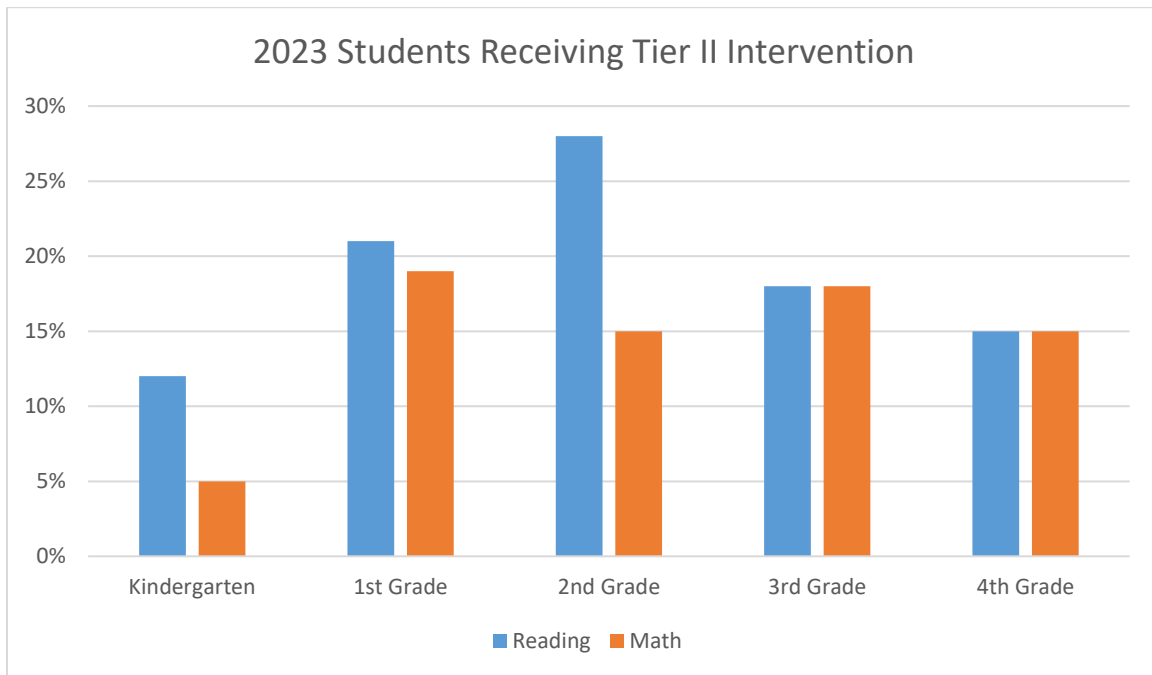
While MCCS carries many strengths and its enrollment is steadily increasing, the need for an improved parenting component is evident in the achievement data, behavior and social skills data, and the current types of parental involvement activities within our school. In the last two years, new elementary curriculums have emerged because of noted achievement gaps in phonics and math fluency. Sadlier Phonics (supplemented with Heggerty Phonics) and Illustrative Math (supplemented with First in Math) are new curriculum models that have recently been adopted and implemented in our elementary school. Parents will greatly benefit from explanatory and explicit information regarding the curriculum, strengthening the partnership between school and home while ultimately increasing student performance and growth.

The Sadlier phonics program and Heggerty Phonemic Awareness curriculum, based upon latest science of reading research, may differ from parents' understanding of how children become successful readers. Each of these curriculums provide resources for parents, yet it is unknown if classroom teachers are providing these resources to parents leaving the parent resources under-utilized.

Illustrative Mathematics “prioritizes depth over breadth. Rather than memorization of equations and procedures, it emphasizes a deep understanding of mathematical concepts” (Cronin, 2023). Within the math curriculum, a parent education piece exists containing newsletters and videos, yet a recent in-house survey revealed that some teachers are not utilizing this feature of the program. First in Math was recently adopted within our entire school (K-12) allowing an online fact fluency practice option for students. According to a recent parent meeting

between the assistant elementary principal and a concerned parent, confusion existed about the expectations regarding this program and other fluency homework options. Some teachers are also noting that while the only math homework expected by students and parents is a few minutes per evening of fact fluency, some parents admit to not participating in these activities with their children due to busyness. The question persists: Do parents understand the importance of math fluency? As teachers begin to utilize these new curriculum guides and instructional resources, our students will benefit immensely from families understanding terminology and strategies to implement at home.

