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LITERACY DEMANDS OF HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING
ADVANCED PROGRAMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

United States public schools are becoming increasingly diverse as more families immigrate to the country. A variety of programs within the schools are offered to all students, including English as a Second Language classes and classes to help struggling students succeed. Although these programs are important for meeting the needs of immigrant students, focusing solely on their needs often leads researchers, teachers, parents, and students of diverse backgrounds to overlook other services available to support students' learning (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Such a gap is seen particularly in connecting secondary immigrant students with advanced placement and gifted and talented programs. This study examined one reason previous research had found may contribute to this underrepresentation: parents' lack of ability to advocate for their child due to a lack of ability to read, understand, and act on home-school communications. Findings suggest several ways educators and schools can communicate more effectively to immigrant parents through home-school communications to help these parents become more involved in the education of their child(ren) and better help immigrant students succeed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States is a diverse country that welcomes families from a variety of cultures and backgrounds to settle within its borders. Since the United States' population is becoming more diverse, this study will focus on immigrant families, and specifically immigrant parents (Brown & Stepler, 2015). Immigrant parents will be defined as foreign-born parents who have moved to the United States intending to stay for a long period of time (Rong & Preissla, 2008). As of 2013, 13.1% of the United States' population, or 41.3 million people, were immigrants (Brown & Stepler, 2015). This represents a fourfold increase in the immigrant population living in the United States since 1960, when immigrants made up only 5.4% of the United States population (Brown & Stepler, 2015). This increase in the amount of immigrants living in the United States is also reflected in United States' public schools, where currently, over 840,000 students enrolled in United States' public schools were immigrants (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). There has also been a steady decline in the number of White students enrolled in United States' public schools in all regions, and there has been an 8% decrease in enrollment of White students in public schools in the Northeast between 2002 and 2012 (Davis & Bauman, 2013).

The increasing diversity of student populations is mirrored in a smaller level in Pennsylvania. In 2013, about 50,175 students living in Pennsylvania and enrolled in public schools in the area were foreign-born immigrants (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). For comparison, between 2005 and 2009, only about 46,800 students living in Pennsylvania and enrolled in public schools in the area were foreign-born immigrants (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a).

This increasing diversity offers many opportunities and challenges to the educational system. While immigrant students from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds each bring unique perspectives to the learning environment that can broaden and enrich the education of all students, increasingly diverse student populations pose a challenge to educators as they seek to navigate cultural differences and potential language barriers in order to best include all students and involve immigrant parents from all backgrounds in the education process.

As the student population becomes more diverse, one challenge to teachers and schools is communicating effectively with parents. The United States education system expects parents to partner with schools and work to improve their students' learning both at home and through advocating for the education of their child(ren). However, immigrant parents may not have the English language proficiency or ability to read English at the levels home-school communications are written in (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Chu & Wu, 2014); may not have the intertextual or prior knowledge needed to understand references made in home-school communications (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014); and may not be aware of their rights or responsibilities regarding the education of their child(ren), and thus, may have difficulty reading, understanding, and acting on home-school communications (Chu & Wu, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013).

While the difficulty immigrant parents may have reading, understanding, and acting on home-school communications can affect all areas of the education their child(ren) receive, a particular concern is the ability their child(ren) have to access advanced placement programs and gifted and talented programs. Although immigrant

students may be overrepresented in some programs, they are underrepresented in advanced programs. For example, although about five percent of the population of students in United States' public schools is ELLs, ELL students only comprise two percent of the population of students enrolled in Advanced Placement programs (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). In contrast, their White peers tend to be overrepresented in advanced programs, as White students account for 60% of the students enrolled in gifted and talented programs, but only 50% of the total student population (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). This underrepresentation could possibly be that teachers overlook these students for advanced programs (Siegle et al., 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Previous studies show that teachers are less likely to recommend immigrant students for advanced programs due to lack of training on how to identify advanced students and biases that lead teachers to be more likely to overlook immigrant students in favor of their White peers when making recommendations for students to participate in advanced programs (Siegle et al., 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). While teachers may overlook immigrant students for advanced programs, these students' parents are able to request their child(ren) be evaluated for advanced programs and may be able to get their students access to these programs. However, research has shown that immigrant parents often do not advocate for their child(ren), citing reasons such as lack of English language proficiency and limited reading levels of immigrant parents, high intertextuality and prior knowledge demands in home-school communications, and few references to parent responsibility and rights as obstacles that affect immigrant parents' ability to read, understand, and act on home-school communications that need to be examined further (Cobb, 2012; Markose

& Simpson, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Vera et al., 2012). Although previous studies demonstrated that immigrant parents often do not advocate for the advanced education of their child(ren), little research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of specific ways schools communicate with parents to provide more clear direction for schools and educators as they seek to communicate with immigrant parents and more research was needed to determine if the findings of previous studies were true across all regions of the United States and immigrant families (Markose & Simpson, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013). More research was also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of home-school communication contained specifically on school websites, as previous studies focused only on written communication sent home with students or parent-teacher conferences (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014; Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Chu & Wu, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to further explore how effective home-school communications provide access of information to immigrant parents, and present communication digitally presented by schools were accessed. This study examined 32 texts from four participating school districts' websites that were used to communicate information regarding advanced programs and parent rights and responsibilities. Texts were examined to determine the reading levels of the information, the intertextuality and prior knowledge demands of the documents, and the references to parent rights and responsibilities in the documents to determine how effective they were at communicating to immigrant parents. Immigrant parents from five different families and five different cultures were also interviewed about their experiences with and perceptions of home-school communications to gain the immigrant parents' understandings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the United States, public schools value parental involvement in their child's education (No Child Left Behind Act, 2011). Communication between schools and students' homes plays an important role in parental involvement. Valuing this connection between home and school, US schools communicate to parents about the programs available to support students in a variety of ways. This home-school communication typically includes fliers, letters, notes, emails, and websites to enable and encourage parents to actively participate in their child's education.

These various communications inform students and parents of everything from fundraisers to sporting events. Home-school communications are also designed to foster communication between parents and schools and improve parent-school relationships (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Guo, 2010; Vera et al., 2012). Finally, these communications serve to connect parents with the school and inform parents of various academic services that are available to support their students, including gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (Cobb, 2012; Guo, 2010; McKenna & Millen, 2013). Because home-school communications are designed to inform, educate, and empower parents to be aware of academic services available in schools and involve parents in their child's education, it is important for all parents to be able to read, comprehend, and act on these communications.

2.1. Websites and Media in Different Cultures

Studies demonstrate that different cultures use and view media in different ways, and thus, information intended to communicate with immigrant parents through school district websites or media outlets may be viewed differently and be less effective at

communicating with parents from diverse backgrounds outside of the United States. According to researcher Luc Pauwels (2012), almost all aspects of websites and other digital communications are culturally coded and reflect the values and opinions of the culture that created them in explicit and inexplicit ways. The layout of websites and the ability to emphasize particular pieces of information and de-emphasize other aspects of information reveals the values of the culture who created the document and/or the values they perceive the consumers of their website have (Pauwels, 2012; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014). This is shown in Saichaie and Morpew's (2014) study on what college and university websites in the United States communicate to prospective students, where researchers found that most of the websites studied emphasized personal gain as the number one reason students should attend their particular university.

The way websites communicate the values and opinions held by the cultures that created them and reflect cultural ideas is further seen in a study done by Hsiu Ching Laura Hsieh (2014). After examining how people from two different countries, Taiwan and Australia, navigated websites from both their own culture and the other culture, Hsieh (2014) found that Taiwanese participants were better able to navigate and understand Taiwanese websites and Australian participants were better able to navigate and understand Australian websites, although both participants attempted to navigate websites from both countries. These findings were also supported by research done by Kang and Kovacevic (2012), which found that participants were more likely to emotionally connect to websites that were culturally-specific to their home culture and responded more negatively to websites that were culturally-specific to another culture.

As US schools often use their websites for home-school communication and more

schools and teachers are providing access to important information online (Center for the Study of Education Policy, 2004), such cultural approaches to navigation and understanding is important to note. This study examines texts gathered from the school websites of several districts and analyzes their effectiveness at communicating to immigrant parents. This study also examines immigrant parents' perspectives about their website use and understanding of the school websites of the schools their child(ren) attend.

2.2. Increasing Diversity in United States Public Schools

For the purpose of this study, immigrant parents will be defined as parents who are foreign-born and have left their native-born country and migrated to the United States to live (Borjas, 2011). Immigrant parents may have differing levels of English language proficiency, depending on their sociocultural backgrounds (Park & McHugh, 2014). For the purposes of this study, immigrant students will be defined as students who have at least one foreign-born parent (Borjas, 2011). United States public schools are becoming increasingly diverse, with over 840,000 foreign-born immigrant students represented in the total population of school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). About 4.6 million people in the United States are currently identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). During the 2012-2013 school year, 9.2% of the population of students enrolled in United States' public schools was identified as ELLs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015b). In contrast, the percentage of ELLs enrolled in United States' public schools during the 2002-03 school year was approximately 8.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). There are many programs like English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, tutoring classes, and peer-

mentoring programs to support immigrant students who struggle to acquire the English language acuity and cultural knowledge required to succeed in United States public schools (United States Department of Education, 2015). Although these programs are important for meeting the needs of immigrant students, focusing solely on their needs often leads researchers, teachers, parents, and students of diverse backgrounds to overlook other services available to support students' learning (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Such a gap is seen particularly in connecting secondary immigrant students with advanced placement and gifted and talented programs.

This paper specifically focuses on advanced placement and gifted education programs, two programs designed for identified advanced learners. These programs are traditionally overlooked in the popular discourse on education, since the majority of education laws and policies created in recent years are devoted to helping struggling students rise to meet the skills and knowledge levels of their proficient peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Not only are these programs overlooked in the popular education discourse, immigrant students are historically underrepresented in these programs due to a plethora of factors. By failing to provide all immigrant students identified as advanced with the support they need, the United States' education system has, in essence, failed to give immigrant students the level of education they need to be successful in the future. This gap demands attention.

2.3. U.S. Secondary School Advanced Placement and Gifted and Talented Programs

Just like struggling students benefit from the support of services like ESL classes and tutoring programs, students who are identified as advanced or gifted and talented benefit from advanced programs. In the United States schools gifted and talented

programs are defined as programs designed to support and challenge students identified as *gifted* and advanced programs are defined as programs designed to support and challenge students identified as *advanced* (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.). According to the federal definition, students are identified as *gifted* or *advanced* when they demonstrate they have the potential for high performance in creative, intellectual, artistic, or leadership abilities and who need additional supports to develop their abilities beyond what is traditionally offered in a school context (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.). Currently, the methods used to identify children as *gifted* or *advanced* are determined primarily by individual school districts and vary depending on a districts definition of giftedness (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

There are two common ways of thinking about *giftedness* that determine what attributes make a student *gifted* and qualified to receive gifted education. The first and most traditional method schools use to define *giftedness* is measuring a student's intelligence (Dai & Chen, 2013). Dai and Chen (2013) describe an intelligence-based view of giftedness as one that relies solely on IQ to indicate potential. In more recent years, educators have taken a more talent-based approach to determining what qualifies a child as a *gifted* student. Instead of claiming that a student is *gifted* because of his or her intelligence, this approach believes that students can be considered *gifted* based on their specific talents and abilities, their potential in an area, and their motivation and intelligence (Dai & Chen, 2013). Since there is no federal mandate that regulates or requires schools to provide gifted and advanced programs, there is no standardized way of identifying these students (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.). However,

there are three typical ways students are identified as *gifted* or *advanced* in most schools including: IQ tests or assessments, records of student performance, teacher recommendations that students be tested, and parent requests that their child(ren) be tested (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

The process to identify a student as *gifted* or *advanced* begins with the request of a student's parent, or a teacher's recommendation of a student to the district's personnel assigned to identify advanced and gifted students (Purcell & Eckert, 2006). After a student is recommended for the program by a teacher or a parent, most school districts examine the student's grades and scores on an IQ test to determine whether or not they qualify for admittance into the district's gifted and talented or advanced placement programs (Purcell & Eckert, 2006).

