



Walk Through the Fire: Practicing Adaptive Leadership to Build a Systemic Approach to Family Engagement in a Large Urban School District

Citation

Rowland, Allison. 2016. Walk Through the Fire: Practicing Adaptive Leadership to Build a Systemic Approach to Family Engagement in a Large Urban School District. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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Walk Through the Fire:
Practicing Adaptive Leadership to
Build a Systemic Approach to Family Engagement
in a Large Urban School District

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

April 2016

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For Mom and Dad

Mahalo

With this capstone, I honor my family, teachers, and dear friends. I honor the students, families and communities for whom I do this work. I honor the patience and sacrifice of my closest loved ones who have stayed with me through my intense commitment to learning and purpose. I honor the lineage of women in my family dedicated to education and learning. I honor my wise teachers, mentors, and coaches who have joined me in classrooms, districts, school buildings, yoga studios, and across the table for tea. I honor my colleagues with whom I have grown and accomplished great things and have also learned together from failure. So many folks have joined me in this journey, sometimes for the long haul and sometimes for just a few months. All of you, I honor with this capstone, the best I could offer in my work and this written piece. I could not have made it without you.

The members of my committee brought depth to this project and my work. Lisa Lahey, thank you for unrolling a yoga mat of adult development and giving me opportunities to grow into my best self as a leader and human being. You have brought me much insight and grounding in the past three years. Marshall Ganz thank you for raising challenging questions about my conception and communication of the work. I feel so lucky to have worked in the San Diego community with your guidance. Staci Monreal and Cindy Marten, thank you for entrusting me with critical work in the district you love with your whole selves. Pei Pei Liu, thank you for the steady, practical, honest voice pushing my writing forward.

SDUSD thank you for teaching me a large urban district could feel like a small town. I loved being around such a brilliant, committed team. A special mahalo to Fabiola Bagula, Bea Fernandez, Elneda Shannon, and Gretchen Rhoads who have taken risks alongside me, trying new things and moving through the ups and downs of the project. Also special thanks to Daniel Nyamangah whose community organizing expertise and knowledge of families in City Heights made so much of this work and the vision for the framework, possible.

The Ed.L.D. family and the Harvard Graduate School of Education supported my work from 2,500 miles away. Cohort 4 thank you for being my companions in this three-year adventure. Jonathan Skolnick, I have treasured our 6 am coaching conversations—thank you for sharing yourself and for coaching me no matter how I showed up. The generous experts on Appian Way always energized my work: Dr. Karen Mapp, Dr. Nancy Hill, Dr. Heather Weiss, Dr. Nell Duke, Dr. Andres Alonzo, Paul Reville, and Monica Higgins contributed to conceptualizing and navigating this strategic project. I am grateful for their time and expertise.

The adaptive leadership community at the Harvard Kennedy School offered me a practice and a lens for understanding the work of this project and my leadership. I am forever changed by our work together. Dr. Tim O'Brien and Dr. Ron Heifetz thank you for your teaching. Dr. Dean Williams, your book became one of my best companions. To my adaptive leadership teams, thank you for your love and collaboration...I have applied our learning over and over again this year.

My current work stands on the shoulders of what I have learned in my previous, beloved professional communities. City Arts and Tech High School and the many teachers, families,

and students there will always provide for me a touchstone of community and equity work. My leadership rests on so much of what we learned together. Thank you. Special thanks to Erika Nielsen Andrew whose philosophy on leadership and learning continues to inform my practice. The fine people of New Tech Network also continue to influence how I think about teaching and learning. Thank you.

My dearest friends across the world, I am grateful for your wisdom and unwavering friendship. Madrelle Cartwright, Kristin Russo, Kyle Hartung, Jennie Braman, Miko Enomoto, Dave Pleasants, Dan Polsby, Heather Mancini, Abigail Romanchak, and April Wang, I knew I could send a scrappy thought into the universe and your wit, kindness, and love would arrive in calls and emails. You are my people and I adore each one of you.

To my lovely nieces and nephew: Addie, Vivi, Townsend, and Lila, I am so proud to call you the children I love with my whole heart. You are each perfect beings, and it brings me such joy to be your Auntie Owl. I love you. To my brother, Bobby Rowland and my sister-in-law, Monika, thank you for sending good thoughts my way. I know you have been rooting for me from Maui.

To my dear girlfriend, Kat Malone, you have been an unexpected light in my life. Thank you for your steadfast support and love. I am grateful for many taco and kayak runs and for the laughter and openness you offer generously, wisely, and without any hesitation. I am a better person for your love. Mahalo.

To my sister Amelia Rowland Carr, and my sister-in-law, Erin Cox Carr, you have been my rocks. I still cry when I think about getting into Harvard and leaving right as you brought Addie and Vivi into the world. Thank you for supporting me on this journey anyway and for believing and appreciating all of who I am. Thank you for sharing your children with me—I love them like they are my own.

To my parents, Margo and Bob Rowland, nothing prepared me better for the work I've done this year than your love. With this capstone and with my diploma I honor our relationship and our family. I honor your parents, my grandparents, and all of their love, too. I am one very lucky human being to call you my family.

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Abstract

Although correlated with student achievement, strong family and community engagement is often at the margins, separate from the central work of school districts. This has previously been true in San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), a district of over 131,000 students, the second largest in California. However, Superintendent Cindy Marten endeavors to directly address inequities in the system, and therefore aims to establish the conditions for each and every family to be empowered to support their student's learning. This project, which became my strategic project, establishes a systemic framework for family engagement with three dimensions: growing family networks and leadership, cultivating trust among educators and families to take action together, and building families' capacity to engage in high impact strategies to support student learning at home.

The journey to the systemic approach took place at the school site and the systems level through, in part, addressing the beliefs and values maintaining family engagement at the margins. In clusters of schools we implemented Design Thinking, a human-centered process, whereby educators and community partners listen to families' experiences, then take action to support students' learning, together. Results show this process, with some adjustments, has the potential to be an engine for family engagement at school sites. At the systems level, leading the project generated political heat from key stakeholders facing difficult change and also provoked personal work to recover from my own assumptions and leadership missteps. Despite bumps in the road, the results of the systemic work are promising. We have generated increasing appetite and awareness for family engagement, as well as political support and leadership for the systemic approach. SDUSD is poised to integrate family engagement into their larger equity efforts with careful attention paid to building investment across the system through Design Thinking and integration into instructional work. Finally, California and districts across the country can learn from key steps to move a marginalized department or work to the center of district priorities.

Introduction

“Will you walk through the fire with me?” Superintendent Cindy Marten interrupts herself reading a poem, *The Invitation* by Oriah Mountain Dreamer to look up at the packed cafeteria at Portola Middle School. Just over two hundred principals, district leaders, and board members meet her gaze, listening. The line inspiring the superintendent’s call to action is: “It doesn’t interest me to know who you know or how you came to be here. I want to know if you will stand in the centre of the fire with me and not shrink back” (Oriah Mountain Dreamer, 1999).

The superintendent read the poem in June, when most SDUSD schools had just finished the end of the year sprint. On the same summer day, the National Equity Project, an Oakland non-profit partnered with the district, introduced a definition for *equity* the district has now made its own: “Equity means that each child receives what he or she needs to develop to his or her full academic and social potential” (National Equity Project, 2015, p. 15). The superintendent’s call to action refers, specifically, to making SDUSD, the 2nd largest district in California, more equitable for its students.

As SDUSD leadership works toward this vision for equity, the superintendent’s invitation to “walk through the fire” with her is an apt metaphor. In the eight years before she was appointed superintendent, the district churned through three superintendents, following Superintendent Allan Bersin’s well-known tenure focused on equity reforms from 1998-2004. Bersin’s superintendency is characterized as having “powerful” equity reforms with “shallow roots” in which top-down, fast-paced change left him fighting with a divided board and union (Cuban & Usdan, 2003).

In her first two years, Marten’s foundational approach to equity work was through positive deviance¹ (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010), whereby the district identified and highlighted successful practices with the intention of scaling what worked. Marten champions ensuring the practices are “systemic, systematic, replicable, scalable, equitable, affordable, and sustainable” (C. Marten, personal communication, March 27, 2016). Thus far her approach has cultivated support from the board and the district union bargaining units.

SDUSD now enters a new phase of making more systemic strong instruction supporting equity. During early August, the Instructional Cabinet, led by chief of staff, Staci Monreal, gained greater clarity on what they mean by equity in practice. Rather than a focus on highlighting already successful principal leadership and instructional practice, they would move to support similar practices in every classroom, actualizing Marten’s vision for systemic change. In practice this has meant area superintendents² work to develop principals’ capacity to identify equity challenges such as student performance falling along predictable lines of race or class. The area superintendents then support principals in building teachers’ practice to create greater equity for students’ learning experiences, aiming to interrupt the inequitable student outcomes.

Along with SDUSD’s current organization around instruction for greater equity, strong family engagement has the potential to also positively impact grades, test scores, attendance, ability to adapt to school, graduation rates, enrollment in higher education, and

¹ Positive deviance is an asset-based approach to solving problems. The process involves looking for solutions that already exist in a community due to “deviant” or different approaches. The goal is to spread adoption of these deviant, more successful approaches to the general population.

² Area superintendents supervise principals and support schools in two to three regions in SDUSD. There are currently six area superintendents in SDUSD.

more (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon 2009). With the vision for instructional improvement now underway, developing a parallel systemic approach to family engagement will support SDUSD's goal for equity. As such, the superintendent and chief of staff decided that family engagement would become a district priority and part of the core equity work. They turned to me to help create a systemic approach to family engagement that would be one in which each and every family is empowered to support their child's learning.

How this might this happen? How might each and every family be empowered to support their child's learning? Taking on such an endeavor is fraught with uncertainty, even for me, the person tasked with leading the process.

Before I could lead this work, I had to engage in profound internal work, myself, in order to become fully committed to the purpose. I had moved across the country to San Diego, a city where I knew no one, even though I was desperate to be close to family. I made a clear choice to sacrifice living with my two-year-old nieces in San Francisco, children I consider to be my own, to learn from the chief of staff and superintendent's instructional leadership. Therefore, my stomach dropped when I understood their hopes for me to work on family engagement and not on instruction. This would push me to the margins of the district, away from instruction, away from what I thought to be the most important work, away from the reason I came.

My internal journey indeed represents one of the most telling stages of this project. For anyone to work in family engagement, you must genuinely believe that it matters, because like me, many educators are raised to believe instruction is the sole key to student success. I half-heartedly set out to learn what this whole "family engagement" thing might be about.

I began to read. I read the research standing at my computer, then on my couch, then at the café, on the plane, and out loud to my sister. I spoke to experts in the field and in SDUSD. It was as if I journeyed to another country, as if I had stepped off a plane and the weather was balmy and suddenly my jacket felt scratchy and hot. I threw off the jacket; I realized I had no clue how stunning the landscape would be, nor how complicated the issues facing the people living there. I immersed myself in a new language—learned—and came away, changed. It turns out, as an educator of close to 20 years, I had not realized the potential power of high quality family engagement. So I dove in. Although a bit sheepish about my ignorance at first, I would later use my personal learning journey about family engagement as an invitation for others to do the same.

Review of Knowledge for Action

It's a tragedy as a sector we have been unable to make strong family engagement ubiquitous since there is a clear warrant for family engagement as a lever for student achievement. "Over forty years of steadily accumulating evidence show that family involvement is one of the strongest predictors of children's school success, and that families play pivotal roles in their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development from birth through adolescence" (Weiss et al., 2009, p. 4). Despite the evidence showing strong partnerships support student achievement, all too often family engagement is not leveraged across the education sector to improve students' educational outcomes (Mapp, 2012; Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).

Focusing in on the earliest stage of a family, right at birth, offers an initial premise for why we have not fully been able to take advantage of family engagement as a lever for change. As a doula or birth coach, I have had the opportunity to witness the first moments of a family. At the crescendo of labor, as rapidly as possible, the sometimes wailing, sometimes quietly bewildered infant is nestled into her mother's anxiously waiting arms. The next moments are the "golden hour," named for the precious time in the new womb outside the womb, the infant in her mother's arms. Surrounded by her partner, family, and nurses or community, pillows are stuffed around the mother who sometimes appears all elbows and concern as she immediately tries to accommodate her new child. Here, we return to the first teacher, and the first learning environment: the beginning of learning for the infant (Winnicott, 1960). The mother³ literally "holds" the infant in her arms, and in

³ I use "mother" here as we discuss birth and Winnicott's description of holding environment but recognize a multitude of family structures including gay parents, grandparents, extended family, or other guardians who might also create an infant's first holding environment.

responding to her needs, also *holds* the environment for the first stage of an infant's development to unfold. What might an infant be learning at this point? Over the first weeks, the infant learns new abilities to convey his/her needs. Although the upheaval is significant and the parents' pre-baby lives might be in shambles, they stay in the game of parenting because of their intense relationship and commitment to their child. This love and intense relationship bond the family together, despite the hard work of parenting.

This concept of a "holding" environment, the necessary conditions under which challenging development occurs, has extended into the realm of psychoanalytic therapy and organizational theory (Heifetz, 1994; Kahn, 2001). *Organizational* holding environments tie people together through difficult work involving shifts in values, behavior change, or learning, despite the challenges or stress they might endure through the process. Heifetz characterizes a holding environment as a container: "The containing vessel is made up of various sorts of glue: authority structure, shared purposes, common identifications, civic associations, trustworthy institutions, and other bonds of community" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 258).

I hypothesize, families, schools, and community may lack a strong holding environment to bring them together, into partnership, to support student learning. I am suggesting here that a holding environment, whatever form it might take, be it the authority of the district or relationships among families, has been insufficient to bring families, schools, and community into partnership to support student learning, whether in SDUSD, or the education sector at large. If the holding environment were sufficient, there would be much greater potential for families and schools to take on barriers keeping them from taking advantage of family engagement as a lever for improved student achievement.

At the same time, the course of action for building stronger holding environments as part of a systemic approach to family engagement in a large, urban school district is a monumental endeavor. By “systemic” I mean an approach where capacity building for family engagement positively impacts all families across SDUSD and not just in certain regions, schools, or classrooms. Systemic also entails the integration of family engagement into the core work of instruction and district priorities to support student success. A systemic approach, on the other hand, does *not* mean each family or school needs the same form of family engagement, but the district should organize for an approach offering the necessary supports for all families to be empowered. How this might happen is the content of this strategic project. Although SDUSD has strengths in particular schools as well as experts in the field, family engagement is not currently systemic. For example, the nationally-recognized Parent Outreach and Engagement (POE) department in the 2014-2015 school year hosted 6,629 family participants in workshops. However, the student population in the same school year was 108,000 students in district managed schools⁴. As admirable as this work is for the families it serves, this is not systemic. With a systemic approach, SDUSD aspires that *each and every* family would be supported to contribute to his/her child’s learning. When we consider some of the big events hosting families at schools, currently, at most, a strong elementary school brings 50% of families to its campus for an evening event (J. White, personal communication August 11, 2015) while a strong high school brings only 15% (C. Hibbeln, personal communication, August 20, 2015).

The goal for SDUSD is for lasting systemic change, and not a program, or a “quick fix” (R. Barrera, personal communication, November 30, 2015). What of the 50-85% of families who don’t come to school? How do we assure they are empowered to support their

⁴ 108,000 students does not include charter school populations in SDSUD.

child's learning, even if they don't come to school? What about families who do come to school? How are they empowered to support their student's learning in impactful ways?

For the purposes of this RKA, then, I will explore the following question:

- *What kind of family engagement matters for student learning?*
- *What are the barriers to systemic family and community engagement?*
- *How might we create a holding environment for families, community, and educators to address barriers to their partnership and ultimately support student learning, together?*

The first section of the RKA describes relevant findings regarding research on family engagement. The second section applies adaptive challenge frameworks (Heifetz, 1994; Williams, 2005) to unravel the underpinnings for weak family engagement, as well as make suggestions for leadership to address the challenges. Lastly, the third section makes a case for Design Thinking as an approach to create an initial holding environment for families, educators, and community to partner to support student learning.

Family Engagement

The impact is clear, family engagement improves school readiness, school academic achievement, and graduation rates (Weiss et al., 2010). In a review of 51 studies on family involvement between 1995 and 2002, Mapp (2002) demonstrates a relationship between family involvement and improved academic achievement across economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds for students of all ages.

The focus of this section is on discerning the kinds of family engagement that matter most for student learning. By identifying these practices, it's possible to consider how the research might be applied in a systemic approach. Tables 1-3 below synthesize impactful practices for family involvement based on a comprehensive literature review of key family engagement (Weiss et al., 2009).

Table 1: Parenting Practices at Home

- Parental responsiveness & emotional support in early childhood provide the emotional and cognitive building blocks for learning
- Cognitive stimulation and engagement in children’s play at home develop stronger academic skills and lead to higher achievement
- Use of language, the number of words used, complexity of speech, and talking with children are associated with cognitive and linguistic development
- Through perceiving a value of education from parents, or “academic socialization,” students demonstrate higher motivation, perceived competence, expectations and effort strongly associated with resilience

Note. Adapted from Weiss, H. B., Bouffard, S. M., Bridglall, B. L., & Gordon, E. W. (2009). *Reframing family involvement in education: Supporting families to support educational equity* (Equity Matters Series No. 5). Boston, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Table 2: Family and School Communication

- Shared responsibility for learning by schools and families by building relationships, communicating meaningful information, and conveying the importance of education leads children to do better in school
- Communication between schools and families when it is ongoing and bidirectional and focused on progress as well as problems is beneficial
- Family involvement in school activities and parent teacher conferences is associated with positive academic outcomes
- Involvement at school is predicted by outreach and invitations from the school as well as convenient opportunities, parental self-efficacy and parents beliefs about their role in educating their children

Note. Adapted from Weiss, H. B., Bouffard, S. M., Bridglall, B. L., & Gordon, E. W. (2009). *Reframing family involvement in education: Supporting families to support educational equity* (Equity Matters Series No. 5). Boston, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

A significant portion of the research focuses on early childhood and elementary school when families are also more inclined to be involved in their children’s lives. As students move into adolescence accompanied by middle and high school, other kinds of family involvement become effective (Hill & Wang, 2015). Table 3 below describes specifically impactful strategies for adolescents.

Table 3:
Parental Involvement Strategies for Adolescents: Strategies to maintain GPA, avoid negative behavior at school, and reduce depressive symptoms

- Parents communicate to adolescents a link between education and future success
- Scaffold teen’s independence to take responsibility for schoolwork, share their opinions, and problem-solve
- Provide structure at home by establishing space and time for homework and setting boundaries around social engagements
- Proactive/preventative communication with teachers
- Parents feel they have comfortable, positive communication with teachers
- Parental warmth enhances all of the involvements listed above

Note. Adapted from Hill, Nancy E., and Ming-Te Wang. “From Middle School to College: Developing Aspirations, Promoting Engagement, and Indirect Pathways from Parenting to Post High School Enrollment.” *Developmental Psychology* 51, no. 2 (2015): 224–35.

In middle and high school, families must learn to be responsive to their student in developmentally appropriate ways. Concurrent with adolescence, “the new zero to three” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 10), when brains and bodies go through the second most intense period of development, middle school learning environments also undergo radical change. Not only do students go through a transition in schools they attend, but the way school is configured changes from a single teacher directing most learning with the same students, to many teachers with many classrooms teaching often more than a hundred students. Given the significant flux, the holding environment for families also needs to be developmentally responsive to the transition. Yet as students get older, school and family partnerships tend to decline unless schools actively invest in their development (Epstein, 2009).

Families Supporting Student Learning at Home and in the Community

As we consider a systemic approach to family engagement, we may consider that families can support student learning without ever coming to the school. This is an important consideration since many families cannot come to school. Epstein’s (1995) foundational research in family engagement describes six types of parent involvement:

parenting, communicating (with school), learning at home, collaborating with the community, volunteering, and decision making. The first four types support student learning, but don't require families come to school. This narrows the scope of what might be necessary for each and every family to participate, eliminating volunteering and decision making from the types of involvement in which all parents must engage to contribute to their child's learning.

Focusing on what families can do to support student learning at home or in the community is bolstered by neuroscience and plain common sense: students' brains don't go dormant when they leave school. A cascade of recommendations in the family engagement field support not just families and schools championing students' learning, but a co-constructed effort with community partners sharing responsibility (Weiss et al., 2010). In other words, adults from all aspects of a child's life create a network for them, whether at home, school, or in the community to support their learning and wellbeing. However, this manifestation of family involvement is not the norm, despite years of research indicating its significant potential.

The argument for supporting student learning at home and in the community is bolstered by recent findings about a widening gap between high and low income families. Putnam (2015) makes an argument for a widening *opportunity gap* in relation to the differences not just in the schools economically advantaged students attend, but in the resources their families spend on activities such as camp and extracurricular activities. Similarly, Reardon & Bischoff (2011) study how the income achievement gap has widened significantly in the past forty years. Reardon also posits not just the growth of income inequality as the source of this widening gap, but the time and resources rich families have to invest in their children's cognitive development, socioeconomic, and social resources.