Following an RTI model for providing instructional support, students are identified for needed support from the Acadience and MAP testing data. Figure 1 represents the number of students reported from M CCS specialists who are receiving Tier II intervention support from qualified professionals in the subject areas of reading and math. According to this data reported from an M CCS reading specialist, there is a higher level of need for first and second grade, especially in relation to reading as the numbers climb above 20 percent. It is also important to note that the numbers in Figure 1 only pertain to grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Due to increased enrollment, M CCS was provided with a second reading and math specialist from the local Intermediate Unit servicing non-public schools. However, due to constraints with numbers and time, the specialist could only add fourth grade to the additional support received.

Figure 1*Tier II Intervention*

According to an internal itinerant support teacher, MCCS provides Tier III support for students in grades two through five, with current numbers at 28 with three evaluations currently in progress. This is an increase from the previous year due to increased enrollment and was expected.

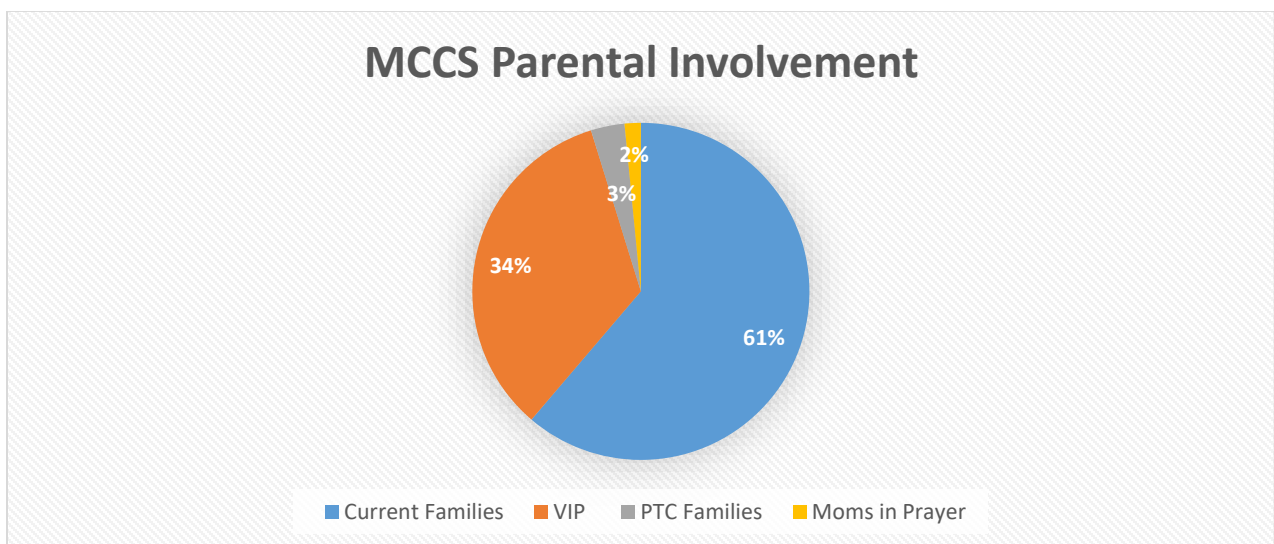
Student discipline and counseling data supports the need for an improved and explicit parenting component. Certain behavior reports are documented within our school wide management system, but some behavior incidents are handled primarily by the classroom teacher, student, and/or family through email or a message in the Class Dojo app. The first quarter of 2023 currently shows documentation of 34 behavior reports within the elementary school. Each of these behavior reports are emailed to parents, and typically an MCCS Chargers Behavior Report is completed by the student and staff member, sent home, and returned with a parent signature to keep on file.

Following an MTSS model, the elementary guidance counselor supports all students from grades kindergarten through fifth grade with lessons and universal support in each classroom. The counselor also provides individual and small group interventions for the teaching and practicing of social and emotional skills to referred students with parent approval. At the end of first quarter, the guidance counselor reported services for approximately 12% of the elementary population with the previous end-of-year percentage for specific guidance support at 18%. Achievement numbers and social emotional issues call for improvement. With the support of parents, the purpose of this school improvement plan will decrease the number of students requiring extra support.

Parental involvement within M CCS is moderately high according to data collected from the M CCS admissions counselor and the chairperson of the PTC (Parents and Teachers in Christ). Figure 2 represents the percentages of parents involved within the school and the various types of parental involvement.

Figure 2

M CCS Parental Involvement



However, as parents desire to be involved, the question arises as to whether parents understand how to effectively support academic and developmental progress. Further assessment may be needed to highlight the need for a stronger parenting component that could include classes, workshops, and detailed informative newsletters. One assessment option could include a survey to parents and educators regarding the teacher parent relationship, frequency and quality of parent communication, teacher workload within the school day, and more. Another assessment option would evaluate parents and their understanding of child development, behavior, and curriculum along with their interest in gaining knowledge of parental engagement within the home.

