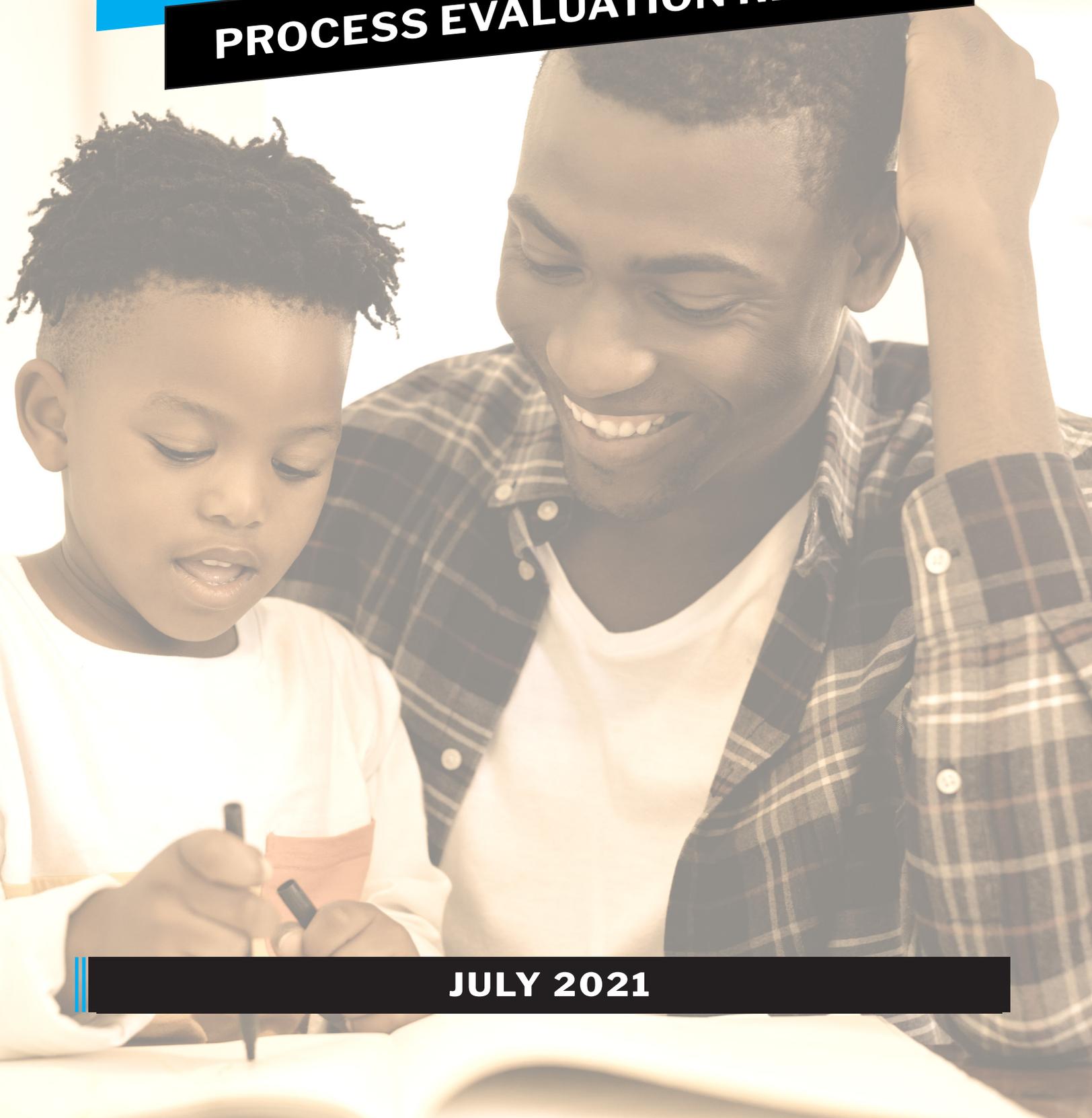


STRONG FATHERS STRONG FAMILIES

PROCESS EVALUATION REPORT



JULY 2021

STRONG FATHERS STRONG FAMILIES PROCESS EVALUATION REPORT

July 2021

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Funder

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annie E. Casey Foundation contracted with Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) at The University of Texas at Austin to conduct a process evaluation of the Strong Fathers Strong Families Campus Program (Strong Fathers) to understand the program experiences of participants and create a report of findings with a proposed evaluation plan for a future program evaluation. For this project, TXICFW conducted a literature review on fatherhood involvement; developed a logic model based on the literature review, Strong Fathers program activities, and intended goals; and collected qualitative data through interviews of fathers and school staff at three Independent School Districts that participate in the Strong Fathers in Texas. Findings from the process evaluation were used to refine the logic model and develop an evaluation plan. This report provides an overview of the program, summarizes the literature on fatherhood involvement, and describes the research activities, key findings, and a proposed plan for future program evaluation.

Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis

TXICFW researchers collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews from July 2020 to February 2021 from a total of 38 participants. Interviewees included 16 fathers who participated in the program, 11 fathers who did not participate in the program, and 14 school staff that included teachers, school administrators, counselors, and coordinators. Three interviewees were both fathers and school staff. All interviews were conducted in

English, except for one father interview that was conducted in Spanish. Each participant also completed a short pre-interview form that collected basic demographics. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for major themes.

Key Findings

- 1.** Dads often enacted the role of provider and disciplinarian, and moms often enacted the role of caretaker, typically more engaged in children's education and learning.
- 2.** Dads' time with children was largely dependent on work schedules. Work and busy family schedules were the most common barriers for dads participating in school activities, including Strong Fathers.
- 3.** Dads felt most connected with children either during special activities or when the opportunity arose to work through stressful or emotional moments together.
- 4.** Schools typically communicated with moms, engaging dads only under special circumstances such as when discipline was needed and/or for dad-specific events.
- 5.** Schools struggled to engage families from various cultures and backgrounds. School staff's assumptions and biases about families may hinder this engagement.
- 6.** Motivation to participate in school activities, including Strong Fathers, was typically dad-led or child-led, ultimately driven by the father-child relationship.
- 7.** Most dads and school staff reflected positively about Strong Fathers, though dads who participated were typically already engaged in their children's education and learning prior to participating in Strong Fathers.

Interviewee Perceptions on Opportunities for Program Growth

- 1.** Dads and school staff recommended hosting Strong Fathers events more regularly and providing more variety in program activities so repeat participants remain engaged.
- 2.** Interviewees suggested making the program more inclusive of other caregivers (i.e., moms, grandparents) and hosting a separate event for Spanish-speaking dads with a Spanish-speaking facilitator from a similar cultural background.
- 3.** School staff recommended more collaboration with schools to ensure Strong Fathers builds on existing school parent engagement strategies and addresses their unique father engagement needs.

Logic Model

The research team developed a logic model based on the literature review and Strong Fathers program materials, which researchers used to guide the process evaluation. After analysis of the findings, this logic model was then revisited and refined with the greater understanding of program activities and their perceived impacts. The purpose of updating the logic model is to accurately describe the relationship between program activities and intended outcomes in preparation for a more robust program evaluation.

Proposed Evaluation Plan

Based on the process evaluation findings, the research team recommended adjustments to various program components to ensure a robust program evaluation in the future. After

Strong Fathers decides on implementation of program adjustments, researchers are prepared to conduct a pilot evaluation of Strong Fathers. This evaluation would seek to understand the impact that the Strong Fathers has on 1) family relationships, father-child relationships, and co-parenting; 2) child academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing; and 3) the school environment.

Researchers will conduct a mixed-method study using a pre-post design. This study will include an outcome evaluation to understand impacts of programming and a process evaluation to understand site development, recruitment, implementation, and functioning of the program. An outcome evaluation will consist of a pre-survey, brief satisfaction form (post-survey), and three-month follow-up survey sent electronically to Strong Fathers participants. A semester survey will also be sent to school staff. The process evaluation will consist of focus groups, interviews, and feedback surveys with participating dads and school staff (administrators, teachers, etc.). Surveys and interviews will be available in both Spanish and English. Qualitative and quantitative analysis will be conducted, and findings will be shared in a program evaluation report.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Annie E. Casey Foundation contracted with Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) at The University of Texas at Austin to conduct a process evaluation and create a report of findings with a proposed evaluation plan for a future program evaluation of the Strong Fathers Strong Families Campus Program (Strong Fathers). For this project, TXICFW conducted a literature review on fatherhood involvement, developed a logic model, and interviewed fathers and school personnel at three Independent School Districts that participate in Strong Fathers in Texas. Findings from the process evaluation were used to refine the logic model and develop an evaluation plan. This report provides an overview of the program, summarizes the literature on fatherhood involvement and describes the research activities, key findings, and a proposed plan for future program evaluation.

About Strong Fathers Strong Families, LLC

[Strong Fathers Strong Families](#) is a school-based fatherhood program that aims to improve father engagement in their child's education both at school and at home. The program invites dads to participate in school-based activities that are designed to increase both the frequency and quality of father-child interactions, which research suggests can improve child and family relationships, child academic outcomes, and school environments. The program was founded by J. Michael Hall, M.Ed., in 2003 and has been implemented at schools throughout the United States and internationally; however, most programming takes place in Texas. While Strong Fathers offers a variety of products and

programs, this evaluation focused on the Strong Fathers Strong Families Campus Program, a school-based program that includes the following events:

- » Bring Your Dad to School
- » Dad & Kid Math Event
- » Dad & Kid Science Event
- » Dad & Kid Reading Event

BRING YOUR DAD TO SCHOOL

- » Breakfast Together – Dads and their children have breakfast together before classes begin.
- » Class Observation – Dads observe their child in their classroom for 45 minutes. Dads may also participate with their children in classroom activities.
- » Fathers' Meeting – All dads meet in a larger space together for a guided discussion led by the facilitator. The facilitator asks fathers to share observations of their child in the classroom and reflect about their own school experiences. The facilitator discusses the importance of father engagement in their child's learning, citing research on fatherhood involvement.
- » Connecting Fathers Activity – The final component is the ice-breaker activity where fathers can connect with one another in smaller groups.

DAD & KID MATH EVENT

- » Dinner Together – Dads and their children have dinner together at school—either a brown bag dinner or the school/Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has the option of providing dinner for the event.
- » Math Kits – Dads and their children are given a take-home math kit that includes cards, dice, and instructions.

- » Math Games – Facilitator teaches the math game at its most basic level for all participants. As dads and their children play the math game, the facilitator periodically stops the game to teach participants how to make the game more challenging. Dads also learn the teaching methods for various age levels and are encouraged to play the game at home.

DAD & KID SCIENCE EVENT

- » Dinner Together – Dads and their children have dinner together at school—either a brown bag dinner or the school/PTA has the option of providing dinner for the event.
- » Science Activities – Dads and their children are given simple household supplies to create several contraptions, including paper airplanes, mouse trap catapults, grocery bag parachutes, and bottle rockets.

DAD & KID READING EVENT

- » Dinner Together – Dads and their children have dinner together at school—either a brown bag dinner or the school/PTA has the option of providing dinner for the event.
- » Interactive Reading Activity – Dads and their children sit on the floor in a circle and the facilitator reads a book that is projected on a screen for participants to read along. For example, when the group reads *Head to Toe* by Eric Carle, dads are asked to move like various animals (e.g., penguins, gorillas, etc.). During this activity, the facilitator models masculine reading styles for dads.

About the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing

The Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing (TXICFW) is a social work research institute within the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin. For over 10 years, TXICFW has used its research and training expertise to engage in a joint learning process with practitioners and agencies to build the foundational knowledge that best serves children and families. TXICFW's research focuses on improving outcomes for children and families in many areas, including school social work, child welfare, foster care, adoption, permanency, adolescent sexual health, child care, social work practices in healthcare, child maltreatment prevention, and immigration. TXICFW researchers have direct practice experience working with families in crisis and utilize this real-world experience to guide their research, evaluation, programming, and support services.

Overview of Research Activities

TXICFW conducted the following research activities to to inform a plan for a future evaluation of the Strong Fathers Strong Families Campus Program. A brief description of each research activity is provided below:

LITERATURE REVIEW OF FATHERHOOD INVOLVEMENT

Researchers gathered, organized, and analyzed existing evidence-based and published research on father involvement. This literature review focused on father engagement within schools, the impact of father engagement on children and families, and father involvement among dads of different racial and cultural backgrounds.

PROCESS EVALUATION

To better understand the program experiences and outcomes of Strong Fathers, TXICFW conducted interviews with fathers (Strong Fathers participants and Non-Strong Fathers participants), teachers, and school administrators. These interviews were conducted across three different school districts at varying stages of implementation of the Strong Fathers Program. Researchers then transcribed and coded the interviews and conducted a thematic analysis. The design, methods, analysis, and findings are included in this report.

LOGIC MODEL

TXICFW developed a logic model that outlines program inputs, outputs, and short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for Strong Fathers. Researchers developed this logic model based on the literature review and program materials. The logic model was then refined to incorporate findings from the process evaluation.

PROPOSED EVALUATION PLAN

Based on findings from the process evaluation, literature review, and the revised logic model, researchers developed a proposed evaluation plan for a future program evaluation of Strong Fathers.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to provide context and background on father involvement as it relates to child and family relationships; child academic, behavioral, and social outcomes; and school environment and cultural context.

First, an overview of the literature is provided, highlighting two influential models of father involvement. Next, father involvement and family relationships are examined in terms of father-child relationships, co-parenting, and family dynamics. Then, the impact of child involvement on child academic outcomes, behavior, and peer relationships is explored. Lastly, the school and cultural contexts that may impact father involvement are considered.

Overview of Father Involvement

MODEL OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Historically, father involvement has been evaluated and operationalized in many ways; however, one of the most influential models of father involvement conceptualizes involvement in terms of three components: father engagement, father's accessibility to their child, and responsibility (Lamb et al., 1985). In this model, father engagement is viewed as a father's direct interaction with their child, in the form of caretaking, play, or leisure. Accessibility is seen as the extent to which fathers are available to their child, and responsibility refers to a father's role of making sure their child is taken care of and has the resources they need (Lamb et al., 1985).

In 2010, Pleck proposed a revised conceptualization of the theoretical model of father involvement that included the following three components: positive engagement activities that are interactive and possibly promote child development; warmth and responsiveness; and control—particularly monitoring and decision making. In this reconceptualization, fatherhood engagement is still viewed as a primary aspect of father involvement; however, there is a shift from focusing on the total amount of time fathers spend with their child to focusing on the amount of quality time fathers spend with their child (Pleck, 2010). Warmth and responsiveness represent the comfort and emotional support provided by the father, either through an outward expression of love and care, the desire to engage positively with their child, or their ability to recognize and respond to their child's problems (Temmen, 2018; Lee, 2018). Control reflects the ability of fathers to monitor their child's actions and set and reinforce boundaries for a child (Temmen, 2018). In parenting research, the latter two components (warmth/responsiveness and control) are viewed as underlying dimensions of the authoritative parenting style. By including these components in the model, the construct of father involvement became more integrated with the broader field of parenting research (Pleck, 2010). Father involvement is often operationalized using these first three components; however, Pleck (2010) also included two auxiliary domains: indirect care and process responsibility, which reflect the construct of responsibility in the original framework. Indirect care refers to activities undertaken for the child that do not involve interaction and do not include the provision of economic support (e.g., purchasing groceries, purchasing clothing, fostering social connections, arranging childcare). Process responsibility refers to taking initiative and monitoring what is needed.

The revised model is useful in that it breaks down different aspects of father involvement and recognizes the fact that father involvement is not limited to direct interactions. Most research has focused on father engagement, looking at the

direct father-child interactions rather than also considering indirect or managerial aspects of father involvement (Diniz, 2021). Moreover, most measures that have been used to assess father involvement are primarily based on measures intended to assess mothering (Cabrera, 2018). It is necessary to capture father involvement in ways that go beyond measuring only direct interactions or relying on tools adapted from research on mothering.