Students who are not identified as gifted but are identified as advanced in specific subject areas or students who desire to gain a depth of knowledge of a particular subject are encouraged to sign up for Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school (The College Board, n.d.). AP classes are college-level courses in a variety of subjects designed to give high school students in-depth knowledge of a subject. These also are intended to give the student a head start on college, as many universities will accept AP classes as college credits if students score high enough on the AP test they are required to take at the end of the class.

Studies demonstrate that advanced students who participate in support services like advanced placement classes or gifted and talented programs are more likely to pursue doctoral degrees and succeed academically than peers who do not receive these services (Kell, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2013; Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, & Benbow, 2001; Young

& Balli, 2014). Participation in advanced programs also encourages students' creativity and improves students' critical thinking skills (Campbell & Walberg, 2011; Young & Balli, 2014). Advanced placement and gifted and talented programs give advanced students opportunities to pursue their interests and provide the support students need to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom (Young & Balli, 2014).

2.4. Underrepresentation of Minority Students in K-12 Advanced Programs

Although the student population is becoming more diverse, students enrolled in gifted and talented programs and AP programs continue to be mostly White, non-Hispanic (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Of the three to five million students currently enrolled in gifted and talented programs in the United States, 60% identify as White, non-Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Although these students only comprise about 50% of the population of United States public schools, White, non-Hispanic students are overrepresented in advanced programs (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). In contrast, students who identify as Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, or other races and ethnicities comprise about 44.4% of the population of United States' public schools only represent 30.4% of the students in gifted and advanced programs (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Students who identify as ELL are also underrepresented in Advanced Placement programs, where they comprise about two percent of the students enrolled despite the fact they represent about five percent of the total population of students enrolled in United States' public schools (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

When surveying the underrepresentation of minority students enrolled in gifted

and talented or AP programs, Equierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012), in their study of Hispanic students in advanced programs determined that bilingual Hispanic students were more likely to be underrepresented in AP and gifted and talented programs than monolingual students of Hispanic descent. Plucker, Hardesty, and Burroughs (2013) found that immigrant students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse were underrepresented in advanced programs due to excellence gaps, or large discrepancies in academic achievement between two different groups of student populations. Researchers found that these excellence gaps existed between White students and students from other cultural backgrounds, as well as between ELL students and their native-speaking peers (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). To determine the presence of excellence gaps, researchers examined the percentage of students scoring advanced on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests over the course of 15 years (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). It was found that over the course of the 15 years, the percentage of White students who scored advanced on the NAEP math tests for fourth and eighth grades increased by about six percent, however, the percentage of students from other cultures and races who achieved advanced these same tests only increased by one to two percent during the years studied (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). Although there was significantly less improvement over the 15 years for all students on the NAEP reading tests, the percentage of White students who scored advanced increased by about 1.5%, while the percentage of students of other races and cultures who scored advanced only increased by 0-1.1% during the same time period (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). The study found that ELL students score similarly and show similar improvement on these tests over the course of the years

studied as students from other races and cultures (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). While excellence gaps do not necessarily correlate to representation in advanced programs, they often coincide with underrepresentation in advanced programs, and may be one reason immigrant students are not considered for advanced programs (Plucker, Hardesty, & Burroughs, 2013). Unfortunately, although immigrant students are an increasing population in American schools, these studies show that they are not finding their way into AP and gifted education programs.

Researchers have identified a constellation of factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of minority populations in advanced placement and gifted and talented programs. Although some might try to argue that immigrant students are underrepresented in advanced placement because these programs are too challenging for these students, studies demonstrate that minority students are just as capable at excelling in these programs as their peers (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014; Nguyen, 2012). In Markose and Simpson's study (2014), which examined immigrant families and the challenges they faced in English-speaking schools, children ages 7 through 12 of participating immigrant families from China and Lebanon were all capable of high achievement if given the proper support. Although when the families originally moved into the country, their students were behind their native English speaking peers academically due to the language barrier, through hard work and dedication, the students were able to stay two years ahead of their classmates (Markose & Simpson, 2014). This study confirmed the findings of an earlier study which found that minority students who had above average capabilities in secondary schools were often expected to wait for their peers to finish or tutor other students instead of being given

enrichment activities to advance their learning (Nguyen, 2012). When this occurred, immigrant students were less likely to reach their full academic potential despite any language barriers encountered (Nguyen, 2012).

Focusing on the secondary education level, researchers have noted that immigrant students have demonstrated advanced capabilities but are denied access to advanced programs (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Kanno and Kangas (2014) studied the academic achievement of students who entered secondary schools as ELLs. This study found that although many of these students exited the ESL program and went on to excel academically, only two of the eight students involved in the study participated in advanced programs (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). The rest of the students who participated in the study remained confined to low track courses despite their capabilities (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Cobb (2012), Esquierdo and Arreguin-Anderson (2012), and Markose and Simpson (2014) who studied the capabilities of diverse students and found that there were many high-achieving students within these populations who were capable of performing well in advanced programs and yet were also denied access to these programs.

Studies also show that students with home languages other than English were more likely to be proficient on standardized tests than their native English-speaking peers the older they got (Broomes, 2013). However, despite the capabilities of immigrant students and their eligibility for gifted and talented or AP programs, teachers, schools, and administrators tend to overlook these factors and ignore these students when making recommendations for these programs (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). Even though an increasing number of students in K-12

schools in the United States are culturally and linguistically diverse, the population of immigrant students enrolled in gifted and talented or advanced placement programs does not reflect this change in population (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The general consensus within the literature is that the underrepresentation of immigrant students in advanced programs suggests that the system used to identify students for these programs is failing immigrant students in some way (Ford, 2012).

2.5. Factors Influencing Minority Student Underrepresentation in Advanced Programs

Recent studies have examined various reasons why minority students are underrepresented in advanced programs, and have identified several contributing factors. Most gifted and talented or AP students are identified through their IQ and test scores on a standardized test. However, in Harris' (2014) examination of the literature regarding the identification of advanced students, it was found that IQ tests tended to be biased against immigrant students, particularly because these tests require students to read, understand, and respond to questions at an English language level and with cultural knowledge immigrant students may not possess (Harris, 2014). These findings are consistent with findings of several other studies that have found IQ tests to be linguistically and culturally biased (Cross, 2013; Fultz, Laura-Alecio, Irby, & Tong, 2013).

After determining that traditional IQ tests were biased against immigrant students, Fultz, Laura-Alecio, Irby, and Tong (2013) examined an alternative testing method to help identify gifted bilingual Hispanic students to determine its accuracy and fairness

compared to other gifted identification tests that did not cater to immigrant students. They found that the test accurately identified bilingual Hispanic students as gifted by scoring them in categories like achievement, creative performance, and problem solving skills (Fultz et al., 2013). While this alternative testing method may help identify bilingual Hispanic students as advanced, the researchers acknowledge that it does little to improve the test biases for students of other cultures and backgrounds and recommend that more research be done to promote bilingual gifted identification initiatives (Fultz et al., 2013).

In school districts where gifted and talented and AP students are not identified solely by a test and their IQ scores, teacher recommendations play a strong role in determining which students have access to advanced programs (Siegle et al, 2010). However, teacher perspectives and lack of training on identifying gifted and talented students limit their referrals of minority students (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Szymanski and Shaff (2013) interviewed six practicing teachers regarding their training on identifying and providing enrichment for gifted students and how they determined which students should be referred to advanced programs. All the teachers interviewed reported a lack of extensive training regarding how to identify or support gifted learners, and few were able to define specific qualities of a gifted student (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). In contrast, all of the teachers reported having received comprehensive training about remediation programs for ELLs, resulting in a possible bias towards thinking of immigrant students as students who need remediation instead of high performers (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) found that because of teachers' lack of training

regarding advanced students, teachers rely on personal experience and conceptions of giftedness to identify advanced students (Syzmanski & Shaff, 2013). Further they noted that teachers identified students who were capable of finishing work quickly and who needed minimal help from the teacher as gifted and talented and often overlooked students who did not have English language proficiency or were living in poverty, regardless of their intellectual or creative abilities (Syzmanski & Shaff, 2013).

Unfortunately, ignoring students who do not have English language proficiency and are living in poverty leaves many minority students overlooked and contributes to the underrepresentation of immigrant students in gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (Siegle et al, 2010; Syzmanski & Shaff, 2013).

2.6. Parental Involvement in Advanced Program Identification

Even though identification tests and teacher recommendations are often biased against immigrant students, preventing them from being considered for advanced programs, parents can also recommend students for participation in these programs. Research has shown that parents are able to recognize signs of advanced capabilities in their children and they have the right to advocate for their students and request they be considered for advanced programs (Cobb, 2012; Young & Balli, 2014).

Parents desire the best education possible for their children, and want to advocate for their child(ren) to receive appropriate education that will challenge them and enable them to grow. Young and Balli (2014) interviewed 52 parents of advanced students and discovered that most of these parents were able to identify traits of giftedness or advanced abilities in their children. These parents, who included several immigrant mothers, spoke about their desire for their students to be challenged appropriately and

receive the enrichment they need as advanced learners (Young & Balli, 2014). Many of the parents in Young and Balli's (2014) study were able to request their children be placed in advanced programs or receive enrichment activities to support their learning. These findings confirmed the findings of an earlier study done by McKenna and Millen (2013), which noted that parents were able to advocate for their children to be challenged and receive the educational support they needed when effective home-school communication strategies are implemented.

One reason many immigrant parents do not use their right to request their child be tested for advanced programming is a lack of English language proficiency (Vera et al., 2012). Due to the diversity of the immigrant population in the United States, it is difficult to find the average reading levels of immigrant parents since it varies across culture and region. However, many statistics indicate that many immigrant parents may have limited English language proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a; Parks & McHugh, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics Demographic Data Table (2013), 8.6% of the population of the United States, or approximately 25 million people, spoke English "less than very well" and thus, may have difficulty understanding home-school communications written in English. Data also shows that in 2012, 47% of foreign-born parents of children under eight years old, or almost two million people living in the United States had limited English language proficiency (Parks & McHugh, 2014).

In a study done by researchers Vera et al. (2012), it was found that language barriers were the most prominent reason immigrant parents did not read, respond, and act on home-school communications. A later study by Markose and Simpson (2014)

confirmed these findings when they interviewed immigrant parents who said their limited English language proficiency created a language barrier that prevented them from understanding home-school communications. Since it is estimated that almost half of the population of immigrant parents has limited English language proficiency, it is important to address this issue in home-school communications.

However, most immigrant parents do not use their right to request their child be tested for advanced programming. One prominent reason for this is not language, but that the communications sent between homes and schools have been found to be ineffective in communicating clearly with immigrant parents (McKenna & Millen, 2013). In other words, researchers have found that parents of ELLs struggle to understand home-school communications meant to inform parents about their rights and responsibilities regarding their child's education (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010). According to a study on effective school-parent partnerships conducted by Chu and Wu (2014), language is the largest obstacle to immigrant parents when communicating with schools and advocating to advance their child's education. Several other studies support these findings (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Guo, 2010; Vera et al., 2012). Guo's (2010) study on immigrant parent-teacher interactions in secondary schools interviewed nine teachers, six bilingual assistants, and over 100 parents and found that immigrant parents received written communications and invitations to parent-teacher meetings and back-to-school nights, but often did not act on them because of a lack of understanding (Guo, 2010). However, when these parents were provided with translators at parent-teacher meetings, they responded by asking questions and voicing concerns about their children's education (Guo, 2010).

A later study done by Vera et al. (2012) confirmed the results of Guo's (2010) study. Vera et al. (2012) interviewed 239 parents of ELLs to determine how parents were involved in their children's education and what factors influenced parents' involvement with schools. It was found that the language barrier between parents' home language and the language schools used in home-school communications was the largest obstacle standing in the way of immigrant parents' ability to communicate with and participate in their children's schools (Vera et al., 2012).