Action Plan

Several pieces of research promote the conception of a parent education component (Leech, et al., 2018; Slusser, et al., 2019; Sri Martini Meilanie, et al., 2023; van der Pluijm, et al., 2019). Based upon research, several topics will be the focus of the improved MCCA's parenting component. These topics include:

- literacy strategies and math fluency skills to practice at home (Davila, et al., 2022; Moon, Larke, & James, 2022),
- limiting technology use with young children (Srisinghasongkram, et al., 2020),
- and ways to improve self-regulation and social-emotional development in early childhood years (Hughes & Devine, 2019; Kok, et al., 2022; Perry, et al., 2018; Williams & Berthelson, 2017).

Specific strategies listed below will be considered and employed to create a successful parent education component and improve the current parent programs:

- Conduct in-person education sessions. Solís-Cordero, et al. (2022) declared that while parent sessions delivered remotely demonstrated success, in-person sessions would most likely promote higher engagement and motivation, leading to greater success. Therefore, in-person sessions should be the preferred delivery model of parenting sessions allowing some remote and digital pieces to coincide.
- Present content related to social-emotional development and parenting styles (Morris, et al., 2020).
- Employ certified trainers to lead the programs and provide parents with routine opportunities to evaluate the program, making positive changes and improvements as needed (Morris, et al., 2020).

The plan will also include:

- Designing routine elementary school-wide parenting newsletters coming from administration and curriculum specialists to include school-wide newsletters to provide more in-depth professional knowledge supporting the work being done in the classrooms.
- Planning curriculum nights for parents to gather information related to the literacy and math curriculum utilized within MCCS. These curriculum nights will be opportunities for parents and children to interact together in recommended home learning activities (van der Pluijm, et al., 2019).

To make these ideas a reality, consideration must be taken for the steps needed to create a successful action plan. Detailed actionable steps are proposed below to achieve the goal of creating a parent education component that increases student achievement, promotes positive behavior changes, and strengthens the partnership between home and school and improves upon the current MCCS parental involvement pieces.

1. Form a team of leaders, including administration, educators, and parents, to identify and assess current practices.
2. Survey school parents and staff to gather the following information:
 - a. perceptions of the current home and school partnership,
 - b. areas of interest in possible parent education classes,
 - c. preferred formats and times of sessions, and
 - d. thoughts about current communication between the school and home and current parental involvement.
3. With the team, clearly define specific goals and outcomes of this improved parenting component based on feedback from parent and educator surveys.
4. Research parenting programs that offer certification and training to focus on behavior, social-emotional development of children, and positive parenting skills selecting the program that aligns with the school's mission and vision statements.
5. Develop a plan for an elementary school-wide parent education newsletter.
 - a. Task - Create a title, such as *The Charge*, with an appropriate subtitle providing a spiritual and educational charge to parents for partnering with the school.
 - b. Task - Determine the frequency of these routine newsletters, such as quarterly with the school-wide current newsletter entitled, *The Shield*.
 - c. Task - Formulate a list of topics and authors to feature in the newsletter considering sections written by school academic specialists, administrators, and counselors.
 - d. Goal - Decrease the burden on teachers explaining educational information to parents.

6. Establish a plan for potential curriculum nights that would include parents, children, and academic specialists building upon the research by van der Pluijm, et al. (2019) that states parent training is most successful with children present and supports the standard from the PA Department of Education for schools to “partner with families to identify information, resources, and strategies to support them in their roles as teachers, models, encouragers, monitors, leaders and advocates as they support their child’s learning and development (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.).
7. Lastly, organize a rigorous and routine evaluation system of the new and improved parenting components with readiness to improve and pivot where needed.

Implementation of the Plan

Timeline, Resources, and Personnel

A successful school improvement plan includes goals with actionable steps (Pipkin, 2015). Each step must be carefully thought out with an appropriate timeline, suggested resources, listed personnel responsibilities, consideration of a monitoring process, and a contemplation of potential barriers and challenges. Therefore, Tables 4, 5, and 6 describe the implementation of this plan related to a proposed timeline, suggested resources, and division of responsibilities for personnel along with subsequent paragraphs explaining the monitoring process and potential barriers and challenges.