CONTEXTUAL MODEL OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

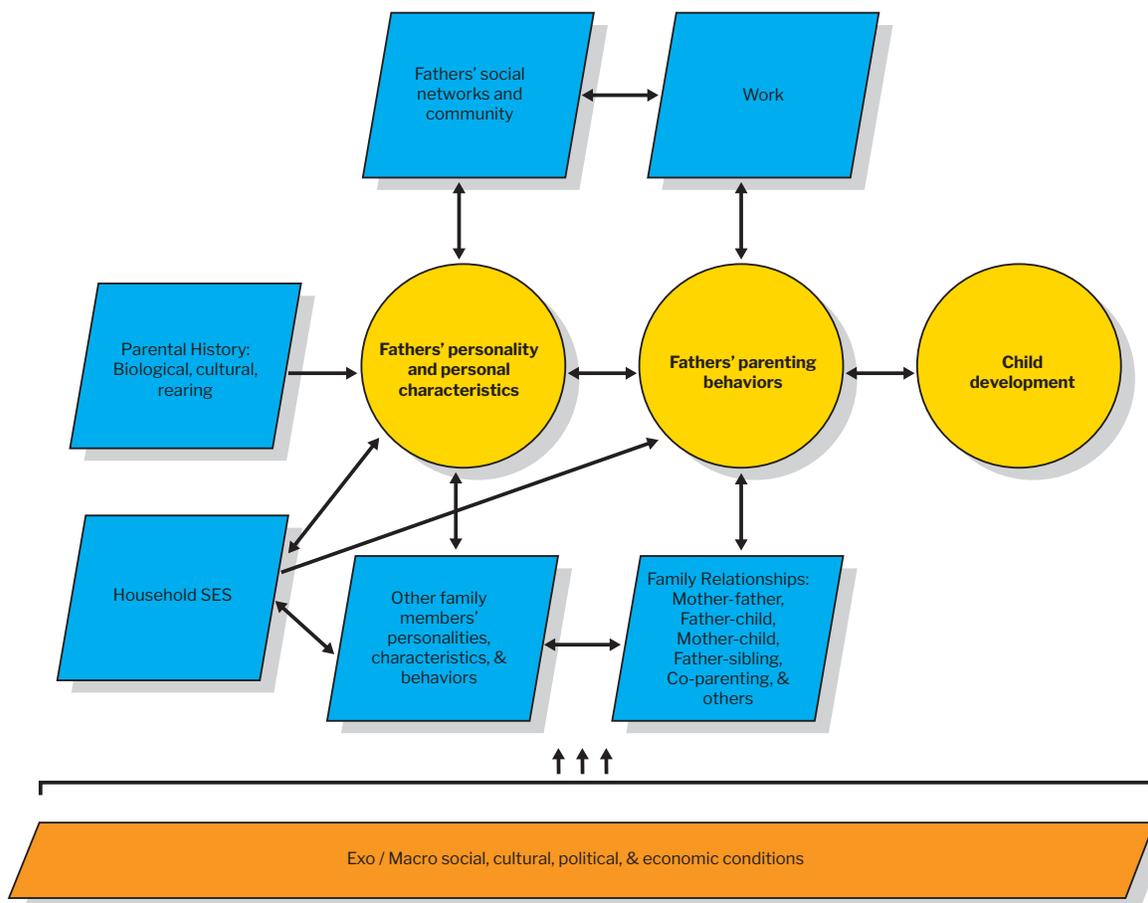
Pleck's (2010) revised model provides a more complete definition of father involvement; however, it is limited in that it does not provide context or consider factors that might influence how and why fathers are involved. In 2007, Cabrera et al. developed a heuristic, contextual model of father involvement that identified variables that predicted father involvement and considered how certain factors might interact or influence these variables directly or indirectly. The model was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological theory and Belsky's (1984) process model of parenting to help explore the complex relationship between child development and father involvement. A contextual variable that impacts father involvement and child outcomes is a father's economic resources, which are influenced by a father's rearing history, cultural background, and biological history. In addition, factors like the quality of the mother-child relationship and co-parenting also influenced involvement and child outcomes.

In 2014, Cabrera et al. expanded their model (see Figure 1) to account for the fact that the relationships between a father's parenting behavior and child outcomes are reciprocal in nature and change over time. The expanded model considers how a father's individual characteristics, personal history, family members, family relationships, peers, work, and socioeconomic status (SES) influence and are influenced by changes in the parent-child system.

It also considers the influence of social, cultural, political, and economic factors on all of these variables, recognizing that involvement may look different in different contexts.

This literature review primarily focuses on 1) the connection between father involvement and family relationships and 2) the relationship between father involvement and a child's academic, behavioral, and social well-being. It also considers the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts that influence father involvement at school.

Figure 1. Revised Contextual Model of Father Involvement



Cabrera, N. J., Fitzgerald, H. E., Bradley, R.H., & Roggman, L. (2014). *The ecology of father-child relationships: An expanded model.* *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 6, 336-354.

|| Father Involvement and Family Relationships

The family is the first context in which child development takes place. Family relationships — including co-parenting relationships, parental relationships, father-child relationships, mother-child relationships, parent-sibling relationships, and sibling-sibling relationships — influence parent involvement, child outcomes, and overall wellbeing. This section examines the relationship between family involvement and two specific family relationships: co-parenting and father-child relationships. It also considers the individual histories and characteristics that influence father involvement.

CO-PARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

Co-parenting is broadly defined as “the ways parents and/or parental figures relate to each other in the role of parent” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 96). While conceptualizations of co-parenting vary, it often includes the following components: agreement or disagreement on child-rearing, division of child-related labor, support for the co-parenting role, and joint management of family interactions (Feinberg, 2003). Feinberg’s (2003) co-parenting ecological model asserts that individual level (parents’ mental health), family level (couple’s relationship quality), and extra-familial level (social support) predictors influence co-parenting. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, for example, Choi and Becher (2019) found supportive co-parenting (i.e., communicating affirmation, appreciation, and respect for one another’s parenting) when children were about age 5 was associated with fewer behavior problems four years later. Cabrera et al.’s (2014) expanded contextual model of father involvement recognizes the bidirectional effects among co-parenting on family relationships, parenting behavior, and a father’s individual characteristics.

A study by Cabrera and colleagues (2009) explored the relationships between co-parenting conflict on parenting and infant social development in a sample of low-income Mexican American parents and their infants (n = 735 infants). Results showed that co-parenting conflict had a significant effect on father engagement and mother-infant interaction, but that co-parenting conflict was not predictive of infant social development (Cabrera, Shannon, & Taillade, 2009). The researchers offer the potential explanation that children’s resulting behavioral or developmental issues may emerge later in the child’s life rather than at infancy (Cabrera, Shannon, & Taillade, 2009). These findings support Feinberg’s (2003) theory that conflict affects parenting, with higher conflict among parents associated with negative parenting outcomes.

In a longitudinal study examining the generalizability of co-parenting and father engagement on different family structures, Fagan and Palkovitz (2011) found that positive co-parenting support during the child’s first year of life showed a significantly stronger association with father engagement in the child’s third year of life among nonresidential, non-romantic couples, compared to residential, romantically involved couples. Additionally, co-parenting support was also significantly and positively associated with father engagement when the child was between 1 and 3 years old. The researchers suggest that fathers who display an early paternal role that emphasized co-parenting are likely to remain engaged with their children as they enter preschool (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). Another study conducted in a sample of Black nonresidential fathers drew similar conclusions: that a positive co-parenting relationship relates to sustained father involvement (Coates & Phares, 2014). Studies have also shown that the quality of father-child relationship has reciprocal effects on the co-parenting relationship (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Cabrera, Shannon, & LaTaillade, 2009).

FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Attachment theory provides a framework for exploring the impact of parent-child relationships on child development in a child’s early relationships (Palm, 2014). Benoit (2004) describes attachment as a process by which “the child uses the primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore and, when necessary, as a haven of safety and a source of comfort.” The early attachment process between infants and caregivers is a critical foundation for many of the child’s future relationships and experiences. A caregiver’s ability to recognize and respond appropriately and promptly (parental sensitivity) plays a critical role in the early attachment process (Ainsworth et al., 1978). A meta-analysis on the relationship between paternal-sensitivity and attachment found that higher levels of paternal sensitivity were associated with higher levels of attachment (Lucassen et al., 2011).

The father-child relationship and father's role within the family is unique to fathers (Jeynes, 2016). Studies show fathers tend to focus more on preparing children for their lives ahead while mothers tend to be more nurturing and emotionally supportive (Denham, Hideko, & Wyatt, 2010; Root & Rubin, 2010; Tam, 2009; Zeman et al., 2010; Thomas, Farrell, & Barnes, 1996 as cited in Jeynes, 2016). Overall, high levels of father-involvement are associated with higher levels of psychological adjustment, cognitive and social skills, empathy, self-control, and self-esteem in children (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Wilson & Prior, 2011).

FATHER'S BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS

Cabrera and colleagues (2014) demonstrated in their expanded contextual model of father involvement that a father's background, personality and characteristics including their rearing history, race, ethnicity, residency, religion, age, marital status, infertility, role identity, beliefs, attitude, and health all influence parenting behavior, which impacts their relationship with their child. Much of fatherhood literature has focused on the modeling or compensatory hypotheses in which fathers draw upon experience with their own fathers (Guzzo, 2011). The modeling hypothesis asserts that fathers use childhood experiences with their own fathers as a model for parenthood (Nicholson et. Al, 2008). Guzzo's 2011 study using baseline data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey supported the modeling hypothesis in that men typically held attitudes toward fathering that reflected their own father's level of involvement during childhood. The compensatory hypothesis asserts that fathers draw upon negative or absent experiences with their own fathers, seeking to be a more present and involved father than their own (Dally, 1993; Townsend, 2002). For instance, in qualitative interviews with men who had absent fathers, East and colleagues (2020) found that interviewees from father-absent households turned to other male relatives and friends, media, and their mother's parenting to

provide a fathering experience for their children that they never had. Whether fathers model or compensate for their own father's involvement, childhood experiences tend to influence fathers' attitudes and beliefs about father involvement.

Impact of Father Involvement on Child Outcomes

A growing body of literature supports the notion that father involvement positively impacts a child academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. A study by Newland and colleagues (2013) examined the associations between father-child attachment, involvement, beliefs, perceptions, life contexts, and school outcomes in Taiwan and the United States. Their study found a relationship between children's school outcomes and father involvement (home-based and school-based), where father involvement was negatively related to school problems and positively related to academic self-concept and school achievement. Academic self-concept and school achievement were also related to a father's motivation to be involved, efficacy, beliefs about teachers, whether they felt invited to be involved, and father-child attachment quality (Newland, Chen, & Coyl-Shepherd, 2013). This study supports Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) expanded model of father involvement in that it recognizes the relationship between father involvement and child outcomes is complex and must consider multiple factors.

In 2019, Rollè and colleagues conducted a systematic review of the literature focused specifically on father involvement and cognitive development in early and middle childhood. All of the articles explored the relationship between father involvement and child outcomes; some articles focused on intervention effectiveness; some focused on the similarities and differences between father and mother involvement; a few focused on determinants of father involvement; and one focused on assessment. Findings showed a positive, statistically significant

association between father involvement and a child's cognitive skills in early childhood (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004; McBride et al., 2005, 2009; Roopnarine et al., 2006; Saracho, 2007; Downer et al., 2008; Coley et al., 2011; Fagan and Lee, 2012; McWayne et al., 2013; Duursma, 2014; Jeynes, 2015; Kim and Hill, 2015; Baker, 2017, 2018, as cited in Rollè et al., 2019). Similarly, Guzzo (2011) found that while mothers were typically more engaged in school than fathers, father-school engagement was positively related to a child's math and reading skills.

A 2015 study found relationships between fatherhood involvement and child academic achievement, psychological welfare, and positive behavioral outcomes for children in urban school settings (Jeynes, 2015). The study suggested that father involvement was positively associated with better school outcomes for White children and children of color. However, father involvement had a stronger association with child behavioral and psychological outcomes than with academic achievement. Lastly, the impact of father involvement on child outcomes was stronger for younger children than older children as well as children of color compared to the general population of children included in the study (Jeynes, 2015).

School Environment and Cultural Context

Cabrera et al.'s expanded contextual model (2014) suggests that the relationships between father involvement, parenting and child development occur within a larger social, cultural, political, and economical context. It is important to consider that families of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses experience the school system differently. Schools often expect parents to engage with their child's learning in ways that are more accessible to White, middle-class parents (Yull et al. 2018). This leads to the inaccurate assumption that families, particularly families of color, who

are not able to or choose not to engage in this way are not involved in their child's learning (Cooper, 2009). A study in 2015 by Bhargava and Witherspoon found that Black parents were more engaged in home-based involvement and academic socialization even though they were less likely to volunteer at school compared to their White counterparts. In a study examining the motivations of Latino fathers' involvement in their child's education, researchers acknowledge that the traditional examples of school involvement, such as parent visibility at school, are rooted in White, middle-class notions, which do not capture the diversity of parental involvement in Latino families (Jimenez-Castellanos et al., 2016, Moreno & Chung, 2015, as cited in Fitzgerald et al., 2019).

Teachers also play a critical role in shaping a student's academic expectations and achievement, and their own biases and expectations impact students. A study that examined racial bias of teachers compared to other American adults found that both groups held a slight pro-White/anti-Black implicit bias (Stark et al., 2020). Results also showed that greater racial disparities in testing scores were present in counties where implicit and explicit pro-White/anti-Black bias were more prevalent (Stark et al., 2020). Another study showed that math and English teachers were more likely to perceive a class as too difficult for students of color compared to White students, even when controlling for other factors (Ho & Cherng, 2018). Similarly, Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) found that White teachers, who represent most of the workforce, had lower academic expectations for Black students compared to White students. When looking at a longitudinal dataset, they found that college completion rates were higher when teachers had higher expectations for their students (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018).

A study in 2017 by Posey-Maddox revealed that Black fathers often experience microaggressions, negative assumptions, and blatant racism during conversations with teachers or school

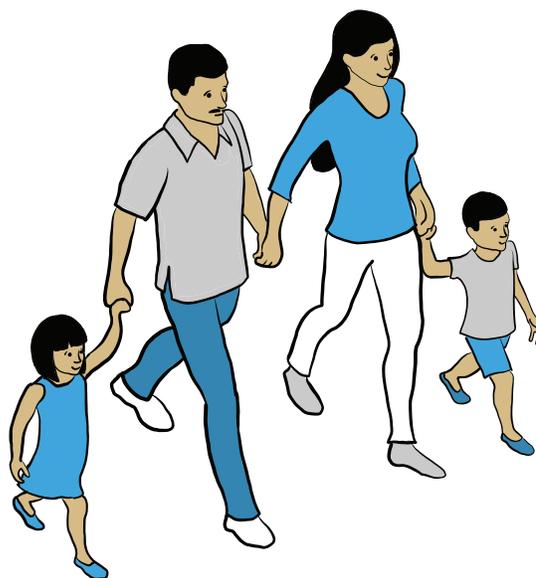
personnel, creating an unwelcoming and alienating environment, particularly among fathers of lower socioeconomic strata. Fathers also noted that they were cautious on their tone and language when interacting with White teachers, particularly White female teachers, to mitigate potential racialized fears. Posey-Maddox (2017) assert the need for school staff and educators to intentionally encourage father involvement and provide opportunities to foster relationships with fathers and build upon fathers' existing support of their child's education. In another study, researchers asked parents of color about their experiences with a school district prior to participating in a parenting program. In their discussions with parents, two themes were identified: 1) feeling unwelcome and dismissed as uncaring and 2) experiencing racial injustice and exclusionary discipline (Yull et al., 2018).

The current understanding of father involvement in learning is limited in scope because studies have failed to capture the diverse experiences of fathers across various backgrounds and cultures. Most studies have used samples of primarily White, two-parent households, where fathers are biologically related to their child (Diniz et al., 2021). Additionally, most measures of parent engagement were originally intended to measure the mother-child relationship (Volling & Cabrera, 2019). Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) explain that while father involvement often focuses on the nurturant aspects of parenthood that take place at home, indirect contributions such as providing financially for the family are also forms of father involvement.

Fatherhood Programming

With evidence showing positive associations between father involvement and academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing, it is not surprising that fatherhood intervention programs have started to focus more on increasing father involvement and engagement with their children. In 2020, Henry et al. conducted a systematic

review of 44 studies that looked at the impact of fatherhood intervention programs between 1988 and 2018. Their study found that the most effective interventions were community-based in which fathers participated together (Henry et al., 2020). Based on Cabrera et al.'s (2014) expanded contextual model of father involvement this finding is not surprising, as fathers' parenting behaviors and beliefs about involvement are influenced by their social network and community. In their review, Henry and colleagues (2020) reported that most fatherhood programs promoted positive parenting and co-parenting as well as focused on the father-child relationship. As discussed earlier, these factors are also related to increased levels of father involvement and a child's academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing. Lastly, Henry et al. (2020) discussed the fact that school-based settings were often not used even though parent engagement at school is closely linked with academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Nokali et al., 2010; Jeynes, 2015).



Summary of the Literature Review

While several models of family involvement exist, this review focused on Pleck et al.'s (2010) revised model of father involvement and Cabrera et al.'s (2014) expanded contextual model of father involvement. These models demonstrate that father involvement goes beyond father engagement and is reciprocal in nature with many factors, including family relationships, child development, work, and peer relationships, all of which take place in a larger social, cultural, political, and economic context.

The Strong Fathers process evaluation adds to existing literature by exploring how fathers living in small, rural areas of Texas conceptualize their role as fathers, family relationships, father involvement, racial and ethnic differences, and their experience with their child's school. It also explores how teachers and administrators view father involvement and school climate. Lastly, the process evaluation captures perceptions of the Strong Fathers program from both fathers and school staff. Findings from this study will be used to inform the final evaluation plan for the Strong Fathers program.



PROCESS EVALUATION METHODS & ANALYSIS

This section describes the research activities, study sample, and methods for the process evaluation of Strong Fathers.

Research Questions

Interviews were guided by the following research questions.

- 1. How do fathers engage with their child's learning and education at home and at school? How does the school environment impact fathers' abilities to engage in their child's education and learning?**
 - » Are there differences in comfort level to engage in schools among Strong Father participants compared to non-Strong Father participants?
 - » How does racism and discrimination impact the way fathers are involved or are not involved at their child's school?
- 2. What are the perceptions of Strong Fathers events among fathers and school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators)?**
 - » What are the perceived strengths and areas for improvement within the program?
 - » What are the perceived impacts of the program on fathers as it relates to their engagement in their child's learning and school?

Study Sample

The study sample includes fathers and school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, and coordinators) at primary and elementary schools in three Texas independent school districts (Van ISD located in Van, Texas; Westwood ISD located in Palestine, Texas; and Whitehouse ISD located in Whitehouse, Texas). Schools were at varying stages of implementation of the Strong Fathers Strong Families program.

SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 2 shows 2019 demographic data for students and teachers by school district according to the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), which gathers data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Public school districts in Texas are required to submit data to TEA on various indicators. Strong Fathers implementation data was provided by Strong Fathers.