Markose and Simpson's (2014) recent study also supported these findings, noting that immigrant parents with limited English language proficiency often signed and returned written communication with schools not because they understood the communication, but because they understood the school wanted them to sign the paper. Immigrant parents were often overwhelmed with the sheer amount of papers and forms sent home and had difficulty understanding these documents, which resulted in these parents feeling inadequate (Markose & Simpson, 2014). Although within this study immigrant parents expressed desire for their children to succeed and knew they had the talent and intelligence to be identified as gifted and talented or placed in AP classes, many of them felt defeated by their inability to understand home school communication and ultimately resorted to seeking help and support for themselves and their families elsewhere (Guo, 2010; McKenna & Millen, 2013).

2.7. Barriers to Immigrant Students' Advanced Program Participation

Unfortunately, immigrant parents continually report a lack of English language proficiency prevents them from being able to read, understand, and act on home-school communications, and their child(ren) often act as interpreters to help bridge the language

barrier and help their parents understand (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Although the language barrier between immigrant parents and schools prevents many parents from being able to read, understand, and act on home-school communication to get their child the support of advanced services, there are other barriers to immigrant parents' ability to advocate for their child's advanced education as well. Studies show that home-school communication can be misinterpreted by immigrant parents as a result of cultural differences and insensitivity (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014; Markose & Simpson, 2014; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). A study done by Guo (2010) found that immigrant parents often fail to act on home-school communication because of cultural differences between parents' home cultures and the school's culture. Specifically, Guo (2010) discovered that immigrant parents waited for the teacher to contact them with information about their children because it was not appropriate for parents to contact teachers in their culture. Later studies confirmed Guo's (2010) findings, reporting that immigrant parents often failed to contact teachers out of respect for their position and belief they would be interfering with the teacher's job (Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014; Vera et al., 2012).

A study done by Cobb (2012) found that although immigrant parents wanted their children in advanced programs, they often did not initiate conversations to advance their child's education because they felt that would be overstepping their bounds as parents. Furthermore, Cobb (2012) noted that immigrant parents expected the school to teach their children and the teacher to make any accommodations and recommendations necessary to ensure their children had the best education possible. Cobb's (2012) study found that immigrant parents trusted teachers and schools to identify and provide advanced support

for their students. However, teachers in this study were found to not always identify immigrant students as advanced and provide them with the enrichment activities they need, resulting in a lack of advanced support for capable immigrant students (Cobb, 2012). Cobb's (2012) results were confirmed in a later study by Bennett-Conroy (2012) which found that immigrant parents often did not initiate contact with teachers even when they had concerns or questions about their child's education because of cultural views that prohibited initiating home-school communications.

Not only do immigrant parents often come from cultures where it would be inappropriate to contact a child's teacher, perceived feelings of disrespect and cultural insensitivity also prevent immigrant parents from acting on home-school communications (Chu & Wu, 2012; McKenna & Millen, 2013). As previously mentioned McKenna and Millen (2013) found immigrant parents reported feeling disrespected in their interactions with their children's schools. Parents in this study claimed that the home-school communications left them feeling as if the school was condemning their parenting skills and choices (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Instead of feeling welcomed by the school and entering into a partnership with teachers to ensure their children got the best education possible, these parents felt defensive when communicating with their children's school and spent much of their communication fighting against stereotypes they perceived the teachers had (McKenna & Millen, 2013). McKenna and Millen's (2013) findings were supported by a later study done by Poza, Brooks, and Valdés (2014), which also noted lack of cultural sensitivity and feelings of being unwelcome in the school as reasons immigrant parents chose not to act on home-school communications.

Furthermore, studies show that immigrant parents often do not advocate for their

child to be provided access to advanced education programs because home-school communication often fails to provide these parents with enough information regarding their rights or responsibilities in their child's education (Cobb, 2012; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Although immigrant parents in Cobb's (2012) study wanted their children in advanced programs, none of the mothers interviewed in the study were aware that they were allowed to request their child be tested for advanced programs. Both mothers attempted to find information regarding their rights, responsibilities, and the programs available to their children, however, none were able to find enough information to properly outline their rights and the steps they could take to advocate for their child's education (Cobb, 2012).

A later study by Beauregard, Petrakos, and Dupont (2014) echoed the stories of the immigrant mothers studied by Cobb. When studying the family-school partnership dynamic of schools in Canada, Beauregard, Petrakos, and Dupont (2014) found that several parents were informed by letter that their children were being sent to different schools, without ever having been consulted or informed this was a possibility. Both this study and Cobb's (2012) study supported the findings of an earlier study done by Vera et al. (2012), which noted a lack of knowledge about the United States education system and parental rights and responsibilities as a barrier to immigrant parent's decision to act on home-school communications.

Finally, studies show parental experiences and schooling background may impact their expectations of their child's schooling and their understanding of their child's schooling. Examining data from numerous studies before them, researchers Holmlund, Lindahl, and Plug (2011) noticed a link between the prior education of a child's mother

and father and the child's education level, suggesting that parents who had more education were more likely to have children with higher levels of education, and that parent nurture plays a role in a child's educational achievement. While Holmlund, Lindahl, and Plug's (2011) examination of the methods used to determine how parents' education correlated to students' education determined current methods used have several limitations, the general consensus of the findings indicates that parental schooling indicates how their child(ren) will achieve in school, and the higher the father's education especially, the higher education the child(ren) will pursue. No studies were found to indicate how parental experience and schooling background impacted their understanding of the education their child(ren) received.

2.8. Conclusion

In light of this information, the purpose of this study was to evaluate home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs to determine their effectiveness in communicating with immigrant parents in four urban/suburban secondary programs in the central Pennsylvania area. This study examined what English language proficiency levels, reading grade levels, and assumed knowledge immigrant parents needed to read, understand, and act on home-school communications to advocate for the participation of their child(ren) in advanced placement or gifted and talented programs through website text analysis and parent interviews. This study addresses a significant topic in education, as the immigrant population in the United States is increasing (Brown & Stepler, 2015), and schools and educators need to be prepared and equipped to provide the best education possible to these students.

Chapter 3: Data and Methodology

In light of the present literature addressing the low enrollment of immigrant students in advanced or gifted and talented program, the purpose of this study was to evaluate home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs to determine their effectiveness in communicating with immigrant parents. Four urban/suburban secondary programs in the central Pennsylvania area were chosen for convenience and the increasingly diverse student populations noted in the region (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). This mixed-methods study examined the English language proficiency levels, reading grade levels, and assumed knowledge immigrant parents need to read, understand, and act on home-school communications to get their students in advanced placement or gifted and talented programs. A mixed-methods concurrent research design (Mertens, 2014) was chosen for this study. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the current English language proficiency levels and reading grade levels of typical home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
2. What intertextuality and prior knowledge is assumed in home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
3. What are the assumptions home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs have about the role rights and responsibilities of parents receiving this communications?

Currently, students of diverse cultural and language backgrounds are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and advanced placement programs in

United States public schools (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Ford, 2010; Gentry, Fugate, Wu, & Castellano, 2014). According to the present research there are three factors which may hinder immigrant parents from effectively placing their children into the advanced programs offered to them. These factors include 1) English language proficiency (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Chu & Wu, 2014); 2) Assumed intertextual knowledge (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014); and 3) Immigrant parents views of advanced programs (Chu & Wu, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013). Therefore, the home-school communications via the school websites and immigrant parents' perceptions of the communications were interrogated on these three factors.

3.1. Data Sources

Because of the information needed, this study design was a mixed-methods research study using data garnered from a text analysis of digital home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs with a focus on semiotic understanding of these texts (Shank, 2008). All texts used in this study were gathered from the school district's websites, which are available at all times for public and parental access. Furthermore, parental perceptions of home-school communication about advanced placement and gifted and talented programs were garnered using semi-structured interviews.

3.2. Sample

3.2.1. School website texts.

Samples of home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs were gathered from secondary schools in four participating school

districts. All districts are located in Central Pennsylvania. School district A has a population that is 78.9% White, 12.4% African American, 4.7% Hispanic or Latino, 2.4% Asian, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Natives, and 2.0% other races (Common Core of Data, 2015). School district B has a less diverse student population, comprised of 91.0% of students identifying as White, 1.9% of students identifying as African American, 2.3% of students identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 3.9% of students identifying as Asian, 0.0% of students identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Natives, and only 0.6% of all other races represented (Common Core of Data, 2015). School district C has a student population that is 89.2% White, 2.2% African American, 5.0% Hispanic or Latino, 3.9% Asian, 0.1% American Indian or Alaskan Natives, and only 1.8% other races (Common Core of Data, 2015). The student population of school district D is slightly more diverse. 85.4% of the students in school district D are White, 7.5% are African American, 5.0% are Hispanic or Latino, 0.7% are Asian, 0.1% are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, and 1.5% are some other race (Common Core of Data, 2015). (see Table 1)

3.2.2. Interviews.

To examine immigrant parents' perceptions of home-school communication parents with students in schools in the area were interviewed to determine their relationship with and feelings about home-school communication. Participants in this study included immigrant parents of school students currently enrolled in the participating school districts. Participants in the study were volunteers identified by a trusted consultant who knew both the participants and the researchers. All participating parents received home-school communications regarding advanced programming through accessing the websites of the schools where their child(ren) attend. Requests for

participation were sent to each of the five families, and a representative from each family agreed to participate. The five participants who were selected were mothers and fathers from five families who represented a range of countries including France, Mexico, Albania, India, and South Africa (see Table 2).

3.3. Data Collection

Before this study began, it was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. All participants were required to sign consent forms before participating and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and an interview script was approved and used during this study (see Appendix C).

3.3.1. School website texts.

The primary data was the communications collected from the school districts' websites. Communications regarding advanced education are made available to parents and the public at any time through school district websites, and are meant to inform parents about the opportunities available to students through advanced programs and steps for the parents to take to enroll their children in these programs.

To address the research questions, samples of communications sent to parents' homes from the school were needed in order to test the English language proficiency, reading grade levels, and the intertextuality demands needed for parents need to read, understand, and act on these communications. These communications were gathered from what information is available online for parents to access. Texts were collected from the school websites of each of four participating schools. Any texts that gave general information about gifted and talented programs or advanced placement programs were included in the study. Texts containing information about specific AP classes or

gifted and talented classes, usually consisting of teacher-maintained webpages, were also collected and used in this study. Also, any documents containing specific information about parent's rights, parent's responsibilities, or the school district's parent involvement policy were also gathered from the participating schools' websites and were included in this study. A combined total of 32 website texts were gathered from the school websites. Once the text was collected, it was collated into word documents. Word documents of website texts were then loaded into Dedoose, qualitative analysis software to be analyzed (Dedoose Software 6.2.7).

3.3.2. Interviews.

Secondary data for this study were garnered from semi-structured interviews conducted with immigrant parents who have children who attend school districts in the area studied (Chu & Wu, 2014; Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014; Young & Balli, 2014). Replicating the approach of former studies, the researcher used open-ended interview questions such as "please describe what information regarding advanced programs you have learned from looking at the website of your child(ren)'s school" to assess immigrant parents' perceptions of home-school communications regarding gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (see Appendix C).

Once participants agreed to be in the study, they were contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview. Interviews occurred at a location and time that was convenient for participants, and it can be assumed participants were as comfortable as possible. At the start of the interview, participants were informed of the interview process and their right to withdraw their participation at any time. All participants signed a consent form prior to proceeding with the interview.

During the interviews, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to generate honest answers about their perceptions, opinions, and experiences regarding the school website of the school their child(ren) attended and the access their child(ren) had to advanced placement or gifted and talented programs. Participants were asked to describe their personal experiences in secondary school, their perceptions of the school their child(ren) attend and the advanced programs available to their child(ren), their experiences communicating with the school their child(ren) attend, and their responses to communications they gathered from the school website of the school their child(ren) attend (see Appendix C). During the interview, participants viewed the school websites of the schools where their child(ren) attend to refresh their memories on information conveyed through the website and their perceptions of the website. Interviews lasted for about 15 minutes, and the longest interview was just over 23 minutes.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. School website texts.

Home-school communications about gifted and talented and advanced placement programs were examined in a text analysis with a focus on semiotic understanding (Julien, 2008). Using text analysis, texts were a-priori coded using the previously identified issues of home-school communication as a guide. Therefore, the text analysis focused on words and phrases in the text and what reading levels and intertextual knowledge, or prior knowledge the text assumes the reader knows, were required for parents to be able to read, understand, and act on home-school communications regarding gifted and talented and advanced placement programs.