The Adaptive Challenge: A Feather in a Hurricane

Making progress on SDUSD's commitment to prioritize family engagement and make it a part of its core equity work requires that we understand the nature of this challenge. Despite the compelling evidence for family engagement as described above, successful engagement remains sporadic and is seen as separate from the core work of a district and schools, generally. I propose prioritizing family engagement represents an *adaptive challenge*. An adaptive challenge is one necessitating a change in values, beliefs, or behavior (Heifetz, 1994). To change the nature of family engagement will certainly necessitate a shift in beliefs, values, and behavior on the part of educators, as well as that of families and the community at large. My own perspective as a seasoned educator is telling. I hesitated to work on family engagement in SDUSD for my residency. As I reflect on why this was the case, and delve into the research, a professor's words remind me to use my reaction as data. "You are just a feather in a hurricane," (T. O'Brien, personal communication, September, 2014) points out the tendency for an individual to attribute to herself something belonging to a much larger system or the "hurricane." The adaptive challenges creating barriers to family engagement are inherent in the system; this challenge doesn't only belong to me.

To work towards stronger family engagement involves challenging assumptions educators make about families (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), what could be characterized as an adaptive challenge. In essence, the shift would be for educators to genuinely value what families can bring to their children's learning. Educators see themselves as being in the business of teaching and supporting student learning, emphasized by their training, which often lacks the why or the how of family engagement. Before learning the potential impact of family engagement on student learning for the purposes of

this project, I felt similarly. But there is more to this adaptive challenge than knowing how to fulfill the tasks of family engagement, especially for those working with historically underperforming students. For example, I assumed my training as an educator, and the possession of a post-secondary education, meant I held greater power to support student learning than my students' families who had not graduated from college. Although I intentionally built relationships with families, I thought it was my job alone to help students understand benchmarks for progress, and I underestimated the role families could play as teachers at home. I assumed I knew more about educating their children than they did, and I failed to understand the resources families could bring.

Adaptive challenges also exist for some families related to their confidence and whether they believe it is their role to engage with school in the first place. For example, Hill et al. (2010) paints a vivid picture of how Latino families experience school. Those who have recently immigrated have high expectations for the American education system and are severely disappointed by the quality of instruction and the inequities of course offerings. Many would rather there were higher expectations for behavior and academics. For those who do not speak English, interpretation and translation are insufficient and they are barred from participating in the baseline level of engagement such as parent-teacher conferences. Furthermore, teachers “talk down to them” especially if they don’t speak English. Conversations with teachers leave them feeling “embarrassed” or “inferior.” Hill et al. (2010) goes deeper into the beliefs Latino families hold about their role. Latino families hold teaching professionals in high regard and respect a trained educator’s domain to do her work. Therefore, they may not see it as their role to venture into the territory of school and education for their child.

This description of the Latino experience is one example of why parents might decide to or not to become involved in their children’s education. The role parents construct for themselves is the most important factor in their decision regarding their level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). If they do not hold the belief that it is their role to engage in their child’s learning, no amount of invitations or outreach from the school will get them involved. The second most important factor in choosing to be involved is a parent’s sense of efficacy with respect to supporting their children’s learning. Thus even if they understand it to be their role, they might not feel they have something to teach, therefore diminishing the likelihood of their involvement.

Williams (2005) identifies four types of adaptive challenges: activist, development, creative, and transition and describes the difficult adaptive work required in each case. Table 4 below highlights these and offers generic leadership moves to address this type of challenge in engaging families. These correspond to the adaptive work I believe is likely required of families, schools, and communities in order to build successful partnerships in support of student learning. Table 4 is intended to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and not as a specific action map to move forward. Later in this RKA, I will describe Design Thinking as a process that can address some of the adaptive challenges below.

Table 4: Adaptive Challenges in Family Engagement

Type of Adaptive Challenge	Description of Required Adaptive Work for the Group	Application to Family Engagement
Activist Challenge (Williams, 2005)	The group consistently resists or ignores an opportunity to heighten performance. Leadership must get the group or other key leaders to shift their “assumptions and priorities so new realities and new ideas can be	Bring attention to families and educators about the potential power of family engagement and lead them to prioritize it For educators, may include

Type of Adaptive Challenge	Description of Required Adaptive Work for the Group	Application to Family Engagement
	embraced or at least entertained.” (Williams, 2005, p. 34)	examination of the assumptions made about families’ potential contribution to student learning, or the tradeoffs in resources to prioritize this work
Development Challenge (Williams, 2005)	If the group develops their abilities, then they can improve performance or their conditions. Leadership in the face of an adaptive challenge “is to orchestrate a learning process through designed experimentation that cultivates the group’s latent capabilities.” (Williams, 2005, p. 89)	For educators and the community may include learning how to reach out and work with families to build engagement in impactful ways For families may include learning and practicing new ways of being engaged
Creative Challenge (Williams, 2005)	The way the group has worked is not and will not produce improvement. There is no known solution to the problem, but if they can operate in completely new ways, they have an opportunity to “break through the wall, transcend the current paradigm” (Williams, 2005, p. 163). Leadership requires creating the conditions for creativity including the “dynamics of the group and contextual influences that produce a certain mood, energy and focus that stimulate creative thinking and exploration of ideas.” (Williams, 2005, p. 74)	For all stakeholders, involves approaching the challenges of family engagement in creative ways, considering new approaches since extant work has not generated systemic change or consistently powerful partnerships for family engagement
Transition Challenge (Williams, 2005)	The group holds some values or mindsets that no longer serve them or keep them from addressing a challenge or taking on a new opportunity that would help them to flourish. “The leadership work is to transition the group to a new state of operating and refashion the values, loyalties, and mind-sets of the people” (Williams, 2005, p.115)	For educators might include examining beliefs about families’ abilities to contribute or the power of engagement to support student learning For families, may include examination of cultural or personal beliefs about the role families should or could play in education

The activist, development, transition, and creative adaptive challenges begin to indicate a pathway toward progress on the challenges inherent to family, community, and school partnerships as well as point to why it is so difficult to make progress on doing this work well. We must galvanize attention for the importance of family engagement, address shifts in values, build capacity of families, schools, and communities, and consider novel approaches. The work encompasses much that is adaptive: beliefs, assumptions, learning, awareness, and changing routines.

Taking on adaptive work necessitates a holding environment to hold people's focus through often difficult work. "To practice adaptive leadership, you have to help people navigate through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable, and as they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand. This disequilibrium can catalyze everything from conflict, frustration, and panic to confusion, disorientation, and fear of losing something dear" (Heifetz, 2009, p. 28). Engaging schools, families, and communities in capacity building entails developing a holding environment for the adaptive work (building capacity, shifting beliefs, changing habitual patterns) to transpire. They will need a reason to stay in the game and not run the other direction from the disequilibrium. In the next section, I consider the kind of holding environment that could keep stakeholders together in a shift to systemic family engagement.

Holding Environments for Family, Schools, and Community

The avenues to creating holding environments vary, so there might be several means which contribute to a holding environment for families, educators, and community to partner for student learning.

The cohesive properties of a relationship or a social system that serve to keep people engaged with one another in spite of the divisive forces generated by adaptive work may include, for example, bonds of affiliation and love; agreed upon rules, procedures, and norms; shared purposes and common values; traditions; languages,

and rituals; familiarity with adaptive work; and trust in authority. Holding environments give a group identity and contain the conflict, chaos, and confusion often produced when struggling with problematic realities (Heifetz, 2009).

A common purpose for family engagement is student learning. In communities without partnership, families, schools, and community may be in different physical environments, they may be divided by language and ritual, and they do not yet have bonds of affiliation and love. However, they likely all engage from their various roles and locales with a student or students with hopes for their success.

Mapp & Kuttner (2013) offer a dual capacity framework for parent engagement that suggests a way to create a holding environment to build the capacity of both educators and families through specific conditions for their interactions. The framework emphasizes student learning and achievement as an anchoring purpose for families and educators. Furthermore, building trusting and respectful relationships as well as doing so through a collective process to build social capital creates ripe conditions for capacity building. Finally, the application of the work must be developmental, building skills and capacity rather than offering a service. The collection of these qualities are “process conditions” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) described in Table 5. Like Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1997), Mapp & Kuttner (2013) assert the work involves families and staff considering how they view themselves, specifically their roles, in the work of student learning and the community.

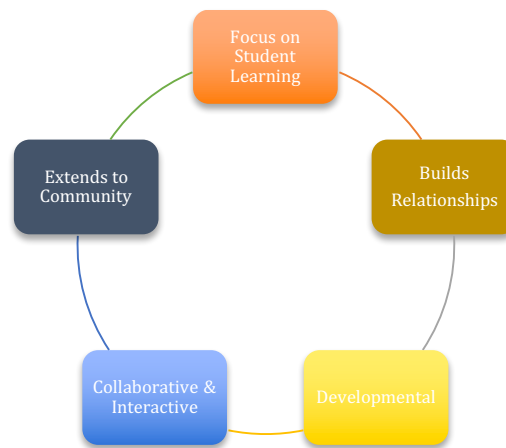
Table 5: Opportunity Conditions for Dual Capacity Framework for Parent Engagement

Process Conditions	Organizational Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to learning • Relational • Development vs. service orientation • Collaborative • Interactive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic: across the organization • Integrated: embedded in all programs • Sustained: with resources and infrastructure

Note: Adapted from Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in education: A dual capacity building framework for family-school partnerships*. Austin, TX: SEDI, p. 8.

Despite the recent advocacy for partnership among families, schools, and community (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010), community partners go unmentioned in the dual capacity building framework. Community is an added layer that might contribute to creating a holding environment for families and educators. The above discussion of holding environments suggests these conditions, as summarized in Figure 1, will likely contribute to educators and families being able to engage the earlier mentioned adaptive challenges.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Holding Environment Conditions for Families and Educators



A Way Forward: Design Thinking

As a process, Design Thinking shows promise for beginning to address the activist, transition, and creative adaptive challenges that are barriers to partnerships among families, educators, and community to support student learning. In this section, I will first offer background information on Design Thinking and then propose a modified version to the process as a first step to address the adaptive challenges and move towards a systemic approach to high quality family engagement

Design Thinking brings people together to tackle tough problems by deeply understanding those involved in the challenge as a means to generate solutions; a process

called human-centered design. Though originally associated with product design, organizations such as the Stanford d. School and IDEO Design Firm now also use the process to tackle complex social problems. For example, IDEO has used Design Thinking to address the following issues for its clients: designing innovative patient-centered experiences for a healthcare pioneer; designing a global plan for disaster response (IDEO, 2016); and in collaboration with the d. School, *School Retool*, or a process to redesign school culture (School Retool, n.d.).

One purpose for Design Thinking related to family engagement could be to start to address the adaptive transition challenges for families and educators. For example, educators might transition from assuming families don't have valuable contributions to the education process to prioritizing partnerships with them because they recognize families have many resources to offer. Families, on the other hand, might transition from not viewing support for student learning as their role, to actively taking steps to support their student's learning. If both sets of stakeholders were involved in better understanding the nature of the challenge, and each other, they might begin to shift their assumptions and their perceived value for family engagement. The collaborative nature of the Design Thinking process would put families, educators, and potentially community partners side by side to work together. Such a process has the potential to begin to form new relationships. Of course, this would entail families and educators being involved in the design process and not separate from it, which would constitute a modification to what is typical with Design Thinking, where designers listen to those involved in the problem but then do the designing independent from them.

Another purpose for Design Thinking could be to address the creative adaptive challenge by generating creative solutions. Educators and families would benefit from the

conditions that could take them out of their typical approaches to family engagement, or a lack thereof, to generate new ideas for supporting student learning, together. Of course just generating solutions will not be enough. There will need to be commitments and structures to carry the new ideas forward.

Finally, Design Thinking, as a process, generates positive excitement and interest. Schools and educators do not typically take the time to engage in deep inquiry to understand families' experiences. However, if families are asked to and indeed share their experiences with the education system, their stories may generate interest, curiosity and value for further engaging them. Empathy-building and personal stories offer a compelling motivation to take action. The process holds promise for generating attention for the value of better including families to support student learning.

Design Thinking Process

Design Thinking does not follow one strict protocol, and I propose a modified version that most likely could engender the conditions for a holding environment described earlier including: focus on student learning, extension to the community, development of family capacities, collaboration, and relationship building. The process I propose for Design Thinking most closely aligns with that of the d. School because its practical resources and application reflect several of the process conditions in the dual capacity framework including: relational, collaborative, and interactive (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Again, the intention of this process is to engage in adaptive work associated with the creative, transition, and activist adaptive challenges. By taking action together to support student learning over time, families and educators might also begin to address the development challenge. Below is a description of the steps for this modified version of the Design Thinking process to serve this purpose.

1. Frame the Design Challenge & Build Relationships. Ground the purpose for Design Thinking in a common goal for all stakeholders: student learning and success. This creates the first anchor for people to remain focused despite the adaptive work that will arise. Take time with introductions in which everyone, regardless of language or role, can participate to begin to build trust and openness in the room. This begins to make the work relational, a second anchor for the holding environment. Introduce the design challenge: How might we design a better way for families, educators, and community partners to support student learning, together? Engage in short dialogue to draw on what people already know about this challenge, but also offer key insights from the research about family engagement. In this way, we begin to also address the development challenge, helping people to learn something new about family engagement.

2. Build Empathy. Human-centered design focuses on both observing and interviewing people impacted by challenges. In this case, we listen to family members as a collective group to deeply understand their experiences with children's education. The format involves speaking in their own language with no interruptions and only light facilitation through questions. If possible we might even observe families in their homes as well, though this might be a step to take in later iterations of the process. Once we have listened to families, educators value their contribution by reflecting back a few key learnings from the listening process. This begins to address, again, the transition challenge. Heterogeneous teams of six to eight people including the very families who were interviewed, along with educators, community partners, and students work together through the rest of the steps, guided by a trained table facilitator. The team shares the significant quotes, insights, and stories heard from families to deepen empathy and builds a visual using post-it notes, markers and posters. The process of families joining the design team deviates

from typical Design Thinking but could contribute to greater trust, investment, and new relationships to support the solutions and family engagement generally.

3. Reframe the Design Question. Small teams discuss whether the Design Challenge has become more specific after building empathy for families and modify it as needed. This step in the process helps participants to be more creative and also to challenge the assumptions they might be making, creating space for a potential shift in the values people hold about family engagement.

4. Ideate. Small teams use a lively structured process of building on each other's ideas to generate as many ideas as possible in response to the Design question.

5. Prototype. The team selects one or a collection of related ideas to fully explore creating a viable solution. They ask for continued feedback from families and students as well, returning to ideating as needed. The teams present their ideas to the collective workshop describing the design challenge for which they're solving, their prototype, as well as the pros and cons to their prototype as they understand it at this point in the process.

6. Commitments. Not typically a part of the Design Thinking process, stakeholders can commit to following through on the next steps of implementing the prototypes that most resonate as solutions for the community. This will serve to carry the creative solutions and relationship-building forward.

Systems Level Work

To be clear, Design Thinking was a calculated intervention I selected to address the adaptive challenges as I understood them at the beginning of the project. The process of exercising adaptive leadership to address adaptive challenges entails a cycle of observation, interpretation, and intervention (Heifetz, 2009). I took a calculated risk that Design Thinking could call attention to the power of family engagement, help families and educators

develop skills to partner to support student learning, and involve those impacted by the challenge in coming up with creative solutions.

However, even if Design Thinking brings together families and educators at the school level, in order for it to become systemic, we need family engagement to be integrated and supported at the district-level. This would mean clear district prioritization for family engagement along with the associated structures, resources and support to assure each and every family is empowered to support their student's learning. Both the dual capacity framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) and the California Family Engagement Framework (California Department of Education, 2014) point to systems level work as critical for the successful family engagement. However, prior to the superintendent and chief of staff directing my work for this strategic project, family engagement had not been a clear priority in SDUSD, a district organizing around instruction.

Adaptive work will need to be addressed at the systems level across different departments, regions of San Diego, and stakeholder groups in order for the entire system to prioritize family engagement. I hypothesize and take the calculated risk that Design Thinking at the local level can be used as an initial way to generate awareness and value at the systems level.

Theory of Action for a Systemic Approach to Family Engagement

If Allison...

- At a localized level, pilots Design Thinking initially in a cluster of schools and then in other contexts to create a codified process for generating a holding environment for families, educators, and community partners to engage in adaptive work and take action together
- At a systems level in SDUSD, exercises leadership to address the activist and transition adaptive challenges associated with creating awareness, building demand, investing in, and practicing a systemic approach to family engagement, using Design Thinking as one means to call attention to and create value for the power of family engagement

Then SDUSD will have the foundation for taking a systemic approach to family engagement where each and every family is empowered to support their child's learning and life outcomes as measured by...

- Demand and support for Design Thinking as a process to do adaptive work and take action together for families, educators, community partners, and district staff as measured by:
 - Number of people who have experienced the process
 - Number and political importance of anticipated events which will use the process
 - Feedback on the process from those who have experienced it
 - Number of stakeholders trained to use the process at school site, cluster, district or community level

- The capacity of a team of people with dedicated responsibility, commitment, and skill to train others in how to implement Design Thinking
- A systemic plan is developed that lays out a way to empower each and every family to support student learning across the district
- The plan is supported by the board, superintendent, and chief of staff as measured by their public support and investment in the resources, people, and structures designated in the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)⁵ to carry the plan forward
- A committed team such as the Parent Outreach and Engagement (POE) department is invested and show support to lead the plan moving forward as measured by their leadership in piloting approaches for the systemic work, developing the systemic plan, and communicating the vision with stakeholders

⁵The LCAP is the district plan developed in collaboration with stakeholders defining the priorities annually. The plan is a part of the accountability and process for California's new established approach to funding, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Project Description

Summary

The work of laying a foundation for a systemic approach to family engagement happened every single day with how I spent my time, the way I spoke in meetings, with whom and how I connected to people, and most importantly, constant learning about the system. With colleagues in and out of the district, I continually observed and diagnosed the system to inform a path to laying the foundation for a systemic approach. My key realizations and misconceptions will mainly be explored in the analysis section, while the project description lays out the architecture of the work through a series of events and strategic moves. In some instances, I delve deeply into key events, such as the initial Design Thinking session, that were pivotal moments for the project.

The arc of the work towards a systemic approach for family engagement began with a catalyzing event, Design Thinking, in a corner of San Diego involving families, educators, and community partners localized to the area. This event occurred in the Crawford Cluster⁶, a group of ten schools, but also penetrated the larger system of SDUSD, by creating attention and more support for family engagement from systems level leaders at board and staff meetings. In subsequent Design Thinking sessions in other clusters and eventually at the school level, more people experienced the process as a way to solve challenges faced by a community, and the demand for it escalated. I began to shift responsibility to lead the process from me to others and most recently led a training for twelve school teams to learn to engage independently in Design Thinking at their own sites. Later in this project

⁶ A cluster is a group of SDUSD elementary schools whose students feed into one to two middle schools, and then one high schools. They are located in the same geographical region.

description, I will outline the Design Thinking process as it transpired in the Crawford Cluster and other iterations in greater detail.

After the initial Design Thinking Event in the Crawford Cluster, my work began to transpire at two levels: continued localized efforts with Design Thinking, as well as the more political work to create attention and a fertile environment for a systemic approach to family engagement that might be supported by necessary resources, structures, and capacity. By December, 2015 I had developed an initial draft for a systemic approach to family and community engagement, as shown in a revised version in Figure 2, and presented it at a board meeting. Although supported by the board and superintendent, the draft of a systemic approach generated controversy and resistance from existing family leaders as well as the Parent Outreach and Engagement (POE) Department.

In the winter and spring, the thrust of the project had shifted to include another level of building capacity. First, I worked closely with the POE department as well as a community organizer from a local non-profit to continue to pilot, develop, and refine aspects of a systemic approach, including Design Thinking. Second, I continued working to generate political will and demand for a systemic approach, recovering from initial mistakes and controversy, and made moves to attempt to secure the associated resources and leadership to initiate the systemic approach in the 2016-2017 school year. Lastly, I also endeavored to build organizational capacity and leadership to carry the work forward after my tenure. Of significance, the POE department leadership has taken significant ownership of the systemic approach at the publication of this capstone. In collaboration with them, along with feedback from the superintendent, chief of staff, family leaders, and educators, the POE department and I have revised the initial draft of a systemic approach. We will present it to the board in late April.

Systemic Work

The SDUSD Framework for Systemic Family Engagement focuses on building the conditions to empower each and every family across the district to support their student's learning. This does not mean that every family or school needs the same supports, but that the district clearly prioritizes family engagement as part of the core work and establishes the resources, structures, and approaches to assure families have the conditions to be empowered.