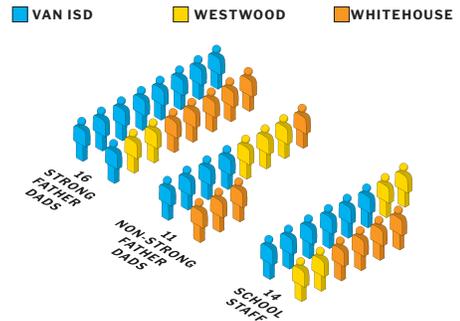
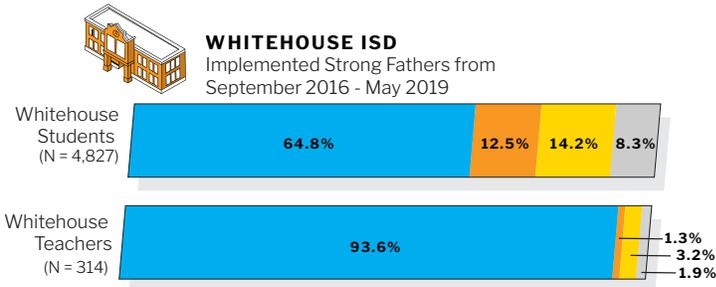
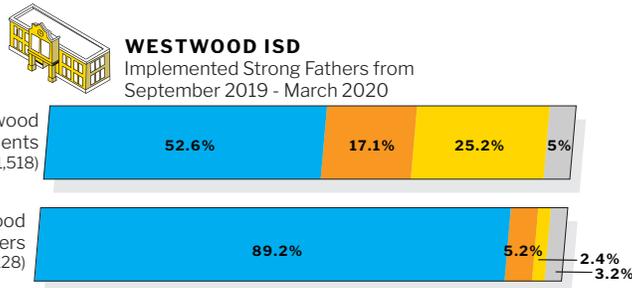
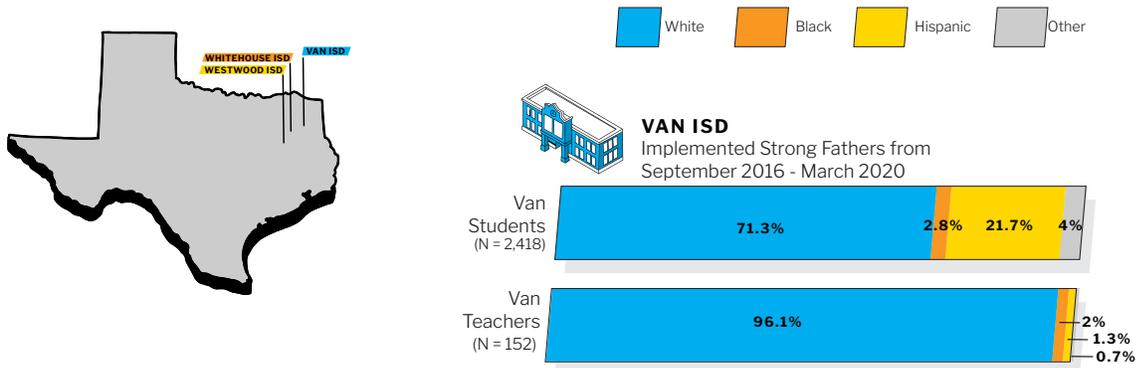
Methods

Researchers collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with three types of participants at each school: 1) fathers who have participated in a Strong Fathers event at their child's school; 2) fathers who have not participated in any Strong Fathers events at their child's school; and 3) teachers, administrators, and other school staff. Each participant completed an electronic pre-interview demographic form. The demographic form and interview guides are located in Appendix A.

All participants received a \$25 gift card for their participation in the study. A total of 38 interviewees participated in this study from July 15, 2020 – February 4, 2021.

Figure 2. School District & Study Participant Overview

TOTAL STUDENT & TEACHER POPULATION AND RACE & ETHNICITY:



THIS STUDY INCLUDES:

Data Sources: Texas Education Agency, 2019 Snapshots: Van ISD, Westwood ISD, Whitehouse ISD and Note: Three participants were Strong Fathers dads and school staff.

Recruitment, Scheduling, Interviews, and Incentives

Researchers originally planned to conduct interviews with dads and school staff in person during the spring semester of 2020. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and families, researchers delayed and extended the interview timeline and conducted all interviews virtually. Researchers began conducting interviews in July 2020 and continued recruiting and conducting interviews until February 2021, at which point there were enough interviews with dads and school staff across participating school districts to conduct a meaningful analysis.

The research team coordinated with each school district's communications staff to identify the best way to recruit participants (e.g., newsletters to parents, school websites, social media posts, email listservs to teachers/staff). TXICFW's communications team developed recruitment flyers and a social media toolkit so that school communications staff could easily distribute information about the study. Flyers and graphics were shared in English and in Spanish. A copy of recruitment flyers is in Appendix B.

The research team made additional efforts to reach out to school staff who were connected with Spanish-speaking families, such as ESL educators and counselors, to share recruitment information. Lastly, researchers encouraged interview participants to share the opportunity to participate in the study with other dads, teachers, and school staff. Below is a step-by-step process of the recruitment, scheduling, interviewing, and incentive process for this study.

1. Distributing Recruitment Flyers

School communications teams distributed recruitment materials via online newsletters,

emails, and/or social media accounts to parents, teachers and administrators.

2. Scheduling Interviews

All recruitment materials included a link to an electronic contact form where prospective interviewees could indicate interest in participating in the study. Researchers then contacted prospective interviewees with further details about the project and to schedule interviews.

3. Completing Consent Form & Pre-Interview Survey

Prior to the scheduled interview, study participants completed a consent form and short pre-interview survey that collected basic demographic information (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, annual income range), past participation in Strong Fathers events, and school information.

4. Conducting Interviews

Researchers met with interviewees over Zoom video or by phone using Microsoft Teams. Researchers briefly reviewed the consent forms, answered any participant questions, notified participants when interview recording began, and conducted the interview using an interview guide created by the research team. There were two semi-structured interview guides, one for dads and one for school staff, to allow researchers to ask follow-up questions or explore additional themes.

5. \$25 Gift Card

At the end of the interview, the researcher confirmed the participant's email address and emailed the \$25 gift card to the participant via Tango Card, an e-gift card service that allows the participant to select a gift card of their choice.

Data Analysis

After completing all interviews, researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data, the process for which is outlined below.

1. Transcribed Audio Recordings

Researchers uploaded interview audio files to GMR Transcription, a third-party secure transcription service. GMR transcribed all recordings verbatim, in either English or Spanish, and returned all files to researchers as Microsoft Word documents.

2. Developed Coding Scheme

The research team developed two different coding schemes, one for the dad interviews and one for school staff interviews, using the interview guides and initially observed themes during interviews.

3. Coded Interview Transcripts

The research team used Dedoose, a secure cloud-based qualitative analysis platform, to apply relevant codes to sections of the transcript. Two research team members independently coded and reviewed transcripts to establish inter-rater reliability. After independently coding and reviewing a few transcripts to establish consistency in code applications, the two research team members divided the remaining transcripts. Each team member coded their transcripts, gave coded transcripts to the other team member to review, and met via Microsoft Teams to review any discrepancies.

4. Analyzed Coding Excerpts

Researchers exported all coding excerpts from Dedoose into a Microsoft Excel document for further organization and analysis. Research team members identified themes based on the coding scheme and summarized interview data within each theme.



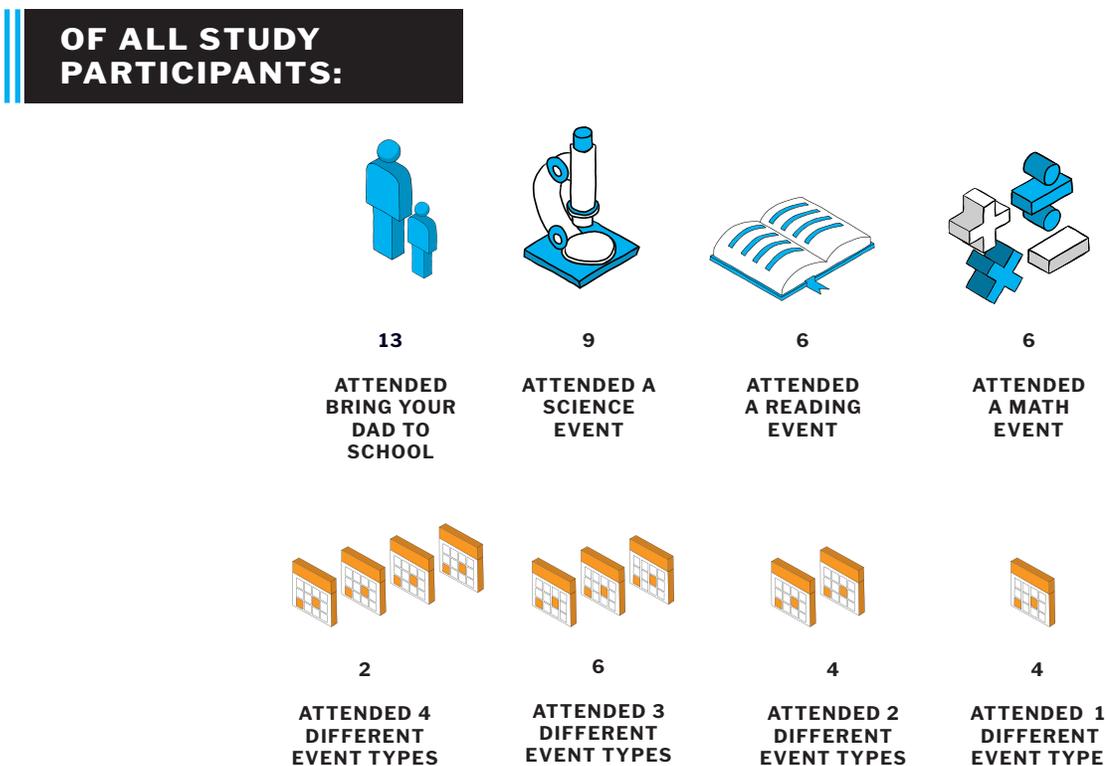
PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

About Dad Participants

All demographic data was collected from the electronic pre-interview form that participants completed prior to the scheduled interview. Of the 27 total dads who participated in interviewing, 16 participated in Strong Fathers programming (Strong Father dads) and 11 had not participated in Strong Fathers programming (Non-Strong Father dads). Three of the 16 Strong Father dads were also school staff.

Figure 3 below describes Strong Father dads who attended each type of Strong Fathers event. Most Strong Father dads (81%) attended Bring Your Dad to School, and many attended more than one type of event. The survey did not capture attendance frequency for each event (i.e., participating in Bring Your Dad to School multiple times). All dads who attended only one type of event participated in Bring Your Dad to School.

Figure 3. Strong Fathers Events Attended by Study Participants

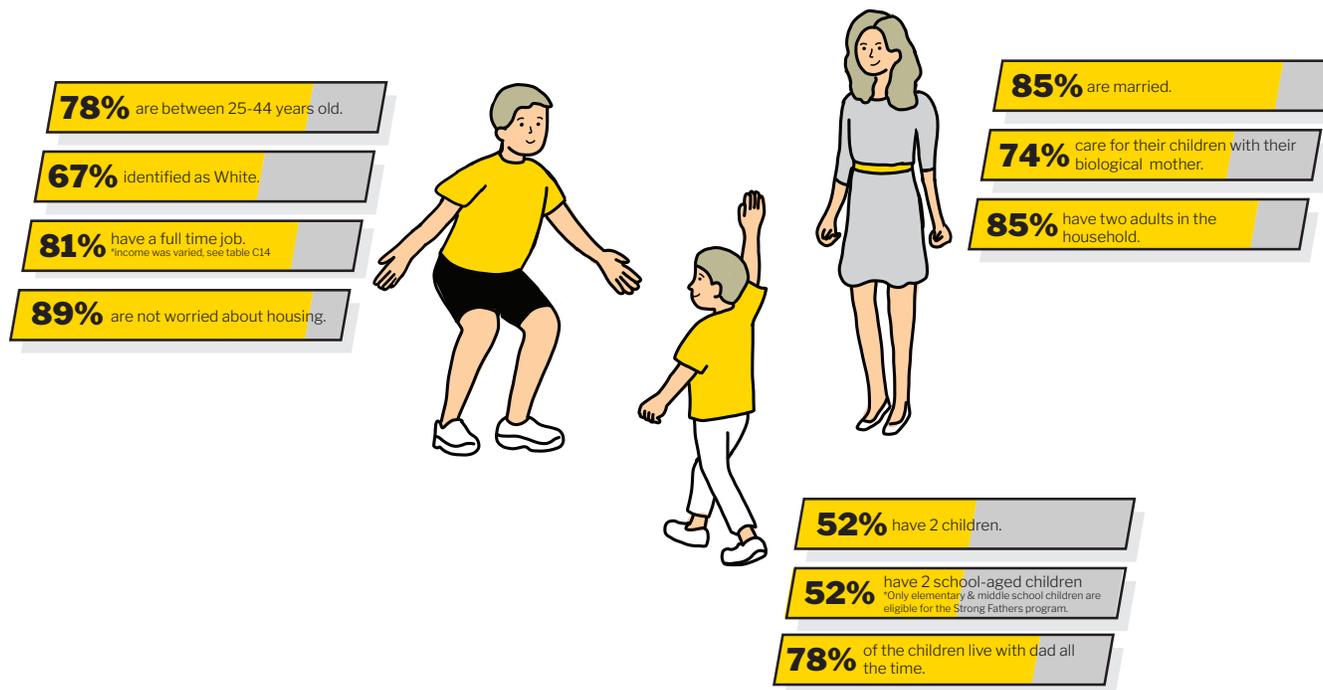


Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Strong Father Dad Responses, N = 16

Figure 4 shows the typical demographic makeup of dad interviewees (Strong Father dads and Non-Strong Father dads). The majority of dads were between ages 25 - 44 years old and approximately two-thirds were White. Only one dad interview was conducted in Spanish and all other interviews were conducted in English. Most dads were married and living in a two-adult household with their children. A little over half of dads had two children with one child being school-aged. Most dads also described the child's biological mother as a caregiver. Most dads worked full-time and lived in stable housing. Household income varied among dad participants (See Table C12).

While data reflects household income in 2019, it is important to contextualize data collection within the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many families experienced changes in employment, income, food security, housing, etc. Additionally, families may have experienced these changes differently depending on circumstances. For instance, disparities in housing stability between White families and families of color reached record highs as the strain of the pandemic compounded existing disparities stemming from longstanding structural racism and discriminatory housing practices (Greene & McCargo, 2020). All dads reported living in stable housing in the two months prior to completing the pre-interview form. However, when asked about their feeling about housing instability in the next two months, one dad was worried about housing stability and two dads preferred not to say. It is worth noting that these responses reflected high stability compared to other surveys such as those conducted by the Urban Institute (2020) and may not be reflective of the general population.

Figure 4. Demographics of a Typical Dad Participant in This Study



Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

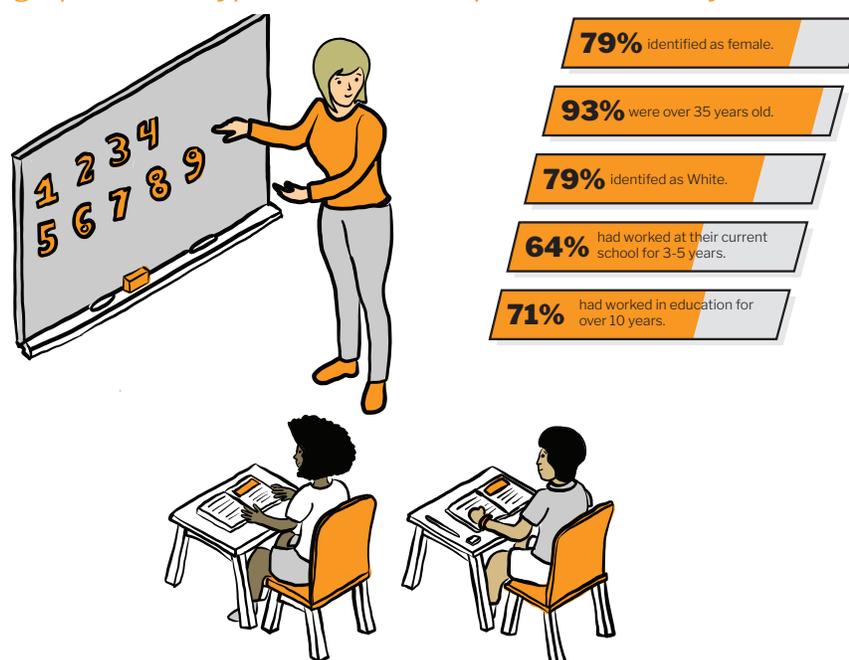
Note: All dads should have had school-aged children to qualify for the study. User error may have occurred among participants when completing the pre-interview form.

About School Staff Participants

A total of 14 school staff (teachers, administrators, etc.) participated in interviews: six from Van ISD, four from Westwood ISD, and four from Whitehouse ISD. School staff also completed the pre-interview survey with basic demographic information and work experience in education. To protect anonymity, the specific job roles of school staff were omitted from this report.

Most school staff identified as female and White, but ages varied. Most school staff worked at their current school between 3 – 5 years and in the educational setting for over 10 years.

Figure 5. Demographics of a Typical Staff Participant in This Study



Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

Thematic Findings from Interviews

This section includes thematic analysis and interpretation of qualitative data from interviews with dads and school staff. The findings are organized into major themes observed across all interviews as well as those observed specifically with dads or school staff. Some interviewees provided their perspectives as both dads and school staff members. Responses did not differ greatly between Strong Father dads and Non-Strong Father dads across themes.

The findings below are organized in the following sections, mirroring the literature review structure:

- » Family Context and Dynamics
- » Father-Child Relationship
- » School Context and Climate
- » Perceptions of Strong Fathers Programming
- » Barriers to Dads' Participation in School Events
- » Interviewee Perceptions on Opportunities for Program Growth

Family Context and Dynamics

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DAD'S ROLE IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Interviewers asked dads and school staff what role dads typically play in their children's education and learning and, for dads, what this looked like for them and their family specifically. In interviews with school staff, an interesting subtheme emerged. Some school staff (N = 3) spoke more broadly about the importance of a dad's role in their child's education or learning before describing any one role specifically. Dads (N = 27), having more personal experience, spoke in greater detail about their roles and how they ultimately aimed to help their children succeed long-term.