Reading levels. Reading levels of the documents were determined using the Fry Graph Readability Formula (Fry, 1969; Readability Formulas, n.d.). Using this model, three random samples of 100 words each were selected from each document. Each sample was analyzed to determine the number of syllables present in each 100-word selection of text and the number of sentences in each selection. The number of syllables and number of sentences of each of the three samples were averaged together to get an average number of syllables and sentences in each document. The average number of syllables and the average number of sentences contained in each document was charted using the Fry Graph for estimating Reading Ages (grade level). The average number of syllables of each document was plotted along the x-axis of the Fry Graph, and the average number of sentences was plotted along the y-axis of the Fry Graph. The point where the average number of syllables and average number of sentences met on the Fry Graph corresponded with a grade level from first grade through college (noted on the Fry Graph as fifteenth grade).

Intertextual and prior knowledge. Previous studies indicated that home-school communications often made assumptions about the prior knowledge or intertextual knowledge parents had that would enable them to read, understand, and act on home-school communications (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Intertextual knowledge and prior knowledge was considered any information or knowledge that one needed to be able to read, understand, and act on home-school communications that was not explicitly explained in the communications themselves (Markose & Simpson, 2014). Since this category was broad, it was broken down into three sub-categories to examine three specific examples of intertextual and prior

knowledge that previous studies suggested may prevent immigrant parents from being able to read, understand, and act on home-school communications: school jargon (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Vera et al., 2012), cultural reference (Chu & Wu, 2012; Cobb, 2012), and teacher/school responsibility (Siegle et al., 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

School jargon. School jargon was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically school-related and required specialized knowledge of the United States' or Pennsylvania's educational systems (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Vera et al., 2012). Any language, words, or phrases that required specific or specialized knowledge of the particular school or district was also coded as school jargon (Markose & Simpson, 2014). Finally, information about specific gifted and talented programs or Advanced Placement programs were also coded as school jargon, as these programs may not be available in all schools or districts in the United States and typically require specialized knowledge or explanations for parents to know what particular aspects of these programs are available in their child's schools.

Cultural reference. Cultural reference was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically related to culture or carried a significant cultural meaning that required parents to know the cultural context of United States culture to fully understand (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012). Words like "gifted and talented," "enrichment," or "advanced" were coded under cultural reference, as different cultures have differing definitions and ideas about what these concepts mean (Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014). Words, language, and phrasing that referenced parental involvement or provided information about how parents should or

could be involved in their child's education were also coded as cultural references, since expecting parents to be involved in their child's education is part of the culture of the United States school system (Markose & Simpson, 2014).

Teacher/school responsibility. Teacher/school responsibility was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically related to a task or responsibility of the teachers or school related to a student's education (Siegle et al., 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Words and phrases that outlined how schools should provide services or support to parents, allow parents to be involved in meetings regarding their child's education, inform parents of their rights and responsibilities regarding their child's education, and identify students for advanced programs were included in the teacher/school responsibility codes. General references to how teachers and schools should provide for student's education and give students opportunities to grow were also included in this code.

Parent responsibility and roles. Previous studies indicated that home-school communication may not be effective at communicating parent responsibilities or parent rights regarding the education of their child(ren) which were defined as anything parents needed to know about their responsibilities for helping their child(ren) learn and their rights to advocate and participate in the education of their child(ren) (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010; McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Parent responsibility. Parent responsibility was coded as words, phrases, or language in the documents that were specifically related to a task or responsibility of the parents to be involved in their child's education (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010). Words and phrases that showed a task or responsibility shared by both parents and

teachers/schools were coded as both teacher/school responsibility and parent responsibility. General references to parents' responsibility to contact the specific teachers that worked with their child(ren) were also coded as parent responsibility.

Parent rights. Parent rights were coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that specifically related to right parents had regarding their child's education (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010). Words, phrases, and language regarding information parents were to be given or programs parents should have access to, were coded under parent rights, since it is the right of all parents to have access to and knowledge of these things. Information regarding parents' rights to have their children tested for advanced programs, make requests of the school, or be involved in school-wide decisions or decisions regarding the education of their child(ren) were also included under the parent rights code.

The 32 pages of text garnered from school websites were analyzed and coded with the following codes following the a-priori heuristic previously established by the literature: school jargon, cultural reference, teacher/school responsibility, parent responsibility, and parent rights (Chu & Wu, 2012; Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Siegle et al., 2010; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013; Vera et al., 2012).

The reading grade levels of the texts were determined using the Fry Graph Readability Formula (Fry, 1969; Readability Formulas, n.d.). This formula has proven to be an accurate measure of the reading grade level a text is written at. The average number of sentences in each 100-word sample of a text and the average number of syllables of each 100-word sample are considered in the Fry Graph. Once these averages

are calculated, they are plotted on the Fry Graph for estimating Reading Ages (grade level). The point on the Fry Graph where the average number of sentences per 100 words and the average number of syllables per 100 words meet corresponds to a grade level from first grade through college (noted on the Fry Graph as grades one through fifteen).

Therefore the text was taken from four school district websites, converted into word documents, and coded as noted above.

3.4.2. Interviews.

The parent interviews were digitally recorded, with participant's permission, to aid the researcher in recalling and remembering what was said. The researcher transcribed each interview verbatim using Express Scribe Transcription Software (Express Scribe Transcription Software 5.78). All information was recorded in transcriptions as stated, and any parts of the interview that were inaudible were noted as such. Interviews were then uploaded to Dedoose (Dedoose Software 6.2.7) and coded using the same codes that were used to code the documents generated from the websites of participating schools: school jargon, cultural reference, teacher/school responsibility, parent responsibility, and parent rights.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

For the purpose of evaluating home-school communications, specifically those regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs, this study examined what English language proficiency levels, reading grade levels, and assumed knowledge immigrant parents need to read, understand, and act on home-school communications to get their students in advanced placement or gifted and talented programs. Further, how immigrant parents perceived these communications was explored. The following are the findings followed by a discussion of the findings framed by the research questions informing this study.

4.1. Reading Level of School Website Texts

Reading levels of the documents were determined using the Fry Graph Readability Formula (Frye, 1969; Readability Formula, n.d.). Of the 32 documents six of the documents gathered from schools' websites were under 100 words, and thus, too small to get an accurate reading level using the Fry Graph. The documents that were too small to accurately measure were all various types and contained different information (see Table 3). Of these six documents, two contained general information about the school district's gifted program, two contained information about specific gifted classes, and two contained information about specific AP classes. Of the remaining documents, ten were written at reading levels corresponding to middle or high school grades (see Figure 1). The two documents written on a sixth grade reading level contained information about a specific gifted class at a school and a specific AP program. The two documents that were written on a seventh grade reading level and one document that was written on an eighth grade level were all about specific AP classes. One document was

written on a ninth grade level and contained information about a specific gifted class. The one document written on a tenth grade level contained information about a specific AP class. Two documents were written on an eleventh grade level and contained information about a specific gifted class and a specific AP class. One document was written on a twelfth grade level and contained general information about the school districts' gifted program.

Although ten of the documents were written on a secondary education reading level, the majority of documents were written in reading levels beyond high school. Four of the documents required readers to have a college reading level. Of these four documents, three were written at a thirteenth grade reading level. Two of the documents written at a thirteenth grade reading level contained general information about the school district's gifted program, and one of the documents written at a thirteenth grade reading level contained information about a specific gifted class. One document was written at a fourteenth grade reading level and contained information about a specific gifted class. The remaining 12 documents were coded as "too complex to measure" because the average number of syllables and/or average number of sentences per 100 words was too high to be measured and exceeded the limits of the Fry Graph for estimating Reading Ages. Of the documents that were too complex to measure, four documents contained general information about the school district's gifted program, four contained information about specific AP classes, one contained information about a specific gifted class, and one contained general information about the school district's AP program. The remaining two documents with reading levels that were too complex to measure contained information about parent's rights and the school district's parent involvement

policy.

4.2. Document Findings of School Website Texts

A total of 1,932 excerpts relating to each of the five codes were coded in the documents. The code that was used most often was school jargon, which was highlighted in the documents 1,093 times. The documents contained 568 instances cultural references or culturally-coded language. Teacher/school responsibility was mentioned 161 times across all documents. Parent responsibility was discussed less overall, with 80 mentions total. There were 30 instances when parent rights were discussed in any of the documents collected from all four schools (see Figure 3).

4.2.1. School jargon.

School jargon was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically school-related and required specialized knowledge of the United States' or Pennsylvania's educational systems (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Vera et al., 2012). Any language, words, or phrases that required specific or specialized knowledge of the particular school or district was also coded as school jargon (Markose & Simpson, 2014). Finally, information about specific gifted and talented programs or Advanced Placement programs were also coded as school jargon, as these programs may not be available in all schools or districts in the United States and typically require specialized knowledge or explanations for parents to know what particular aspects of these programs are available in their child's schools.

All 32 documents contained at least one instance of school jargon (100%), and the highest number of instances of school jargon in a single document was 372 out of the 1093 total references to school jargon made in all the documents, or 34% of the total

references to school jargon. Each document contained an average of 34 references to school jargon. Some of the most notable examples of school jargon included in the documents include: “Title I parent involvement set-aside funds,” “Gifted Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation (GMDE),” “impartial due-process hearing,” “IDEA and Chapter 14,” and “RtII Meetings” (see Table 4).

All of the documents with a reading level that was beyond twelfth grade and documents that were too complex to have measurable reading levels contained school jargon. In contrast, only 3.1% of the instances of school jargon were contained in documents that were written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level. Documents that were written at an eighth or ninth grade reading level contained 1.2% of the instances of school jargon, and documents that were written at a tenth or eleventh grade reading level contained 3.5% of the references to school jargon. The documents written at a twelfth grade reading level contained 1.6% of the instances of school jargon. The remaining 87.8% of the references to school jargon were contained in documents written at beyond a twelfth grade reading level or that were too complex to measure (see Table 5).

Of the 32 documents, 25.8% of the documents with school jargon were from school district B, which was the school district with the highest population of White students, the school district with the lowest population of African American students, and the school district with one of the highest population of Asian students. In contrast, the school district with the lowest population of white students, highest population of African American students, second highest population of Asian students, and highest population of students of other races, school district A, contained 22.8% of school jargon references. School district D, the school district with the second highest population of

African American students and students from other races, lowest population of Asian students, and third lowest population of White students, contained 0.3% of the references to school jargon. School district C, the school district with the highest population of Asian students, second highest population of White students, and second lowest population of African American students had 51.1% of their documents contain school jargon. (see Table 6).

4.2.2. Cultural reference.

Cultural reference was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically related to culture or carried a significant cultural meaning that required parents to know the cultural context of United States culture to fully understand (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012). Words like “gifted and talented,” “enrichment,” or “advanced” were coded under cultural reference, as different cultures have differing definitions and ideas about what these concepts mean (Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014). Words, language, and phrasing that referenced parental involvement or provided information about how parents should or could be involved in their child’s education were also coded as cultural references, since expecting parents to be involved in their child’s education is part of the culture of the United States school system (Markose & Simpson, 2014).

All but one of the 32 documents contained at least one cultural reference (96.8%), and the highest number of times a single document contained cultural references was 187 out of the total 568 references made to cultural jargon in all the documents, or 32.9% of all the references to cultural references. The average number of cultural references across the 31 documents that contained cultural references was 18. Most notable examples of

cultural references in documents include: “gifted and talented,” “Parent Involvement,” “traditional education program,” and “advanced placement” (see Table 7). These were coded as cultural references because many cultures do not define gifted, talented, or advanced the same and cultures have differing ideas about how involved parents should be in school and what “traditional education” is.

All of the documents with a reading level that was identified by the Fry Reading Level as too complex to measure or was beyond twelfth grade level contained cultural references (86.4%). In contrast, documents written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level contained 2.5% of the instances of cultural references. Documents written at an eighth or ninth grade reading level contained 0.5% of cultural references codes, and documents written at a tenth or eleventh grade reading level contained 2.5% of the total cultural reference codes. Documents written at a twelfth grade reading level contained 2.8% of the cultural references coded in this study (see Table 8).