Moving forward, the systems and school level work will be driven by the systemic framework. Not every school or cluster will use the framework in the same way; it offers flexibility, but the district will provide the necessary supports for it to become a realistic approach at school sites to support families to support their student's learning. Of note, as the systemic framework took shape through pilots, Team Family for Equity⁷, and collaboration with the POE department, we realized additional practical research was necessary. For the High Impact Home Strategies (HIHS) at the middle and high school level we drew from the work of Nancy Hill Ph.D. whose work is described in the Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA). For the HIHS at the elementary and Pre-K level, we sought new input beyond the scope of the RKA through the work of Nell Duke Ed.D.

Following the framework description, I will also explain the origins for each dimension.

⁷ Team Family for Equity is a new team I established and facilitated.

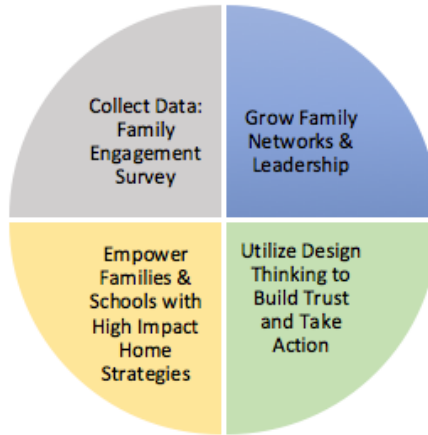


Figure 2. SDUSD Framework for Systemic Family Engagement

Grow Family Networks & Leadership

- Train existing and new family leaders to assume leadership roles
- Grow networks and relationships among families through community organizing, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), foundations, faith-based groups, school governance etc.
- Teach High Impact Home Strategies (see below) through family networks, especially families not coming to school
- Invest in community organizers & non-classroom teachers to join district “green” teams⁸ to support strategies (Design Thinking, HIHS), activate networks where they aren’t yet strong, and train school staff

Utilize Design Thinking to Build Trust and Take Action

- At schools or clusters, educators listen deeply to build empathy for families and students in their community
- Collaboration among all stakeholders to solve context-specific challenges and take action together
- Mobilize investment in partnerships among families, educators, and community

Empower Families and Schools with High Impact Home Strategies⁹

⁸ Teams of content experts such as special education or language acquisition supporting area superintendents working with schools

⁹ High Impact Home Strategies

Pre-K & Elementary (N. Duke, personal communication, November 18, 2015)

- Talk with your child as much as possible and in the language in which you’re comfortable. Your talk that explains, tells stories, or deals with past or future is most impactful.
- Seek “brain-building” activities for your child because learning happens anytime, anywhere.

- Train schools, community partners, and family leaders to empower families with High Impact Home Strategies (HIHS)
- Online resources to learn HIHS in conjunction with community organizing to support all families, especially those who cannot come to school
- Schools connect families in greater need to more intensive supports through Parent Outreach and Engagement Department or community partners

Collect Data: Family Engagement Survey

- Annual, district-wide family engagement survey to identify strengths and improvement areas for family engagement by sub-group, school and cluster
- Area superintendents lead survey implementation
- At school-site level, design family engagement plan based on survey results, student academic needs, and/or Design Thinking

The Origins of Each Dimension in the Systemic Framework

In the explanation below, I describe how we arrived at each dimension of the systemic framework.

Build Family Networks & Leadership. When we recruited families for Design Thinking, we learned that community organizers engage and bring to the school the families who might otherwise not come. When we think about “each and every family” we need ways to build families’ connections to each other and the school, especially if they are marginalized for any reason. This dimension of the framework requires resources invested in further developing family leaders as well as hiring community organizers to join the teams engaged in supporting schools from the district level. Building networks involves a “train the trainer” approach whereby community organizers train the school and other family

-
- Read with your child. This doesn’t have to be at bedtime and could be a magazine versus a storybook. If you don’t read, tell a story about the pictures in a book.

Middle & High School (Hill & Wang, 2015)

- Communicate with the school and teachers about your student’s progress on A-G requirements, grades, and enrollment in advanced coursework.
- Support your child in learning to become independent in and out of school.
- Talk with your student about how his or her learning and education connects to their future.

leaders to connect to all families, but especially marginalized families, through new and existing relationships. They then teach and learn with families about how to support their student's learning at home and in the community.

Utilize Design Thinking to Build Trust and Take Action. Implemented at both the school site and the cluster level, the process appears to create a temporary holding environment for families, educators, and community partners to start to engage in adaptive work, as well as take action together on problems facing their community. The process is intended to create a way to respond to the needs as articulated by families in a particular context, as well as develop value and commitment from educators to more deeply engage with families. A critical piece of Design Thinking is assuring there is a designated team committed to moving the ideas forward into implementation and action.

Implementing High Impact Home Strategies (HIHS) to Support Student Learning. As the research described in the Review of Knowledge for Action indicates, specific parent approaches are associated with student achievement. The SDUSD systemic framework creates an opportunity for schools, community partners and family leaders to reinforce with families three developmentally appropriate high impact strategies. This dimension will work in conjunction with growing networks, as families learn the HIHS from family leaders, as well as online resources to build families capacity to support student learning.

For Pre-K and elementary HIHS, I discussed approaches with Nell Duke a researcher from University of Michigan who works on literacy development in early childhood.

- Talk with your child as much as possible and in the language in which you're comfortable. Your talk that explains, tells stories, or deals with the past or future is most impactful (N. Duke, personal communication, November 18, 2015).
- Seek “brain-building” activities for your child because learning happens anytime, anywhere (Weiss et al., 2009)
- Read with your child. This doesn't have to be at bedtime and could be a magazine versus a storybook (N. Duke, personal communication, November 18, 2015). If you don't read, tell a story about the pictures in a book.

For middle and high school, I discussed the following strategies with Nancy Hill that also align with her research described in the RKA (personal communication, November 4, 2015).

- Communicate with the school and teachers about your student's progress on A-G requirements, grades¹⁰, and enrollment in advanced coursework
- Support your student in learning to become independent in and out of school
- Talk with your child about how their learning and education connects to their future.

Finally, with the intention of aligning to the districtwide instructional professional development for principals and teachers, I aligned the HIHS with the four learning cycles (Figure 3), the four professional development units of learning led by the area superintendents with principals and teachers. This means schools might engage in building the capacity of families in ways that align with that of staff learning over the course of a year. Of note, the district uses the same four learning cycles across elementary, middle, and high schools.

¹⁰ The A-G requirements are the course sequence students must complete to graduate from high school in SDUSD as well as be eligible for state universities in California.

Figure 3. Alignment of District Learning Cycles to High Impact Home Strategies

Annual District Learning Cycles: Professional Development for Principals & Teachers			
Social & Emotional Environments Worthy of Our Children	Collaborative Conversations Among Students	Unlocking the Genius of Our Students	Building Student Agency
Alignment to High Impact Home Strategies for Pre-K & Elementary			
Read with Your Child	Talk with Your Child	Seek Brain-Building Activities	Seek Brain-Building Activities
Alignment to High Impact Home Strategies for Middle & High School			
Communicate with the school and teacher about your student's progress	Talk with your child about how their learning and education connects to their future	Talk with your child about how their learning and education connects to their future	Support your child in learning to become independent

Collect Data: Family Engagement Survey. Family leaders and the POE department were considering creating a family engagement survey before I arrived. This became a part of my work with family leaders and educators as we analyzed potential, existing surveys. We needed to figure out a better way to gain a baseline at the school and district level for family engagement. The current LCAP goal for family engagement only has one quantitative measure for family engagement related to whether parents have a login to PowerSchool, the online system where parents can check their student's grades. Therefore, a survey, aligned to the current research on family engagement, as well as the systemic framework, will support an understanding of the impact of the framework and how to move forward at the school and district level. We are currently in the process of determining other measures of the impact of the framework.

Again, the development of the above framework arose from a combination of learning from pilots, observing what was already working, and applying the research. However, designing a framework for a systemic approach would never be enough. It needs to be animated, brought to fruition, become a priority, be supported by people and resources, and integrated into the existing system. In upcoming sections of the project description I will outline some of this work in greater detail.

Project Timeline

Below is the timeline of key events which will be referenced over the course of the rest of the project description. The timeline represents the increasing number of Design Thinking sessions which, as of the writing of this capstone, culminated with a training for twelve schools to learn how to independently implement the process. The timeline also includes key events related to creating the political will and capacity for a systemic approach to family engagement, including board meetings and presentations to the superintendent. Finally, the timeline also shows increasing participation of the POE in leading the systemic work.

Table 6: Strategic Project Timeline

September		
9/26/15	DT: Crawford Cluster	First and largest DT session for schools in the SDUSD Crawford Cluster a group of ten schools in City Heights neighborhood. 120 people attend. Event includes students, families, principals, teachers, community partners and district staff.
9/28/15	Crawford Cluster Small Team Planning	This small team of ten stakeholders plans for Crawford Cluster meeting on 10/12. The team is led by the area superintendent.
October		
10/12/15	Crawford Cluster Meeting	Follow-up Crawford Cluster meeting during which the community selects prototypes from 9/26 DT to carry forward as a group. Attendance increases from 10 to 60 people. They select creating a cultural center and an online tool for communication as the ideas to

		carry forward.
November		
11/10/15	Board Resolution: National Family Engagement Day	Initially alone, then with the PTA, I revise an existing resolution to recognize parent volunteers. Crawford Cluster testimony on the resolution describes DT and the board and superintendent respond positively. The process generates controversy with PTA leadership, who feel the district and I coopted their resolution.
11/17/15	DT: Lincoln Cluster AAAE	Second implementation of DT focused on African and African American students in the Lincoln cluster of 14 schools. We modify the DT process from 6 hours to 75 minutes.
December		
12/8/15	Board Presentation: Draft of Systemic Family Engagement	POE and I present to the board. I focus on a draft of a systemic approach. The presentation generates both support from superintendent and board and controversy with existing family leaders and the POE department.
January		
1/23/16	DT: LCAP Feedback Team	With my support, POE leads DT with stakeholders from across SDUSD.
February		
2/10/16	DT: Claremont Cluster	A different area superintendent initiates and leads DT to focus on maintaining enrollment in the Claremont Cluster, a group of 8 schools. The prototypes are being worked on during each subsequent monthly cluster meeting.
2/24/16	RFP for Title I Middle Schools Released	With the POE, I write a Request for Proposal from the district for community partners to work with Title I Middle Schools. As part of the RFP the district and community partners will learn together about teaching families high impact home strategies to support student learning.
March		
3/2/16	Pilot: Community Organizing and High Impact Home Strategies	Working with the POE and a non-profit community organizer focused on Crawford Cluster, we train family leaders from many cultural communities. We teach a HIHS strategy to talk more with children at home to support student learning. We also teach a community organizing approach to share the strategy with other families.

3/8/16	DT: Training of 12 schools and 3 district departments	In a day long training, school teams learn how to implement DT at their own sites. POE leads DT process. Ninety people attend.
3/15/16	Present Systemic Approach to Superintendent	POE leads a presentation to the superintendent and chief of staff about the revised draft framework for a systemic approach to family engagement.
3/19/16	DT: LCAP Feedback	POE independently leads DT for the LCAP feedback session.
April		
4/26/16	Board Presentation: Systemic Approach	POE and I will present a reading of the revised SUDSD Framework for Systemic Family Engagement

Terms

- POE: Parent Outreach and Engagement Department
- DT: Design Thinking
- LCAP: Local Control Accountability Program, the required California Statewide process where stakeholders give the district feedback on its vision and goals

Some of the key events in the project timeline, such as Design Thinking in Crawford Cluster, will be described in greater detail in the following section. I want to ensure any leader hoping to replicate the process might be able to do so through this detailed description. In less detail, I describe a subsequent Design Thinking Event implemented through the Association of African American Educators (AAAE). This event highlights key learnings about Design Thinking and suggests that the first implementation in Crawford Cluster wasn't a fluke event, but that the process offers a potential contribution to the systemic approach.

With the work transpiring at two levels, I will also describe a key incident ignited by the Resolution for National Family Involvement Day. This and other similar events provide critical data for the adaptive work related to taking a systemic approach to family engagement. Similarly, my presentation to the board about the systemic approach, again, offers critical data on adaptive challenges in the system.

Design Thinking: Creating A Temporary Holding Environment

Early on, I knew we needed to make a big splash to garner attention, and more importantly, gain traction with an early success at family and community engagement. I developed a team, Team Family for Equity, a group composed of cross departmental district staff to join me in leading a systemic approach to family engagement. I shared with them a simple purpose for our work, developing systemic family engagement to support student learning, and invited each member through a one-to-one conversation. I often used my own personal realizations about the power of family engagement as a means to tip them in favor of coming on board, though was very clear, they were not required to do so. In addition to district staff, I also included a non-profit community organization, the Crawford Community Connection, known for doing strong work with families.

Initially, we considered drawing stakeholders from across SDUSD for Design Thinking, but I thought better of it as I began planning. To create a critical mass of stakeholders sufficiently invested in the work to carry it forward, I decided to localize the initial work in one cluster, rather than engage with a smattering of stakeholders dispersed across the District's 189 schools and sixteen clusters. Furthermore, we would launch in one of five priority clusters¹¹. Collectively the priority clusters enroll 52% of the district's student population and have historically underperformed in comparison to other clusters. I elected to work with the Crawford Cluster because it was a priority cluster in high need with an area superintendent a year into the job, Fabiola Bagula, with the bandwidth and interest to take it on. She indicated some of her principals also had expressed motivation to improve family engagement, which suggested conditions more likely for success. For further context,

¹¹ Clusters encompass neighborhood schools in a region of San Diego, usually with elementary and middle schools that feed into a high school.

Crawford Cluster is composed of a collection of eight elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in the densely populated, low-income, immigrant and refugee community in City Heights, San Diego.

Building Capacity. Team Family then supported the Design Thinking process in Crawford Cluster. I trained ten members to facilitate small table groups of Design Thinking teams for the event. By taking Team Family through a scaled back version of the Design Thinking process described in the RKA, and reflecting together about what worked in the process, we together got ready over the course of two ninety minute meetings. In addition to getting them ready to lead, their feedback as participants, even in the abbreviated process while I trained them, was critical in helping us to identify, anticipate, and work through pitfalls in advance of the investment of 120 people on September 26th.

Inviting Staff and Recruiting Families. With hopes of building investment in family engagement, rather than mandating it, I made sure all communication to district and school staff about the event was a genuine invitation and completely voluntary. Two elementary schools, the middle and the high school in the cluster were invited by the area superintendent and agreed to recruit to the event five to ten family members, especially those who typically don't participate in the school. They also were asked to invite three to five teachers or staff members. We wanted a critical mass of families and school staff from a smaller group of schools to support carrying forward the ideas or prototypes coming out of Design Thinking. For the other six schools in the cluster, all of the principals attended.

To further raise the likelihood that the work we commenced with Design Thinking would gain momentum and attention moving forward at a systems level, I also strategically invited district and community participants beyond school site teachers and principals who could support the future process. I selected participants in the following order:

- Educators, family members and community partners who would do the work of family engagement in Crawford Cluster
- District staff whose work most directly relates to family engagement
- District, Family, and Community Leaders who might create political will or themselves engage in the process in the future

The community organizer, Daniel Nyamangah, from Crawford Community

Collaborative, a nonprofit family center in the cluster, turned out to be critical in recruiting families to join us for the event. Two of the four schools specifically asked to bring families were led by newly hired principals in those schools, and thus these leaders had few connections to draw upon for recruitment. On the other hand, Nyamangah, funded by Say San Diego, a philanthropic organization, promised he could get families out for the Saturday event. Indeed, he did. With experience community organizing in Kenya, Nyamangah had worked for two and a half years tapping into and building connections to the Karen, Somali-Bantu, Somali, and Latino communities. We largely stood on the shoulders of Nyamangah's work when it came to successfully bringing out families whose voices typically are not heard in the school system.

Sufficient translation services proved to be one of the biggest hurdles to planning for Design Thinking, but in the end, this challenge led to an impactful shift in the process. In a typical version of Design Thinking, we would interview, individually, each of the families. However, SDUSD translation services are sorely underfunded and have limited translators available for Spanish and Vietnamese and none for Karen, Kizigua, or Swahili. At the advising of Nyamangah, I decided to use a focus group approach to the listening, or empathy building portion of Design Thinking. For example, Somali families could speak to each other in Somali, while sitting in a circle, with one translator who could translate from Somali into English. The rest of the room would wear headsets and listen in either English, or for families speaking a language other than English or Somali, another translator would

translate from English into their native language, Karen, for example. Nyamangah, offering another key insight, indicated the communal approach would draw out family members to speak more than if they were put on the spot through one-on-one interviews.

Design Thinking in Crawford Cluster. At 7:15 am on the morning of the event, five members of Team Family for Equity greeted me to finalize set up. The room came alive with the happy buzz of a community saying hello to itself as teachers, principals, families, community members, and district staff arrived. Bagula, Nyamangah, and I shared the large group facilitation, while Team Family worked with teams at their tables for small group work. Bagula began by highlighting our shared common purpose to support student learning and then engaged in large group introductions grounded in gratitude for the collective community. Our intention was to start to level the power dynamics in the room, by downplaying the district hierarchy, while also connecting all stakeholders to a shared common value: supporting student learning (Table 7). In addition to what is below, each person at their table shared a greeting typically offered in their family or community.

Table 7: Community Introductions

<p>It is in the collective that we are powerful for student learning. This is in the room with us today.</p> <p>Students, please stand. You are brilliant. Look around. You are surrounded by a community who wants you to succeed and will support your learning. Thank you for being here today to support not just your own learning but the learning all students</p> <p>Family members, please stand. Thank you for entrusting us with your child's learning. Your love and sacrifice for your children means a better future for them and for all of us. Look around, there are many, many adults here to partner with you for your child's success.</p> <p>Teachers and principals please stand. Thank you for your commitment to each and every student's learning. Look around the room. You make a difference for all of the families and students here as well as those who have come before. 100's of people's lives are impacted by your work. Thank you.</p>
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Community partners please stand. Your work supports us to become a more thriving community. You surround schools and families with your powerful work. Look around, you make a difference for so many of us.

District staff please stand. You work to support student learning every day, but don't always get to sit at the table with the people you serve. Look around. Your work matters in this community. Thank you for your support.

Central to the day was our Design Question: “How might we design a better way for families, educators, and community partners to support student learning, together?” I introduced the question, and then we watched a two-minute film clip that runs through the process of Design Thinking with further explanation from me. I also “taught” some of the research on family engagement as shown in Table 8. Using inquiry-based, interactive strategies, I highlighted the following concepts, using a variety of facilitation approaches. At several points, we also engaged in large group discussion.

Table 8: Opening Facilitation Strategies during Design Thinking

Concept	Facilitation
Positive impact of family and community engagement on student learning, grades, attendance, behavior, college enrollment, and life outcomes	Rhetorical Question to Whole Group: Do we care about these measures as families, as educators, as community? Then show key aspects of the research
<p>Surfacing people’s own ideas and knowledge about family and community engagement</p> <p>Debunking the myth that engagement only entails volunteering or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)</p>	<p>Instructions to brainstorm at tables: Why is family, educator, and community engagement important for student learning? Why might it be challenging? What works? What do you mean by “family engagement”?</p> <p>Large group discussion: What is family engagement?</p> <p>Question to large group: For an individual family, which kinds of involvement will improve their child’s learning and academic performance?</p> <p>At tables, sort different kinds of family engagement listed on pieces of paper into</p>

	two piles: those that most impact student learning versus not
There are developmentally appropriate approaches to family engagement and offered examples	Image on screen of students at different ages from infancy to high school. List of examples of developmentally appropriate engagement from the research.
80% of children’s waking hours annually are spent outside of school, so connecting them to learning anywhere, anytime, matters	As a room, guess what these numbers mean: 6,000, 1,000, 5,000? Then, reveal percent of annual waking hours spent outside of school as 80%.
We each have certain mindsets or beliefs which may get in the way of successfully supporting student learning together	Personal stories from Bagula and a principal about how this is true in their own culture or in their work as educators

Listening to Users: Empathy-Building. It was like magic. We listened to families in Crawford Cluster, and for many educators, it was the first time they had a chance to hear from their families. We heard their vivid challenges with communication with the school due to language barriers and insufficient translation. We heard how they didn’t understand a report card. We heard about negotiating enrollment and concerns about their children. We heard about teachers that supported and hindered their hopes for their children having better lives than theirs. One large group of participants listened to three language groups, in sessions of about 25 minutes each, while families spoke in their native languages: Kizigua, Karen, and English. The other room listened to families in Spanish and Somali. Of note, there were no African American families and only one Vietnamese family, which is likely the case because Nyamangah, the community organizer had stronger connections to the former communities. After the fishbowl discussions, educators and community partners had a few minutes to write about what they learned from families and reflect a few of these ideas back

to them. The room was attentive and people spoke with emotion and meaning. Some educators expressed gratitude for understanding where families were coming from.