Table 4*Proposed Timeline of School Improvement Plan*

Schedule	Tasks
January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a team and/or parent education coordinator to facilitate this parenting improvement and education component. • Research various parent training materials listed below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Parenting the Love and Logic Way</i> ○ <i>Behavioral and Emotional Skills Training (BEST)</i> ○ <i>Emotional ABCs</i> ○ <i>Biblical Parenting</i>
February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and send a Google form and/or Likert scale survey to parents and educators gathering relevant information on current perception of parent and school communication, parental involvement, and current parent programs within the school. • Select the parent training program, ensuring certification and proper training for the parent education coordinator and purchase the training materials.
March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine cost, location, and dates/times of parent training sessions. • Create digital and paper copy advertisements for the parent training sessions. • Continue the planning and training of the parent training course to begin in April.
April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run the first round of parent training courses. • Prepare Google form survey to send out to parent participants in May.
May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap up the parent training course (approximately 6 weeks from start). • Send out the prepared evaluation/Google form survey to participants of the course for potential improvements for the following year.
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule and plan curriculum nights for upcoming school year and the parent education newsletter format. • Implement an improved parent communication platform.
Aug/Sept 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise for next round of parent education course. • Conduct first curriculum night (end of September). • Send out first issue of parent education newsletter.
October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct second parent education course. • Begin gathering information for second issue of parent education newsletter.
2024-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue cycle of evaluations and improvements to strengthen the home and school partnership.

Table 5*Resources Needed*

Resource	Description
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 months to research and begin implementing components in small steps • 1 year to continue implementation and evaluate components • 1+ year to add/improve as needed
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent education coordinator • Parents and educators to serve on a parent education team
Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location considerations to conduct the future parenting classes and curriculum nights
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projectors and computers for digital and video presentations • Use of digital arts programs such as Canva to create material and newsletters
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds needed to purchase the selected parent training curriculum kit and training materials • Funds needed to purchase the selected school-parent communication platform with potential on-boarding and annual subscription fees

Table 6*Suggested Personnel and Responsibilities*

Personnel	Responsibilities
School Admin Team	Approve the timeline and recommend parent education team members
Parent Education Team	Help facilitate plans and schedules for the parent education programs Conduct meetings, assist in writing the newsletters, and participate in curriculum nights and parent education classes
Parent Ed. Coordinator	Lead parent education classes and chair the parent education team
Secretary	Create advertisements and necessary paperwork along with needed communications provided by the parent education team

Monitoring

The process of monitoring this school improvement program will acknowledge successes and failures through various pieces of documentation. The proposed timeline above recommends cycles of the evaluation process, and the process will include attendance records of parenting classes and curriculum nights along with completed evaluations and surveys by parents and teachers. Throughout the entire monitoring process, improvements will be considered and implemented as needed. Most importantly, the monitoring process will include noted correlations of student achievement after a cycle of parenting classes, parent education newsletters, and curriculum nights to identify if these parent education components are proving to be successful for students, families, and the school.

Barriers and Challenges

Perceived barriers and challenges that could impede the success of this school improvement plan include the following:

- Time: Numerous activities are already scheduled throughout the school year for preschool to grade 12 students, athletes, fine arts students, and other school and parent organizations.
- Space: As the Christian school is a ministry under the umbrella of a church, several spaces such as church sanctuary, school gymnasium, various lobbies, meeting rooms, and classrooms are shared and noted in a shared space calendar.
- Buy-in:
 - Parents – Parents are already intricately involved within the school through current volunteer and service organizations. Parent interest in the proposed educational component will need to be determined.

- Teachers – Teacher willingness to serve on the parent education team and/or assist in curriculum nights and parent education meetings will also need to be determined.

Conclusion

Test scores show room for growth, learning gaps are present, negative behaviors disrupt learning, and parents lack information. Yet, parents are the child's first teachers. As educational leaders understand the vital role that parents play in student development and achievement, school leaders must strive to build an educational partnership with parents. Many schools boast of high parental involvement through volunteer opportunities and successful parent teacher organizations, but the partnership that boosts achievement and improves student behavior stems from parents and teachers engaging together to better child development and promote appropriate educational activities in the home *and* school (Slusser, et al., 2019; Sri Martini Meilanie, et al., 2023; van der Pluijm, et al., 2019). MCCS shines with parental involvement, parent volunteers, parents in prayer, and parents encouraging teachers. Teachers are focused on student achievement and development in the classroom.

The mission of Mount Calvary Christian School states, "MCCS exists to partner with families to provide a quality education and encourage students to grow into faithful and mature followers of Christ (Mount Calvary Christian School, n.d.). It is this school improvement plan that will strengthen the educational partnership with families as it defines best practices for parents to implement at home aligning with the standards and curriculum taught in the school. It is this school improvement plan that will decrease teacher burden and increase parent understanding of child behavior and social emotional development. This school improvement plan will also improve communication reducing stress on families, educators, and the school

created by poor communication and awareness. Finally, this school improvement plan will ultimately better students as it anchors parents, teachers, students, and education together through systematic parent education classes, routine parent education newsletters, curriculum learning workshops that highlight initiatives of the school, and improved communication.

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