Documents from school district B, the school district with the highest population of White students, lowest population of African American students, and one of the highest populations of Asian students contained 23.9% of cultural references. In contrast, school district A, the school district with the highest population of African American students and students from other races, second lowest population of Asian students, and lowest population of White students contained 23.1% of cultural references. School district C, the school district with one of the highest populations of Asian students, second highest population of White students, and second lowest population of African American students contained 52.1% of cultural references. The school district with the second lowest population of White students, second highest population of African

American students, and the lowest population of Asian students contained 0.9% of cultural references (see Table 9).

4.2.3. Teacher/School responsibility.

Teacher/school responsibility was coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that were specifically related to a task or responsibility of the teachers or school related to a student's education (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013; Siegle et al., 2010). Words and phrases that outlined how schools should provide services or support to parents, allow parents to be involved in meetings regarding their child's education, inform parents of their rights and responsibilities regarding their child's education, and identify students for advanced programs were included in the teacher/school responsibility codes. General references to how teachers and schools should provide for student's education and give students opportunities to grow were also included in this code.

Thirteen of the 32 documents contained information about teacher/school responsibilities (40.6%). The highest number of times a single document contained information about teacher/school responsibilities was 71 out of the 161 total references made in all the documents to teacher/school responsibility (44%). The average number of references to teacher/school responsibilities contained in all 13 documents was about 12. Some of the most notable examples of teacher/school responsibilities include: to "enable parents to participate in district/school related meeting and training session" and "to provide gifted education services." Documents also discussed how teachers and schools must give parents "full explanation of the parental rights or procedural safeguards available to the parents" and should work at "communicating and working with parents."

Other documents contained information about how teachers and schools were required to communicate with parents, and notable examples of this include: “written notices must be written in language understandable to the general public,” “notices must be communicated orally in the native language or directly,” and “communication will be translated into a language parents can understand” (see Table 10).

Almost all of the references to teacher/school responsibility were contained in documents that were written at a reading level beyond twelfth grade or considered too complex to measure (95.6%). For comparison, documents written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level contained 2.5% of the references to teacher/school responsibility and documents written at an eighth or ninth grade reading level contained 1.2% of the references to teacher/school responsibility. Documents written at a tenth or eleventh grade reading level contained 0.6% of the references to teacher/school responsibility (see Table 11).

School district B, the school district with the highest populations of White students, smallest population of African American students, and one of the highest populations of Asian students had 30.4% of references to teacher/school responsibility in their documents. For comparison, the school district with the highest population of African American students and students from other races, the second lowest population of Asian students, and the lowest population of White students had documents that contained 50.9% of the references to teacher/school responsibility. The school district that contained the highest population of Asian students, second smallest population of African American students and students of other races, and second largest population of White students, school district C, had documents that contained 18.6% of the references

to teacher/school responsibility. The school district with the second smallest population of White students, second largest population of African American students and students of other races, and smallest population of Asian students had no documents that contained references to teacher/school responsibility (see Table 12).

4.2.4. Parent responsibility.

Parent responsibility was coded as words, phrases, or language in the documents that were specifically related to a task or responsibility of the parents to be involved in their child's education (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010). Words and phrases that showed a task or responsibility shared by both parents and teachers/schools were coded as both teacher/school responsibility and parent responsibility. General references to parents' responsibility to contact the specific teachers who worked with their child(ren) were also coded as parent responsibility.

Of the 32 documents in the study, 17 contained information about parent responsibility (53.1%). The highest number of times a single document contained information about parents' responsibilities was 24 out of the 80 references made in all the documents to parent responsibility (30%). The average number of references to parent responsibility contained in all 17 documents was 4. Notable examples of information coded as parent responsibility includes: "may request evaluation if they believe their child is gifted," "seek help from personnel in your school district," "request in writing that their child be evaluated," "visiting the school website," and "be involved in the planning, review, and improvement of the district/school's Parent Involvement Policy" (see Table 13).

Over half of the references to parent responsibility (65%) were contained in

documents that were written beyond a twelfth grade reading level or too complex to measure. For comparison, the documents written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level contained 21.3% of the references to parent responsibility, and documents written at an eighth or ninth grade reading level contained 6.2% of the references to parent responsibility. Documents written at a tenth or eleventh grade reading level contained 3.7% of references to parent responsibility (see Table 14).

The documents from school district B, the school district with the largest population of White students, smallest population of African American students, and one of the highest populations of Asian students had 23.8% of references to parent responsibility. In contrast, school district A, the school district with the largest population of African American students and students from other races, the lowest population of White students, and the second lowest population of Asian students contained 61.3% of the references to parent responsibility. School district C, the school district with one of the highest populations of Asian students, the second smallest population of African American students, and the second largest population of White students contained 13.8% of the references to parent responsibility. The school district with the second smallest population of White students, second largest population of African American students, and smallest population of Asian students, school district D, contained 1.3% of the references to parent responsibility (see Table 15).

4.2.5. Parent rights.

Parent rights were coded as any language, words, or phrases in the documents that specifically related to right parents had regarding their child's education (Chu & Wu, 2014; Guo, 2010). Words, phrases, and language regarding information parents were to

be given or programs parents should have access to were coded under parent rights, since it is the right of all parents to have access to and knowledge of these things. Information regarding parents' rights to have their children tested for advanced programs, make requests of the school, or be involved in school-wide decisions or decisions regarding the education of their child(ren) were also included under the parent rights code.

Five of the 32 documents contained at least one reference to parent rights (15.6%), and the highest number of references a single document made to parent rights was 17 out of 30 of the total references made to parent rights in all documents. Across all five documents, the average number of references made to parent rights was 6. The most notable examples of parent rights coded in the documents include: "right to an impartial due-process hearing," "right to be informed," "right to obtain an independent educational evaluation," "right to initiate due process procedures," to "be involved in the planning, review, and improvement of the district/school's Title 1 program," and "right to be involved" (see Table 16).

Almost all of the references to parent rights were made in documents that were written at a reading level that was beyond twelfth grade or too complex to measure (93.3%). No documents written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level, or written at a tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade reading level contained references to parent rights. All remaining references to parent rights (6.6%) were contained in documents written at an eighth or ninth grade reading level (see Table 17).

The school district with the most references to parent rights in their documents (56.7%) was the district with the largest population of White students, lowest population of African American students, and one of the highest populations of Asian students,

school district B. In contrast, the school district with the largest population of African American students, smallest population of White students, and smallest population of Asian students, school district A, had documents that contained 30% of the references to parent rights. The school district whose documents contained 0% of the references to parent rights was the district with the second smallest population of White students, second largest population of African American students, and smallest population of Asian students, school district D. School district C, the school district with one of the largest populations of Asian students, second largest population of White students, and second smallest population of African American students had documents that contained 13.3% of the references to parent rights (see Table 18).

4.3. Interviews

Although participants were from different cultures and countries, several themes and concepts emerged across all interviews. These themes included cultural differences between the parents' school experience in their home country and their school experience with their child(ren) in the United States, the ease of access to information on the school's website, the usefulness of information on the school's website, and the parents' advanced program knowledge.

4.3.1. Cultural differences.

All participants commented on cultural differences between their secondary school experiences and the experiences of their child(ren) in United States schools. The mother from France confessed, "I'm kind of trusting the institution to do whatever they do because this is what all the kids in this area do....I'm not sure I fully understand how it is supposed to be and how it really is" (T1: 69-71). The father from Albania on the

differences in curriculum between their own experience and the experience of their child(ren), and said, “If I find it as different as all usually because I’m coming from a different country” (T3: 58-59). The mother from Mexico noticed a difference in the cultural expectation of the United States that parents be actively involved in their child’s education, and stated, “In my country, after middle school, you have to be responsible for yourself...it is a shame if your mom is called. Or it is a very shame if your mom goes to the school asking for your grades or something...But here, when I went to the back-to-school night, all of them were like, “You can talk to us. Here’s my email.”...but in my culture, it’s not in that way” (T2: 127-134).

4.3.2. Ease of access to information on the school’s website.

Most participants admitted to not finding the information conveyed on school websites helpful and confessed they rarely looked at anything on the website outside of the grades their child(ren) were earning. The mother from France made statements like “I don’t really feel connected with that, so I haven’t really looked at the website that much” (T1: 101-102) and the father from Albania stated, “I have looked at it first to get to know mostly about... outside logistics....I haven’t done much...looking at...the programs” (T3: 78-81).

4.3.3. Usefulness of information on the school’s website.

When participants did access their child’s school website, they expressed mixed feelings about how useful the information they gathered from the websites were. Several participants reported being pleased with how the school’s websites conveyed information about student grades and upcoming events. The father from India, who regularly checked the school website stated, “It’s really good....It’s easy to follow....We are happy with the

communication—with their website” (T4: 81-88). However, other parents reported frustration with their child’s school websites. After searching unsuccessfully on a school website for information about advanced programming, the mother from Mexico stated, “it is really difficult to understand” (T2: 195-196) and further elaborated that “I don’t think that [the school] use [the website] as a way to communicate....probably if it were a way to communication, it would be helpful” (T2: 241-242; 246-247).

4.3.4. Advanced program knowledge.

In response to questions about advanced placement and gifted and talented programs available at the schools where their child(ren) attend, most participants knew little about advanced programs that might be available to their child(ren). When asked what information they knew about any advanced programming available at the schools where their child(ren) attend, several participants expressed they knew little about these programs. The father from Albania stated “I haven’t learned of anything....if anything, I’m just learning it from you now” (T3: 115-117). Other participants knew some information about the schools where their child(ren) attend and the gifted and talented and Advanced Placement programs available there. The mother from Mexico who knew there were advanced programs at the school found the lack of information they received about these programs frustrating, said, “I know that there is, but I don’t know anything else. I know that there are programs and they’re for advanced kids, but I don’t know how they select them. I don’t know how they work. I don’t know anything at all....Which I’m mad, you know? Very mad.” (T2: 95-100). The father from South Africa, who knew the most about advanced programming, was pleased with the opportunities available to their children in this area, but admitted “Very little information was actually—that I

knew...about these programs for our kids” (T5: 100-101).

Only one participant, the father from South Africa, in the study knew something about how students were admitted into advanced programs, since their kids were involved in Advanced Placement classes. When asked to describe the gifted and talented or advanced programs available, he stated, “we have been very fortunate. [The school district] has a host of programs, a lot of Advanced Placement classes....They see if your kid falls within advanced group or not. I thought that was a little bit arbitrary, you know...especially the cut off....If you got almost ninety...you are like, eighty-nine point nine, cannot be [part of the advanced programs]. I felt that to be discouraging for the kids” (T5: 65-72). Despite feeling the strict cut off of testing used at the participant’s school district to determine which students were allowed to participate in advanced programming, the father from South Africa was overall happy with the opportunities provided to his children, and stated “Our kids had a lot of opportunity” (T5: 72-73).

4.4. Discussion

For the purpose of evaluating home-school communications, specifically those regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs, this study examined what English language proficiency levels, reading grade levels, and assumed knowledge immigrant parents need to read, understand, and act on home-school communications to get their students in advanced placement or gifted and talented programs. Further, how immigrant parents perceived these communications was explored. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

- 1) What are the current English language proficiency levels and reading grade levels of typical home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
- 2) What intertextuality and prior knowledge is assumed in home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
- 3) What are the assumptions that home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs have about the role rights and responsibilities of parents receiving this communication?

4.4.1. What are the current reading grade levels of home-school communications.

Sixteen of the 32 documents included in the study were written in language that required parents to have either a college-aged reading level or were written at a reading level that was too complex to measure using the Fry Readability Graph. Although it is difficult to find the average reading levels of immigrant parents due to the diversity of this population and the limited English language proficiency of many of its members, according to the National Center for Education Statistics Demographic Data Table (2013), 8.6% of the population of the United States, or approximately 25 million people, spoke English “less than very well” and thus, may have difficulty understanding home-school communications written in English. Data also shows that in 2012, 47% of foreign-born parents of children under eight years old, or almost two million people living in the United States had limited English language proficiency (Parks & McHugh, 2014). This suggests that many of the documents intended to inform parents of the

advanced programs available to their child(ren) are written at reading levels that are not ideal for reaching and communicating to immigrant parents, as the documents are written for people who have attended at least one if not many years of college to understand, and parents may or may not have attended college.