Ideation & Prototyping. After lunch, at tables of between 7-15 people, facilitated by Team Family, diverse teams inclusive of families, students, educators, districts staff, and community partners engaged in developing an empathy map capturing the patterns they heard from families, the ideation process, reframing the problem to solve, and finally, building prototypes. As a former instructional leader, gazing around the room, I gauged about 95% deep engagement in the work. The teams were lively and taking charge of the process and the discussions focused on the purpose. As the day evolved, the feel of a community taking charge of itself continued to grow. Bagula shared that day, “They have solutions I never would have or even have considered” (F. Bagula, personal communication, October 9, 2015).

Presentation of Prototypes & Commitments. The small teams presented to all participants their prototypes in five minute presentations during which they described the design challenge for which they were solving, the solutions to the challenge, and the pros and cons of their idea. After all of the presentations, everyone had three stickers to put next to the ideas on posters that most resonated with them. The prototypes that resonated for the community mainly centered around improving communication between home and school, especially as it related to translation, as well as developing greater celebration and awareness for the diversity in the Crawford Cluster. There were 10 teams that presented. The prototypes receiving the most sticker votes are below in Figures 4-7.

Figure 4: Prototype 1

How might we create a systematic system that supports both translation and communication needs?

- 1) Create a network of translators
- 2) Pre-recorded messages by phone in native language
- 3) Partnering with community organizations to provide support for school connections
- 4) Every cluster has a team of interpreters

Figure 5: Prototype 2

How might we increase cultural understanding and pride among students, families and staff?

Idea: Cultural Center: Welcoming, Decorated, Place of Celebration, Place for Learning and Resources

- Centralized location where the family can get support and resources
- Importance of volunteer recognition
- Cultural fair put on by the community rather than teachers and administrators
- Strong Foundation for the center: students, staff, and community

Benefits: School becomes a more welcoming place. Less bullying due to lack of cultural understanding builds a sense of pride and school culture

Drawbacks: Time, Money, Energy

What will be different? Instead of culture being seen as a holiday celebrated a few days a year it will be all year long.

Figure 6: Prototype 3

How might we design a better way to communicate with a culturally diverse population?

Challenges:

- 1) Meetings without interpretation
- 2) Not understanding directions for homework
- 3) Not understanding the school system

Solutions:

- 1) Schools send out communication to families weekly at a particular time with a reading for families that is translated that gives them a conversation to be had about school with students at home.
- 2) Quick Connect: Families know a weekly time they can come to the school site before school to talk with staff and translators will be present
- 3) Moments in time when we can celebrate families, and send communication in multiple forms that is translatable.
- 4) Toolbox on the web site with a menu of support services for all families translated into all languages

Figure 7: Prototype 4

Design Challenge: How might we maximize our new technology to systematically improve interpretation so all schools and families can easily communicate?

Why? Improving communication between home and school because it's a basic human need to be understood. And it's important that our parents are able to communicate about their children because they are most precious commodity.

Idea: Train families in a translation application with the new 1-1 technology by first having students trained to use the application with their teachers. Also invite community groups to be onsite at the training so that resources such as tutoring or health clinics would be available at the same time. The families work in small groups in their primary language. At the training, everyone would receive a certificate of appreciation to show appreciation for them coming.

Benefits:

- 1) Improve access to translation and communication
- 2) Have the text in their own language as well as voice activation

Drawbacks:

- 1) Don't lose the human connection through technology
- 2) Technical support at home

What will be different?

Shift in the way we communicate during the 21st century, using the device, though will still have the human contact through the training. It's about making families comfortable with the device in their home.

Finally, they had a chance to commit to next steps including:

1. ***Join a smaller team to plan for the next Cluster meeting.*** This option was two days later on September 28, 2015.
2. ***Attend the next Cluster meeting to give feedback on next steps.*** This option would support implementation of the selected prototypes and took place on October 12, 2015.
3. ***Build and share ideas with family, community, and educators in my school.***

Effects of Crawford Cluster Design Thinking. After Design Thinking on September 26, 2015, work on the prototypes continued to unfold in the Crawford Cluster. I

worked with Area Superintendent Bagula to conceptualize the next steps in the planning process, and she in turn, worked with the principals and the small team that committed to the planning. The next Crawford Cluster Meeting was radically different in attendance and process. First, 60 people attended, whereas typically, only 5-10 attend. According to Bagula, the principals owned the facilitation in a way that was different than usual and wanted to begin by asking families what they wanted to talk about in cluster meetings. This was followed by a process to consider next steps in the implementation of the ideas generated during Design Thinking. The room elected to focus on a cultural center. The middle school principal volunteered to spearhead this process with families. They also decided to work on a training for families on the technology to improve communication and translation for families. A month later, a training was held, but as of now, the technology has not been given to the families.

Also important, a few weeks later, the SDUSD Board of Education also approved significant funds for translation. Although this funding had already been recommended, its approval had stalled, according to the Executive Director of Communications at the time. She indicated the Design Thinking process was influential in accelerating the approval of the funding for more translators.

Design Thinking: Different Cluster, Different Context, Similar Results

A salient opportunity arose to revise and implement Design Thinking in another context. The Association for African American Educators (AAAE), a team of community members, retired educators, and current school and district staff developed a “Blueprint” in 2013 for how to support the education of African and African American students. This plan was adopted by the district and the board, and after a year of unsuccessful implementation endeavors, they established working committees to support taking action. With my

influence, the parent engagement group elected to do Design Thinking to work on Blueprint implementation of family engagement. Specifically, we also made a decision to begin a pilot in the Lincoln Cluster, another priority cluster.

This time, my intention was also to build the capacity of someone else to lead this work. Each step of the way, I supported a former principal, Gretchen Rhoads, a member of Team Family, to lead the work. I wanted to understand what it would take to prepare someone else to lead the process in order to build a future training for more stakeholders to become lead facilitators. Rhoads and I planned for Design Thinking together with other members of the committee; this time, specifically to address the experiences of African and African American students. In the context of the AAAE, Design Thinking would be highly outside of the norms and expectations for what typically transpires in meetings dominated by presentations with minimal interaction or collaboration. Resistance to Design Thinking came from the president of AAAE, who felt we should have done Design Thinking with schools in advance and then reported to the group. On the other hand, the general tenor of the committee leading the work was one of hope and excitement, as well as ownership for success of the process.

We significantly modified the Design Thinking process from six hours to insert it into one hour and fifteen minutes. Of note, we removed:

- Reframing the design challenge
- Introductions
- Norms
- Personal storytelling about mindsets and beliefs
- Participants sharing what they know about family engagement
- Table level practice for ideation
- Eating together

On the evening of Design Thinking at AAAE, I engaged as a table facilitator, while Rhoads facilitated the large room of 60 people and moved them through the process. The

principals from the Lincoln Cluster were all present and some of them had brought teachers and families. The majority of the room, however, was composed of the regular AAAE attendees who are, again district staff and community members, with most of the community members being African American.

Systems Work: National Parent Involvement Day

When the superintendent asked me to update an annual Board Resolution for National Parent Involvement Day based on the systemic work I was doing, she and I discussed that it would be an opportunity to build awareness for family engagement and highlight Design Thinking as a powerful tool. She indicated it was one of those perfunctory resolutions that they passed every year, without much meaning. What we didn't know was the PTA and the Parent Outreach and Engagement Department had engaged in grassroots efforts to initiate the resolution three years earlier, before Marten became superintendent. So, when I proposed shifting the language from National Parent Involvement Day to National Family Involvement Day, as well as building in statements about systemic work, the president of the PTA Council of 80 PTA's in the district indicated we would have to postpone the resolution until her Council could offer feedback and approve it.

With revisions to the resolution as our first conversation, my introduction to the PTA was not positive, but I saw it as an opportunity to build a bridge to close to 80 PTA's in the city. I met with the president and vice president, apologizing for not seeking their input sooner. I explained my intentions were to support a systemic approach to family engagement, for each and every family, and the reasoning behind a language change from "Parent" to "Family." I also listened extensively about their work, asking lots of questions. We shared a common commitment to advocate for children and families. We revised the resolution together, and I incorporated every one of their suggested revisions. A week later,

the three of us met again to brainstorm a means for collaborating further. We agreed on a date in December, where I could take those interested PTA leaders through a process to consider how they might shift their work to include family engagement focused on student learning. They indicated much of the work of the PTA at school sites had been about planning events, fundraising, and volunteering. The council trained chapter leaders and advocated within the district and at the state level.

I was ecstatic that a conflict had led to such a fruitful collaboration, but I spoke to soon. The day of the board meeting, I received an email from the PTA President regarding a PowerPoint to accompany speakers from the Crawford Cluster that contained three slides with photos of the families and educators during Design Thinking in the Crawford Cluster. The email addressed to the superintendent, executive director of communications, PTA vice president, and other board related officials suggested that the PTA was uncomfortable with “singling out a cluster” since National Parent Involvement Day was about celebrating the work of family members to help school sites. Baffled by this email in the moment, I spoke directly to the president by phone. I agreed to remove the slides, though pushed back for a moment, indicating we had taken out any reference to the Crawford Cluster in the Resolution.

The Family Engagement Resolution turned out to be a huge win for Design Thinking, the Crawford Cluster, and laying a foundation for a systemic approach, while disastrous for my relationship with the PTA. It turned out that the board didn’t even read the Resolution aloud, as they usually do, and instead got confused about the order of speakers for several minutes which made it seem as if the president and other PTA member were not welcome to speak. They did indeed speak, though without any verbal response from the board. Then two principals, two teachers, and two family members from Crawford

Cluster drew applause and captivated the board and the superintendent. All of them expressed support for Design Thinking for fifteen minutes, while the superintendent indicated how important it was to update the resolution and family engagement “because the definition of insanity is doing the same things and expecting different results” (C. Marten, personal communication, Nov 10, 2015). She also asked me if I wanted to speak and I shook my head “no” from where I sat in the audience. Somewhere in the middle of the board talking, the PTA members walked out of the boardroom. By the morning, I had received an email from the PTA President disinviting me to work with the PTA leaders, because their meeting agenda was now “impacted.” In the analysis section, I will discuss this further. But this was one of many occasions when I, inadvertently, offended parent leaders or other district leadership who had already been working on family engagement.

Introducing the Systemic Approach to the SDUSD Board

For one week before a board meeting on December 8, 2015, I met with a variety of stakeholders including educators, family members, the superintendent, and board members. These were informal meetings during which I tested an emerging strategy for systemic family engagement involving: Design Thinking, Community Organizing and Building Networks, Top Strategies for Families at Home, as well as Data Collection. The ideas for the systemic approach arose from the learning we were doing about Design Thinking, the collaboration in Team Family where we were working on identifying a family engagement survey, and learning from researchers and practitioners in the field. How the emergent strategy came together was entirely my doing during Thanksgiving holiday. I invited the POE department to join the presentation after vetting it with the chief of staff and superintendent. Although this was still a week before the actual presentation, it was just one day before we needed to submit the PowerPoint for public posting and so most of it had been solidified. The POE

department program manager, now my co-presenter, did not receive this news well.

Unexpectedly, during our board presentation together, she indicated she and her district colleague had not been sufficiently included.

Before I get started I'm going to preface my piece of the presentation by saying in all fairness to the parent outreach and engagement department and to the parents who are actively engaged at their school sites, the parent outreach and engagement department was not made aware of this presentation, nor were we asked to contribute, until shortly before the final presentation documents were due to the board office. With that being said, I am presenting, for the most part, on the work of the district's parent and outreach engagement department, and I'll also talk about some of the other strengths as well (program manager, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

After she had presented the strengths of her department's work, the sixty-minute presentation I made included the following:

Figure 8: Board Presentation Outline

- Research on the power of family engagement
- POE department description of the strengths in their approaches
- Description of some of the adaptive challenges creating barriers to systemic family engagement
- Information about the process and outcomes of Design Thinking in Crawford Cluster and AAAE
- Presentation of a draft for a systemic approach

As part of the presentation I asked, *Why haven't we already figured out a systemic approach to family engagement?* I then encouraged people not to personalize the issue, or seek to blame individuals, but to know we are all a part of a system and that we need to shift the organizational conditions in our system so that we can better support all families. Then, using a framework taught to district staff and board members by the National Equity Project non-profit partner, I essentially outlined the adaptive challenges at hand. Figures 9-10 illustrate how I described the reasons why we might not currently have a systemic approach, including my own earlier misconceptions about the power of family engagement.

Figure 9: Potential Barriers to Family Engagement in Partnership

- Beliefs about whether it's their role to support learning or their own efficacy to do so
- Don't feel welcome, valued or included in the school
- Historical marginalization, feeling hopeless, lack of trust in school/district follow-through
- Fear of retribution against their child if they advocate
- Unaware of the community resources available to support student learning

Figure 10: Potential Barriers to Educator Engagement in Partnership

- Beliefs about:
 - Whether families are important partners
 - Whether families “care”
 - Additional work involved
- Threats to competence or status
- Not knowing how to do strong family engagement
- Influence of personal history with family and school partnerships
- Intimidated by families
- Unaware of the community resources available to support student learning

Following the description of the adaptive challenge, I made connections to Design Thinking, live and recorded testimonials and quotes from participants to show that Design Thinking begins to address some of the described barriers.

The response from the board and support from the superintendent were lengthy and largely positive. Public response to the presentation ranged from highly caustic and a personal attack on me and the superintendent, to two PTA members feeling insulted that the presentation suggested school governance and volunteering were not impactful on student learning.

Overall, however, the fundamental systemic strategy remained untouched by critique. The presentation consisted of an earlier iteration of the SDUSD Systemic Framework for Family Engagement explained at the beginning of this project description. Four of the five

board members expressed that the strategy presented resonated with the district vision. The fifth board member did not comment.

Collaboration with the Parent Outreach and Engagement (POE) Department

A significant portion of my work since February 2016 has been working to rebuild trust and collaboration with the POE Department. The program manager's statement at the board meeting clearly indicated they did not feel ownership over the draft of the systemic plan, a fact of which I was keenly aware. Furthermore, the district watchdog continued to accuse me of not consulting with the POE department, which was slowing any work I tried to accomplish.

The resolution process with the POE occurred over the course of a couple of months, beginning with a long listening session with them. I began the meeting by stating, "We have an incredible opportunity to do good work for families together, and I want to do this with you. I also know I have made mistakes and I want to be sure to address issues under the surface that might get in the way of us working together." Over time I became aware of the deep disrespect they felt, not only from me, but through the churn in district leadership and the general isolation of the department. I learned their department had never presented to the board, so my presentation of close to two hours, to which they weren't invited until the last minute, felt shocking and an affront to their work. I listened, apologized, and reiterated my commitment to families and students. I genuinely understood their perspective.

Over the course of several months we worked long hours on several projects together including the RFP for Title I middle schools and training the twelve schools in Design Thinking. At the superintendent's request, we revised the systemic framework for family engagement together, which the POE department presented to the superintendent

and chief of staff with conviction and details about implementation in March. Together, we will present a revised SDUSD Systemic Framework for Family Engagement to the board on April 26, 2016.

Results of Strategic Project

Organization of Results

The work of this strategic project unfolded on two levels and the results will be organized to reflect this. First through an analysis of reflections from families, community partners, educators, and district staff during the Crawford Cluster and Association of African American Educators (AAAE), I conclude Design Thinking creates an initial holding environment for some transition (Williams 2005) adaptive work to occur for educators, and some development (Williams, 2005) adaptive work to occur for families. The results on communities taking action together after Design Thinking are mixed. Then we rise to the systems level to consider how Design Thinking is functioning in the whole system, where demand, capacity, and implementation of the process, is building. In this case the results are both quantitative (numbers of requests, events, participants), and qualitative (data through emails, conversations, and meetings).

Second, I describe the results of my efforts to lead the activist and transition (Williams, 2005) adaptive work at the systems level to build a foundation for each and every family to be empowered to support their child's learning across the district. The early results (first six months) rest primarily on stakeholder response in board meetings to National Family Involvement Day Resolution on November 10, 2015 and Family and Community Engagement Update on December 8, 2015. The superintendent has committed to invest more in family engagement next year and board responses are positive. Later results show a shift in the willingness to invest in a systemic approach to family engagement from the superintendent and chief of staff. The results also show the POE department demonstrates commitment to leading the work moving forward.

Design Thinking Results

The results of Design Thinking demonstrate a promising approach to creating temporary holding environments for not just families, but educators and community partners as well. The process gives stakeholders an opportunity to problem-solve context specific challenges and face the reality of assumptions they may make about each other. For educators this is a particularly perspective-changing experience.

The results from two sessions of Design Thinking will be represented, first, the Crawford Cluster Design Thinking on September 26, 2015, and second, the session focused on the Lincoln Cluster implemented through the AAAE on November 16, 2015.

Initial, Temporary Holding Environment Generated by Design Thinking

A holding environment consists of the necessary conditions through which challenging adaptive work might unfold (Heifetz, 1994; Kahn, 2001). I posit families, educators, and community generally have insufficient holding environments to address adaptive work. In the RKA, I suggest several conditions might contribute to creating a holding environment including: focus on student learning, building relationships, collaboration and interaction, extension to the community, and development.

After the listening session with families at the Crawford Cluster Event, we asked all participants to write an anonymous reflection about what they had learned from families. Although intended for the educators and community partners to reflect back to families what they had learned, many families spontaneously also engaged in this process. I read all of the reflections and synthesized them into themes. The numbers below are approximations based upon discerning whether the reflection was written by an educator, community partner, or family member. The most prominent data relates to what it means for families to experience language barriers in relation to supporting their children at school.

Also significant are some realizations touching on assumptions educators might have about families. Twenty-one percent of educators or community members learned that parents want to be involved, while thirty-one percent recognize the need to address cultural competence and differences. Furthermore, some families indicate they learned parenting strategies, likely arising from the research presented. At the midway point of the Design Thinking day, these results suggest we were achieving substantial, focused attention on the challenges faced by families. This aligns with the leadership work associated with the activist (Williams, 2005) adaptive challenge. We were waking people up to the challenge and opportunity of addressing barriers to family engagement during this part of the process.

Table 9: Participant Written Reflections after Listening to Families for 90 minutes

Prompt: What did you learn from listening to families?			
Theme	All Respondents (n=47)	Educators or Community (n=28)	Family Members (n=14)
Learning parenting strategies to support student learning	15%%	0%	43%
Language barriers	56%	68%	36%
Recognize cultural differences; Need for cultural competency, or the value of diverse cultures	31%	32%	36%
Need to strengthen communication between families and school	25%	36%	7%
Parents want to be involved	13%	21%	0%

The dominant theme of the reflections from which this data is drawn relate to the language barriers families face. For example, one participant wrote,

“The need for translation services at each school site is a huge factor in parents feeling involved, and included in their child’s education. The message we send when we don’t have translation is that we don’t care enough to provide the support and resources to effectively communicate how individual children are doing and how families can help.”

Many responses from educators were emotionally charged and acknowledged they lacked understanding of families’ perspectives and realized, through the listening process that day, they were making assumptions about whether families cared about their children’s learning. The following participant also indicts the district for not providing resources; this also became another emerging theme.

I had no idea they didn’t even understand an “A” or “pass” or what a report card was. I’ve thought that more once: they parents don’t care, why should I break my neck for parents and kids that don’t care. I saw them through the lens of my personal experiences. English speaking, uneducated inner city parents are NOT what showed up here today and spoke. These parents are powerless. Their stories explicitly revealed the parents want to help, but can’t and that the kids have all the power. Too much power. Kids need guidance from knowledgeable adults, and everyone here wants to be that for our youth. They just can’t. Isn’t technology supposed to make things better? The district does a piss-poor job of utilizing its money and resources to support students in culturally diverse communities. Damn I have a lot of work to do (Crawford Cluster Design Thinking participant, September 26, 2015).

Family participants, on the other hand, were more likely to point out what they learned from the morning session focused on the research surrounding family engagement. For example, one family member wrote, “Importante: idiomas, importante que alga mas comunicacion con los padres y maestros, Leer y escribir con los ninos diarios, Los maestros trabajan mucho con ninos.”¹² Some non-native English speaking family members wrote reflections in English that lacked specificity, but others had a translator write their

¹² Translation: Important: languages, important to have more communication with parents and teachers, to read and write with children daily, The teachers work a lot with children.