"They play a big role, bigger than they probably realize."

School Staff

DISCIPLINARIAN, EXPECTATION SETTER, AND PROVIDER

Some dads (N = 8) and school staff (N = 3) described dads as disciplinarians. For dads, this meant ensuring their children stayed on track in their learning and behavior. For school staff, this meant sometimes only communicating with dads under special circumstances such as when behavior or academic issues arose. Several dads (N = 5) also mentioned setting expectations for their children, using phrases such as "pushing [children] to excel."

"I think the primary role dads play, when they do play a role, probably centers on discipline. If there's an issue at school or whatever, I think most of the time the help we get from dads comes from, 'Hey, maybe your kid's not turning in his work or doing what he's supposed to in class.' If we let dad know, dad will be like, 'Hey, I'll handle that. That won't happen again. Thanks for letting me know,' kind of thing."

School Staff

"I want her to excel. I probably push, honestly, I probably push too hard. Because I did so well in school, I know she can. She is so smart. She's so far ahead of her grade level and so we do push her to excel, but that's at least I do try to take a very active role in her school."

Strong Father Dad

In hand with dads as disciplinarians, school staff (N = 3) described dads as financial providers for the family, while moms were primary caretakers for children. This meant that moms were typically more involved in children's education

and learning at school and at home. In addition to the special circumstance of discipline, dads usually interacted with schools during dad-specific events. One school staff described this phenomenon by saying, “I think that dads try to do as much as they can when they know what to do, when they’re specifically invited.”

“I think lots of times dads feel like they’re more in charge of the discipline and trying to make sure all the bills are paid and things like that and mom is in charge of making sure the kids do what they’re supposed to do.”

School Staff

HOMEWORK HELPER

While the amount of homework varied for children from pre-kindergarten to 6th grade, approximately one-fourth of dads (N = 9) explained their role helping their child with homework. Within these responses, subthemes emerged such as different comfort levels with helping or a child’s disability requiring more help. Some dads (N = 5) also described proactively helping with homework while others (N = 4) intervened only when specific questions or subjects arose, such as with science and math.

“I try to do everything I can to try to get them motivated to do their homework and to get them to where at the level that they need to be. Like I said, I sit there and help them with everything every time that they need help with it. If I’m at work and they need help on a problem and their mom don’t know it, she’ll call me on the phone and I’ll try to help them as best as I can over the phone.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

ACTIVE AND CONTINUOUS INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING AND BEYOND

Approximately one-fifth (N = 6) of dads described their role as actively and continuously involved in their child’s learning. A few dads (N = 2) used phrases such as “taking pride” and “protection” in their involvement. Dads who had children with disabilities described heavy involvement in their child’s learning at home and at school. They often felt it necessary to advocate for their child to ensure the school met their learning needs.

“...my role is very active. I’m in constant communications with their teachers. One of our children is dyslexic and so, we’re always bouncing stuff off of each other especially with the teachers...I’m very active in their life anyway, and so, I’m lucky enough to have a job that is very family oriented and so, if something comes up I can clock out and be at their school in two minutes.”

Strong Father Dad

REFLECTION ON OWN EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOL

Several dads (N = 6) reflected on their own experiences in school. Some dads described poor performance in school and lack of involvement by their own father while others described a positive relationship with school and active involvement by their own father. Dads who had negative school experiences or uninvolved fathers were often motivated to play an active role in their child’s education to improve their opportunities for success. One dad mentioned he and his wife prioritize education and hope to give their children educational opportunities they never had. Two school staff mentioned that limited or negative educational experiences among dads often posed comfort barriers for them to become involved.

“...we pride oursel[ves] on education in our family. So, I am what you would consider blue collar uneducated. I didn’t go to college; my wife neither, but we want to change that.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“A lot of times that’s not voiced, but you know that has to be some of the factors why they’re not participating, like you said. It’s fear or it’s a bad school experience that they had themselves.”

School Staff

Dads whose own fathers were involved in their education and learning described what it meant to grow up with this example, often expressing motivation to model the same behavior in their relationship with their children. One dad reflected on having an absent biological father, but an active stepfather.

“[I] grew up without my biological father being a part of my life and I had a wonderful stepfather who was always there and participated [in school activities] with me. So, he taught me how to be a dad and really be a man. So, having children of my own I knew I would never put them in the same situation I had to grow up in.”

Strong Father Dad

INSTILLING MORALS AND VALUES AND HELPING CHILDREN SUCCEED

Some dads (N = 7) described their role as instilling values and morality in their children such as “patience,” “making right decisions,” “character building,” and “being a good person.” Dads often

did this by serving as a role model and leader in living these values. This related to previous themes such as protecting children, giving their children better opportunities compared to their own, pushing children to excel, and feeling ill-equipped but motivated to help their children. One dad described taking on multiple roles to help his children become successful and happy.

“I try to teach him those things and reiterate what he’s learned in school. Teach him manners and how to respect people and adults, how to share. Things that are really going to make him a good person and a credit to society.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“Being the provider, supporter, mentor, just whatever I need to do to help my kids succeed and feel comfortable and let them be who they are.”

Strong Father Dad

Dads and school staff agreed that dads often play the role of disciplinarian and provider for children. As previously mentioned, literature suggests it is worth considering indirect contributions such as providing financially for the family as part of father involvement (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). When going into further detail, some dads described involvement on a day-to-day level such as with homework or school communication. Many dads also described more of a leadership role, setting expectations, protecting their children, instilling good values, and serving as a mentor toward success. Dads and school staff reflected on how dads’ personal experiences, whether positive or negative, impacted their involvement with their children. Responses reflected the modeling and compensatory hypotheses described in the literature review, echoing the sentiment that dads with involved fathers sought to model their parenting

(Nicholson et al., 2008) and that dads with uninvolved fathers aimed to be more involved than their own fathers (Dally, 1993; Townsend, 2002).

PARENTING ROLES IN CONTEXT

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MOM'S ROLE IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Dads and school staff were also asked to describe a mom's role in children's education and learning. Interestingly, some dads (N = 5) and school staff (N = 3) initially said mom's role was the same as dad's role but went on to describe notable differences between these roles. Interviewees may have perceived the roles of moms and dads as similar or the same, but upon further reflection noticed where they may be distinct.

"It's pretty much the same I would think. Maybe the mom probably a little more nurturing. I'm just kind of tough on mine because I don't want the world to swallow them up as they get older."

Non-Strong Father Dad

"So, I would say that it's basically the same as with dads through the same type meetings, things like that. And the same events. Usually, they're both invited to the same events. But I would say class parties is more moms. And then, like I said earlier, our communication about concerns are more with mom."

School Staff

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN PARENTING

Dads and school staff often described dads' roles as providing for the family, typically outside of the home, while moms stayed home with the children. This resulted in moms managing the day-to-day educational and learning needs of children. Several dads (N = 4) described moms as primary educators, suggesting that moms play a formative role from early development throughout the child's education and learning experience. Dads also described a mom's role as nurturing, empathizing, and being patient with their children. This contrast of dads as providers and disciplinarians and moms as caretakers represents what school staff described as a more "traditional" view of parenting roles.

"Since [my wife] stays at home, I mean she was the primary educator for those first few years growing up. I mean she was the one that sat down with them and taught them ABCs. She was the one that gave them foundations. She was the one that gave them just that environment that nurtured them in a way they felt safe and comfortable to learn."

Strong Father Dad

"I think we encourage either, but I think for some reason that some traditional, I don't know, thought process, is that it's usually going to be the mom."

School Staff

Some dads (N = 3) mentioned being uninvolved or under-involved in their children's education and learning, with a few acknowledging this as typical in their community in rural East Texas. Some dads (N = 3) emphasized the need for dads to be more involved in children's education and learning. One school staff member echoed the need to get dads more involved.

"Sometimes the woman's job is usually harder because in our society that's just the way it works. Really, as men we really need to step up..."

Non-Strong Father Dad

"I think it's very important that fathers are involved. I think kids definitely do better when that happens...because I think most of them they feel and think that moms are always there and always involved. When fathers get involved...it means more to the kids when they realize and know that 'Dad's interested in what I'm doing.'"

School Staff

CO-PARENTING: TEAMWORK TOWARD A SHARED GOAL

Dads in two-parent households mentioned they worked as a team with their partner to manage their child's learning and daily activities (e.g., taking child to extracurricular activities). Dads described shared vision and goals with their partner regarding their children's future but stressed the importance of distinct roles or split responsibilities to achieve them. Dads acknowledged differing areas of strength between them and their partners. For example, one dad claimed math as his strength and reading as his partner's strength, working together to support their children in education and learning.

"...Specifically in our case – Mom's math gifts are not the strongest, but mine are pretty good and the flip side of that is Dad, I really don't care to do any recreational reading, but Mom does. So, it kind of depends on the subject. But as far as overall role, I think it's the same. It's just one may be more comfortable for the other in a different subject."

Non-Strong Father Dad

"PLAYING BOTH ROLES" DEPENDING ON FAMILY STRUCTURE

Single dads often described needing to play "both" mom and dad roles, highlighting the perception from interviewees that these roles in a child's learning are distinct. One school staff echoed this idea of single parents playing "both roles." In interviews where dads had shared custody of their children, roles appeared to be dependent on the parents' relationship, with some dads describing amicable relationships with shared vision and responsibility and other dads feeling the need to take the lead in the child's education and learning due to mom's absence or un-involvement.

"I mean we're divorced so I mean obviously she's had to play both and I've had to play both in the process of them growing up."

Strong Father Dad

“We have a lot of single moms, so of course, they’re playing both roles, as far as mom and dad. So, a lot of moms do play the disciplinarian at home. They also play the instructional helper at home, helping kids finish assignments, or homework, or get caught up.”

School Staff

Several school staff acknowledged grandparents and other family members stepping into the parent role at school, going so far as to say that mom- or dad-specific parent events can be difficult for some children and families.

“And like I said, the exclusivity or not including people really bothered some of our single parents, either way, or we have a lot of grandparents doing it.”

School Staff

These findings echoed previous studies where fathers remained future-oriented in their involvement with their children and mothers tended to be more nurturing and emotionally supportive (Denham, Hideko, & Wyatt, 2010; Root & Rubin, 2010; Tam, 2009; Zeman et al., 2010; Thomas, Farrell, & Barnes, 1996 as cited in Jeynes, 2016). In saying that mom and dad roles were similar but going on to describe differences, dads and school staff may have meant that these roles were distinct yet equally important. This was reinforced as dads described teamwork toward shared goals for their children. As it was mentioned in the literature review, positive co-parenting relationships reinforce and sustain father involvement (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Coates & Phares, 2014). It is important to note that dads and school staff largely reflected on heteronormative family structures, even when describing single parenthood where a parent or caregiver “filled” the role of the absent, unavailable, or uninvolved mom or dad.

Father-Child Relationship

DAD’S TIME AND ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

Interviewers asked dads how they spent time with their children and the type of activities they did together. Most dads described a mixture of educational activities such as helping with homework or reading with their children, play-based activities such as sports or video games, and leisure activities such as watching movies.

Since the age of children ranged from pre-school to 6th grade, activities depended on what was developmentally appropriate. Regarding educational and learning activities at home, dads often described helping their children with homework in the evening, reading with their children, or reiterating current learning topics from school (e.g., counting).

Some dads (N = 10) described activities led by their child’s interests, especially among daughters. One dad with sons and daughters described more difficulty connecting with his daughters because their interests were more “girly,” but still trying to connect with them based on their interests.

“And me and the girls, my youngest daughter, she likes to do tea parties I should say. You know, the more girly things...Me and her like to do the movies, maybe we go out and do some lunch, but it’s harder for me and her to spend time together because she does way different things than I do. But like I said, I’ve been known to do a tea party or two with her and things like that.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Dads also mentioned either playing sports with children or attending organized sporting events in which their children participate (e.g., basketball, swimming, football, soccer). One dad of children with disabilities said his family struggled to find sports and activities in which their children could participate.

“Because we’ve been trying to find out other things they’re into and so I feel like that’s actually a struggle to find various connections with because we tried various sports that would match their needs and it’s not working for any of them right now.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

When interviewers asked school staff what activities dads typically participated in, over one-third of school staff (N = 6) mentioned organized sports and outdoor activities such as field day. School staff also mentioned dad-specific events (e.g., Strong Fathers) and more “fun” or “hands-on” activities.

“I would say I think dads are most involved with sporting events and sport-type clubs.”

School Staff

“Of course, the Bring Your Dad to School, the math and reading nights, science night with the dads. If we have a field day, a P.E. fun day, they come.”

School Staff

DAD’S TIME WITH CHILD DEPENDS ON WORK

Dads who worked from home or had job flexibility spent more time with their children, while dads

who worked out of the home, worked longer shifts, or were required to travel for weeks or months at a time (e.g., oil/gas industry, trucking) said time spent with their children was limited.

Dads typically mentioned spending time with children outside of working hours, such as in the mornings before school or during school drop-off, in the evenings during dinner, homework, bedtime, or during weekends which were often dedicated to family and leisure. For dads who had shared custody of their children, custody schedules dictated time spent together as children split time between households.

“I’m in the agriculture field, so we’re considered essential employees. So, during all this time, we’ve been working 40 plus hours and I usually see my kids every weekend.”

Strong Father Dad

When asked in which activities dads were most involved, a few school staff (N = 3) mentioned the timing of activities was a crucial factor due to busy work and family schedules. One interviewee mentioned dads often spend time with children during meals when everyone is finally home together, speculating that dads more often attended school events centered around a meal as this was something comfortable that dads already did with their children.

“I would say – this sounds weird but – if there’s food involved. We’ve noticed the Doughnuts with Dad and the Coffee with Dad and the things like that really bring them out and I don’t know if it’s because it’s more like a social thing and not such an academic thing, which sounds weird. I’m not saying that they aren’t involved in academics. I’m just saying it seems like if it’s more of a fun thing.”

School Staff

WHEN DO DADS FEEL MOST CONNECTED WITH CHILDREN?

Several dads (N = 4) said they felt most connected to their children when helping them with homework or learning. Outside of school or learning activities, nine dads mentioned feeling most connected through one-on-one time with their child, often during morning or evening routines free from distractions.

“I’d say with the homework because I feel like I’m actually helping them in some type of way that they need help.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“When me and him are usually one-on-one. Mom and Sis is gone somewhere when it’s just me and him. If it’s me, Mom, Sis and everybody’s in the room he’s usually interacting with everybody, but if it’s just me and him one-on-one we connect a lot better.”

Strong Father Dad

Two dads said they felt most connected during moments of emotional bonding with their children. For one dad, this meant during times of stress when he opened up to his children. Another dad of children with disabilities described feeling most connected when he helped his children emotionally regulate after they were upset or overstimulated.

“It’s just the little things. It’s the days they’re mad because their toy broke or they’re mad because we didn’t stop at Taco Bell today. It’s those moments of we have this emotional connection when they get angry and they let it out and then they finally calm down just from whatever I can calm them down with is a good definitely emotional connection there.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Emotional connectedness may play an important role in motivating dads to participate in school activities. When describing fatherhood programming, one school staff member described how much it means to children when dads participate at school.

“I do know though that – whenever we have dads show up – you can see the light in the kids’ faces. They light up. They’re excited.”

School Staff

DO DADS GET ENOUGH TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN?

Overall, 11 dads reported spending enough time with their children while 13 dads felt they did not spend enough time with their children. It is important to note that these interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, where many families spent more time together due to virtual learning and lack of extracurricular opportunities. One dad highlighted this as a silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I think that’s kind of one of the crazy things that this pandemic has caused, at least for our family, is that we’ve gotten to spend more time with our kids because of our time working from home…”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Dads who felt they spent enough time with their children mentioned their jobs afforded them this time, comparing themselves with dads who may work more demanding jobs or in industries where they are out of the home for multiple weeks or months at a time.

“It’s a bit unique. Not many families have the luxury of being able to be so close all the time.”

Strong Father Dad

Dads who felt they did not spend enough time with their children cited work as the main barrier. They also cited busy family schedules, with various activities for multiple children throughout the week.

“It just seems like these days there’s so much going on all the time. I mean it has slowed down a little bit with COVID, but at the same time there’s always you know they have a birthday party or they have a school function or they have a practice or sports or just it’s few and far between that I would say that they really have just nothing to do.”

Strong Father Dad

School staff (N = 9) echoed work and scheduling conflicts as frequent barriers for dads participating in school-based activities, explaining that with the limited time they have with children, dads may not want to spend it at a school function.

“Working parents who, either they work during the event, so they can’t attend, or they’ve worked all day and they haven’t been with their child all day. And they finally get to see their kid at 6:00, and they just want to spend their own time with them at the house.”

School Staff

Dads who had shared custody of children said they never had enough time with their children and wished they were able to spend more time together.

“Never. Especially I would like to have them full time and so, it makes me sad every day knowing that I don’t get them all the time. Because co-parenting was not part of my plan in raising kids for sure.”

Strong Father Dad

Dads described a variety of activities they engaged in with their children and the moments in which they felt most connected with children varied. For some dads, connection was felt through a special activity, while others placed more value on moments of emotional connection. Dads and school staff mentioned that time spent together between dads and children depended on work and family schedules and that job flexibility played heavily into whether dads felt spent enough time with children.



School Context and Climate

SCHOOL COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

Interviewers asked dads about their experiences and perspectives interacting with schools, with the goal of understanding school culture and environment surrounding family engagement, particularly with dads. Interviewers asked school staff similar questions, but with the goal of understanding how schools communicate and engage with families, including dads.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

Across districts, schools communicated with parents in many ways, including email, text, phone call, classroom portal, Facebook, and school websites. Several dads (N = 12) said schools used multiple methods to communicate with parents, including email, text, and phone calls. School staff (N = 7) more frequently mentioned communicating with parents using a school portal or app. Since data collection occurred simultaneously with changing school protocols during COVID-19, regular communication may have shifted in both frequency (e.g., more alerts and updates) and method (e.g., more virtual communication).