Regardless of how much education a parent has received, 12 of the 32 documents contained sentences that were so complex and words with so many syllables, they were unable to be charted on the Fry Readability Graph, which includes up to fifteenth grade, or the equivalent of junior year of college-level education. The complexity of these documents suggests that they may be too complex to be read, understood, or acted upon by many parents, both those who have lived here their entire lives and those who have immigrated to the United States from another country. The complexity of these documents further suggests that regardless of their education level, parents who have limited English Language proficiency may struggle to read, understand, and act on these communications. This supports the findings of prior studies, in which language barriers and limited English Language proficiency were identified as the largest obstacles to immigrant parents' ability to read, understand, and act on home-school communications (Chu & Wu, 2014; Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Vera et al., 2012; Guo, 2010).

It is understood that given the nature of school communication on websites, people from different cultures may have more difficulty accessing and reading the website communications of another culture, since website communications contain cultural codes and references that reflect the values of the culture who created them (Pauwels, 2012; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014). Immigrant parents may also have more difficulty reading documents due to limited English language proficiency and the high

reading levels home-school communications are written in. However, analyzing the reading level of documents is limited for several reasons including the variety of different ways to measure reading level that differ slightly from one another (Fry, 1969; Readability Formulas, n.d.) and lack of definitive information available about the typical reading levels of immigrant parents.

4.4.2. What intertextuality and prior knowledge is assumed in home-school communications regarding advanced programs.

To measure the intertextuality and prior knowledge demands the school website documents made on parents, documents were coded to identify instances of school jargon, cultural references, and teacher/school responsibility. The findings suggest that most of the documents about parental rights and responsibilities and advanced programs contain a fairly high amount of school jargon, which may make it difficult for parents to be able to read, understand, and act on these communications. Furthermore, it appears that very few of the school jargon terms are explained or defined in these communications, which may also prevent parents from being able to read and understand these documents.

The school district with the second largest population of White students had documents that contained the highest number of instances of school jargon (51.1%), while the district with the smallest population of White students and highest population of students from other races had only 22.8% of the references to school jargon contained in their documents. This suggests that schools with larger populations of immigrant students may be more aware of the school jargon they use, and may adapt their communication to contain less school jargon in order to better communicate with parents.

This trend held true when examining the number of cultural references contained in documents gathered from the school's websites. Over half (52.1%) of the cultural references in all the documents were contained in documents from the school district with the second largest population of white students. For comparison, the documents from the school district with the largest population of African American students and students from other races and smallest population of White students contained only 23.1% of cultural references in their documents. This trend further supports the suggestion that schools with more diverse student populations may be more aware of the cultural references in their documents and may do better at avoiding language that is culturally based than their fellow school districts with less diverse student populations.

While school districts with more diverse students populations tended to have fewer cultural references in their schools' documents, it is important to note that all but one of the documents used in this study contained at least one cultural reference. This suggests that, despite the indication that some school districts may be more conscious of the cultural references that may prevent parents from diverse backgrounds from being able to read, understand, and act on communications (Chu & Wu, 2012; McKenna & Millen, 2013), school districts continue to use cultural references in their home-school communications.

Less than half of the documents (40.6%) contained references to teacher/school responsibilities. Although documents written at every reading level contained references to teacher/school responsibilities, over half (95.6%) of the references that were made to teacher/school responsibilities were made in documents written at beyond a twelfth grade reading level or too complex to measure, suggesting that teacher/school responsibilities

are not communicated clearly in home-school communication.

The school district that referenced teacher/school responsibilities the most (50.9%) in their school website documents was the district with the smallest population of White students and the largest population of African American students and students from other races. In contrast, the school district that had the largest population of White students and smallest population of African American students and students of other races contained only 18.6% of the references to teacher/school responsibility in their documents. This suggests that school districts with more diverse student populations may be communicating the responsibilities of the teacher and the school in a child's education more than school districts with less diverse student populations. This was the opposite of what many researchers found in their studies, where immigrant parents often did not understand the teachers/school's responsibilities and their own responsibilities regarding the education of their child(ren) and thus, parents thought they would be interfering with the teacher's job or responsibilities if they contacted the school or advocated for their child(ren) (Cobb, 2012; Guo, 2010; Markose & Simpson, 2014). More research should be done to determine if more school districts with diverse student populations are communicating more about teacher/school responsibilities, as the findings of this study suggests, or if this apparent finding is limited to a few select school districts.

Overall, the school website documents examined in this study contained high amounts of school jargon, cultural references, and teacher/school responsibility references that require parents to have prior knowledge of the United States' educational system and the school districts' programs as well, which may create barriers for

immigrant parents to fully understand and act on these communications. These findings generally support the findings of previous studies that suggest one obstacle to immigrant parents reading, understanding, and acting on home-school communication is the high intertextuality and prior knowledge demands home-school communications place on parents (Markose & Simpson, 2014; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014).

4.4.3. Parent role rights and responsibilities in home-school communications.

To determine the assumptions home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs have about the role rights and responsibilities of parents receiving this communication, school website documents were coded to find all references to parent responsibilities and rights. Only 17 documents out of 32 contained references to parent responsibilities (53.1%). Over half of the references to parent responsibility (65%) were contained in documents written at beyond a twelfth grade reading level or at reading levels that were too complex to measure. Outside of those documents, the documents written at a sixth or seventh grade reading level contained most of the remaining references to parent responsibility (21.3%), and as documents were written at higher secondary education levels (eighth through twelfth grades), they contained fewer references to parent responsibility. This suggests that schools communicate explicit information about parent responsibilities more during the earlier years of a child's education. One possible reason parent responsibilities appear to be more emphasized in home-school communication received earlier in a child's education may be that school districts assume parents are aware of their responsibilities regarding their child's education as students' progress throughout the education system.

The school district that made the most references to parent responsibility (61.3%)

in their school documents was the district with the smallest population of White students and largest population of African American students. In contrast, the school district with the second largest population of African American students and students from other races had documents that contained only 1.3% of the references to parent responsibility. The school district with the second largest population of white students had the second highest amount of references to parent responsibility (23.8%). These findings suggest that communication about parent responsibility varies across school district and there appears to be little correlation between diversity of the student population and the amount of times a school district communicates about parent responsibility. This demands further exploration.

School districts made even fewer references to parent rights regarding their child's education or ability to advocate for their child. Only five of the 32 documents (15.6%) contained references to parents' rights regarding their child's education, and on average, each of these five documents contained about six references to parent rights. Of the five documents that contained references to parent rights, only one was written at a secondary school reading level (eighth and ninth grade). The remaining four documents were written at reading levels too complex to measure. This suggests that the majority of documents on school districts' websites do not communicate information about parent rights. The documents that do contain information about parents' rights were written at complex reading levels, suggesting that these rights are not communicated to parents in a way that is easy for parents to read, understand, and act on.

The documents that contained over half of the references to parent rights (56.7%) were from the school district with the second largest population of white students. There

were no references to parent rights made in any of the documents from the school district with the second largest population of African American students and students of other races. The school district with the smallest population of white students and the largest population of African American students contained about one-third (30%) of the references to parent rights. These findings suggest that the diversity of a school's student population may influence the amount of references home-school communications make to parent rights. It appears that schools with larger populations of white students make more references to parent rights in the documents on their website, however, this correlation between references to parent rights in documents and diversity of student population is not strong.

Overall, the school website documents examined in this study contained few references or explanations informing parents about their responsibilities or rights regarding their child's education and specifically, informing parents of their rights to advocate for their child's placement in appropriate programs. These findings support the findings of previous studies, which found parents often did not advocate for their child(ren) because they did not know their rights or responsibilities regarding their child's education and often waited for the school to make suggestions or contact with them because they did not know they had the right to question the school's recommendations and advocate for their child if they choose (Young & Balli, 2014; Cobb, 2012; Guo, 2010; Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Vera et al., 2012).

4.4.4. Experiences and perceptions of immigrant families.

To augment the interrogation of the school text, the experiences and perceptions immigrant families had of home-school communications, participants from five different

families who were raised in five different countries were interviewed. Participants' responses to open-ended questions about their experiences with and perceptions of home-school communications were analyzed for similar themes.

One theme that emerged from participants was cultural differences between their secondary school experiences and the secondary school experiences of their child(ren). Parents also expressed cultural differences in their expectations of the teacher/school's responsibility in the education of their child(ren) and their responsibility and rights as a parent. Many parents expressed that they trusted the school to make decisions about the education of their child(ren) and came from cultures where parents were not involved in schools. These differences suggest that many immigrant parents from cultures may not see the need to be as involved in the education of their child(ren) as parents are expected to be in the United States (Cobb, 2012; Guo, 2010; Markose & Simpson, 2014). Different cultural views on parental involvement may contribute to the lack of parental advocacy for their child(ren). To address this, schools and educators should be aware of the parental experiences and schooling backgrounds of the parents of the students in their classes and have conversations with these parents about what parents feel is appropriate parent participation in the education of their child(ren).

Parents from other cultures also may come from a background where they trust the teachers and the school to educate their child(ren) and do not feel the need to get involved or may even feel it is shameful for their child(ren) if they have to get involved with the school. These findings support the findings of previous studies, which found that parents from other cultures often had different expectations of the teacher/school responsibility and their responsibility and rights regarding their child's education

(Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Cobb, 2012; Markose & Simpson, 2014; Vera et al., 2012).

Immigrant parents also expressed hesitation about communication received from the website. While a few parents were satisfied with the website communication, most only used the school websites to get general logistic information, and were unable to use the website to garner information about specific programs available to their child(ren) or their rights and responsibility regarding the education of their child(ren). Most parents struggled to find information on the website about anything outside of the grades their child(ren) received. While one parent expressed frustration with being unable to find information on the schools' website, the majority of parents expressed that they had little expectations for communication on the schools' website and did not find it particularly useful for most information.

These statements suggest that school websites are not designed in the most effective way to communicate with parents in a way that is clear and easy for them to find information outside of the school calendar and updates on student grades and school events. Furthermore, these sentiments also suggest that parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may not gather information from the school websites of the schools their child(ren) attend, and thus, may be missing information that schools assume parents have gotten through accessing the website. These findings are similar to those found in previous studies, which suggested that people were more likely to relate positively and connect with websites that reflected their home cultures and less likely to connect with or react positively to websites that reflected other cultures (Kang & Kovacevic, 2012). This suggests that designing communications that are more culturally neutral may help schools communicate more effectively and appropriately to immigrant

parents from other cultures.

Finally, participants who were interviewed knew little about advanced programs available to their child(ren). Only one of the parents had information about advanced programs and had children in Advanced Placement classes at their school. All the other parents either did not know about advanced programs available to their students or knew about advanced programs but were frustrated by their lack of ability to get their child(ren) tested for admittance into these programs.

These findings suggest home-school communications on school district websites may not be communicating effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse parents about the advanced placement and gifted and talented programs available to their child(ren) and may not be giving parents the information needed to get their child(ren) tested for advanced programs. Similar studies also found that home-school communications may be ineffective at communicating information about different programs to immigrant parents (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Young & Balli, 2014).

4.4.5. Implications for home-school communications.

This study's findings expose the importance of recognizing different parental experiences and schooling backgrounds and their influence on parents' perceptions of home-school communications and ability to read, understand, and act on these communications. While parents who have lived and gone to school in the United States may have the intertextual understanding, prior knowledge, and school jargon needed to read, understand, and act on home-school communications because they have been immersed in the experiences of American schools, parents who do not have personal experience with American schools may not have the knowledge needed to read,

understand, and act on home-school communications. Despite this research, documents from school websites were often written using language, jargon, and references and communicating information in ways that assumed parents would understand what was being communicated due to their prior experiences and school background. As the population of the United States becomes more diverse, it becomes more important for schools and educators to be aware of parental experience and how not all of their students' parents will be able to rely on their personal experience to read, understand, and act on home-school communications.