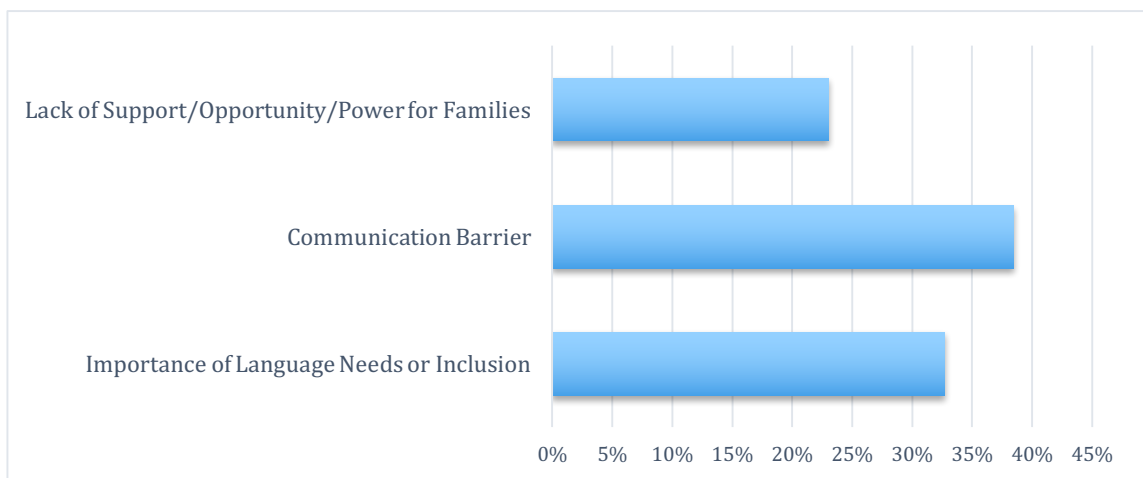
thoughts for them. Many indicated a desire for more learning. “I learning today to be strong parent. And be strong all the time. And I like to come to meeting and if they make us meet at least Ibarra School parent meeting please. Parent and teachers meet at least once months.”

Anonymous written reflections were completed by 52 participants (all of whom identified their role as Family Member, Community Partner, Principal, Teacher, District Staff, Student, or Other School Staff) at the conclusion of the event. Participants responded to three questions on a single sheet of paper.

- What did you learn today?
- What about today went well?
- What could be better? How?

I read the responses, first identifying themes and then counting the number of participants whose written reflection aligned with the themes. Overall, the data also show an initial holding environment was created and some adaptive work took place. The following themes arise for the group.

Figure 11. Participant Refelections: *What did you learn today?* (N=52)

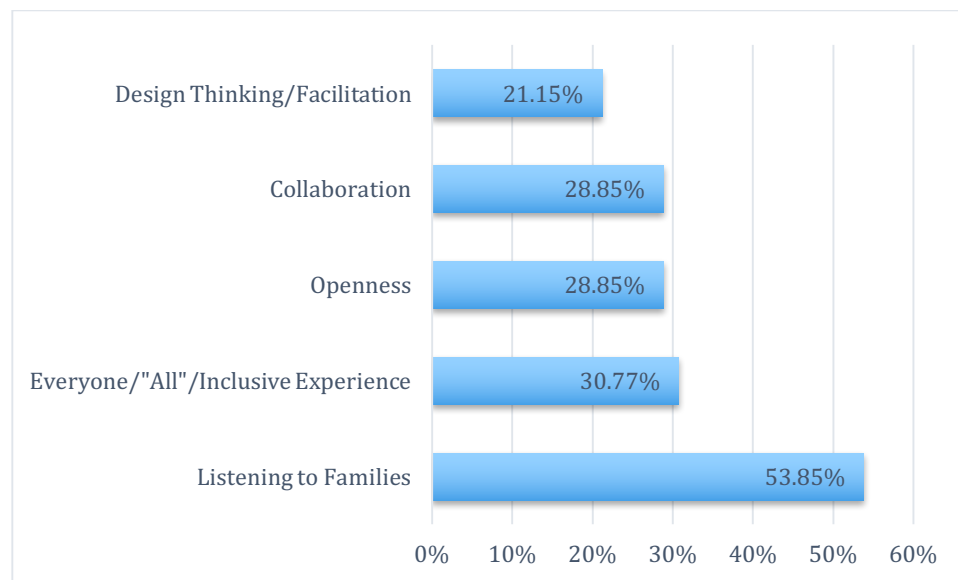


As I read the reflection forms, two other patterns emerged for non-family participants (educators, district staff, and community partners) in response to the question:

What did you learn, today? Twenty-nine percent of participants recognized, valued, or identified with the parents’ expressed emotions. For example, one teacher wrote, “Parents are just as frustrated as teachers with the difficulties we face regarding communication.” Another important pattern occurred in the nature of the language used to describe the experience. Forty-six percent of non-family participants effusively expressed the importance of what they learned in response to the question: *What did you learn today?* Examples of the language they used include: *importance, value of, huge factor, the power of, extreme need, or largest issue.*

The following graph shows participants’ responses to the Design Thinking process. As a reminder, the conditions we set forth for a holding environment include: focus on student learning, building relationships, collaboration and interaction, extension to the community, and development. The results are suggestive that relationships, collaboration and interaction, and some community was being built for some participants. The experience of listening also contributed greatly to a positive experience of the day.

Figure 12. All Participant Reflections: *What went well today?* (N=52)



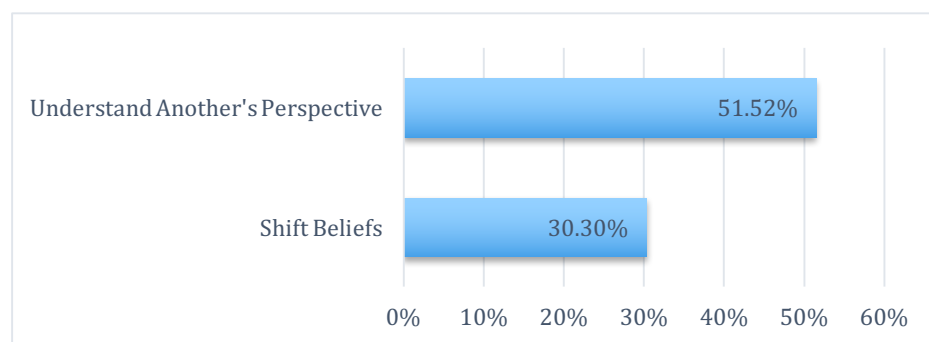
As indicated by the data, a common theme was value for listening to families. Many people indicated on their reflections not just that listening was important, but that they

valued sharing their perspective, too. Words like “honesty” and “authentic” were often used to go along with the themes related to collaboration, openness, and the inclusive nature of the work together. Additionally, many participants shared their own emotional experiences using words such as “heartbreaking” or “enjoyment.” One family member wrote, “Extremely happy and thankful to the teachers and principals who took the time to come up with ways/ideas to help us and our children.”

Participants engaged in initial, transition adaptive work.

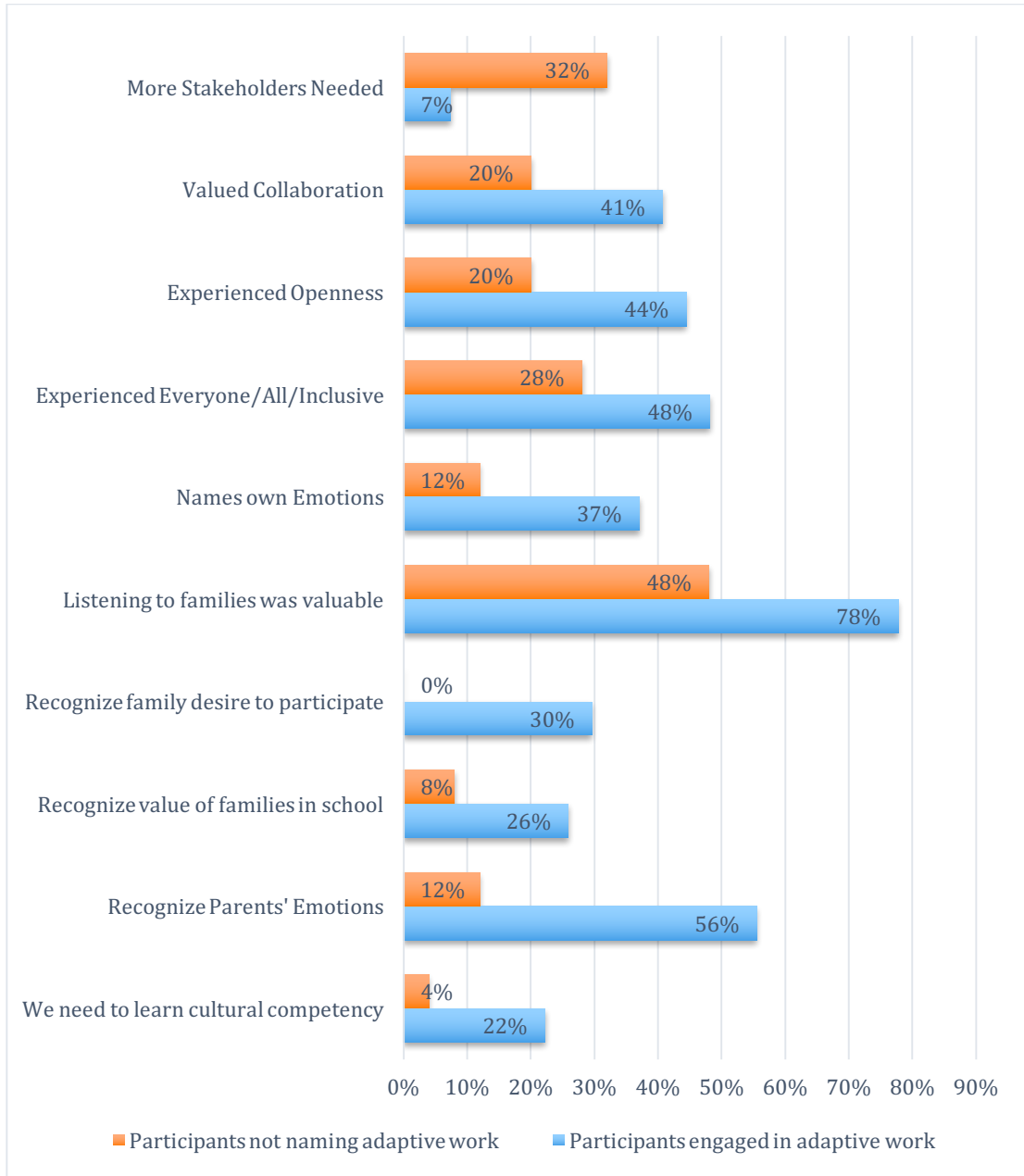
Two types of adaptive work associated with the transition challenge surfaced as themes in the reflections. A transition challenge consists of holding some values or mindsets that no longer serve a group of people and eventually involves arriving at a “new state of operating and refashioning of the values, loyalties, and mind-sets of the people” (Williams, 2005, p. 115). During Design Thinking participants engaged in initial examples of this adaptive work through understanding another’s perspective or a shift in beliefs. Many participants experienced more than one kind of adaptive work. **52% of all participants experienced at least one kind of adaptive work listed in the chart below.** This does not necessarily mean this work has a lasting effect, but during this Design Thinking session, participants showed evidence of initial work.

Figure 13: Participants Engaged in Early Adaptive Work (N=52)



There were also striking differences in the experience of the day between those who engaged in adaptive work as described above, versus those who did not.

Figure 14:
Differences Between Participants Engaged in Adaptive Work (n=27) and Participants Not Naming Adaptive Work (n=25)

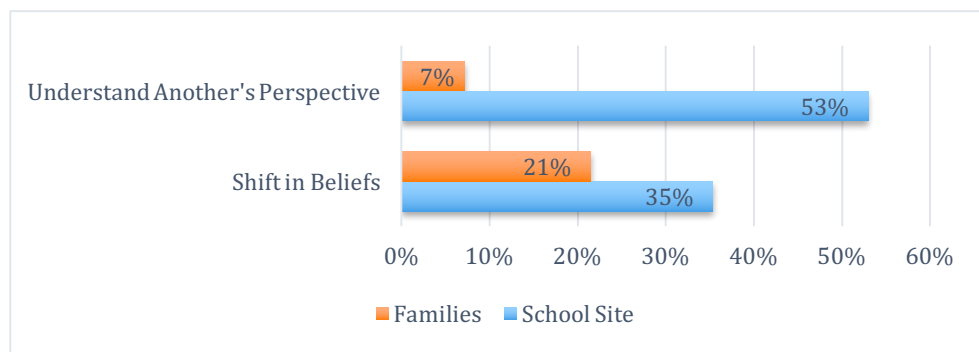


Those who engaged in initial adaptive work were more likely to recognize families' emotions, as well as their own emotions, and make note of the collaborative, open

environment, again, a beginning of a holding environment. Those who did not name an experience related to adaptive work still valued listening to families, while some may have needed more participants to be involved in the process to truly engage in initial adaptive work. The comments regarding what could be better were primarily about including more stakeholders, holding more meetings, or the day being too long. There were no other negative comments about the event.

Disaggregating the data shows some alignment and differences between how school site level educators and families engaged in the beginning of adaptive work. This is relevant since family engagement will likely take place in schools among families and educators, thus their different experiences with Design Thinking are enlightening. First, though not portrayed in the chart, families and educators shared a sense that collaboration, as well as the experience of everyone being together, the “all,” or collective, contributed to a valuable experience. Again, this suggests an initial holding environment established through relationships and collaboration. Though not noted in Figure 15, both groups also recognize communication barriers, as well as more specifically, the importance of translation and inclusiveness for limited English speakers. As shown in the Figure 15 below, almost all of the transition challenge adaptive work related to the educators in the room.

Figure 15: Comparison of Adaptive Work for School Site Educators (n=17) and Family Participants (n=14)



Though not noted in the above chart, 70% of families indicated they had engaged in learning during the process. Some examples of the learning they describe include: how the school system works, learning to support their child in school, the homework process, or how talking with their children about the future can help their academic success. Families were also more likely than site-level staff to refer to the nature of the temporary holding environment indicating openness, and everyone/inclusiveness as important to their experience. The presence of staff also mattered to them.

A survey of school site level educators *10 weeks after* Design Thinking in Crawford Cluster showed the experience was powerful but needs follow-up at the school site level. Educators reported the session helped them to better partner with families to support student learning (75%). One participant wrote, “I make it a personal goal each day to not be afraid or quick to pass up the opportunity to stop, smile, and chat with all my students’ parents whenever I see them, regardless of ‘stereotypical’ language barriers.” Eighty-eight percent of educators reported the experience helped them to better understand the families at their school sites. Eighty-eight percent also reported the experience helped them to better understand the students they teach. Fifty-six percent indicated the experience led to action at their school site, while fifty percent indicated the experience improved cluster meetings. In comparison to other professional development, 56% indicated it was above average professional development, while 31% indicated it was in the top 10% of professional development in which they had ever engaged.

Table 10: Survey of All School Site Level Educator Participants 10 Weeks after Crawford Cluster Design Thinking 84% Response Rate (n=21)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
DT helped me get better at partnering with families to support student learning	4.8%	0	23.8%	47.6%	28.6%

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
DT helped me to better understand the families we serve at my school site	0	4.8%	9.5%	57.1%	28.6%
Listening to families during DT helps me to better understand my students	4.8%	0	9.5%	38.1%	47.6%
DT has let to action to improve family engagement at my school site	0	0	42.9%	47.6%	9.5%
Cluster meetings have improved since DT	4.8%	4.8%	38.1%	38.1%	14.3%
I have now used an aspect of DT in my own practice with colleagues or students	4.8%	4.8%	19%	61.9%	14.3%

In an open response question on the same survey, participants answered the question: Describe any specific shifts in practice for you, the school site, or the cluster as a result of Design Thinking. Nine participants responded to the question. Two indicated Design Thinking needed follow-up at the school site. One participant wrote, “This training seems like a good place to start and has a lot of potential. But it needs follow-up at the site.” Three described how the process helped them to better understand parents, as well as how to work them. For example, one participant reported, “The structured forum for parents to voice their needs, wants, and desires for the highest quality education for their children is a great shift for working with parents and families, the schools and communities as a whole.” While another commented, “As a cluster, this process has been able to place the emphasis more on the parents and deal with their concerns for their children’s learning or lack of learning, the safety of the schools and the higher education opportunities for all their children.” In addition to the preceding comment, one other participant described the work in the cluster. Finally, one participant mentioned the importance of working with the Ballard Parent Center (POE) department to support Karen families.

Finally, district staff also represent another kind of experience of Design Thinking in Crawford Cluster. District staff had the highest percentage of any group who mentioned the value of listening to families (82%) and the importance of building relationships (45%). With respect to adaptive work, no district staff experienced a shift in beliefs, but 36% described understanding another’s perspective.

Commitments to Next Steps

At the conclusion of the Design Thinking Event, participants were given an opportunity to complete commitment forms. It’s worth noting here that instructions for these forms came as many people needed to leave at the end of the day, so it’s possible the numbers would otherwise be larger. In fact, the subsequent meetings to which people committed showed much larger attendance than what is listed below. Sixty people attended the cluster meeting on 10/12 and fifteen people attended the planning meeting beforehand.

Table 11: Participant Commitments to Next Steps at Crawford Cluster Design Thinking

Commitment	Number of Participants
Yes! I want to be a part of a smaller team to work on refining the ideas presented today and sharing proposals with the cluster on 10/12.	10
Yes! I will attend the cluster meeting on 10/12 to give feedback on next steps	17
Yes! I want to build and share these ideas with family, community, and educators in the school.	16
No, I will not be participating in next steps	1

Lincoln Cluster Design Thinking

The results of another iteration of Design Thinking in the Lincoln Cluster through the Association of African American Educators (AAAE) share similarities and demonstrate

differences from the Design Thinking implementation in the Crawford Cluster. Participants from the Lincoln Cluster and the AAAE responded to the same reflection questions used in the Crawford Cluster. In the second iteration of Design Thinking, participants valued hearing from families. Fifty-four percent of the total 41 reflection respondents indicated they valued families' voices in the process. Twenty-four percent indicated they valued collaboration during Design Thinking. Beyond this, unlike in the Crawford Cluster, there was no other consensus on what they were learning, or what went well. However, thirty-four percent of participants did indicate they wanted more families to be present. There were ten family members at the meeting.

Table 12:
Participant Commitments to Next Steps at Lincoln Cluster Design Thinking (N=41)

Support next Lincoln Cluster Meeting	56%
Support ideas at school site	73%
Join the team working on Family Engagement in AAAE	32%
Other	24%

Although many participants expressed commitment, the next cluster meeting did not expand in numbers as much as it had in the Crawford Cluster. The Lincoln area superintendent and I met with the principals to discuss implementing Design Thinking at their school sites. In a different room, families and community partners learned Design Thinking table level facilitation. The conversation with the principals did not go as planned. In the session with the area superintendent and me, several principals indicated they would rather focus on cluster collaboration around articulation of programs across the schools in an effort to keep more families in the Lincoln Cluster, since a significant percentage leave the cluster to attend charters or other district schools beginning in middle school. The principals proposed this focus instead of collaborating to engage families to support student learning. On the other hand, families and community partners reported readiness to engage

in Design Thinking at school sites after the table level facilitation training they received on the same evening.

Design Thinking Builds a Bridge to the Systems Level

Almost immediately after the Design Thinking Event, I started to notice the effects of the Crawford Cluster Design Thinking event beyond the level of the cluster. The District Communications office asked me to write an article about it. The superintendent called me in the evening on the day of the event, apologizing for not being there, and indicating she wanted to highlight the work at an upcoming board presentation. A parent leader from the Cluster Congress who had attended the event sent an email expressing how impressed he was by the process, “First, I wanted to thank you for inviting me to the meeting. I must say I came away very impressed and, needing a boost, was inspired. Thank you for that alone.” (M. Snyder, personal communication, September 29, 2015) I also presented to the instructional cabinet about family engagement.

Over time, the interest in Design Thinking increased, the capacity of people to lead it has grown, and the initiation of using the process has begun to shift from me to other district leaders.

Table 13: Design Thinking Participation Rates in SDUSD

Event	Participants	Table Facilitators Trained	Date	Initiator
Design Thinking: Crawford Cluster	120	10	9/26/15	Allison Rowland
Design Thinking for Lincoln Cluster in the Association of African American Educators (AAAE)	60	8	11/17/15	Allison Rowland
Design Thinking for	60	8	1/23/16	Allison

Event	Participants	Table Facilitators Trained	Date	Initiator
LCAP Feedback Session on Family Engagement			3/19/16	Rowland
Design Thinking in Clairemont Cluster	50	5	1/13/16 & 2/10/16	Area Superintendent
Design Thinking Training for Principals, Community Members, & District Staff	75	75	3/8/16	Allison Rowland
Design Thinking at Grad Nation	200	20	9/2016	Executive Director for Secondary Education

Systems Level Work

In this section, the results will be represented as themes occurring in response to the systemic work to address the activist and transition challenges at the systems level. The responses at the systems level to two events will be considered, the first being the board resolution to recognize National Family Engagement Day and the other the presentation to the board regarding the systemic approach to family engagement presented on December 8, 2016.