PARENT COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Most dads (N = 20) and many school staff (N = 7) acknowledged that moms were in closer communication with schools and more aware of school updates and events. Some dads (N = 14) said that while they are on contact lists, schools typically called moms. School staff also referred to moms as the main point of contact, explaining that moms responded to parent outreach and teachers reached out to moms automatically.

“But I think overall there tends to be a natural gravitation toward mom being the first point of contact. Anytime there’s a need to communicate, whether its teachers communicating home, or administrators reaching out for a particular reason to an individual household, the immediate reaction is, ‘Who is mom? Where is mom? How do we contact mom? And how do we communicate with mother?’”

Strong Father Dad

“Generally, when we call home, the moms are generally the ones that will call you back, and we’re saying we’re having this problem. And so, a lot of times it’s more moms than dads that handle all of that...”

School Staff

One dad who had shared custody of his child expressed frustration about being outside of the communication loop regarding his child’s performance at school.

“Well, like my son that I have custody of, he’s struggling in school, but I kind of feel like the moms might get a call quicker like when he’s not doing so good as far as the dad. Like me, I have to find out during progress reports or like report cards come out. Why not call me within that week and let me know how my child is not doing so good in this.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Interestingly, dads among all school districts who described that both mom and dads received communication from school equally noted that communication was sent via the classroom portal or listserv, where each parent had to sign up using phone number/email.

“Whoever subscribes to their service – so mom and dad equally.”

Strong Father Dad

IS THERE AN EMPHASIS ON ENGAGING MOMS?

Interviewers asked school staff if there was more of an emphasis on engaging moms than dads when it came to school activities. Most school staff (N = 9) acknowledged more engagement with moms, though many (N = 8) mentioned this was unintentional, explaining that more frequent engagement with moms was reinforced by schools and families alike. School staff often assumed that moms would be the ones to engage or reached out to moms automatically, as previously described. Families would also default to mom when it came to school involvement. One interviewee referred to this pattern as something “systemic” and another described school activities and opportunities as more “feminine.”

“I think yes. I don’t think that it is intentional. I think it’s just that because some of the events that we do, I wouldn’t say they’re not manly, but well...I just think that dressing up and being part of the musical would be something that mom is more wanting to do...So, I don’t think it’s intentional. And even book fairs...We’ve got lots of cookbooks and journal type things.. So, I would say even like the products at a book fair for adults are pretty feminine.”

School Staff

Similarly, interviewers asked dads if moms and dads are treated differently at their child schools. Some dads (N = 5) said there was no difference in school treatment of moms and dads while others (N = 16) noted differences. Dads who felt they were treated equally said that schools communicated with and tried to engage both parents. In contrast, dads who felt they were treated differently mentioned having to advocate to be included in parent-school communication.

“I don’t feel that they are [treating moms and dads differently]. I feel like the school tries to get both of the parents to participate in their kids’ life and in their activities at school.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“I had to constantly remind them that we are co-parents. And so, I don’t always get the information because the Mom lives in the district. They don’t call me, and they don’t let me know things. And if she doesn’t tell me, I have to find out weeks later and so forth. And so, I feel like maybe I am treated differently even though I’m on everything and have every right to know. I feel like I’ve maybe not always had that.”

Strong Father Dad

DAD COMFORT AT SCHOOL AND SCHOOL EFFORTS TO ENGAGE DADS

Dads described varying comfort levels in the school environment. Dads already engaged in school events and activities described feeling comfortable at school while dads who were not engaged often felt uncomfortable and out of place in an environment of mostly moms. As previously mentioned by school staff, these dads echoed that school events and activities were geared more toward moms.

“At our previous school and even at this school, when I’ve had to go up there, it’s me in a room full of moms and it’s a little bit – intimidating is the wrong word – but it can be a little uncomfortable or awkward because most of what the teacher has prepared are activities that I’m not necessarily gonna be good at – crafting, t-shirts, making pumpkin crafts... So, as far as things that schools might be able to do to maybe be a little more accommodating to dads might be a little more hands-on things you know?”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Some dads (N = 3) and one school staff felt that schools went out of their way to include dads with dad-specific outreach and events, which they did not always do for moms.

“We never received stuff saying, ‘Hey moms participate.’ It’s only dads.”

Strong Father Dad

“I don’t really remember or know if we do something just for moms, I’m trying to think, I don’t remember at the time.”

School Staff

PARENTS WHO ATTEND EVENTS ARE TYPICALLY ALREADY INVOLVED

While several dads (N = 3) noted schools made an extra effort to engage dads, they acknowledged parents who attended events were typically already involved. Interviewers sought to better understand why dads may or may not show up to school events. Most dads were unsure of how families were treated when they did not show up, noting they had no personal experience with this as they were already engaged.

“I can’t say I really know because the stuff that we’ve been invited to, we went and I guess I really never talked to a parent that didn’t go to any of this stuff. Most of the parents I know are pretty hands-on.”

Strong Father Dad

Some dads (N = 6) emphasized that schools were understanding that not all dads could attend due to work or busy schedules. However, one dad mentioned he felt that teachers pay more attention to the parents that show up more consistently to school events.

“I don’t know about the other schools but I don’t believe [district] really holds it against you because there are a lot of oil fields and stuff in our town so there’s a lot of times, a lot of the dads are gone a good bit of the time.”

Strong Father Dad

“Well, I mean I haven’t been able to make it to everything because of my job because sometimes it’s during the day, and the times I have been, I’ve seen how the teachers and staff kind of pays more attention to the regulars that they pretty much know that comes to everything that’s going on.”

Non-

Strong Father Dad

“Well, I mean you know I would say it was mostly middle class. I mean obviously dads that I mean couldn’t afford to miss work or either weren’t off, I mean I noticed it was a lot of business, a lot of police officers, a lot of office type jobs, a few I would say manual labor jobs – you could tell by their uniform – mixed in.”

Strong Father Dad

DIVERSITY, DISCRIMINATION, AND INCLUSION

While the research team aimed to recruit a diverse sample of dads, most dads who participated were White and already engaged with their children’s school, which may influence themes presented in this section. Interviewers asked dads if they had ever witnessed or experienced families being treated differently because of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or any other reason. School staff were asked if families from various cultures or backgrounds engaged differently with schools. Responses across interviewees varied for each of these questions.

Socioeconomic Status

Several dads (N = 3) described differences in family engagement based on socioeconomic status. Some school staff referenced socioeconomic status when asked if families from diverse cultures or backgrounds engaged differently with schools, but school staff more often mentioned socioeconomic status throughout other parts of the interview.

“I would say it’s more of your economically disadvantaged that are less likely to interact with us because of time, if they work crazy hours, multiple jobs, or if they’re a single parent, we don’t really see them much, just because they’re just trying to make it and working a lot.”

School Staff

Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Regarding the racial, ethnic, and cultural makeup of families in schools, dads either described schools as “mainly White” or “pretty diverse,” sometimes describing the same school or school district.

“I would say it’s mainly White families, but I think that has less to do – I think that’s just because the demographic of the school.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“Oh, it’s diverse – White, Black, Hispanic, a lot of Asian people – so it was pretty diverse.”

Strong Father Dad (from same school district as above)

While some school staff (N = 5) said that families engage equally with schools, many staff (N = 9) described differences in engagement based on race, ethnicity, or culture. One school staff said that efforts to create a welcoming culture for families from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds have been hard to prioritize. Another school staff explained that the demographic makeup of school staff did not match the demographic makeup of families and that families were more willing to engage with school staff with the same racial, ethnic, or cultural background.

“We are really starting to become more diverse. [...] I think the last time I looked, we got 13 or 15 different languages reported on our home language cards, and our district is really working on cultural awareness and meeting those needs. Unfortunately, I think we put too much emphasis on only focusing on our Hispanic population, because that is our next highest number, but when you look at a campus like us, we have a pretty diverse group of students. [...] I think it’s about building those relationships and making them feel welcome and comfortable in our school. And that’s an area we’re definitely still working on. I don’t think we do enough in that area. And it hasn’t been a priority, if I’m being perfectly honest, just because we’ve had to focus on so many other things [...] creating that culture, that I feel [...] hopefully out of COVID [...], that we can really start highlighting the diversity that we have and making that more of a priority for us. But it has not been, if I’m being perfectly honest with you.”

School Staff

“Well, I think sometimes there are – I’m thinking from the parents’ side. I think, especially if your child has multiple teachers, if they keep hearing from the one parent about all of the behavior issues from the one teacher, I do think they begin to assume it is racism. And you don’t like my child, because that does come out, if it’s continually just one teacher complaining when the others don’t. So, I have seen that come out, and the children will usually say something. If they’re hearing their parents say it, they’re pretty quick to mention it at least to another teacher or to another student. So, that is a little bit of perceived racism, and it could be real racism, depending on the teacher. So, we have seen that. And I think it goes back to demographics of your staff, too, on campus. And I think that Black parents are much more comfortable when their child has a Black teacher, and vice versa with Hispanics. [...] So, I think that they feel more comfortable, depending on the race of the teacher. And so, when we have a very white staff, I think that does turn off parents who are not white. So, I could see that. I don’t want to say that they feel like the campus is racist, but I do think that there is a comfort level that’s not there because of it.”

School Staff

One dad expressed safety concerns for his children in a predominantly White school and community. Another dad approached the topic of race with hesitancy, alluding to experiences with racism at his children’s school without describing them specifically.

“Yeah, El Paso where the guy just went and shot a bunch of Hispanics just because of the way that they looked. And we definitely fear things like that a little bit more with our oldest just because she definitely looks Hispanic. Our other two I mean they’re half White and I think they honestly take on more of my traits than my wife’s traits. They don’t look as Hispanic.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“...Like I say, I try not to pull the race stuff, but you never know who’s racist.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

School staff also shared personal assumptions and perceptions of families from certain racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Typically, school staff made statements about specific racial, ethnic, cultural groups engaging frequently or infrequently with schools. Some school staff made more broad statements about how families viewed children’s education or learning.

“Typically, more of our Asian cultures are more interactive with us and more concerned about grades than I would say most. And they are much harder on their children. If they don’t make an A, then they want to talk to us about what’s wrong. So, I would say that, that particular race would care more.”

School Staff

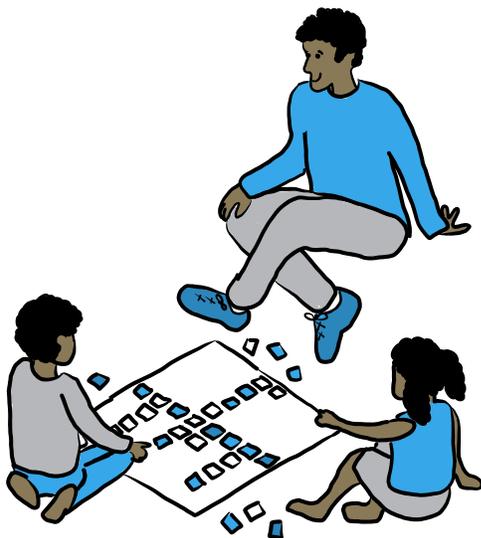
“Yeah, well, if you think about the African American culture, there are some that are very absent and get upset if you call them at all. But then, there are others that want to help but don’t quite know how to help. And I think a lot of our African American culture – I teach writing. If their child is struggling with grammar, I think they take that as their fault. So, I think that they don’t feel equipped to help their child with school in modeling that in the house. But I don’t want to say that they all don’t want to participate. We do have a great population of African Americans who do. I think that the only things they know how to help with are math facts and behavior, or spelling list type things. So, I do think that they just don’t know how to help.”

School Staff

“Well, we have one family from the Philippines and they just don’t engage at all. Rarely at all. I mean, we’ve had to go to their homes to even get any engagement and then they say they’ll do things and then they won’t.”

School Staff

It is important to consider how personal assumptions and perceptions by school staff impact the overall culture of parent-school engagement. One school staff described hesitancy or distrust by families with undocumented immigration status, explaining the need to “build trust” and “prove you care about their kid.” However, using language such as “illegal” to describe undocumented families may negate efforts toward inclusion. Another school staff alluded to uncertainty about why Hispanic families were apprehensive to send their children back to school during the pandemic, but research shows that Latinx families have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (American Medical Association, 2020). School staff described a desire to understand and build relationships with families from various racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds, and could potentially benefit from training or support to better connect with families.



“They don’t really engage differently. They’re a little shy and they’re a little more apprehensive about getting involved. Until you build some trust they’re not really sure because they’re worried about what’s gonna happen. I would say once they get involved they’re involved like everybody else; it’s just getting them involved because of their distrust of government or the school and what the school has to do. Because I’ve had to tell parents it’s not my job to report if you’re illegal. That’s not my business, that’s not my job, I’m not gonna do that. But until you say that, and I think even then they’re like, okay is she really telling the truth or are they gonna come up there, are they gonna ask her and she’s gonna have to say – I think there’s a lot of distrust there. [...] A lot of it I will get an interpreter come and have them come up and meet with me and once you meet with them and let them ask questions and you explain everything to them they generally feel a little bit better about it. And it kinda has to happen over time. You kinda have to prove yourself that you really care about their kid and you have their best interest in mind. And so, that’s just something you have to build over time I think.”

School Staff

“So, I’m going to say yes. A good example is COVID, right now. At the beginning of the school year, we had 27 to 30% of our students were virtual. They were online learners. The others came back, and a pretty large percentage of those virtual learners were Hispanic students, particularly from Mexico. And for whatever reason, culturally, that group really is very apprehensive about the virus. And so, the majority, a pretty good chunk of our virtual students were Hispanic students, because their parents didn’t want to send them back to school.”

School Staff

Language

Most dads (N = 19) did not mention discrimination based on language, but one dad who was also a staff member acknowledged the need to improve translation and communication for non-English speaking families. One Spanish-speaking dad felt he wasted other parents’ time asking for clarification at a parent event.

“There was a person in the school who spoke Spanish, but I felt like I was slowing the process down. I asked twice to get a better explanation and I saw that the other parents were growing desperate because it felt like they were wasting time with us because they were explaining again. So, I understand that everyone’s time is valuable.”

Strong Father Dad, Quote Translated from Spanish

Three school staff mentioned that non-English speaking families are less inclined to engage in school activities due to language barriers, referencing Spanish-speaking families specifically. Another

school staff member said that having bilingual teachers and providing translators helped non-English speaking families feel more comfortable.

“Yes, they do. I feel that we have less Hispanics that participate in events. And I think, again, it’s the language barrier, perhaps. Just feeling uncomfortable.”

School Staff

Gender

Only one dad felt that he was treated differently based on his gender, describing his demeanor as intimidating in an environment of mostly women. School staff did not mention gender in response to whether families from different cultures or backgrounds engaged differently with schools but described differences in parent engagement based on gender as mentioned throughout the previous findings.

“I am particularly a very big, rough looking fella and I think they just really don’t want to deal with me because I’m kind of scary looking and lots of people tell me that so I understand that’s kind of why I get [treated that way]. I don’t know if more fathers are that way but, they just don’t want to talk to me very much. I am the primary of my children and even though my wife will be at work where she can’t have her phone, they will still call her phone and she’ll have to call me or text me and tell me, ‘Hey the school is calling, call and see what’s going on.’ And I will and they’ll be like, ‘Well where’s your wife at?’ She’s at work.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

Disability

Responses regarding treatment of children and families based on disability varied. One dad mentioned witnessing accommodations for children with disabilities, but another dad felt that events at school were not inclusive of children with disabilities and their parents. School staff did not discuss disability in this portion of the interview.

“...there were some accommodations for some kids that we saw one day that it was a special needs child and it seemed like they were actually handling it quite well. They took care of that little girl and it was what I would call up to par.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“They do various events or stuff for dads, like dads with coffee or something like that. But since my kids are in special education I feel like that leaves out that whole spectrum of dads because their special education is not massive or anything, but there’s still a good amount of families with that. And so, I feel like all the dads out there that have their kids in life skills or anything like that I feel like they get left out on a few things.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

While some dads of children with disabilities shared negative perceptions or even conflict with schools over their child’s learning needs, other dads of children with disabilities were pleased with school staff and their child’s learning experience.

“That’s why he moved to [another school] because we were at a smaller school and they really didn’t have a program for that. And so they moved to [another school] which was really great with the dyslexia thing and one thing I’ve noticed from elementary to he’s in junior high now I mean kind of the – how do I put the word? The extra help has gone away so he struggles with things like English and reading and whatnot.”

Strong Father Dad

Dads and school staff described a school culture in which moms were more engaged than dads, often attributing this to traditional gender roles reinforced by both families and schools. Interviewees referred to dads as providers and disciplinarians and moms as nurturers and caretakers who manage the day-to-day needs of children, meaning moms were often the default for parent-school communication and involvement. They explained that while dad-focused programming such as Strong Fathers created a comfortable space for dads at school where moms were typically more involved, dads who participated were already engaged in their children’s education and learning.

There was also broad recognition that family engagement looks different for moms, dads, and families depending on demographic characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, family structure, disability, etc.). As discussed in the literature review, the biases and assumptions of school staff can affect not only student outcomes (Stark et al., 2020; Ho & Cherng, 2018; Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018), but also parent engagement and inclusion in the school setting (Posey-Maddox, 2017; Yull et al., 2018). Findings suggest a need for more support for schools to better engage the full spectrum of caregivers and families represented in their school population. Because Strong Fathers events take place in the school environment and

school staff are often tasked with recruitment for events, it is important to consider how schools communicate with families and to what extent all families feel comfortable in the school environment. It is also important to reflect on the notion that fatherhood involvement means having dads physically present at school, which may not always be feasible or culturally relevant for families.