Several implications emerge from these findings and inform the literature and challenge schools' understanding of home-school communication with immigrant families. One such implication includes the need to re-evaluate the reading levels and school jargon included in home-school communications to make these communications more readable for parents. It is also important for schools and educators to talk to immigrant parents to better understand their parental experience and how it informs their understanding of home-school communications. Finally, it is important for schools to equip and train teachers to communicate more clearly and effectively across all mediums including the schools' website and to recognize and consider parental experience and how it may inform the ability of their students' parents to read, understand, and act on home-school communications.

4.4.6. Limitations and opportunities for future research.

One of the limitations of this study was that reading level is a limited way of looking at data. The reading levels of home-school documents found in this study should only be used as a baseline. More research should be done to determine more accurately

how readable home-school communications are.

Another limitation of this study was that all home-school communications used were garnered from school district websites. Schools use a variety of mediums to communicate to parents including websites, notes, emails, letters, fliers, and phone calls. This study focused on communications regarding advanced programs that was sent to parents through the school districts' website, and the results may or may not be reflective of how effective other mediums of communications schools use are at communicating to parents about their rights and responsibilities and the advanced programs available to their child(ren). Future research should examine other mediums of communication used to inform parents about advanced programs and parents' rights and responsibilities in order to determine if other mediums of communication schools use are more or less effective at communicating with immigrant families.

A third limitation of this study is the small sample size of immigrant parents who were interviewed. Due to time constraints and participant availability, the sample of parents interviewed cannot be assumed to be representative of all parents from all countries represented in the student populations of the participating school districts. Future studies should explore the parental experiences and perceptions of a more diverse and representative sample of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Future studies should use more accurate measures of gauging the English language proficiency and reading proficiency parents need to read, understand, and act on home-school communications. More research should also be done to determine if other methods of home-school communication including physical papers, notes from teachers, or personal phone calls or emails are more or less effective at communicating with

immigrant parents than website documents alone. Future studies should also gather the parental experiences and opinions of a larger population of immigrant families to see if these experiences with home-school communications are different or similar for families from different cultures and families who live in different areas of the country. Finally, future research should seek to address two major questions raised by this study: (1) how can school districts become more aware of parental experience and recognize this experience and schooling background in the ways they communicate to parents and (2) how can schools communicate more effectively with parents who do not share the assumed parental and school experiences?

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the current English language proficiency levels and reading grade levels of typical home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
- 2) What intertextuality and prior knowledge is assumed in home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs?
- 3) What are the assumptions that home-school communications regarding advanced placement and gifted and talented programs have about the role rights and responsibilities of parents receiving this communication?

The results of this study indicate that home-school communications may not be effective at communicating with immigrant parents about their rights and responsibilities regarding the education their child(ren) receive and advanced placement programs or gifted and talented programs available to their child(ren).

It is also important to note how this study suggests parental experience becomes the lens through which parents viewed home-school communications. Most of the documents in this study were written in a way that assumed parents had prior knowledge or intertextual knowledge from their own experience to help them read, understand, and act on communications sent between the school and students' homes, which may limit immigrant parents' ability to read, understand, and act on home-school communications due to different parental experience. For example, when a school includes the words "Students may be...identified as gifted at any time....The process begins with a referral

from within the school or a written request from parents” (B11A; 16-20) and think they have communicated that parents may request their child(ren) be evaluated for advanced programs at any time. However, an immigrant parent reads this and may decide they trust the school to provide their child(ren) with the best education possible, and thus, they do not need to request their child(ren) be evaluated. An immigrant parent may also read the above statement and be unable to act on it because they are unsure who to send their written request to or unsure why they should want their child(ren) in these advanced programs. Further research could be done to better explore the link between parental experience and their ability to read, comprehend, and act on home-school communications.

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Figure 1: Reading Levels of School Website Documents

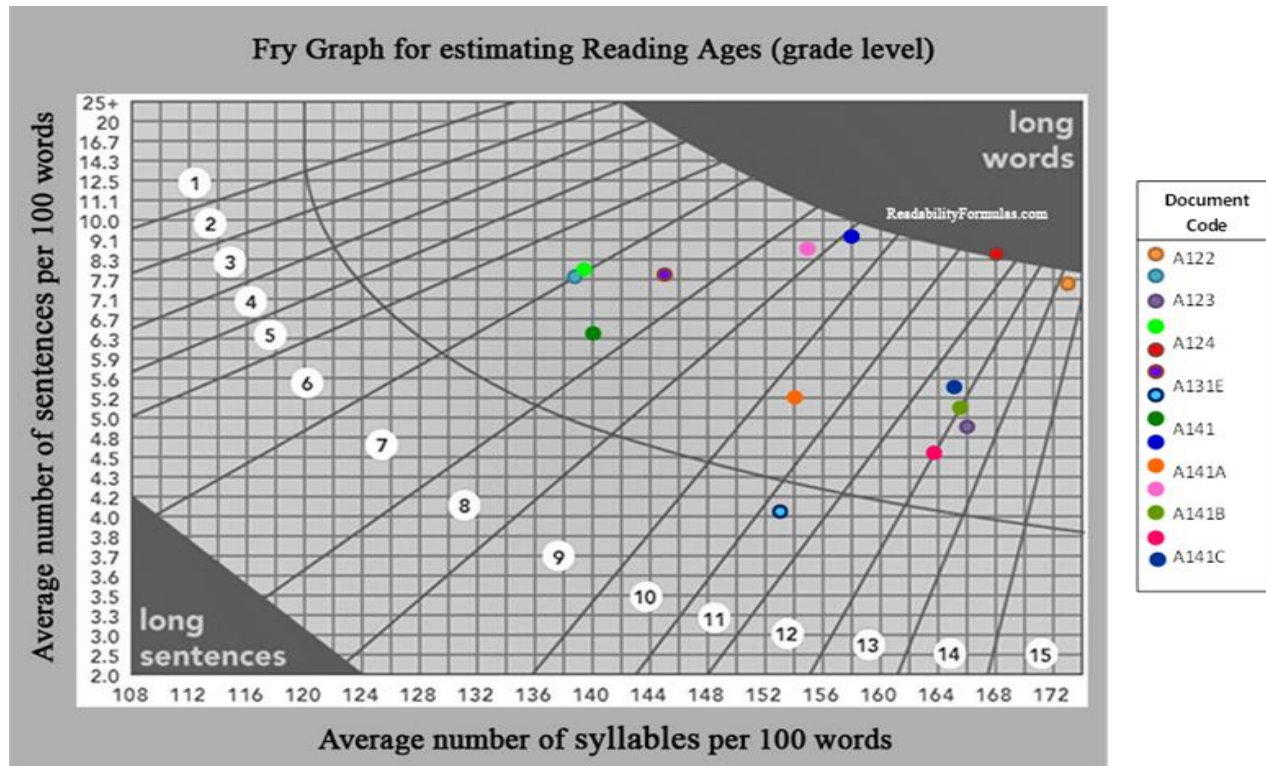


Figure 1: Reading Levels of School Website Documents

Figure 2: Types of Website Documents by Reading Level

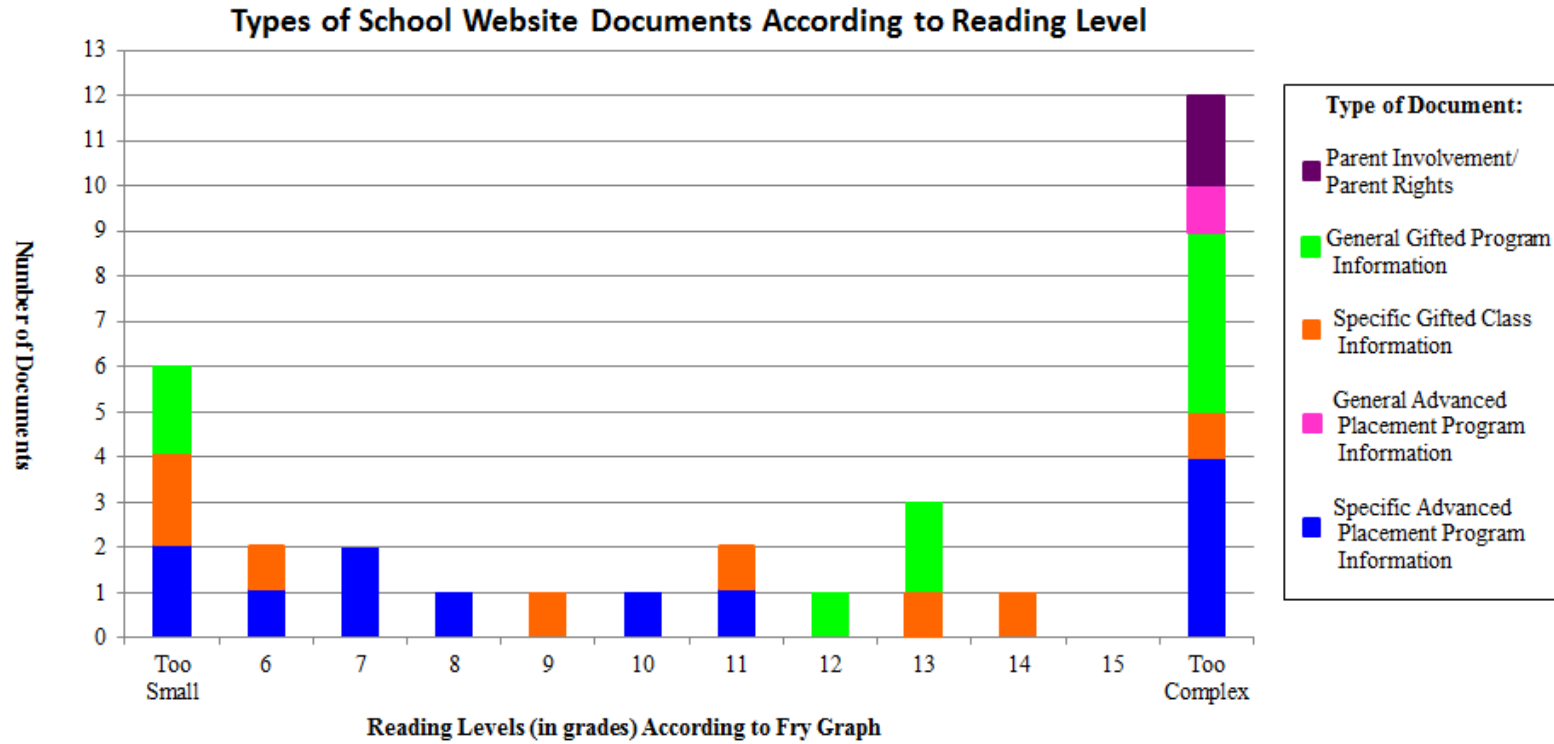
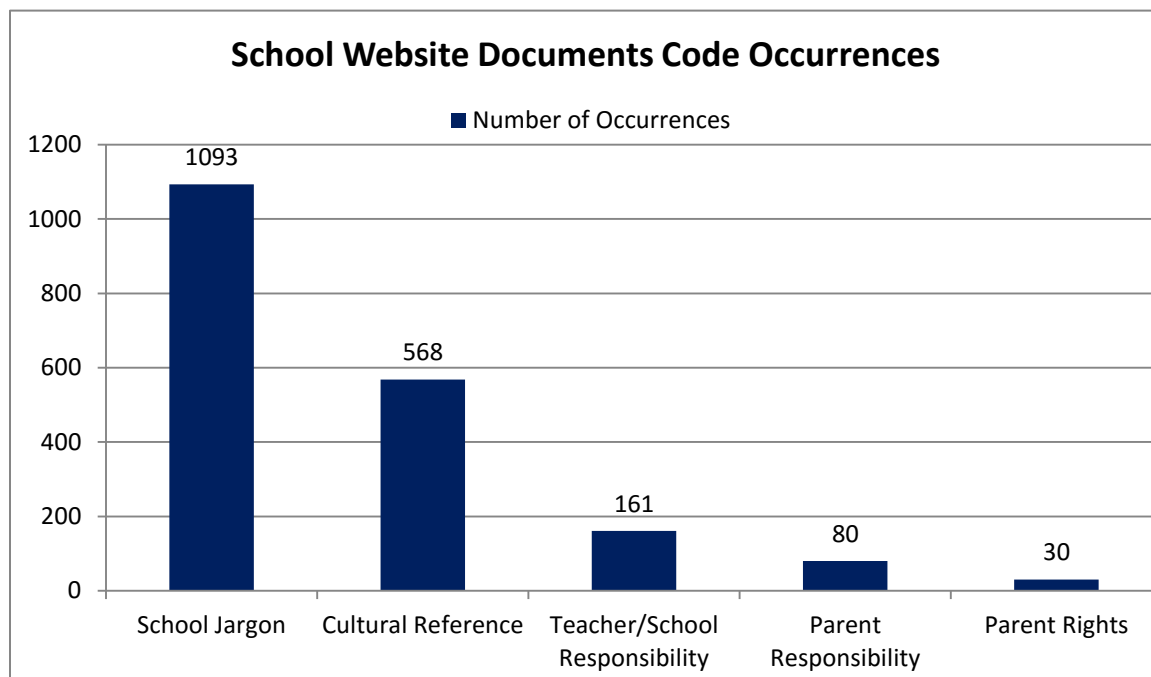