Board Resolution: National Family Involvement Day

During the discussion of the board resolution for National Family Involvement Day, several important perspectives were represented during the public comment. First, the PTA and district watchdog felt the intention of the resolution was political and coopted by the district for their own purposes. Crawford Cluster stakeholders on the other hand voiced appreciation and hope as a result of the Design Thinking process. The board and Superintendent the superintendent then showed excitement about the work of Design Thinking.

Before the resolution came up on the agenda, a district watchdog first questions the politics behind the resolution.

This timing is political and nothing else, it doesn't belong on the agenda today. It's confusing. The agenda item states it's a resolution, but it's truly not. Is this the National Family Day? Is it a PTA recognition? Is this a Crawford Parents' Day? What is this really about? I think it's just more sneaky, sneak from the school district and its politicking behind the scenes... (community member, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Once the presentation of the resolution began, two themes arose that explain part of the community member's confusion. First, the PTA spoke to the resolution as grounded in a grassroots effort, initiated four years earlier, to recognize volunteers and family members to support children. The president of the PTA called these volunteers the "unsung heroes" who are supporting children. She was followed by a longtime member of the PTA Council, who like the district watchdog had an underlying message that the district was coopting the purpose of the Resolution for its own political purpose, rather than to recognize those families and volunteers serving schools. She referred to the original goal for National Parent Involvement Day four years earlier, "It was our intention to partner with the district schools to recognize all things, big or small, that parents and caretakers do every day to make our students successful, and we didn't care if you were a PTA or foundation or even if you didn't have an organized parent group, this was about the schools and the parents" (PTA council member, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

The families and the principals who spoke from the Crawford Cluster during public comment spoke about their experience with Design Thinking that aligned with much of what we heard in the surveys. One principal said,

We were able to engage in an authentic dialogue, to kind of come up with a vision of how we could we work together, and so it was really a way for us to build trust, a way for us to erase the titles, our job titles, the titles of whether we're high school, middle school, elementary school, whether we're a parent, teacher, student, community member, administrator, whether we're from Crawford, Mann, or Ibarra.

It was a way for us to get together and work collaboratively, and so the final part of it was really about finding the voice (A. Teng, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Finally, the board and the superintendent responded to and eventually voted to approve the resolution. Board member Richard Barrera made several points in a long statement worthy of dissecting because his words demonstrated support for the systemic approach. It's immediately clear that the board has charged the superintendent with a systemic approach to family engagement. He acknowledges the work of the PTA but then moves to an aspirational systemic approach to family engagement. He expresses the disconnect between the activities some families can engage in volunteering while the majority may need a different kind of engagement.

I know this is for referring to National Family Involvement day, but we're talking about every day, and all parents having the ability to support their students in their process of learning. That's a massive task, and it goes well beyond anything that we typically think of as parent engagement. We're talking about more than parents participating in the governance, parents participating in activities at the schools, all of that is important. We'll want to continue to support that kind of work. But we also understand that at best 2%, 3%, of parents in this district are engaged in those type of activities. So what we're talking about is what happens with the 95%-97% of parents in our district who we all know are the key to making a difference in terms of whether students meet their academic goals (R. Barrera, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Barrera values the approach taken in the Crawford Cluster but also pushes for a more systemic strategy and speaks to the importance of hearing from family voices typically not heard.

The process that you've undertaken and the Crawford Cluster is part of our first attempt to develop a district-wide strategy, and it's so exciting to hear the way you're going about this because it's parents and teachers and principals and people within our district, but then it's also our community partners from San Diego. It's understanding that everybody has to come together to help design a strategy, and I'm especially grateful to hear that the process that you used is a process that engaged parents who normally are not engaged, who we normally don't see (R. Barrera, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

In addition to Barrera’s words, Board President Foster and Superintendent Marten spoke to the Resolution. Foster responded to the organic, grassroots, creative nature of Design Thinking, “You developed ideas and strategies on how to meet a need that perhaps the district isn't currently meeting that you developed with parents and community members among yourselves. That’s by design, right? So that’s very powerful” (M. Foster, personal communication, November 10, 2015). The superintendent also gave an indication SDUSD will be taking a more systemic approach, “And something happened in Crawford that we think signals all of the ways that we will be doing this. So the reason why we took the opportunity to talk about it tonight is it's an annual resolution the board has always done and we’re adding the thinking into it in how we’re planning to expand” (C. Marten, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

SDUSD Board Meeting December 8, 2015

On December 8, 2015, I presented to the board basic research on family engagement, the nature of the systemic challenges in SDUSD, and a draft of a systemic approach to family engagement. A program manager from the POE also joined me and shared the current strengths in the district.

Below in Tables 14-18 are the themes and supporting evidence from public comments.

Table 14: Theme I from Public Testimony

POE not included in the work, and it’s redundant with some of their existing work.
<p>PTA Council Member “It speaks volumes that the Parent Outreach and Engagement as a department is not funded to lead this work as they already have the connections with the parent communities all over the district and conduct ongoing parent education and empowerment workshops” (PTA council member, personal communication, December 8, 2015).</p> <p>District Watchdog</p>

“Well, Cindy Marten just let a steamroller flatten one of the best programs she’s got. I have never made a complaint about the Parent Engagement office, because they do great work” (S. Smith, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

President PTA Council

“What School Smart stands for is ultimately to get these parents to come up with an action plan that’s SMART-specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. So it kind of sounds a lot like Design Thinking and I’m a little bit confused about this approach because I feel like the answer’s kind of there. And I don’t feel like the resources are being utilized as well as they could be” (PTA council member, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Table 15: Theme II from Public Testimony

Why are we funding and listening to an outsider working on family engagement, when we already have the POE department, which has expertise and is also underfunded?

PTA Council Member

“It does bother me that the district needs an outside agent to listen to the parent leaders and that the district leaders, superintendent, area superintendents, board of ed members don’t listen as well. I’m not sure how Ms. Rowland is funded, I thought a grant, so obviously this is not important work or the district would have put real money into parent engagement” (PTA council member, December 8, 2015).

District Watchdog

“There is no direction, it is duplicative efforts. When parent involvement needed money, they found grants, for the Indian education program, for the Target program, they found the money. Team Family for Equity? A bunch of nonsense. You have ignored the educational professionals that know this district for a woman that admits that she has only been here a short time”(community member, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Table 16: Theme III from Public Testimony

How is Allison Funded? Is Cindy Marten going to reorganize the organization to get Allison a job? If Allison is funded through a grant, then it shows lack of value for the parent engagement office that actually needs funding.

District Watchdog

“She’s only been here a short time! And all of a sudden she knows San Diego Unified better than the employees that have been running the Ballard Center? That’s insane. What

are you thinking, Cindy Marten? What are you thinking? I know what you are thinking. You're thinking, I need another re-org because Allison needs a \$100,000 position. Because this whole thing was the Allison show” (community member, personal communication December 8, 2015).

“I’m not sure how Ms. Rowland is funded, I thought a grant, so obviously this is not important work or the district would have put real money into parent engagement” (S. Smith, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Table 17: Theme IV from Public Testimony

Slide 7 is insulting because it represents the district’s infuriating practice of not recognizing or valuing volunteers or parent contributions which we believe make a huge impact.

PTA Council Member

“On parent engagement slide 7 Ms. Rowland shows hubris so evident in this district. School governance is listed as not important to student learning and parent volunteers are not important to the education of the students at San Diego Unified” (PTA council member, December 8, 2015).

Active Parent from Northern San Diego

“Finally I too was stunned by slide 7 of the LCAP presentation where it specifically said volunteering and student government do not directly impact student learning. And I only say that I invite you to talk to parents where there is robust parent engagement about how we really do work with students. And there is that capacity, and I hope this isn’t reflective of how the district views parents because it was insulting to be honest, thank you” (parent, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Table 18: Theme V from Public Testimony

Allison gets it right when she says deep listening matters and the adaptive challenge at hand.

PTA Council Member

“Allison Rowland has interviewed many parent leaders in the district, and she’s distilled the problem down to two slides, 21 and 23, and they’re actually spot-on. This is not new information it just now has been put into a PowerPoint” (PTA council member, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

After public comment, the board members also had a chance to respond. Board member Barrera spoke first for several minutes. He reflected back the purpose of the presentation and its connection to a challenge they gave to the superintendent this year. It's important to note here that he does this directly following the public comment just described.

Let's keep our focus, which this presentation does, on the challenge that we're taking on. This is thousands and thousands and thousands of parents in this district, that because of the above the line and below the line issues Allison identified, are facing barriers to engaging and supporting their students learning. And yet we know, and everybody knows, all of the research for decades has identified parent support for student learning as critical. Yet we haven't taken that on at a significant scale and now we are. Then the first step is to identify exactly as this presentation did, what are the key challenges, why is it that we know that parent engagement and support of student learning is critical, but yet we haven't addressed it at a system level? (R. Barrera, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Another board member also responded, starting with acknowledging the PTA and the work already taking place in the district then moving to reflect back ideas about system level work to address more families.

I think the question is, how do we take the work to the next level, how do we identify those best practices, and amplify that system-wide. That's really the work and the conversation we're starting to have... Do we have a lot of parents involved now? Yes. Are there still a lot of parents that could be involved? Absolutely. I tend to think that we have a little bit of an iceberg in our school district, where you have a very small percentage of parents that are involved. And that's awesome, but how do we reach all of them underneath the iceberg, get those parents involved. And that's the conversation that I am glad we're having (K. Beiser, personal communication, December 12, 2015).

Other Relevant Results

In the winter and early spring, the work continued to unfold with more sessions of Design Thinking as well as a training for twelve school teams and members from four district departments to learn how to lead the process at their sites. Participants indicated the degree to which they were ready to lead implementation of Design Thinking: 67% indicated they were ready to implement at their school sites, 31% indicated they would be ready with

more practice, and 3% indicated they were not ready. However, it is unclear who and how many actually will.

We did analyses of potential surveys for family engagement and are currently piloting a connection between community organizing that already exists in the Crawford Cluster with the High Impact Home Strategies we have proposed through the systemic approach. Finally, through a Request for Proposal put forward by the district, we will be funding community partners to work with students and families in Title I Middle Schools, doing the quality work they already do, but also reinforcing the High Impact Home Strategies with families as part of the process. On a monthly basis, we will be pulling together the community partners to learn together about the successes and challenges of the implementation.

Finally, during a board meeting in the spring, in her overview of the budget, the superintendent indicated she would be investing more money in a systemic approach to family engagement.

Summary

To give a short overview, the results as aligned to the Theory of Action are presented here.

Table 19: Results Summary

Scale:

- 1-Unrealized or Unsuccessful
- 2-Early Stages or Minimally Positive Results
- 3-Currently Underway or Positive Results
- 4 Fully Implemented or Very Strong Results

If Allison...	
4	Pilots Design Thinking in multiple contexts

3	Design Thinking creates a holding environment to do adaptive work and take action together
3	At a systems level, addresses the activist and transition adaptive challenges

Then we will lay the foundation for taking a systemic approach to family engagement where each and every family is empowered to support their child's learning and life outcomes as measured by...	
3	<p>Demand and support for Design Thinking as a process to do adaptive work and take action together for families, educators, community partners, and district staff, as measured by...</p> <p>2 - Number of people who have experienced the process 2 - Number of requests to learn or use the process at all levels 4 - Number and political importance of anticipated events which will use the process 4 - Feedback on the process from those who have experienced it 1 - Number of stakeholders at every level trained to use the process at school site, cluster, District or community level</p>
3	Systemic plan that lays out a way to empower each and every family to support student learning
3	Board, superintendent, and chief of staff show public support for the systemic plan
3	Board, superintendent, chief of staff take action to invest in the resources, positions, and structures to carry the systemic plan forward as measured by the goals and associated resources in the LCAP Goal related to family engagement
3	<p>There exists a committed team such as the Parent Outreach and Engagement Department to support the plan moving forward as measured by:</p> <p>3 - Participation in decision-making meetings related to the plan 3 - Taking leadership in communicating and implementing the plan</p>

Analysis

The results show qualified success of Design Thinking at the localized level and, at the systems level, positive trends towards leadership for and investment of resources in the SDUSD Framework for Systemic Family Engagement. For this analysis, I return to the four types of adaptive challenges described in the Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), Activist, Transition, Creative, and Development (Williams, 2005). Each type of challenge demands a different kind of leadership (Williams, 2005) and can provide a lens through which to look at the results of our efforts to address each one.

Before diving into an analysis of each challenge, it's worth pointing out leading in the face of multiple kinds of adaptive work creates a conundrum for leadership. A mistake leaders make is applying the same leadership strategies, regardless of the type of adaptive challenge they encounter (Williams, 2005). Instead they must be flexible, "real leadership is fundamentally an interactive art, in which the leader is dancing with the context, the problem, the factions, and the objective" (Williams, 2005, p.218). The idea of a dance or of a practice feels much more resonant with my experience. I learned on the job, adjusted in the moment, changed strategies, and focused more in some areas than others.

Also recommended, even while doing the leadership dance, is getting clear about the most primary adaptive work to be accomplished (Williams, 2005). Williams (2005) recommends creating a "hierarchy of challenges" and then taking action according to the hierarchy. "The leader should give primacy to the intervention approach best suited to the *principal* challenge but have the flexibility to provide appropriate interventions for *subchallenges* and leadership tasks as they crop up. Therefore, in diagnosing the terrain, it is important to distinguish the overarching challenge from the many subchallenges and tasks that need to be addressed" (Williams, 2005, p. 218).

Though initially not conscious this was how I was operating, over time it became clear that the activist work of building attention, awareness, and appetite across the system for the power of family engagement was the key adaptive work to be done if we were going to lay a foundation for a systemic approach. Furthermore, intertwined with the activist work was transition work for educators and families to shift the values or beliefs acting as barriers to partnership for student learning.

The creative and development challenges were less of a priority because in many ways we have known solutions about how to train families to support student learning, or how to develop educators in the field of family engagement. The field has been studied for over forty years, and the POE has been at the work for more than thirty. The more primary adaptive work was to create attention for the value of family engagement and the conditions for shifting educators' and family's beliefs that created barriers to productive work. This is where I focused my energy and will describe the sometimes graceful, sometimes clunky dance associated with the process.

Activist Challenge

“The first challenge of leadership is to get people to wake up to the fact there is a problem—that the group is avoiding some aspect of reality, ignoring a threat, or missing a great opportunity” (Williams, 2005, p. 59). Upon my arrival in SDUSD my diagnosis of the system showed a lack of “ripeness” (Heifetz, 2009, p. 127), a ubiquitous demand and belief that family engagement in SDUSD should be a priority did not yet exist. The system was ignoring and marginalizing family engagement, cloistering it in a silo, in a department, separate from the organization of coherent district work around instruction. Therefore, at the systems level, the adaptive challenge is of the activist sort. There were two pieces to addressing this challenge. First we needed to get SDUSD, families, and community to pay

attention to family engagement. Then, either simultaneously, or subsequently, we also needed to cultivate a belief in all three groups that family engagement was valuable enough to make it a systemic priority.

After working on the instructional cabinet and engaging in Design Thinking, I realized the activist adaptive work facing educators was different for different people. One challenge was educators might not be aware of the potential power of family engagement. Another perspective held by educators was a conflict between theory and action: in theory family engagement was a priority, but in action they did not prioritize this work. Finally, another perspective some educators' held was that some families don't care about investing in their children's learning.

At a local level the results show Design Thinking provides a means for some activist adaptive work for educators. Through the process, educators hear and understand families' hopes for their children's education as well as the challenges they may face. Then, in the moment, they create a plan with them for how to address what they heard. Families, on the other hand, are already aware of the challenges, so do not engage in activist adaptive work, but are able to experience a temporary holding environment, inclusive of educators, to share their challenges. As the results also show, Design Thinking is slowly spreading and creating greater awareness for family engagement, generally.

Through interventions at the systems level, we have generated board, superintendent, and chief of staff support for the SDUSD Systemic Framework for Family Engagement. The activist work at the systems level took place primarily at board meetings (e.g. National Parent Involvement Day Resolution, 11/10/15) by bringing awareness to both the opportunity and some of the barriers to systemic family engagement. The controversy at board meetings produced added attention for family engagement, as challenging as it was in

other ways. We also built awareness for the power of family engagement through Design Thinking participation by systems level family and district leaders. They in turn became voices championing its importance. Finally, in other meetings with the superintendent strategy and instructional cabinets, I pointed out opportunities to address families' hopes and needs as leaders engaged in problem-solving or planning to meet the district vision overall.

Williams (2005) admonishes activist work is risky work. As I took on the activist challenge, the public heat I took showed this indeed to be true. Williams advises several strategies to take on activist work, risky as it may be. I will use the strategies as a means to understand how my work on the challenge led to the project results.

“Know what threat you represent to the people” (Williams, 2005, p. 87). The first step when facing an activist challenge is to understand the threat one poses to anticipate and navigate resistance (Williams, 2005, p. 87). At the local level with Design Thinking I accurately understood the threat I posed, while at the systems level, I was blind to it. Here I will describe both instances and explore why I missed the critical threat I represented at the systems level. In the discussion of missing the threat I posed to the POE department, I explore the deeper reasons why I got caught up in the nature of the system and realize it was less about threat to the department, and more about marginalization of the work they represent.

During Design Thinking in the Crawford Cluster, I anticipated the threat I could pose, successfully took steps to diminish that threat, and therefore, avoided people blocking or attempting to thwart the process. Before any of the work started, I knew I would be perceived as an outsider in the room. I neither come from San Diego, nor have I worked in SDUSD for more than a few months. My newness gained me little credit in a system where many educators retire after 30 years of service. Compounding the issue was the fact I didn't

work in Crawford Cluster. With this “new to the district” status, along with an association with the superintendent and/or a Harvard University, I could have been seen as a power-player forcing a process. Or, I could have been a threatening judge of the work already happening in schools. I could have been someone who would make rapid change to the way things have been done without regard for previous investment. For families marginalized by the school system and in this country, I might have been seen as a white woman simply assuming a position of authority by dint of the color of my skin, my socioeconomic class, or my role at the district, without any knowledge of their experience or needs, but with power to affect their children and schools they attend.

Therefore, during Design Thinking at Crawford Cluster I introduced myself as a former teacher and high school principal to start to gain informal authority with educators in the room. I made no mention of my connections to the superintendent or Harvard University. I relied on Area Superintendent Bagula and the community organizer, Nyamangah, to initiate the process and lead with me. They are consistent, trusted, respected leaders in the community, as well as people of color. Both were born in other countries like many of the families from the Crawford cluster. Therefore, I stepped back and supported from behind, especially at the opening when we were building trust in the room. When it was time for the listening session with families, though I was concerned about how the new process would go, I intentionally did not facilitate and instead supported Bagula and Nyamangah in doing so. Finally, steps in the Design Thinking process also served to diminish the threat I posed; the ideas bubbled up from participants as responses to community needs, rather than the district or school leaders mandating specific actions.

With each subsequent round of Design Thinking, I have made sure to consider the threat I represent to people. In the Association of African American Educators (AAAE)

and the Lincoln Cluster, with my very new presence in a highly political and established group not accustomed to a process like Design Thinking, I recruited Gretchen Rhoads to facilitate, someone with longtime relationships with the group. This supported an initially successful process. On the other hand, I failed to accurately realize the threat I might represent to the Lincoln principals when I met with them and the area superintendent to consider site-level Design Thinking as next steps. Here I made an error and threatened the ownership of their work and was associated with the formal authority of an area superintendent also new, also an outsider, also white. I also potentially faced an association with the AAAE group, new as I was, which has aimed to influence the Lincoln Cluster for a long time. Principals did not react positively and only those with whom I worked to build relationships more informally were later willing to be trained in Design Thinking.

Systems level activist work in SDUSD is a radically different context, and my mixed performance in “knowing the threat I represent to the people,” (Williams, 2005, p. 74), especially as it relates to the POE department and existing family leaders, created political bumps in the road. I should have been “anticipating group and factional reactions and forecasting possible resistance, apathy, and danger” (Williams, 2005, p. 75). Activist work can provoke people to face “new realities” and doing so can create strong self-protecting reactions. Not only did I miss this critical diagnosis once, but I missed it three times. I missed it even after I sought early on to know whom I would threaten. A district leader had already warned me longtime family leaders might be threatened by my work.

My first error: I didn’t understand why revising a seemingly perfunctory National Parent Involvement Day Resolution could generate such strong reactions, and when it did, I discounted it as something bizarre I couldn’t wrap my head around. With hindsight, I realize by making revisions, I posed a threat to the purpose and efforts that had gone into the

resolution years before. The POE department and PTA view the day as an accomplishment of grassroots efforts, so to change it from the top, was insulting. Furthermore, and more fundamentally, I was a threat to the PTA's longtime practice rooted in families contributing to the schools through volunteering.