COVID-19 AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT

As previously mentioned, these interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic amidst many changes for families, schools, and the Strong Fathers program. Interviewees discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family-school engagement. School staff overwhelmingly reported being less connected with families than in years past, with parents unable to be physically present in schools and struggling to help their children with virtual learning. One school staff mentioned having more connection specifically with dads because of virtual communication options.

“It’s hard to say because no one can come in our building. So, I would say that there’s [not] a lot of parent involvement. I see a lot of parents that would like to be involved, it’s just that they can’t come in the building right now.”

School Staff

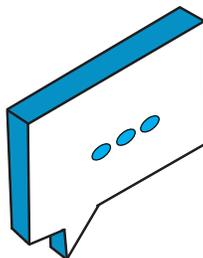
“I was shocked that this year – because of COVID – we couldn’t do in-person conferences and I had a lot of dads that said, ‘I’m working at this time, but I really want to know what’s going on so can you please make sure to call me too or get me on the Zoom?’ So, I felt like because it wasn’t they didn’t have to take off work, they could just Zoom, do whatever Zoom, we had a lot more dads involved this year.”

School Staff

Dads also expressed similar challenges of feeling less connected with schools during the pandemic, particularly the inability to attend in-person school events like parent-teacher conferences. However, a few dads who were able to work from home discussed how they became more closely involved in their child’s schooling during the shift to virtual learning, since they had to help their child log into virtual learning platforms and help submit homework.

“I think just being involved with the day-to-day things that she does. It’s been a lot harder this year, that’s for sure, with COVID just because in years past, the schools always have events that you can go...But they can’t really do anything right now, so it’s been kind of hard.”

Non-Strong Father Dad



“Well, I’ve been lucky, I’ve worked from home for several years now. With her not going to school, that was definitely a new one... So, we did more of her homework together, more of her school activities together than we did when she was in – when things were ‘normal.’”

Strong Father Dad

Dads reflected that the evolving understanding of COVID-19 and subsequent changes to school protocols were the main challenges related to the pandemic. Schools were tasked with shifting entire learning systems to accommodate public health and safety measures, which was a huge challenge for all school districts. Some dads cited the lack of consistent communication from schools regarding these changing protocols. However, other dads noted improved communication during the pandemic, particularly through email/text message systems that alerted all parents who signed up.

“My son, he was actually quarantined for indirect exposure. He didn’t actually get corona, but he was within six feet of somebody that did and for the first couple of days [school staff] was just contacting Mom and I was having heck trying to get him started because the way we were working, our communication we were crossing our paths for a couple of days and I had heck trying to figure out how to get it rolling this year. Because so much had changed from the end of last year to the beginning of this year how they do things remotely.”

Strong Father Dad

Perceptions of Strong Fathers Programming

Interviewers gathered perceptions and opinions about Strong Fathers from dads and school staff. Among dad interviewees, 16 dads participated in at least one Strong Fathers event (e.g., Bring Your Dad to School, Dad & Kid Math, Science, and/or Reading Events). All 14 school staff were aware of Strong Fathers programming to varying degrees. Two school staff attended at least one Strong Fathers program with their child, providing the perspective of both a dad and school staff member.

LEARNING ABOUT STRONG FATHERS

About half of the dads (N = 8) who participated in Strong Fathers events became aware of the opportunity through flyers sent home with children. Some dads (N = 10) saw the information in an email from the school, on Facebook, or the classroom portal. One dad mentioned his wife notified him by texting a picture of the flyer. Another dad said his child made him aware of the opportunity and encouraged him to attend.

The first time was with [my daughter]. I think it was three years ago. She said, ‘Look, dad, you have an invitation to come to my school.’ And I asked, ‘Okay, when?’ ‘This day.’ I said, ‘I am going to ask permission at work so I can be there.’ And she said, ‘Okay, I can’t wait.’”

Strong Father Dad

School staff were asked about their familiarity with the Strong Fathers program. Two school staff mentioned they were not familiar, while most school staff (N = 9) said they were at least somewhat familiar with the program. Those most familiar had attended themselves or by their partners.

“...not very [familiar], I just know that we send the information home and the note says for dads to come into the classroom. But as far as what they do, I’m really not sure.”

School Staff

“I mean, I thought it was a good idea. My initial thought was to make sure that I checked my business calendar to make sure I could take the time off.”

Strong Father Dad

“I think I’m pretty familiar with it. I’ve been to every session, pretty much, that they’ve had here. Because I am a dad of a kid in the district, so – I feel pretty familiar with it, and we’ve had a few events, actually, on our campus.”

School Staff

“My first thought was fear. Since we’re not used to going. I would sometimes attend meetings at the start of the school year to meet their teachers, or gatherings, or other events, or when they had outings I would also attend. But when they invited me, I was like, ‘What is going to happen? How am I going to know what they are telling me? What am I going to do? I am not going to understand?’ I said I’ll figure it out. I have to see what it is.”

Strong Father Dad, Quote Translated from Spanish

In summary, dads most often learned about Strong Fathers events through physical flyers sent home with children. While all school staff were somewhat familiar with the program, there may be an opportunity to foster more awareness and involvement from school staff, serving as an opportunity to help school staff connect more regularly with dads.

INITIAL THOUGHTS AND MOTIVATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN STRONG FATHERS

While some dads attended the program out of a “duty” or responsibility to their child, most dads (N = 12) had positive initial thoughts about Strong Fathers such as excitement to attend and urgency to ensure their schedule would allow it. A few dads (N = 2) mentioned initial expectations for low participation or that the event would be “corny.” One Spanish-speaking dad expressed fear stemming from the uncertainty of what the event entailed and if he would be able to participate and understand.

Interviewers also asked dads and school staff what motivated dads to participate in Strong Fathers. Responses generally fell into two themes: dad-led and child-led motivation to participate. Dad-led motivation was born out of curiosity about what goes on in school, desire to be involved in their children’s education and learning, or general interest in spending time with children.

“Because I’m strongly supportive of my child’s education, and I wanna be involved. And I wanna know what he’s learning in school, what the school curriculum is, and if it goes along with what I believe in.”

Strong Father Dad

“Yeah, see what they’re doing in class. I know my husband, he would go with my son – with our son and he was very excited to see what they’re learning or see what he’s learning.”

School Staff

Child-led motivation meant that dads were compelled to attend because of their child’s desire to have them at school. Several dads mentioned that they were motivated to attend because they did not want their child to be disappointed or feel left out if they did not attend. While not directly child-led motivation, it does suggest a concern for child’s feelings and protection of child’s experience at school.

“Just my boy wanted me to come in for it, so I – guess little boys, they tell about their dads, and that way they can kind of show who they are or what they are...”

Strong Father Dad

“Well, honestly, I think a lot of it has to do with us telling the kids and then getting the dads to go. They want their dads to be there and the dads want to make their kid happy, so I think when the kids know about it, they’re more encouraging to their dads to go.”

School Staff

Four school staff mentioned that dads were motivated to attend Strong Fathers because the programming was dad-specific, suggesting that dads felt more comfortable in an environment with other dads. Though initial thoughts about the opportunity to participate in Strong Fathers varied, dads were driven by their interest in being involved with their child or their child’s desire to have their dad at school.

HOW INTERVIEWEES DESCRIBED STRONG FATHERS

Interviewers also asked dads who attended Strong Fathers and school staff how they would describe the program to other dads. Dads generally described Strong Fathers events as an opportunity to get insight into a child’s learning environment, to bond with their child, and to show support for their child.

“I would tell them, ‘Hey, look it’s a good time to be able to get that one-on-one time where Mom’s not around, another sibling ain’t around, you get that one-on-one a little bit of bonding time with the kid, plus you also get the interaction with the kid and then you also get some learning skills that maybe you can bring home and have that more bonding time but you’re also still also teaching your kid as y’all are playing or doing whatever you’re doing.’”

Strong Fathers Dad

School staff described Strong Fathers as an opportunity for dads to see what their child does at school, become more comfortable in the school environment, and know how to become more involved in their children’s learning.



“It’s an opportunity to come up to the school and to go in your child’s classroom and see what it’s like from their perspective, what they’re doing. It’s kind of like your invitation to get to see them in action. And you learn some activities that you can do with your child at home that gets you involved at home with your child and involved with your child.”

School Staff

Rather than describing individual activities or programming, both dads and school staff described Strong Fathers more generally as a positive way to engage with children in the school environment.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT STRONG FATHERS ACTIVITIES

Interviewers asked dads to share their opinions on their overall experience of Strong Fathers events, what they liked most about the program, and what they liked least. While school staff were not asked about specific activities, they provided thoughts during other parts of the interview. This section summarizes opinions about the following Strong Fathers program activities:

- » Meal with Child
- » Classroom Observation
- » Facilitated Discussion
- » Connecting Fathers Game

MEAL WITH CHILD

During this part of the interview, dads did not mention sharing a meal with their children. As mentioned previously, school staff speculated that dads may feel more comfortable at school events involving meals because mealtimes are a common activity for families. Dads may not have

mentioned mealtimes with children because it did not stand out to them (as it is something they already do with children) or because it is not a part of the programming that is as important to dads as school staff assume.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Several dads valued and enjoyed the opportunity to observe their child in the classroom and see their learning environment. For some, this activity was the part they liked the most about the program.

“I like seeing the glow on my kids’ faces. Showing me off like I was some kind of trophy or something like that. I don’t know, it was the cutest thing; just how happy they were. And just seeing them in a learning setting, like sitting in the back and watching and observing them was very – it changed my perspective of like learning now considering school has changed a lot since I was that age, so it was really neat.”

Strong Father Dad

INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY: DAD & KID MATH, READING, AND SCIENCE EVENTS

Dads who attended the Dad & Kid events described that they enjoyed the subject-specific activities, especially the opportunity for active participation. One dad described the reading activity as outside of their comfort zone because it was “silly,” but felt more comfortable after seeing everyone else participating. Dad expressed that working on activities together with their child was important one-on-one time with their child, particularly among dads with multiple children.

“Just the hands-on stuff because we built stuff and I mean he enjoyed it and I enjoyed it and I got to spend time with him and it was something we both like.”

Strong Father Dad

Dads seemed to enjoy the science event more than the reading event. One dad who attended both the science and reading events mentioned liking the science event more because it allowed for more participation.

“I mean the science ones were our favorites. The reading one we didn’t have as much fun, but it was just because we weren’t participating. I think that was the key is that it’s harder to sit and listen to someone do something like that than we get to actually touch something and do something and work on something. But there’s nothing I didn’t enjoy. I’ve been pleasantly surprised with every single one of the science ones we’ve done.”

Strong Father Dad



FACILITATED DISCUSSION

Several dads (N = 6) specifically liked the facilitated discussion, describing it as “informative” and useful.

“I remember them having a speaker one and they talked about how to give you strengths and traits at home of how to bond more with your child or find out things that he wants to do so it helped me realize, okay, it’s not all about school. There’s other things that you can do with your son, so he doesn’t get where he don’t want to do the stuff and teaching you how to bond more with your child.”

Strong Father Dad

All dads enjoyed the facilitator’s energy and levity. Most dads (N = 12) felt that the facilitator was relatable, easing anxiety and allowing dads to relax and open up. Some dads also felt the facilitator was genuine and passionate about dad involvement.

“Even the vernacular that he uses, and the way that he speaks geared more towards men in a guy type of setting, it kind of helps to bring down that anxiety that guys might feel sometimes.”

Strong Father Dad

“[The facilitator] was a great guy. I mean half of our enjoyment of the nights were his personality and the energy that he brings to it.”

Strong Father Dad

When asked if whether they would relate more to a facilitator of their own racial, ethnic, or cultural background or from their community, most dads mentioned that the passion for fatherhood involvement was more important than the background of the facilitator. One dad expressed that his comfort level may improve with a facilitator of his same race. One Spanish-speaking dad felt ashamed about asking for clarifications and worried he would slow the discussion down.

“The realness, the speakers were very real. They had life experiences that they talked about that matched life experiences that I went through or go through with our children. And so, it was good information being transferred.”

Strong Father Dad

“...the facilitator spoke English and Spanish. It was fine, but sometimes we don't ask questions out of shame. And many times we don't exactly understand what is being said point by point. In my case, I understand a little bit, but I don't know how to express myself. So, I can't offer my opinion. I can't speak about my point of view. Sometimes it's frustrating to want to say something and not be able to do it.”

Strong Father Dad, Quote Translated from Spanish

CONNECTING FATHERS GAME

The Connecting Fathers game is the last activity for Bring Your Dad to School where dads interact with each other. Most dads (N = 15) did not mention this activity. One dad mentioned it was his least favorite part but understood the goal to promote connection with other dads.

“Maybe some of the games that they play, but I see there's a reason for those games that they do to get people to get to know each other.”

Strong Father Dad

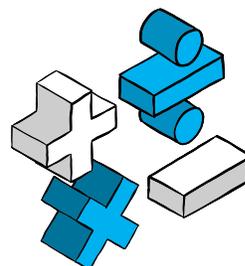
Overall, fathers most enjoyed getting to see their children in the school environment, participating in learning activities with their children (particularly science activities), and engaging in the facilitated discussion about fatherhood involvement.

PERCEIVED CHANGES IN FATHER INVOLVEMENT AFTER STRONG FATHERS

Interviewers also asked dads about any changes in school or learning engagement after participating in Strong Fathers. It is important to reiterate that these interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, when families may have had different or limited engagement with schools.

DAD INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD'S LEARNING

Most dads (N = 10) who participated in Strong Fathers events said their involvement in their child's school or learning was about the same. However, some dads (N = 4) mentioned being more motivated to stay engaged in their child's learning or the desire to improve on their engagement after participating in the program.



“I definitely think that each time that we get to spend that time together it does kind of encourage me to then take that more proactive role and make sure I know what she’s learning. And obviously from the last time we met, we went right into COVID and so I was the primary person doing her education at that point. But I definitely think it encourages me to be more involved. It kind of reminds me that she loves it. She loves that dedicated time spent with dad at school. So, it definitely does encourage me to just even be more intentional about, ‘What are you learning? How can I help?’”

Strong Father Dad

“[My involvement] was actually the same. I try to be a strong father at home with his daily activities as well as his education. When the implemented this at school and started it, I immediately got involved with it. Nothing actually has changed except I did attend the meetings and have an involvement with my child’s education at the school.”

Strong Father Dad

DAD COMFORT LEVEL INTERACTING WITH SCHOOL

Many dads (N = 7) were already comfortable at school, mentioning that participating in Strong Fathers did not change their level of comfort with participating in events or interacting with school staff. However, some dads (N = 4) became more comfortable participating in events after attending the Strong Fathers program. For example, a Spanish-speaking dad who

expressed initial fear and discomfort became more comfortable and felt more valued by school staff in his commitment to his children after participating in Strong Fathers.

“Well, going to these meetings, you stop being afraid of going with them and learning with them too. But they always try to be supportive at the school, and they try to help us, but sometimes I think that out of fear, or because you don’t know what people will say about you, you don’t make more progress. But yes, it’s been better. I think that there is a stronger bond [between me and the school staff] because they see that we’re trying to be supportive and be there for them [my children].”

Strong Father Dad, Quote translated from Spanish

DAD INVOLVEMENT AT HOME

A few dads (N = 4) described changes in their involvement with children at home such as finding more bonding time with their child or engaging in more learning activities at home with their child.

“When it come[s] to education I’m pretty really strong on it, so I was involved in his education more. So, like I said I was the enforcer with school before and after [participating in Strong Fathers]. Strong Fathers has taught me just to find that one-on-one with my child.”

Strong Father Dad

“I mean, not really much changed. I mean, we just still do the same thing... We do a lot more like the board games, we do math games at the house.”

Strong Father Dad

DAD-FOCUSED NATURE OF EVENTS

Several dads (N = 4) liked that the program was dad focused. One dad said the dad-focused approach made him feel valued as part of his child’s learning.

“Well, the fact that they have activities where you get involved with them. I feel that we [as dads] are being taken into account. We’re a part of that community. Although sometimes we don’t have time, we are interested in our children’s education.”

Strong Father Dad

Another dad said the fact that the program was geared towards dads encouraged him to take initiative in engaging in learning activities at home.



“But being something that’s focused specifically geared toward the guys in the kid’s family, in the kid’s life, I think is really important because suddenly, we’re sitting there. And there might be a table with three or four other dads and their sons and daughters. And we look around and think, okay, I can sit and read with my child. I can do a science activity at home with them. It’s not something that they have to do on their own or that we have to put that responsibility onto somebody else in the household. So, I think it’s good. We kind of look at each other and go, hey, that was fun. We can do this at home, too, that kind of thing.”

Strong Father Dad

DO SCHOOLS THINK STRONG FATHERS IS HELPFUL?

Most school staff (N = 9) said that the Strong Fathers program is helpful, with some requesting more Strong Fathers programming. Two school staff mentioned that dads who participate in Strong Fathers are those that already regularly engage, and one school staff mentioned the dad-focused nature of Strong Fathers could be difficult for children whose dads are absent or not available to participate.

“Absolutely, yeah, I mean, I think – especially the part of them coming in the room and spending time with their kids... when the wives aren’t around, it really – I just think it gives them ownership and responsibility and just to see how their kids act around them and how excited they are to see ‘em. I would like to do more of it actually.”

School Staff

“I think it’s good for dads to think about being more involved. I think this is where, how do you measure its helpfulness? Because I will say, the days when the dads come to the classrooms, it’s an issue for our students who don’t have dads, especially our little boys who don’t have dads. It’s very bothersome to them. And we usually have to have a conversation about it. Just ‘Hey, if you get upset about something, this is what we can do.’ So, it is an issue for those who don’t have them. But I do think it’s a good thing. I don’t quite know how to measure if it’s helping.”