Figure 2: Types of Website Documents by Reading Level

Figure 3: Prevalence of Codes in School Website Documents**Figure 3: Prevalence of Code Occurrences in School Website Documents**

APPENDIX A

Table 1: School Demographics of Participating Districts

School District	Total Students	White	African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Some other race	Two or more races
A	18974	78.9%	12.4%	4.7%	2.4%	0.1%	2.0%	3.9%
B	4863	91.0%	1.9%	2.3%	3.9%	0.0%	0.6%	2.2%
C	7810	89.2%	2.2%	5.0%	3.9%	0.1%	1.8%	2.5%
D	4259	85.4%	7.5%	5.0%	0.7%	0.1%	1.5%	4.4%

Table 2: Demographics of Participants

Participant Number	Family Role	Family Context	Gender	Country of Origin
1	Mother	1 child in preschool	Female	France
2	Mother	2 children in secondary school	Female	Mexico
3	Father	1 child in kindergarten	Male	Albania
4	Father	2 children in elementary school and 1 in preschool	Male	India
5	Father	2 children in secondary school	Male	South Africa

APPENDIX B

Table 3: Reading Levels of School Website Texts

Number of Documents	Reading Level	Percentage of Documents
6	Too Small to Measure	18.75%
2	6	6.25%
2	7	6.25%
1	8	3.12%
1	9	3.12%
1	10	3.12%
2	11	6.25%
1	12	3.12%
3	13	9.37%
1	14	3.12%
12	Too Complex to Measure	37.5%

Table 4: Most Notable Examples and Excerpts of School Jargon Code

Code	Examples and Excerpts
School Jargon	“Title 1 parent involvement set-aside funds” A11A: 97
School Jargon	“Gifted Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation (GMDE)” B11A: 80
School Jargon	“impartial due-process hearing” C11A: 103
School Jargon	“IDEA and Chapter 14” C11:6
School Jargon	“RtII meetings” A11A: 81

Table 5: Percentage of School Jargon Codes Contained in Documents by Reading Level

Reading Level of Document (Grade)	References to School Jargon in Documents
6-7	3.1%
8-9	1.2%
10-11	3.5%
12	1.6%
Beyond 12 th grade or too complex	87.8%

Table 6: Percentage of Documents Containing School Jargon by School District

School District	Percentage of Documents Containing School Jargon
A	22.8%
B	25.8%
C	51.1%
D	0.3%

Table 7: Most Notable Examples and Excerpts for Cultural Reference Code

Code	Examples and Excerpts
Cultural Reference	“gifted and talented” A122: 141
Cultural Reference	“Parent involvement” A11A: 11
Cultural Reference	“traditional education program” C131: 194
Cultural Reference	“advanced placement” C131A: 367

Table 8: Percentage of Cultural References Contained in Documents by Reading Level

Reading Level of Documents (Grade)	Reference to Cultural References in Documents
6-7	2.5%
8-9	0.5%
10-11	2.5%
12	2.8%
Beyond 12 th grade or too complex	86.4%

Table 9: Percentage of Documents Containing Cultural References by School District

School District	Percentage of Documents Containing Cultural References
A	23.1%
B	23.9%
C	52.1%
D	0.9%

Table 10: Most Notable Examples and Excerpts of Teacher/School Responsibility**Code**

Code	Examples and Excerpts
Teacher/School Responsibility	“enable parents to participate in district/school related meetings and training sessions” A22A: 45-46
Teacher/School Responsibility	“to provide gifted education services” C11A: 7
Teacher/School Responsibility	“written notices must be written in language understandable to the general public” C11A: 67-68
Teacher/School Responsibility	“notices must be communicated orally in the native language or directly” C11A: 69-70
Teacher/School Responsibility	“full explanation of the parental rights or procedural safeguards available to the parents” C11A: 80-81
Teacher/School Responsibility	“communicating and working with parents” A11A: 103
Teacher/School Responsibility	“communication will be translated into a language parents can understand” A11A: 58

Table 11: Percentage of Teacher/School Responsibility Codes Contained in**Documents by Reading Level**

Reading Level of Documents (Grade)	Reference to Teacher/School Responsibility in Documents
6-7	2.5%
8-9	1.2%
10-11	0.6%
12	0%
Beyond 12 th grade or too complex	95.6%

Table 12: Percentage of Documents Containing Teacher/School Responsibility by**School District**

School District	Percentage of Documents Containing Teacher/School Responsibility
A	50.9%
B	18.6%
C	30.4%
D	0%

Table 13: Most Notable Examples and Excerpts of Parent Responsibility Code

Code	Examples and Excerpts
Parent Responsibility	“may request evaluation if they believe their child is gifted” A11: 23
Parent Responsibility	“seek help from personnel in your school district” C11A: 12
Parent Responsibility	“request in writing that their child be evaluated” C11: 5
Parent Responsibility	“visiting the school website” A141A: 78
Parent Responsibility	“be involved in the planning, review, and improvement of the district/school’s Parent Involvement Policy” A11A: 15

Table 14: Percentage of Parent Responsibility Codes Contained in Documents by Reading Level

Reading Level of Documents (Grade)	Reference to Parent Responsibility in Documents
6-7	21.3%
8-9	6.2%
10-11	3.7%
12	0%
Beyond 12 th grade or too complex	65%

Table 15: Percentage of Documents Containing Parent Responsibility by School District

School District	Percentage of Documents Containing Parent Responsibility
A	61.3%
B	13.8%
C	23.8%
D	1.3%

Table 16: Most Notable Examples and Excerpts of Parent Rights Code

Code	Examples and Excerpts
Parent Rights	“right to an impartial due-process hearing” C11A: 139-140
Parent Rights	“right to be informed” C11A: 17
Parent Rights	“right to obtain an independent educational evaluation” C11A: 104
Parent Rights	“right to initiate due process procedures” C11A: 44
Parent Rights	“be involved in the planning, review, and improvement of the district/school’s Title I program” A11A: 39
Parent Rights	“right to be involved” A11A: 26

Table 17: Percentage of Parent Rights Codes Contained in Documents by Reading**Level**

Reading Level of Documents (Grade)	Reference to Parent Rights in Documents
6-7	0%
8-9	6.6%
10-11	0%
12	0%
Beyond 12 th grade or too complex	93.3%

Table 18: Percentage of Documents Containing Parent Rights by School District

School District	Percentage of Documents Containing Parent Rights
A	30%
B	13.3%
C	56.7%
D	0%

APPENDIX C

Research Study

Title: Literacy Demands of Home-School Communications Regarding Advanced Programs: Implications of Immigrant Families

Primary Investigator: Martha J. Strickland, Ed.D.

Co-Investigators: Connie Cook

Participants: Families living in the United States with at least one parent/caregiver who is an immigrant who has at least one child attending a secondary school in the study region who may be qualified for advanced programming.

Context: A location chosen by the participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews:

Script: Thank you for being willing to talk with me, today. This area continues to welcome families, like yours, into this community and yet as teachers, we recognize we need to be better equipped to best serve you all. To help us out we would like to talk about your perceptions of the schools where your child(ren) attend, your experiences with the information conveyed on your child(ren)'s school's website, your experiences communicating with your child(ren)'s schools, and any ideas or suggestions you have for schools as they particularly desire to best facilitate the learning of children like yours.

There is no right or wrong answer. We are only interested in hearing your thinking on these. No one but the researchers will hear this recording and this recording will only be used for our own recall. This will be digitally recorded so that we can recall what you said. It will not be aired in any way and no identifiers will be attached to any quotes taken from the recordings we do during this study.

QUESTIONS for semi-structured interviews:

General Demographic Information

Please describe...

- 1) Your school secondary education experience

General Perceptions of School

Please describe...

- 1) The school your child attends
- 2) What you believe to be the gifted and advanced programs available to your child

Previous Experience with School Communications

Please describe ...

- 1) How you have looked at your child(ren)'s school website

Perceptions of School Communications

Please describe...

- 1) What caught your attention when you looked at the website for your child(ren)'s school
- 2) What information regarding advanced programs you have learned from looking at the website of your child(ren)'s school

Response to School Communications

Please describe...

- 1) How you have responded to information gathered from your child(ren)'s school's website in the past
- 2) How you want to respond to information gathered from your child(ren)'s school's website

Final question: Are you willing to have us contact you if we need to clarify something you said?

Closing Script: Thank you so much.

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Literacy Demands of Home-School Communications Regarding Advanced Programs: Implications for Immigrant Families

Principal Investigator: Name: Martha J Strickland

Address: 777 West Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057

Telephone Number: 717-948-6525

Subject's Printed Name: _____

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information about the research.

Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you.

Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

1. Why is this research study being done?

We are asking you to be in this research because you have moved to the United States from another country and your child attends a secondary school in the study region and may qualify for advanced programs.

This research is being done to find out the effectiveness of communications sent between home and schools regarding advanced programs and determine what information these communications give to immigrant families. Approximately 30 people will take part in this research study at local site.

2. What will happen in this research study?

The following will take place if you choose to participate in this research study:

1. You will be asked to choose a time and location for an interview.
2. You will be asked to read documents from your child's school.
3. You will be asked to answer questions about what you think the documents are saying. You will be audio digitally recorded during this interview.

You are free to skip any questions you would prefer not to answer. You are also free to withdraw your participation from the study at any time.

3. What are the risks and possible discomforts from being in this research study?

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information or your identity is obtained by someone other than the investigators, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening.

4. What are the possible benefits from being in this research study?

4a. What are the possible benefits to others?

The possible benefits others may experience as a result of this study include receiving more clear and effective communications about advanced programs from their child's school.

5. What other options are available instead of being in this research study?

You may decide not to participate in this research.

6. How long will you take part in this research study?

If you agree to take part, it will take you about 1 hour to complete this research study. You will be asked to return to the research site 0 times.

7. How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this research study?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to people who have a need to review this information.

- A list that matches your name with your code number will be kept in a locked file or password protected file on the researcher's computer.
- Your research records will be labeled with your code number and will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office.

Only researchers will have access to the coded list containing your name and code number and your research records. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research.

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and
- The Office for Research Protections.

Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

11. What are your rights if you take part in this research study?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

- You do not have to be in this research.
- If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.
- If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

12. If you have questions or concerns about this research study, whom should you call?

Please call the head of the research study (principal investigator), Martha Strickland at 717-948-6525 if you:

- Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.
- Believe you may have been harmed by being in the research study.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775, ORProtections@psu.edu if you:

- Have questions regarding your rights as a person in a research study.
- Have concerns or general questions about the research.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else about any concerns related to the research.

INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH**Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the subject or subject representative and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

Signature of person who explained this research

Date

Printed Name

(Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.)

Signature of Person Giving Informed Consent

Before making the decision about being in this research you should have:

- Discussed this research study with an investigator,
- Read the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Signature of Subject

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily choose to be in this research and agree to allow your information to be used and shared as described above.

Signature of Subject

Date

Printed Name

ACADEMIC VITA

Connie Cook

Education:

Bachelor of Humanities in English Secondary Education, Penn State University,
Spring 2016

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Published in *From the Fallout Shelter* Literary Magazine, 2014

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