My second error: I missed the threat I posed again, even after I rectified my initial threat to the PTA, during the presentation to the board about National Family Engagement Day. Irritated by being pressured into taking down the PowerPoint slides representing Design Thinking in the Crawford Cluster, I lost sight of my purpose, briefly, and instead became competitive. This kept me from seeing how in the moment I might have built a bridge to the PTA, instead of alienating them. When the superintendent asked me to speak on that evening, I might have gone up to the podium to highlight the historical efforts of the PTA to establish National Parent Involvement Day, celebrated them publicly, and laid the path forward for collaboration. This is not what happened. I justified remaining silent, thinking families' voices were enough. Then, when the PTA was clearly upset, I didn't want to call even more attention to my own work. My mistake was I didn't actually understand what the PTA cared about. They cared about recognition for their work and affirming volunteers. Staying silent didn't help; it only subtly showed my competitive spirit. Williams (2005) warns one's personal preference and habituated approach to leadership may impede the leadership work. For an activist challenge one way this might happen is through becoming "self-righteous about the cause and becoming an unrelenting an unthinking crusader who tries to force change" (Williams, 2005 p. 246). In the moment, not only was I personally annoyed and competitive but also wanted to accelerate my work. I likely pushed the PTA too fast. Once I became grounded again, I came to better understand how I got stuck on the dance floor rather than stepping up to the balcony (Heifetz, 1994).

My third error: For the first five months of residency, I also failed to fully comprehend the threat I might be to the status of the POE department. Initially, I didn't appear to pose a threat; they were supportive and working alongside me to plan for the Crawford Design Thinking process. I also genuinely acknowledged their expertise, built relationships, and was unconcerned generally since our collaboration seemed productive. Even more important, the program manager had communicated a desire to make family engagement more systemic, so I thought I was on stable footing.

However, when I made the presentation about family engagement to the board, without adequately including them in leading the systemic approach, I posed a threat to their status as longtime experts dedicated to their work. I better understand the history behind this now. In the past during superintendents' tenures with a singular focus on instruction, there's no incentive for schools to take on family engagement, nor is it supported. Busy principals may lack the knowledge for how to do family engagement, and may even risk their reputation if it goes awry by generating critique from families. During the last twenty-seven years and many superintendents' tenures, the POE department has lacked a systemic way to build family or staff capacity to support family engagement. In fact, the POE has been valiantly working to bolster families' needs, despite this context, relying primarily on their relationships with principals to gain access to the schools. They have done so in alliance with the PTA and other family leaders.

The threat to their status became immediately apparent in the program manager's statement, where she publicly castigated me at a board meeting for not including the POE department in the preparation or content of the presentation. She made the statement to families and the rest of the department who were likely wondering why the POE department would not be making the bulk of the presentation. Even though I had apologized for my

misstep and worked hard to include her in the presentation, it was not enough to combat the deep history of isolation the POE department has felt in the district.

The subsequent public testimonies turned up the volume on the threat I posed: I had not included them in this move to a systemic approach, while the POE department were the valued experts in the field. I did not represent myself here, but the district, superintendent, and the power to marginalize, and we went under public attack. I became the “Allison Show,” (community member, personal communication, December 8, 2015) an outsider, or a corrupt insider working in cahoots with the superintendent. I would hear this message repeatedly, until I resolved the threat I posed.

I could justify my actions with logistical reasons for why I didn’t include the POE department. At the same time, on a deeper level, I didn’t trust that they’d be willing to come along for an innovative, systemic process. Since resolving the controversy, they have proven otherwise, so why did I make this mistake?

An organization may begin to “mirror” the issue conflicts of the exact problem it’s trying to solve (Heifetz, 1994). Heifetz (1994) offers an example from Harvard University, and the collection of schools therein. The business school has organizational dynamics and challenges reflective of the business world, as does the education school of the education sector, as does the law school, etc. The communities in those schools in fact “import” the perspectives and challenges from their respective fields, and so even as they try to improve or solve problems in the world of education, or law, inside of the school they face the very same challenges. Applied to SDUSD and family engagement, the problem of families being marginalized from supporting student learning has been imported into our district and thus the POE department is also marginalized. I participated in the mirroring already happening in the organization, by again marginalizing the POE when I did not include them in the

presentation. Contributing to my decision were all of the associated factors that led to them not being expected to present with me in the first place. In the district dynamics, the POE department has gone unheard and unsupported, and their expertise not drawn upon, in the same way the families they attempt to serve have been marginalized.

In reality, I knew the threat I posed to the POE department and went ahead anyway. I felt urgency to move the work forward and therefore pressured to take advantage of an opportunity to call attention to the systemic approach. I stepped over the POE department, ignoring their expertise and potential contribution. I became caught up in the same dynamic that had existed between the district and the POE department for years. The irony is at the board meeting I presented the adaptive challenges faced by families: they do not feel heard or supported, while at the same board meeting I went ahead and did the very same thing to the department representing families. In the implications for self section of this capstone, I will further explain my learning from this experience.

Be strategic when and how you intervene (Williams, 2005, p. 87). To tackle an activist challenge, one can strategically use an intervention on the spectrum between provocative and evocative to call attention to the contradiction between actions and espoused values (Williams, 2005). To “evoke” is to inspire versus to “provoke” or to force a group to see the contradictions inherent in their actions. In this section I will explore the ways Design Thinking embodied an evocative intervention, while the board meeting interventions verged into the territory of being provocative.

At a localized level, Design Thinking, proves to be evocative. The results suggest the process does inspire partnership perhaps because it provides a context for listening to voices not typically heard, and in the process, sometimes even implicates educators’ as contributors to the problems they hear from families. Yet there is an immediate opportunity to work

through the challenges together during the next steps in Design Thinking. Educators can make a difference right away by collaborating with the very people about whom they might have made assumptions. Design Thinking then offers a productive outlet for the tensions raised by listening to families. I intentionally chose this process because I anticipated it would modulate the “disequilibrium” of adaptive work (Heifetz, 2009), in evocative ways.

One purpose of activist leadership work is to, “get the people to steadily entertain the aspect of reality, or the hard facts, that they are refusing to consider” (Williams, 2005, p. 62). In the follow-up survey 10 weeks after the Crawford Cluster initial event, educators report their thinking was still influenced by the experience. However, based on questions raised about action taken at the school site level, as well as follow-through on prototypes in the Crawford Cluster, we must consider whether the evocative experience of Design Thinking is sufficient to generate follow-up action.

At the systems level, my interventions both provoked and evoked. One of the most evocative strategies to which everyone from the POE department, the superintendent, and the PTA responded was the direct description of the adaptive challenges experienced by families, educators, and community partners described in the board presentation. I strategically described the problem as systemic and then explicitly showed the variety of ways this is experienced by families, educators, and community partners. Through this process, people were given the opportunity to nudge toward understanding someone else’s perspective while feeling their own perspective was also validated.

On the other hand, the infamous “Slide 7” proved to be provocative to family leaders. Intentionally challenging, I wanted the questions “What do we mean by family engagement?” and “What kinds of family engagement matter most for student learning?” to be publicly debated. We needed to call attention to an assumption that the primary form of

family engagement entails volunteering or involvement in school governance, because if this is the main means for families to participate, then there is no reason to invest in building the capacity of families who cannot currently engage in these ways. “Orchestrating conflict is a discipline. It requires seeing the process as a necessary step in the journey toward a better future, tolerating the moments your people are not working well together, and believing that working through some rough patches will help to solidify their collective effort and commitment.” (Heifetz, 2009, p. 149). As I sat on the dais at the board meeting, tolerating the backlash for slighting family leaders and volunteering, I wondered if I should clarify. In the end I elected to “hold-steady” (Heifetz, 2009), hoping someone else would take up the torch in supporting each and every family. As noted in the results, Trustee Barrera took it on, and he remains an ally able to both validate volunteers and push for a strategy that better supports all families. At the same time, during a later presentation, I took out the provocation so that family leaders could focus on the rest of the systemic approach without a blazing affront to their contributions as volunteers and members of school site governance teams. This shift in communication has contributed to their greater support for systemic family engagement.

Find good partners to support you and keep you alive. During the first half of the strategic project, finding partnership was difficult. For a few months I was alienated from the POE department and some established family leaders, while my work in family engagement remained at the margins, away from the central work of the district. The leaders from the Crawford Cluster, including Nyamangah, families, the principals, and area superintendent often supported the work and sometimes offered partnership in thinking. They showed up for the National Family Engagement Day board meeting and were willing to jump in to experiment with High Impact Home Strategies. The purpose of partnership is

to bring greater creativity and wisdom to the interventions you make (Williams, 2005). Once we had finally healed the relationship, the POE department became an invaluable partner to do just that. The systemic framework improved and my understanding of the political landscape broadened. I no longer felt solely responsible for the job of enacting the systemic approach. As described earlier, my own mirroring of the system prevented me from fully taking advantage of this partnership until much later in the project.

Transition Challenge

A transition challenge entails shifting values, not entirely throwing them out, but a process of keeping some beliefs, while evolving or letting go of others (Williams, 2005). The values people hold close may get in the way of growth. Historically in SDUSD, families, and community partners have not fully taken advantage of the power of partnering to support student learning. “There are times when some of the values and mind-sets of a people are no longer useful in addressing the challenges that beset the group or organization” (Williams, 2005, p. 115). So it is in San Diego, families and educators hold values that keep them from taking advantage of an opportunity. At every level of the system in SDUSD, the main transition we as educators must make, is towards prioritizing family engagement and valuing families’ current and latent abilities to contribute to their child’s education. For many families they must believe, and take a role to support their students’ learning. As described in the Review of Knowledge for Action section of this capstone, many families might not believe this to be their role, as committed as they certainly are to their child’s success. Some families in leadership must transition to understand that their approach to family engagement is not the only way and consider supporting a systemic approach that builds families’ capacities to support their child’s learning at home. Finally, the POE department must transition the way they understand their work from a service delivery model to one that

operates systemically in concert with the rest of the district to build the capacity of schools and families to support student learning.

The results of Design Thinking implementations show that the process of listening to families and then developing ideas to address challenges supports some educators in doing initial transition adaptive work, namely shifts in beliefs about what families offer and understanding their perspectives. Design Thinking creates a holding environment inclusive of all stakeholders that allows educators to see how their role and beliefs might need to shift without making them defensive or resistant to the work it takes. Listening to families during the process mattered most as reported by educators. Most educators have not been given the condition to be listeners, and this aspect of the initial holding environment, intentionally creating the space for listening to families without needing to respond, supported some of them in an initial shift in values, temporary as it might be.

The surveys for Design Thinking did not query how families view their roles in relation to their child's education, though based on what we know from the literature, this might be their transition adaptive work at hand. Of course, if they participated in Design Thinking, they were taking steps to support their child's education, so may already have held the belief that it was their role. Yet, we stood on the shoulders of Nyamangah's work, the community organizer who had already worked to increase participation from marginalized groups such as the Somali-Bantu or Karen families. His work to bring typically "hard to reach" families to Design Thinking and other trainings has greatly influenced the network building and community organizing aspects of the plan for the SDUSD Framework for Systemic Family Engagement.

Lastly, the POE department has shifted how they think about their work in this process. They have taken ownership for improving the systemic approach making it clearer,

more concrete and feasible, and are planning steps toward a “train the trainer” model, where schools, family leaders, and community partners work with educators and families on engagement.

Williams (2005) shares three strategies for leading in the face of a transition challenge relevant to the way my work unfolded, and two others that illuminate a path moving forward.

Provide an orienting purpose (Williams, 2005, p. 124). “The orienting purpose must address the threat to the group and articulate the promise that is available if the group can succeed in making the transition. Fundamentally, it must answer the question ‘Is this journey really necessary?’” (Williams, 2005, p. 124). From the very beginning, I have grounded the work in a purpose to support student learning. We have also learned that putting families front and center during the Design Thinking process generates a sense of urgency to address their needs.

Sticking to the orienting purpose of student learning has defused and refocused many challenging conversations, especially with the POE department. As a team, we were able to move beyond their frustration over marginalization, and my own contribution to it, by finding common ground in the purpose of supporting family engagement. An orienting purpose has undoubtedly contributed to them also being able to lead the work moving forward because they now begin all communication about the systemic approach with the goal: “Building the conditions to empower each and every family to support their student’s learning.” As we have worked together, we have all learned to practice coming back to the touchstone of purpose when we get caught up in details or uncertainty.

Finally, the orienting purpose permeates every part of the systemic plan. Even though when I presented at the board meeting, I received political pushback, no one could argue with the purpose, and no one did.

Get people to own the passage, or they will probably deceive you (Williams, 2005, p.127). Although I typically espouse this leadership practice, I became a “feather in the hurricane” of the system, and initially made the mistake of not investing the time and resources in inviting the POE department to own the passage. The program manager did not tell me she would make a critical public statement at the board meeting, even though we planned together for two hours, right beforehand. I was deceived.

More important for the work, however, is that I recovered. Through the collaboration with the POE department this spring, they have transitioned to owning the systemic framework. As evidenced by their leadership in Design Thinking sessions and pilots of the HIHS, leadership in presenting the systemic plan to the superintendent and chief of staff, and constant communication with me, they now also own the passage.

Determine what must be preserved, and help people own the losses; (Williams, 2005, p. 140). Because I knew a systemic approach to family engagement had never been tried in SDUSD, I initially didn’t consider the question of what to preserve. Not acknowledging the current work of the POE department, or considering how it might fit into a systemic approach, led to dissonance for them and weakness in the work I proposed. Once we came into closer collaboration, we could begin to determine together what should be preserved.

Change can also involve huge loss, and to not acknowledge this is to create greater resistance to the adaptive work. “Adaptive leadership almost always puts you in the business of assessing, managing, distributing, and providing contexts for losses that move people

through those losses to a new place” (Heifetz et al. 2009). Family leaders and the POE department had the most to lose in my framing of the systemic approach because they have been doing the work for the longest. The losses they may feel relate to their core identities and roles they have played both professionally and personally. I did not work well with the PTA in understanding these losses because I paced the work too quickly without acknowledging their need for time and a process to refashion the way they think about supporting families. As a district, we will need to recover from this mistake to bring them on board for the process.

Similarly, the POE department might have felt a sense of loss related to their competence and status. With me out front at a board meeting, it puts Harvard and an outsider at the forefront of the work, someone who isn’t even an expert in the field. Though an orienting purpose helped with this, I needed to extend myself more when they were becoming harder and harder to reach as the work moved forward. A critical piece to the recovery process was the close and intentional listening done both by me and the superintendent. I was not present for a meeting with the superintendent, but the POE department has said it helped them be open to rebuilding our collaboration.

Though in the beginning I mirrored the system, in the end I more closely espoused one of my core leadership values captured by Heifetz.

“In leading adaptive change, you ask people to open their hearts to you and the purposes that you believe you share with them. Demonstrate the same openness to them and their sense of purpose. Don’t resent them when you deliver a message that isn’t easy for them to hear and their eyes begin to glaze over or they resist. Instead, listen from your heart, take in information beyond what is being said, using as sources of information your own feelings and nonverbal signals people are giving you” (Heifetz, 2009).

I believe in the moment of listening to the POE department’s experience of my leadership, I exercised listening from my heart. Even though I didn’t fully comprehend the

complex dynamic of marginalization they faced as I do now, and even though I thought it wasn't just about me, I listened with my heart. I allowed myself to feel their pain even as it was delivered in ways that were passionately angry. When I asked them what made a difference in healing our work together, the first thing they said, was that I listened.

Creative Challenge

“Sometimes a group hits a wall. It can go no further or be more productive while persisting in its current practices. To break through the wall, transcend the current paradigm, and advance to the next level of performance the people must create” (Williams, 2005, p. 163). The use of Design Thinking at the local level in clusters and schools was intended to focus on new ways to address the challenges of partnership to support student learning. Although innovative approaches emerged from the process, it still appeared more productive for the activist and transition adaptive work.

Key aspects of the Design Thinking process serve to address the creative challenge. Empathy-building, or deeply listening to families, appears to have contributed significantly to participants' experiences with 54% identifying this feature in the process as something that went well in the Design Thinking at Crawford Cluster. In the various implementations of Design Thinking, different stakeholders in different contexts have also consistently appreciated this part of the process. Kahane (2004) indicates the profound effects of listening in contrast to “only talking” to address some of the most profound challenges. By contrast, he describes the “dialogue of the deaf” (Kahane, 2004, p. 69), in which participants rely on their prepared statements and views, rather than “taking in something new and being unsettled and changed by it” (Kahane, 2004, p. 69). He also argues this approach is a platform for creativity. In SDUSD, communication with typically marginalized families usually flows in one direction: from educators to families. Thus, the shift to listening creates

a new experience and new ideas, essentially disrupting the typical power dynamics and mode of communication.

Novel approaches are developed through the Design Thinking process, as exemplified by the prototypes in the Crawford Cluster, but this does not solve the challenge of assuring the resources and leadership to move the ideas forward. In the case of Crawford Cluster, for example, the cultural center came to fruition, but few of the ideas about how to solve communication and language barriers were enacted. This challenge will be addressed in the implications section.

Design Thinking did successfully fulfill one of the key strategies for leading in the face of a creative challenge: “Attend to the mood, energy, and focus needed to make a discovery” (Williams, 2005, p. 174). Our facilitation of the Design Thinking process intended to create different conditions for thinking together: the music, the food, the introductions, the translators, the table configurations, and the hands clasped on the PowerPoint were meant to evoke another way of being creative together. The process creates highly focused teams charged with a sense of hope and purpose. The fact that minimal complaint or concern has been given about the Design Thinking process suggests it gets the mood, energy, and focus, right.

Development Challenge

“A development challenge is when the group or organization must build new capabilities—competencies, practices, and processes—to ensure the survival and progress of the group or organization” (Williams, 2005, p. 90). In SDUSD, at the launch of the project, we knew we faced at least three development challenges. First, families need to be empowered to support their student’s learning. Second, educators need to learn how to better partner with families across the system. Third, systems level leaders need to learn how

to support educators and families in this process. I thought Design Thinking would begin to identify ways to better develop educators and families across the system. Certainly some of the prototypes generated ideas for improvement, but again, we need to improve follow-through action. The interactive process of Design Thinking gives educators some practice working with families, but we don't know if the process builds families' capacities to support their students' learning. In the results of the Crawford Design Thinking session, some families report they learned how to better support their child's education, but it's unlikely one session will deeply develop their capacity to support student learning at home. Additionally, we haven't touched development work for the instructional cabinet, the place from which systemic work for family engagement would arise. Therefore, the results described do not show we made progress on the development challenge.

For this reason, the SDUSD Systemic Framework for Family Engagement includes High Impact Home Strategies, specifically because we want to assure families are supported in developing their capacity. This also means educators at school sites, family leaders, and community organizers will also learn strategies to support families. The POE department and instructional cabinet will communicate the priority and establish supports for the work to move forward. In the implications for site section, I lay out recommendations for the process and structures to animate the framework as an integral part of the system.

Implications for Site

The systemic approach to family engagement holds great promise for the ongoing equity work in the district. Yet, there is still work to be done for the framework to be integrated into the core work as a priority across the system. First, the plan needs leadership that can continue to take on the systems level activist and transition adaptive work with careful attention paid to current political realities. Second, the framework should be introduced to schools in ways that are integrated into the existing equity and instructional priorities so as not to feel separate from the core. Third, as the district continues to use Design Thinking, the passionate work and thinking inspired by the process must consistently translate into continued action and relationship building at the school site level. Finally, using technology as a lever to build networks and families' capacities should be on the horizon for future next steps. I make recommendations for how to take each of these steps below.

Integration of family engagement into the core work of schools will not happen without systems level leadership to carry it forward. Not since the tenure of former superintendent Bersin has a family engagement leader sat on the instructional cabinet in SDUSD. As I have done this year, a leadership position on the instructional cabinet will continue to build awareness and connections to family engagement where the core work of the district is formed. We have created sufficient support and warrant to bring family engagement out of the margins and into the center. As is the case with other departments, family engagement should have members on the “green” teams¹³, those teams supporting the area superintendents, principals and schools. I recommend both classroom teachers and

¹³ Each area superintendent has a team of experts from various departments working with them to support schools. For example, there are Common Core resource teachers, English Language Acquisition support teachers, and technology resource teachers.

community organizers be hired for this role. It's important that the community organizers very clearly have the skills to amplify their work through building family and community leaders to work shoulder to shoulder with them. They cannot alone be expected to grow sufficient networks but will need to know *how* to bring others into the community organizing process. They can also share this skill with the teachers, for example, who will join this team as well.

A new executive director will step into the current political state of the work of systemic family engagement in SDUSD. The following table summarizes my perceptions of the current political realities as well as provides an analytic tool (Heifetz, 2009, p. 100) for diagnosing the systems level political landscape.