School Staff

When asked if there was any type of family that benefits more from Strong Fathers, several school staff (N = 5) thought all benefited equally, referencing families of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For school staff (N = 7) who mentioned certain families benefitted more from the program, the type of family varied greatly. Three staff said that families with adults such as grandparents or stepparents raising children or families with split custody arrangements benefitted more.

“...[I’m] think[ing] of one family. So, her parents split up, but she was actually living with dad rather than mom. Both were involved in her life, but she was living with dad. And he was the one who asked those questions about how she’s doing. He was the one who made every single ARD meeting that we had. So, but he probably did read with his child at home. So, I do think that yes, the kids who don’t have the involved parent, or don’t see their parent as much would benefit from it, just because it’s another interaction that they can have.”

School Staff

Changes in fatherhood involvement before and after participating in Strong Fathers were minimal and dads who attended Strong Fathers events were typically those that were already engaged. This suggests there may be an opportunity to better engage dads who do not typically participate in school activities. However, dads and school staff highlighted the program as a good opportunity to spend time with their children, particularly in the school environment. This was especially helpful for dads who struggle to spend one-on-one time with their children. The dad-focused nature of Strong Fathers also brought up mixed opinions. Dads liked that events were dad-specific and school staff saw the value of helping dads feel more comfortable in an environment where moms are typically more involved. However, school staff were cognizant that the dad-specific nature of Strong Fathers can pose barriers to inclusion for some children or caregivers.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL EVENTS

Interviewers also asked dads and school staff about barriers to participating in school events, including Strong Fathers. Dads and school staff mentioned work schedules and comfort as the main barriers to participation. Dads and school staff described additional barriers outlined below, with no distinction between Strong Father and non-Strong Father dads.

WORK AND SCHEDULES

Working dads, particularly those with inflexible jobs or jobs with demanding hours, cited this as a barrier to participation. As previously mentioned, school staff (N = 9) echoed work as a primary barrier for dads. Several dads (N = 3) acknowledged their privilege in their ability to attend events, stating that some dads could not miss work to attend school events despite their desire to attend. One dad mentioned the timing of Strong Father events was the best it could be given the scheduling challenges.

“Many parents flew out the door [after Strong Fathers] because they had to return to work. In my experience, I missed my work hours, and the second time, I had to switch my day off. There are people who can’t do that. Maybe they didn’t get permission. Maybe they were told that if they skipped work they would get fired. There are many people who didn’t attend. So, I think that many of the parents who ran out of there had to return to their work. Unfortunately, we don’t have the wiggle room or the privilege to skip work.”

Strong Father Dad

“I mean, you can’t really move that stuff around. You move it to please 20% of it and you’ve made it harder for the other 80%. So, I think it was – like I said, that’s something that – I feel that they did a best of a job as possible given all the cultures, given all the different dads, their job schedules and everything else. I thought they’ve done about as well as you can do it.”

Strong Father Dad

Approximately half of dads who participated had to change their work schedule and half did not. Among dads who had to rearrange their schedule, most noted flexibility in their workplace. Other dads mentioned their jobs required advanced notice and in one instance, a dad lost work hours for attending Strong Fathers. Among dads who did not have to change anything in their schedules, most mentioned that the Strong Fathers programming was in the evening after work.

DISCOMFORT AT SCHOOL

Discomfort in the school environment was another frequently cited barrier to participating in school events. For events that were not dad-specific in which moms more often participated, dads described discomfort in an environment of all moms. One dad noted his discomfort interacting with other men’s wives. Three school staff said that participating in Strong Fathers helps dads with the initial discomfort of being in the school environment.

“I would almost attribute it to the uncomfortable factor of being surrounded by a bunch of other men’s wives... I don’t know maybe I’m not the only one to express this to you, but it could be a little uncomfortable to be social or interact with other moms – typically the wives of other men. There’s a stigma about it and kind of a mutual respect where you kind of just don’t do that.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

“Well, usually if you didn’t hear that much about it, you didn’t know to go or they called you the day before... It’s kind of hard to take off and go.”

Strong Father Dad

“And then, the other is just not knowing enough about it. I think just – I don’t want to say more advertisement, but kind of build it up more, so that they know what to expect.”

School Staff

“So, I think it’s all about getting them in the door the first time, and getting that comfort in there, so they know, ‘Hey, this is targeted for me. This was fun. I want to do these types of things with my kids.’”

School Staff

FAMILY STRUCTURES & PRIORITIZATION

Dads and school staff (N = 2) also discussed challenges for dads attending school events depending on family structure, mentioning split custody arrangements, single-parent families, and families with children of multiple ages.

“There’s probably some issues with divorce, split families, and then there’s probably a lot of people that are just working long hours and in their defense it can be tiring.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

School staff mentioned other comfort-related barriers such as low literacy or negative experiences with education, living in a small town where everyone else grew up together, language barriers, and being a parent attendee who is not a dad.

UNAWARE OF SCHOOL EVENTS

Some dads (N = 3) and school staff (N = 2) said that dads were simply unaware of events or did not have enough notice to attend. One dad suggested promoting events across multiple mediums and with greater notice to improve attendance.

“I think just time, a lot of times, when you have multiple children, it’s hard just to get everybody in bed, and fed, and all of that. So, I think when you have a ton of children and maybe if you don’t even have a spouse to help, I think it’s just on the bottom of the priority list to go to those things.”

School Staff

Dads and school staff most frequently mentioned work and scheduling barriers to dads participating in school events, including Strong Fathers. Dads and school staff also mentioned the need to increase comfort in the school environment for dads, which the Strong Fathers program aims to do. Dads and school staff also expressed the need to create more awareness around parent engagement opportunities and be cognizant of the difficulties single parents or those with split custody may face.

INTERVIEWEE PERCEPTIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM GROWTH

Dads and school staff gave a variety of recommendations to improve the program.

TIMING AND ACTIVITIES

Among dads who attended Strong Fathers programming, some dads (N = 4) recommended having more events per year. School staff (N = 3) echoed this recommendation.

“I would like for [the facilitator] to do more events. I know he goes to a lot of schools, so it’s kind of hard. I mean, it’d be cool if he get him – I guess another guy or another person to go do it with him so he can spread it further.”

Strong Father Dad

“Absolutely, yeah, I mean, I think – especially the part of them coming in the room and spending time with their kids and making – it really when the wives aren’t around, it really – I just think it gives them ownership and responsibility and just to see how their kids act around them and how excited they are to see ‘em. I would like to do more of it actually.”

School Staff

Dads who did not participate in Strong Fathers programming (N = 8) recommended increasing promotion of events and giving more notice of the event. Several dads mentioned that they would have participated if they knew about it or had more notice about it to take time off work.

“I would say asking [inviting dads] and really making sure that we’re aware of the information. I think it needs to be those two things.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

In reference to scheduling barriers, one school staff recommended asking dads at each school which dates and times would be best for them. Similarly, one dad also echoed the need to ask dads about the best time to have events based on each school.

“So, maybe we need to send out a survey and try to get an idea. Survey specifically to the dads and ask what would be the best time during the week during the day, during the week of an evening, a Saturday, things like that.”

School Staff

“...the communication of scheduling these events of how we’re gonna do it, look at the area. I don’t know if y’all do, do it that way, or if it’s just the same time throughout every school that y’all go to or if it’s look at the area you’re in and see hey, this is how it’s gonna be able to work for this area. Focus more on each school that you’re doing them in and how the community works.”

Strong Father Dad

Two school staff highlighted the need for variety in the programming so that dads who want to participate more than once can stay engaged.

“I do think that he needs to change it up every year [...] So, once they start, they get the same thing repeated every year and they get burnt out.”

School Staff

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Two school staff recommended making the programming more inclusive of other caregivers.

“The other thing we ran into, just being frankly honest, is that for a lot of our kids [...] there’s not a dad in the picture. And so, we had moms coming. We had grandpas coming. We had anybody who was willing to come, we always opened our doors, and we had not a lot of complaints, but a number of complaints that we needed to be more inclusive in thinking about what our students were dealing with at home.”

School Staff

Some dads (N = 4) and school staff (N = 2) suggested splitting the events for smaller groups by language or grade-level to improve accessibility and comfort. Dads with multiple children in the same school expressed that they felt rushed during the classroom observation since they had to go to multiple classrooms instead of just one. One school staff member said they would like to see the program implemented with older children. One Spanish-speaking dad suggested having a separate Spanish-speaking Strong Fathers event to follow along better and feel more comfortable engaging in the program. Similarly, one school staff member suggested having a Hispanic facilitator may be more meaningful for Hispanic families.

“You could ask the parents who don’t speak English to come and explain everything and that way, we would waste less time. It will be better to express what they have to tell us and we will completely understand. So, I believe that would be a good point.”

Strong Father Dad, Quote Translated from Spanish

“But I feel like there could be a way to group those in a way. Like you could have fifth and fourth grade dads. I feel like it would be just too much to get a whole school of dads in one – that’s just the way I feel. But it seems like it could be sorted out better... To me, every time I hear about that I’m like it sounds like a lot. And I would some days drop off my kids on those days and it would just be crazy.”

Non-Strong Father Dad

COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOLS

Two school staff expressed a desire to be more included in the decision-making process during Strong Fathers implementation. While the intent may be to make program implementation as easy as possible for schools, there is still a need for flexibility and adaption within the school environment. There may be opportunities to collaborate with schools, building on existing efforts to engage families.

“If you’re going to have a program and you want to engage dads and stuff through the school, then work with the school to make it the best it can be, and don’t try and micromanage everything the school is trying to do to serve parents.”

School Staff

Many dads and school staff expressed a desire for more Strong Fathers events at their school, with the recommendation by school staff to provide more variety in programming. Both dads and school staff suggested asking dads at the campus level about their availability to get around scheduling barriers. There were also several ideas to better engage Spanish-speaking families. Lastly, school staff expressed a desire to have more collaboration and involvement in the implementation process for Strong Fathers.



LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong Fathers campus programming was paused during the time of this study, requiring interviewees to reflect on past experiences with Strong Fathers as opposed to current experiences. School operations were also continuously disrupted, with students transitioning in and out of virtual learning. Understandably, school communication around COVID-19 health and safety protocols took priority, which created difficulty connecting with schools to engage in the project, especially given that many schools were unable to send home paper flyers with students. The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted family relationships, with some families spending more time together than usual and others under tremendous financial and emotional strain. Researchers began each interview with a brief acknowledgment of the impact of COVID-19 on families and schools, and many interviewees talked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in their responses. Researchers also adapted interview recruitment strategies to fit the changing operations and communication protocols of schools.

In addition to pandemic-related recruitment issues, using schools for recruitment posed its own challenges. Researchers used school websites and Strong Fathers leadership to connect with school personnel and implement strategies for recruiting interviewees (dads and school staff). Researchers struggled to connect with dads and school staff through this indirect recruitment, often employing several strategies with each school before garnering interest from prospective participants. As previously mentioned, assisting in this recruitment was understandably not a high priority for school personnel at that time. Additionally, relying on

school personnel posed challenges to recruiting a diverse sample of participants. For instance, researchers found it difficult to connect with Spanish-speaking families. Researchers attempted to connect with families through Spanish-speaking staff at each school or district but were still only able to recruit one Spanish-speaking dad participant. Lastly regarding recruitment, dads who responded to recruitment efforts and took the initiative to schedule interviews were likely those that were already engaged in their children's education or learning, which could pose issues related to response bias. Efforts toward a future evaluation may consider strategies aimed at recruiting dad participants who are not already engaged with their children's education or learning.

Finally, given the fact that this study was a process evaluation with a small sample of dads and school staff, results are not generalizable to the larger population of dads and school staff. A more robust program evaluation with a larger sample size would be needed to be able to generalize results.



DISCUSSION

Most dads and school staff reflected positively about Strong Fathers, with recommendations to host events more regularly and provide more variety in programming to keep repeat participants engaged. Dads who participated in Strong Fathers were typically already involved in their children's education and learning, suggesting there may be opportunities to better engage other dads and caregivers. Interviewees recommended making events more inclusive of non-father caregivers and hosting separate events for Spanish-speaking dads or smaller events by grade level to better support dads with multiple children. School staff recommended more collaboration with schools to ensure Strong Fathers builds on existing school efforts and addresses their unique father engagement needs. For instance, schools that struggle to engage families from diverse backgrounds and cultures may benefit from cultural humility and responsiveness training as part of their site development with Strong Fathers. The ability to adapt and tailor program implementation based on the school may deepen Strong Fathers' connection with schools and engagement with families.

Traditional heteronormative gender roles were a prominent and consistent theme throughout process evaluation findings, with dads seen as providers and disciplinarians and moms seen as caretakers who managed the day-to-day needs of children, including school. This often meant that schools communicated more with moms, both because school staff reached out to moms automatically and because families defaulted to moms for school communication and involvement. Dads' work schedules heavily dictated not only time spent with their children,

but involvement in school-based activities. Schools often only connected with dads over issues of discipline or during dad-specific events, including Strong Fathers. When dads did participate in school activities, including Strong Fathers, their motivation centered on the father-child relationship, driven by their desire to connect with their child and their child's desire to connect with them. Many dads and school staff expressed a desire to improve father engagement in children's education and learning. School staff also reflected on their struggle to engage families from various cultures and backgrounds, with some school staff revealing assumptions and biases that may hinder this engagement.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Changes to the Logic Model

At the onset of this research project, the research team developed a logic model (see Figure 6 below) based on the literature review and Strong Father program materials which researchers used as the framework to guide the process evaluation. A key step in preparing for an outcome evaluation is to revisit the logic model with the new lens of program understanding to identify if the initial logic model components are valid based on process evaluation findings. This process helps validate the program components or outcomes that are working and highlights components that may not be showing intended results. Based on this revisiting and refining process, the research team recommends the changes to the logic model in Figure 7.

A brief overview of the recommended changes to the logic model are described below.

1. Remove short-term and intermediate outcomes related to fathers improving social support.

Findings did not show any changes to social connection among dads who participated in Strong Fathers.

2. Change short-term outcome of “Fathers increase intent to actively participate in child(ren)’s education” to “Fathers increase motivation to actively participate in child(ren)’s education”.

During interviews, dads often used the word “motivate” and described that they were motivated to continue to be engaged in their child’s school and learning.

3. Change short-term outcome of “Fathers increase intent to actively communicate with teachers & school administrators” to “Fathers feel more comfortable at child’s school”.

Findings did not show that program participation influenced how dads communicated with school staff and schools. This could be due to multiple factors, including the fact that dad interviewees were already communicating with teachers and school staff.

Figure 6. Initial Logic Model

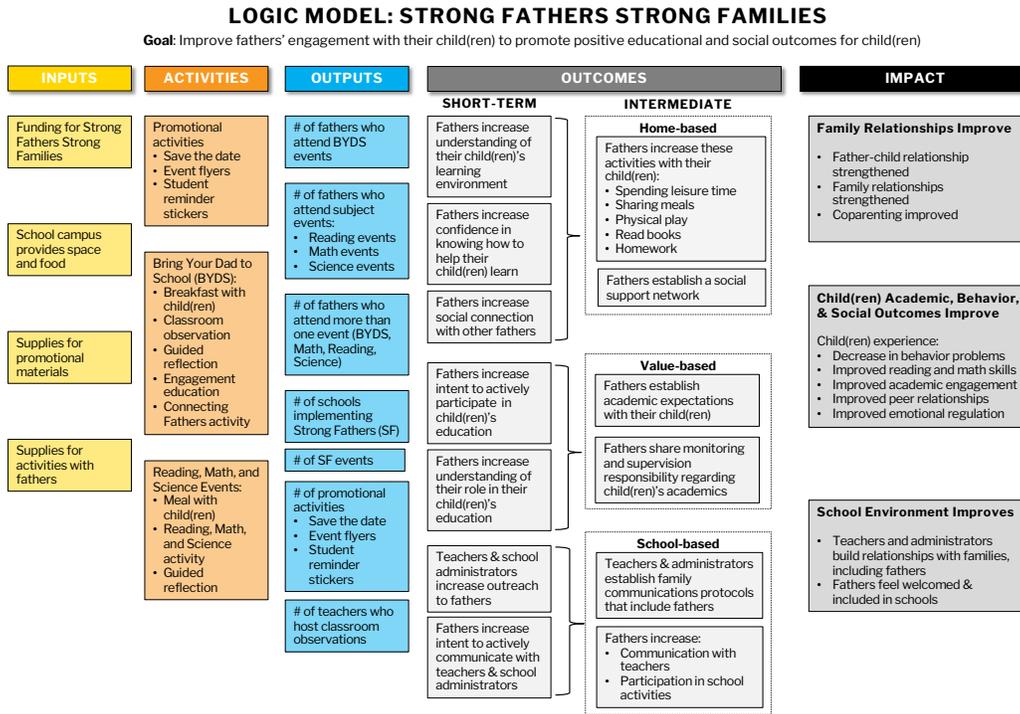
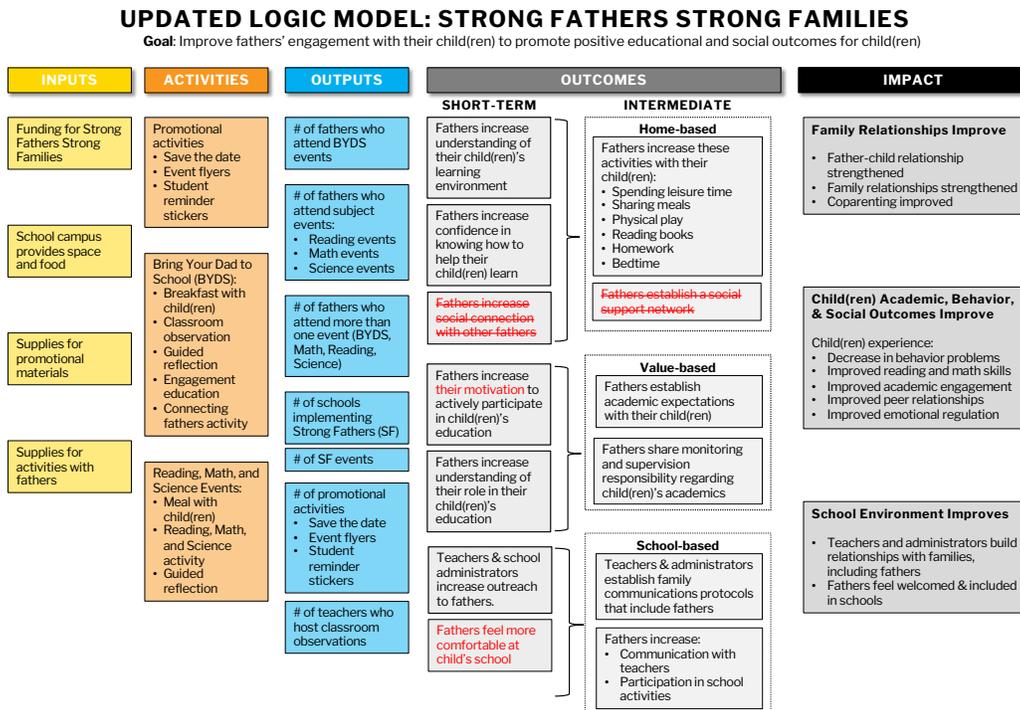