Table 20: Perspectives on Systemic Family Engagement

Stakeholder Group	Relationship to the Issue	Preferred Outcome	Noblest Value	Loyalties	Potential Losses/Risks
Instructional Cabinet	<p>In rhetoric believe family engagement matters but actions currently do not reflect family engagement as a top priority</p> <p>Has not been introduced to or vetted the systemic framework</p> <p>May not believe family engagement is critical for student success</p>	<p>For many, improve family engagement to support student learning without touching current instructional work</p>	<p>Equity and excellence for all students</p>	<p>Colleagues past and present</p> <p>Superintendent</p> <p>Professional role models who teach them</p> <p>instruction is the most important avenue to equity</p>	<p>Trade-offs in time focused on instruction</p> <p>Competence: Enter unknown professional territory</p> <p>A transition in identity to value family engagement</p>
SDUSD Board	<p>Believe family engagement is important and largely hear from empowered families who come to board meetings</p> <p>Influenced by families in their constituency in</p>	<p>Implementation of the systemic approach especially for families not typically heard in the system</p>	<p>Commitment to equity & excellence</p> <p>Intention to build a stronger San Diego</p>	<p>Constituents in their region of San Diego</p> <p>Cultural group</p>	<p>For board members in the more affluent parts of San Diego there are constituents who do not support an equity agenda</p>

Stakeholder Group	Relationship to the Issue	Preferred Outcome	Noblest Value	Loyalties	Potential Losses/Risks
	<p>their region of SDUSD</p> <p>Made family engagement a priority for the superintendent through her evaluation and the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)</p>				Elevating families voices may create risk of critique of their work
Parent Outreach and Engagement Department	Long-standing commitment to family engagement and now committed to a systemic approach	<p>Implementation of the systemic framework without losing key programs that support high need families</p> <p>Educators need to be trained to better engage with families</p>	<p>Believe families' capacity can be built</p> <p>Respect for family voice and contributions</p>	PTA, Parent Leadership groups, community members	<p>Competence & Identity: A systemic approach demands new roles and ways of working</p> <p>Control for how work is done</p>
Parent Leaders (PTA, Parents involved in governance)	<p>Now showing support for the systemic framework, especially Design Thinking, the district-wide survey, and training family leaders</p> <p>Long-standing commitment to volunteering and being involved in decision-making bodies</p> <p>Advocates for families with less voice when they know their needs</p>	<p>Systemic framework implemented with necessary resources and structures</p> <p>More training and support for parent leadership</p> <p>More recognition for their contributions & responsiveness from the district which is "all talk and no action"</p>	<p>Acting on behalf of all families and their children</p> <p>Advocacy for children</p> <p>Community leadership</p>	<p>PTA at large members of the various councils</p> <p>Parent Outreach and engagement department</p> <p>Their own children and school communities</p>	<p>Sense of identity if the focus of family engagement does not value governance and volunteering</p> <p>Potential loss of attention for their work</p>

Stakeholder Group	Relationship to the Issue	Preferred Outcome	Noblest Value	Loyalties	Potential Losses/Risks
Families not in leadership	When introduced to the systemic framework, support Design Thinking and High Impact Home Strategies Want better relationships with teachers and principals to make a difference for their child's learning	They learn how to support their student's learning Positive relationship and communication with their student's school Some want to move into leadership to support others in their communities	Commitment to their student having a better life than theirs	Other families Their children Cultural values	Competence Cultural values challenged

The political map reveals possibilities for support for the systemic work, as well as potential political pitfalls. To briefly summarize the current support for the systemic framework, the board, superintendent, and chief of staff support a systemic approach; the POE department owns and is committed to the vision; and families who have experienced pieces of the framework, as well as offered feedback, are generally hopeful, though some have concerns over whether it will be sufficiently supported with action, structures, and resources. Collectively, these groups represent allies to rely upon as the new executive director, the POE department, superintendent, and chief of staff move the work forward.

The resistance to the systemic framework for family engagement will potentially come from a few stakeholder groups, but this potential threat is also mitigated by the nature of the framework itself, as well as with strategic leadership moves going forward. Currently, the most prominent resistance will likely be leaders on the instructional cabinet who have not yet internalized family engagement as a priority. They aren't yet fully aware of the framework and the implications for their work, though many have engaged in Design Thinking and are aware of the High Impact Home Strategies. With many on this team, we

face another transition challenge in the sense that in theory they believe in family engagement while in action they do not prioritize action and investment in this aspect of district work. They are the next horizon of transition adaptive work in relation to family engagement. Therefore, it's critical they are given experiences to learn the why and the how behind the framework as it is adopted and integrated into the vision for equity and instruction.

The second form of resistance to this work may continue to arise from long-time family leaders. Their initial resistance to the systemic approach was addressed as the POE department, a group they trust and with whom they have worked side-by-side, made the systemic vision their own. With the POE department operating with commitment and passion, we gain the support of many family leaders. Even more critical, however, the systemic approach also incorporates family leaders' needs and hopes to further build their capacity to contribute to family engagement. The framework includes family leadership development as a key means to reach more families. If this aspect of the framework comes to fruition, they will offer significant support, if it does not, they will certainly make known the district has not followed through on their promises and likely question the entire framework overall.

The district leadership and the new executive director must also pay close attention to the power dynamics across families and consistently build bridges among them. We will shift the status quo as families, whose voices typically have not been heard, become more engaged through community organizing, Design Thinking, and the High Impact Home Strategies. Through bringing to life the framework, well-established family leaders may be concerned with a district attention shift from their important contributions to school and district governance, as well as volunteering. Although their contributions are important, they

are also just one part of this systemic approach. We can anticipate and address this political liability, based on my experiences this year. Assuring equal representation and significant collaboration between those families typically empowered and those typically marginalized builds bridges across divides of race, language, class, country of origin, and regions of the city. When more empowered families have had a chance to hear from those with less power, they are moved to support approaches that look beyond their own interests. One effective strategy includes assuring diverse voices are represented during Design Thinking through community organizing strategies, as we saw in the Crawford Cluster. Another strategy involves collaboration to support the district as a whole through teams like Team Family for Equity. In reality, many established family leaders long for broader representation and we must activate this noble hope through collaboration and communication across typical boundaries that maintain the separation of people with varying levels of power.

Given current political realities, with many critical stakeholders on board for the systemic framework designed to further the district equity focus, the executive director should specifically be hired and charged to lead implementation of the framework *as it has been designed*. If this is not the case, the POE department and family leaders will undergo a debilitating cycle of change, and the progress we have made this year will be lost. With a new hire to lead the framework with fidelity, we will build from where we are now. I recommend establishing a hiring committee inclusive of the POE department, key family leaders representing those established, and up and coming, who represent more marginalized families. Also included on the hiring team should be members of the instructional cabinet, teachers, and principals. The process should seek a leader with the following beliefs and competencies:

A leader who...

- Shows alignment in practice and belief with the SDUSD systemic approach to family engagement as demonstrated in their previous work. He/she should show commitment to family and community voice, ownership and action, especially for those families who typically are not heard, with equal commitment to deliberately empowering families with skills to support their student's learning at home.
- Believes the work of family engagement entails, in part, adaptive work. He/she will need to be a leader who can continue to build attention and awareness in the district and the community for the importance of partnering with families to support student learning.
- Articulates the connections between the purpose of family engagement and student achievement. He/she should have an ability to generate respect from instructional leaders including area superintendents, principals, and teachers. This is particularly important for the work in which he/she will need to engage in relation to the instructional cabinet.

Hiring the right person will not be enough. A new executive director cannot be expected to represent the importance of family engagement, alone. The superintendent and chief of staff will need to model prioritizing family engagement by strategically integrating it into the equity and instructional strengths already underway in the instructional cabinet. There are many instructional cabinet leaders who do not realize the value and potential power of family engagement, so now is the time for the chief of staff and superintendent to, in a deliberate way, lead the transition, alongside the new executive director.

A few structures and supports for the new executive director will go a long way. First, he/she needs coaching on the leadership challenges associated with this work. This

need not be the superintendent or chief of staff, but another leader on the instructional cabinet who can offer perspective both on the district and his/her leadership. Upon the new leader's arrival in the position, the superintendent and chief of staff should host an intentionally planned meeting to introduce and clearly prioritize the systemic approach and framework with both the POE department and the new leader. This should involve sharing the history of family engagement in the district from multiple perspectives, as well as the current political context. He or she would also benefit from a clear list of stakeholders, provided by the POE department and superintendent, with whom to build relationships and understand their perspectives and history with family engagement. To cultivate relationships, communication, and trust across the system, the executive director should also have an office in two locations: The Ballard Parent Center where the POE department is located, as well as in the instructional wing of the Education Center, the main district building.

Moving outward from the instructional cabinet and the new executive director, to the district at large, there is additional transition work to do. As the district introduces more broadly the systemic framework, we have to be careful not to repeat the mistakes I made with the POE department by jumping ahead without first working through the framework together. There are natural avenues for the framework to integrate into the schools' and area superintendents' existing equity work. Equally important, there is room for ownership in how the framework is implemented.

First, Design Thinking provides an engine for opening up educators to the work of family engagement. We should use Design Thinking to shift underlying beliefs and mindsets to create fertile ground for more intensifying demand and commitment to strong family engagement. Second, the HIHS alignment to the learning cycles provides an avenue for

introducing this structure which will directly develop families' capacities. It's absolutely essential we make systemic capacity building for families. The framework must get to this level of the work to genuinely address the inequities in our system, but we have to build to this place. The HIHS might be introduced at principals' institutes during the district learning cycles as an invitation to learn and an opportunity to enhance equity work. Trainings for learning how, especially for schools in need, might be identified through the districtwide survey for family engagement. These approaches will be supported by the leadership in the POE department with investment in the necessary resources to support the work.

The increasing demand and interest in Design Thinking has been promising. This process will be most productive at the school site level where families, educators, and community partners can come to a shared understanding of the problems they face and take action together. The mixed results on action in implementations of Design Thinking should improve through operating at the school site level with the direct stakeholders involved in supporting student learning. Sites will also need a clear team and plan to carry the work forward coming out of the process. The POE department is poised to make these adjustments in the training and coaching for Design Thinking at schools.

As the district works to address staff cultural competence and the inevitable biases we all hold, family engagement, and especially Design Thinking enrolls staff in an equity focus. For many, the transformative process of listening to families and students incentivizes the ongoing push to improve one's instruction, especially through an equity lens. Through Design Thinking, educators will be situated to deepen their instruction through an equity lens because they more fully see the students and their families in front of them.

Finally, although this year we have only been able to imagine the possibilities for the use of technology and social media in family engagement work, they have potential to

magnify its impact. With a goal to empower each and every family, even those who do not come to school, community organizing in conjunction with technology can better help to connect families to each other and to the school. It can reduce language barriers and provide examples of High Impact Home Strategies in multiple cultures and languages.

Implications for Sector

The results of the project have implications not just for the work of family engagement, but leading change in a large urban district, generally. Bringing important work to the center from the margins demands careful analysis, leadership, and structural supports. I begin with considerations for how to understand the political environment and tackle the work in a large system. Then I describe implications for the kind of leadership approaches and associated structures necessary for taking on a transition challenge. Finally, I will discuss the implications for the particular field of family engagement in the education sector.

Diagnosing and Taking Wise Action in Political Environments

Diagnosing the political environment (Heifetz, 1994), specifically in relation to the most important adaptive work, offers critical information about the opportunities and pitfalls of taking action in bringing work to the center. As exemplified in the implications for site section, gaining an understanding of stakeholder groups' perspectives on the most important work (in my case, this was systemic family engagement), their loyalties, and potential risks or losses, offers a map delineating the opportunities for and constraints on taking action (Heifetz, 2009). Getting a clear political analysis of the landscape, not just in the moment, but over time, including the deep histories existing in districts, reveals the passages of least resistance in systems where of course we will inevitably encounter resistance.

Obviously, in large systems, we will get it wrong and misdiagnose, especially while making work in the margins a priority, for this is often unexplored territory. Therefore, we get the best political assessment, and then adjust when we're wrong. "Each action ought to be viewed as an experiment. Improvisation demands ongoing assessment. In practice a person who leads must intervene and then hold steady, listening for the effects of the

intervention. She must move from balcony to dance floor, back and forth” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 272). “Experimentation” here does not, however, mean a wild guess. Instead it entails careful political analysis.

Working at both the systems and school level generates a productive cycle of political will *and* impact on students—another important component of political work. This is significant because only doing systems level work means high level leaders do not have a vivid vision of student impact on which to build a platform for contributing their support. On the other hand, only doing work at the local level will remain local, unless the larger system awakens to impactful work taking place for students. Working at both levels, then, allows the work to be pulled in from the margins in increments. Success at the local level brought to the systems level generates some awareness and leeway to do more work at the local level, and so forth.

Furthermore, being clear about the type of adaptive challenge (Williams, 2005) to address at each level (e.g. activist, transition), and using leadership moves associated with the type accordingly, also can contribute to the work moving forward. In my case, when I used an activist approach while also engaging in transition work, the political heat generated was not productive. This learning, again, points to the necessity of a clear understanding of political landscapes in large districts.

When pulling work from the margins, a district must consider whether it is “mirroring” (Heifetz, 1994) or taking action in ways that reflect the very problem it is trying to solve. This is especially true while working with departments serving marginalized groups (e.g. English language learners, special education students, or families). Being mindful of how one uses the power associated with a leadership role charged with bringing work to the center is important because it can lead you to work too quickly without fully understanding

the complexity of the problem. From a position of power, it's harder to understand the experiences of those with less power, and from a position of less power, it's hard to push for systemic change. Minimally, you need each other to solve the problem, and at best, you will be brilliant in collaboration with each other.

At the systems level in districts, especially in departments in the margins, leaders are often left alone to figure out how to implement change rather than having an embedded structure assuring they have a thinking partner or coach for this work. This is an essential structure because to engage in political analysis and adaptive work requires an understanding far beyond what one person can hold on his or her own. Such leadership also involves waking up to one's own contributions to the challenge at hand. I recommend across the education sector that district leaders engaging in important change work, especially those bringing work from the margins, not be left to navigate alone

Leadership for Transition Challenges

Pulling work from the margins to the center will likely include a transition challenge, one in which people's values or current understanding of themselves will need to shift (Williams 2005), not easy work to lead. Relatedly, as districts across the country engage in equity work and closing the achievement gap, transition work abounds as leaders must challenge people to interrogate their own mindsets. In this section I directly address the systemic leader who will need to bring both strategy and self-knowledge to lead the process.

First, simply mandating innovation or change is likely to create compliance rather than genuine investment for deep-rooted shifts in practice. Out of frustration with resistance, we might contemplate transferring staff out of departments, or creating such a toxic environment that they want to leave, but this is not a sustainable, systemic approach,

nor does it align with a core value of education: the ability to learn. But, how can a district leader help a long marginalized department to make this transition?

Supporting transition work takes a deep understanding of the human condition, sometimes considered for the children we serve, but typically not for the people who work in district environments, especially those at the margins. Adaptive work can be painful and powerful and those experiences cannot be ignored. We cannot assume adults can change how they understand themselves in their work with a new PowerPoint slide or a new protocol on a page. “The learning required to accomplish adaptive work is not simply conceptual. Logical argument is rarely sufficient. Sifting through the old and fashioning something new takes emotional work. To move at the pace of logic alone, people would need an unusually high level of rationality and freedom from habit tradition and pride” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 245). Some leadership approaches to helping people to make the transition are listed below. These admonitions for leaders of transition work may appear overly personal for sector level implications, but to ignore such practice is to leave a giant roadblock to bringing important work to the center of district priority. Simply put, these big systems are composed of people, and recognizing the tolls and realities of adaptive work, as shown throughout this project, can make or break a change initiative. I am not suggesting here this is the only way to address a transition challenge, but perhaps one way that is usually neglected in large districts.

Begin by learning the history of the department by listening to the people affected by a potential shift in practice. Even if you know the history, understand it from their perspective and their voices. This will give you insights into how to better do the work and how to support them moving forward. As with the listening process to families during Design Thinking, listening is healing because it allows people to be seen, their experience

validated, and most importantly to be respected as a human worthy of being heard. Do not use listening as an opportunity to further the agenda, but be a learner, curious and in their shoes. If you listen perfunctorily without really seeking to understand, it will be obvious. This is not the time to defend yourself. Put yourself in the headspace to have compassion by listening “for the music beneath the words” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 265) listening hard for the deepest messages of hope and insecurity, sometimes masked in anger or silence. Tap into your own hopes and insecurities. Listen for the strategies and ideas you might be missing or may be replicating. Listen for the people they intend to represent. This is the opposite of calling on authority or power to get work done. This involves meeting people where they are, as if you have sat down with a friend for a cup of tea to understand her problem.

Don’t avoid listening though you might want to because people will push you away and avoid you, especially if you’re trying to make change. Don’t skip it because you think it will take too much time. Inadequate information about a department and the resulting political heat takes way more time. Take the time.

Find common ground through the purpose of the work and allow this to help you through the ups and downs as people engage in adaptive work. As I worked to restore collaboration with the POE department, I reiterated, “We have this opportunity to act together on behalf of families and students, let’s not miss it.” Make sure you are clear about the purpose for yourself and use this as a touchstone through hard times.

Understand the reactions to change might not be about you, personally, but acting impersonally does not help the situation. Again, remember the history and experience of marginalization and realize you are only the last in a long line of people representing a similar role in a position of power.

For a good long while, you might feel you are the only one extending yourself, and this is the mantle you carry as a leader, but people come around during transition work. Do not get attached to their first reactions or explosive moments. You will not end where you began, but you will also not end where you expect and this means getting comfortable for yourself with the uncertainty of change.

In districts across the education sector in this country, we do right to consider appropriate leadership practices as we work with marginalized groups and departments. In our systems with long histories we sometimes rely too much on the power from the top to make change happen, leading to less durable change arising out of compliance rather than conviction. As we make changes on behalf of our students and families, it's important to pause and remember to be human with the staff also making the transition, the time and energy spent pays off in the work moving forward. This kind of leadership takes both humility and staying grounded in purpose.

Implications for the Field of Family Engagement

The systemic framework we developed in SDUSD has implications for California districts, where currently the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) makes family engagement a state priority. Adopting this priority could come in many forms. The SDUSD systemic framework provides one way of addressing the priority in districts. Strategically built for a large urban district, the framework is designed to engage in adaptive work to address mindsets and values too often dampening or putting an end to strong partnerships before they even start. The same framework also offers opportunities to tailor to context-specific needs, as well as bring forward the families often not heard or well-supported in district systems. Lastly, the framework integrates well with the work of instruction rather than being seen as a separate initiative.

Conclusion

The education sector has a responsibility to engender strong partnerships with families and community to support student learning and achievement. Yet we also sometimes put families at the outskirts of their child's education and, therefore, also have a duty to initiate bringing them back into partnership. As a sector, we have to come together in a way that establishes a place of connection among the adults supporting students in our districts and communities.

To do this work in large districts demands attention to the adaptive work that maintains family engagement at the margins. Initial stages of this work involve tackling the transition and activist challenges (Williams, 2005), while operating at both the local and systems level. To do so, we must also diagnose the perspectives of political stakeholder groups that determine opportunities or constraints for leadership action. Pulling marginalized work to the center of district priority requires leaders to exercise skills and a stance honoring the process undergone by the people who may be shifting their values, mindsets, or sense of identity (Heifetz, 1994). The same leaders will need thinking partners and coaches to identify their own blind spots, where they might be caught up in mirroring the problem they try to solve or are, unknowingly, caught up in the typical ways the system maintains critical work at the margins.

SDUSD is poised for promising work with support from many key stakeholder groups and a systemic framework designed to focus on partnerships to support student learning. Moving forward, a new executive director for family engagement, along with the POE department and a team of community organizers and classroom teachers will work to animate the framework. This will only be successful in close collaboration with the superintendent and chief of staff who will need to model, in work and action, prioritizing

family engagement for the instructional cabinet. The instructional cabinet will likely be the next transition challenge the SDUSD will take on in this work.

With sufficient resource investment and careful attention to continued transition and activist adaptive work, the SDUSD Systemic Framework for Family Engagement can provide a supported path for schools and the district to create the conditions for empowering each and every family to support their child's learning. The essential elements of the framework that can be tailored to fit the needs of clusters and schools include the following:

- Grow family networks and leadership, especially where they are weak or don't yet exist
- Utilize Design Thinking to build trust between educators and families so they can take action together on behalf of student's learning
- Empower schools and families with High Impact Home Strategies
- Activate awareness of where we are to know how to move forward through an annual, district-wide survey on family engagement

Embedded in this systemic approach exists an opportunity to make a lasting, sustainable contribution to the equity work. We have already weathered early political backlash in response to the shifts. Systemic family engagement will broaden the positive support for the outstanding equity work of the superintendent and chief of staff, leading to greater sustainability of their work on behalf of students and families.

Finally, the work of SDUSD in family engagement could eventually become a model for the California Local Control Accountability Program which currently has a goal for family and community engagement. Grounded in the research and practice, the SDUSD

Systemic Family Engagement Framework we have created in this district can inform the work as other districts take on similar challenges in their contexts.

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