Figure 7. Proposed Updates to the Logic Model



Proposed Evaluation Plan

The purpose of this proposed evaluation is to pilot the Strong Fathers Strong Families Campus Program (Strong Fathers) with adaptations that have been made based on results from an initial process evaluation. Strong Fathers is a school-based fatherhood program that aims to improve fathers' engagement in their child's education both at school and at home. This goal of this evaluation will be to understand the impact that Strong Fathers has on 1) family relationships, father-child relationships, and co-parenting; 2) child academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing; and 3) the school environment. Researchers will conduct a mixed-method study to evaluate outcomes and understand the site development, recruitment, implementation, and functioning of the program. An outcome evaluation will consist of a pre-survey, brief satisfaction form (post-survey), and three-month follow-up survey sent electronically to Strong Fathers participants. An end of semester survey will also be sent to school staff. The process evaluation will consist of focus groups, interviews, and feedback surveys with participating dads and school staff (administrators, teachers, etc.). Surveys and interviews will be conducted in either Spanish or English.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

Researchers will conduct a mixed-methods program evaluation using a pre-post design. The program evaluation will address the following research questions:

1. To what extent did family relationships, father-child relationships, and co-parenting relationships improve after a dad participated in a Strong Fathers event?
2. To what extent did father involvement at home and at school improve after participating in Strong Fathers?
3. To what extent does a child's academic, behavioral, and social wellbeing improve after their dad participated in a Strong Fathers event?
4. To what extent did a dad's level of comfort with engaging with the school improve after participating in a Strong Fathers event?
5. To what extent do school climate and father engagement practices improve after Strong Fathers has been implemented at that school for a period of time?

METHODS

Participants

This sample will include dads who participate in at least one Strong Fathers event at their child's elementary or middle school. School staff and administrators at schools implementing Strong Fathers will also be included in this study.

Measures

Based on the review on father involvement literature in the initial process evaluation, the researchers will include validated measures to capture changes over time. Depending on the program changes, researchers anticipate including measures that align with the logic model in the following domains:

Father involvement:

- » Engagement in activities with child at home and school (ex. Home-based Parent Questionnaire, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).
- » Warmth and responsiveness (capacity to respond to child's problems)
- » Control/setting and maintaining boundaries

- » Indirect care (i.e., engaging in activities to support the child without the presence of the child, including grocery shopping, shopping for clothing, fostering social connections, and arranging childcare)
- » Process responsibility/monitoring what is needed
- » Family relationships including father-child relationships and co-parenting relationships (ex. Child Relationship Scale, Driscoll & Pianta, 2011)
- » Child academic performance
- » Child behavioral health
- » Child social wellbeing
- » School climate (ex. School Climate Scale, Scheuler, et al. 2014)
- » School engagement with fathers (ex. Teacher Invitations for Parental Involvement Questionnaire, Yulianti, et al., 2019)

The research team may also develop specific measures to address the limitations of existing measures. For example, most measures of father involvement primarily assess father engagement and/or are based off measures originally intended to assess mothering (Cabrera, 2018). Additionally, researchers will aim to ensure measures capture the diversity of father involvement in children's education and learning across backgrounds and cultures (i.e., not limited to direct father-child interaction or parent visibility at school).

Dads

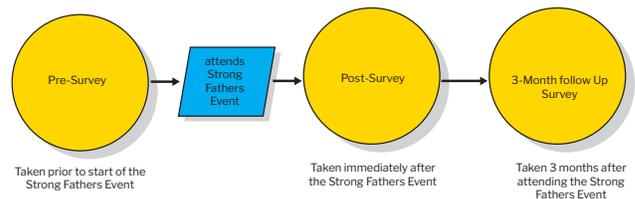
Recruitment

Dads will be recruited to participate in this study when they sign in to attend a Strong Fathers event. At this time, a link or QR code will be provided to dads with information about the study purpose, what they will be asked to do, potential risks and benefits of participation, compensation, voluntary nature of the study, and

what will be done to maintain their privacy. Dads will be required to provide informed consent electronically before participating in the survey.

DATA COLLECTION

Surveys with dads will take place at three time points:



Prior to starting the Strong Fathers event, dads will be given an opportunity to complete the pre-survey on their phone. Upon completion of the pre-survey, dads will automatically be redirected to an electronic contact form. This contact form will briefly review the post-survey and three-month follow-up survey and ask participants to provide their name and email address for follow-up and incentive purposes only.

Dad will automatically be emailed a brief post-survey at the end of the Strong Fathers event. After three months, dads will receive a second email asking them to complete the three-month follow-up survey. Pre-surveys, post-surveys, and three-month follow-up surveys will be used to measure progress toward short and intermediate outcomes.

Incentives

Dads who participate in the three-month follow-up survey will be redirected to an electronic form where they can opt to receive a \$25 e-gift card. Survey information and contact information will be collected and stored separately to protect participant anonymity. After participants complete the incentive form, they will receive an

email via Tango Card, an e-gift card service that allows the participant to select a \$25 gift card of their choice.

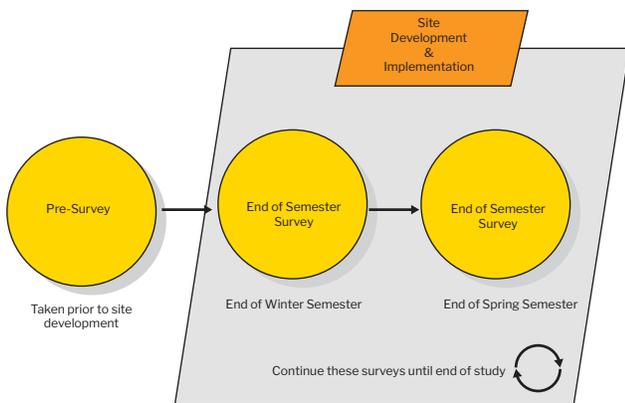
School Staff

Recruitment

Prior to site development or at the beginning of the school year, school staff (teachers, administrators, etc.) will be asked to participate in the Strong Fathers evaluation. They will receive information about the study via email or in person depending on the school's preference. This information will explain what they will be asked to do, potential risks and benefits of participation, compensation, voluntary nature of the study, and what will be done to maintain their privacy.

Data collection

An initial survey on school climate and family engagement practices will be provided to school staff prior to site development, when possible. School staff will be asked to complete an additional survey at the end of each semester while this study is in place, as shown below:



Researchers will identify a Strong Father's Champion or point of contact at each school implementing Strong Fathers. Researchers will work with Strong Fathers, school administrators and teachers, and the Strong Father's Champion to determine the best way to disseminate the initial pre-survey and end-of-semester surveys.

Upon completion of the pre-survey, staff will automatically be redirected to an electronic contact form. This contact form will briefly review the end of semester surveys and ask participants to provide their name and email address for follow-up purposes.

Survey Incentives

After survey completion, school staff survey participants will have an opportunity to enter a raffle for a staff breakfast or school donation.

Data Analysis

Researchers will use SPSS statistical analysis software to analyze all survey data. Short-term outcomes will be analyzed by examining within subject change from pre to three-months' post training. Paired sample t-tests will be used to detect changes between the pre and post-tests in terms of means, standard deviations using a p-value of 0.05. Effect sizes of the outcomes will be calculated using Cohen's d. The effect sizes will compare the degree of participant change based on Strong Fathers. Other bivariate procedures among measures will be performed consistent with item metrics (e.g., cross tabulations of categorical measures, correlations among interval scales, mean comparisons for interval outcomes and categorical independent variables via ANOVA or t-tests, etc.).

PROCESS EVALUATION

Researchers will interview school staff at schools where Strong Fathers is being implemented as well as dads and other caregivers who participate in at least one of the events listed below:

- » Bring Your Dad to School
- » Dad & Kid Math Event
- » Dad & Kid Science Event
- » Dad & Kid Reading Event

Some data collected as part of the outcome study may also be used to understand how the program is working. Interviews with dads and school staff will be used to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent was the Strong Fathers Campus Program implemented as planned?
2. How is the program working for staff and dads?
3. What were major successes during program implementation?
4. What were major barriers or challenges to program implementation?
5. What processes affected expected results?

METHODS

Sample

The study sample will include dads/caregivers who participate in at least one Strong Fathers event and school staff at schools that have implemented Strong Fathers. The research team will aim to recruit a diverse sample of dad interviewees that is representative of the population of families in each school district based on Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Dad Interviews

At the end of the post survey, dads will be asked if they would be interested in talking to researchers about their experience with Strong Fathers. Dads who indicate interest in participating in a research interview will receive an email with more information and a link to an electronic pre-interview form. Dads will receive a \$25 gift card incentive for participating in a research interview. Strong Fathers.

The pre-interview form will help researchers recruit interviewees across a broad range of demographic characteristics (e.g., child's school, number of Strong Fathers events attended, racial and ethnic identities). Researchers will contact prospective interviewees by email and schedule either a Zoom video interview or Microsoft Teams phone interview. Researchers will ask participants to complete an electronic consent form prior to their scheduled interview. All interviews will be recorded (using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams) and stored on a secure cloud-based server.

School Staff Surveys and Interviews

Upon completion of the end of semester surveys, participants will be redirected to an electronic contact form. This contact form will briefly explain the opportunity to participate in a research interview and ask participants for their email address. This form will also mention the ability to receive a \$25 gift card incentive for participating in a research interview.

School staff who indicate interest in participating in a research interview will receive an email with more information and a link to an electronic pre-interview form. The pre-interview form will help researchers recruit interviewees across a broad range of demographic characteristics (e.g., school, length of time Strong Fathers has been implemented at their school, racial and ethnic identities). Researchers will contact prospective interviewees by email and schedule either a Zoom video interview or Microsoft Teams phone interview. Researchers will ask participants to complete an electronic consent form prior to their scheduled interview. All interviews will be recorded (using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams) and stored on a secure cloud-based server.

Data Analysis

1. Transcribe Audio Recordings

Researchers will upload interview audio files to GMR Transcription, a third-party secure transcription service. GMR will transcribe all recordings verbatim, in either English or Spanish, and return all files to researchers as Microsoft Word documents.

2. Develop Coding Scheme

The research team will develop two different coding schemes, one for dad interviews and one for school staff interviews, using the interview guides and initially observed themes during interviews.

3. Code Interview Transcripts

The research team will use Dedoose, a secure cloud-based qualitative analysis platform, to apply relevant codes to sections of the transcript. Two research team members will independently code and review transcripts to establish inter-rater reliability.

4. Analyzed Coding Excerpts

Researchers will export all coding excerpts from Dedoose into a Microsoft Excel document for further organization and analysis. Research team members will identify themes based on the coding scheme and interview data within each theme.

Data Management Plan

Data from the evaluation will include electronic files. Evaluators are committed to maintaining data securely in accordance with IRB guidelines. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. After transcription, all audio files will be deleted. Information from transcriptions and/or the process evaluation will not use

participants' names or potentially identifying information.

All surveys will be collected electronically using Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform that meets IRB requirements for collecting and storing data including PII, FERPA, and HIPAA/PHI (it is encrypted in transit, at rest, and in backups). The database and all files of raw data are stored on password protected computers on servers designated for category I data.

The study will comply with relevant institutional standards and applicable laws for the protection of human research subjects, including HIPAA and HHS regulation 45 CFR part 46. All evaluation team members and counselors will have current human subjects training certification either through UT Austin or through the National Institute of Health's online training. The researchers will work with Strong Fathers to monitor that consent and other research protection standards are maintained. This study will be submitted for review by The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the evaluation will ideally be used to contribute information to the general knowledge base regarding father involvement programs at schools. The evaluation team will take the lead in developing papers, presentations and reports using the data collected. All those participating in the evaluation are welcome to take an active role in dissemination activities in order to be included on any papers, presentations or reports. If interested, they can contact the evaluation team for more information.



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APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Strong Fathers Pre-Interview Form

CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

This interview is part of a study is being conducted by researchers at The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). The researchers are getting information from fathers, teachers, and school staff to understand their opinions, experience, and observations of the Strong Fathers Strong Families program and father-child engagement within home and school contexts. The goal is to understand the perceptions and impacts of the program to help inform a program evaluation for Strong Fathers Strong Families.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

Participate in a 30-40 minute interview with a researcher over the phone or Zoom video.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY?

We believe that there is little risk for you to be harmed in this study. There is always a small chance that someone might look through your responses, but your name and any other information that would identify you and will not be written on any research form. You can skip any question you do not want to answer. Skipping questions or stopping the interview will not impact your relationship with the program, school, or the UT Austin research team.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, there is a potential benefit that this information might help program developers and fathers in the future.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

No, your participation is voluntary. You should only participate if you want to. You can decide to participate now but later change your mind. That is okay. If you decide not to participate, you will not hurt your relationship with Strong Fathers Strong Families, you child's school, or The University of Texas at Austin.

WILL THERE BE ANY COMPENSATION?

To thank you for participating in the study, you will receive an electronic \$25 gift card. This gift card will be e-mailed to you at the end of the interview. You will have the option to select which type of gift card you want (e.g., Amazon, Target, Walmart).

WHO IS GOING TO KNOW INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

This study is confidential and your responses to the questions will not be linked to your identity. Results will only be reported in aggregate form. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for up to five years and then erased.

WHO DO I TALK TO IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about the interview, contact Dr. Monica Faulkner, who is the lead researcher for this research project. You can contact Dr. Faulkner by email at mfaulkner@mail.utexas.edu. You can also ask any questions to your researcher who will be in contact with you before, during, or after your interview.

Do you agree to participate in this interview? By clicking “I agree”, I acknowledge that I have been informed about this study’s purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks.

- » Yes, I agree to participate
- » No, I do not agree to participate

SURVEY QUESTIONS

ID

Please complete this short form about yourself. The information in this form is confidential and you may skip any questions you do not want to answer.

To begin, please enter the last four digits of your phone number. This number is your Interview ID number.

- » Enter Interview ID Number

INTRODUCTION BLOCK

School Information

5. Name of School:
 - » JE Rhodes Elementary

- » Myatt Elementary
- » Van Intermediate
- » Van Middle School
- » Westwood Elementary
- » Westwood Primary

6. What is your current role at this school?

- » Dad
- » Teacher
- » School Principal, Vice Principal, or School Administrator
- » Parent-Teacher Association/Parent-Teacher Organization Representative
- » Other school personnel, please describe:
- » Prefer not to say

7. Have you participated in or observed any of the following Strong Fathers Strong Families events at [school name – selected from #1]? Select all that apply.

- » Bring Your Dad to School Day
- » Dad & Kid Math Event
- » Dad & Kid Science Event
- » Dad & Kid Reading Event
- » I have no participated in any of these events
- » I'm not sure
- » Prefer not to say

DADS QUESTION BLOCK

About your children and household members

8. How many adult caregivers, including yourself, live in your household?
9. How many children under the age of 21 do you currently live in your household? (Please include biological, adoptive, foster, step-children, or any other child that depends on you for support)
- » Text entry response
10. How many of your children attend [school name- selection from Introduction Block question 1]?
- » Text entry response

11. How often do these children live with you?
 - » All of the time
 - » Some of the time please describe:
 - » None of the time
 - » Prefer not to say

12. Who else is a parent or caregiver to these children? Check all that apply:
 - » Child's biological mother
 - » Child's grandparents
 - » Child's aunts or uncles
 - » Child's older siblings
 - » Child's other family (e.g., cousins)
 - » Child's step-parent(s)
 - » My partner (if not child's mother or step-parent)
 - » Other, please describe:
 - » Prefer not to say

HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

13. In the past 2 months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?
 - » Yes
 - » No
 - » Prefer not to say

14. Are you worried or concerned that in the next 2 months you may not have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?
 - » Yes
 - » No
 - » Prefer not to say

15. What is your current employment status?
 - » Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)
 - » Employed part-time (up to 39 hours per week)
 - » Unemployed and currently looking for work

- » Unemployed and not currently looking for work
- » Student
- » Retired
- » Homemaker
- » Self-employed
- » Unable to work
- » Other, please describe:
- » Prefer not to say

16. What was your household income in 2019?

- » Less than \$20,000
- » \$20,000 - \$34,999
- » \$35,000 - \$49,999
- » \$50,000 - \$74,999
- » \$75,000 or more
- » Prefer not to say

SCHOOL STAFF BLOCK

17. How long have you worked at [school name- selected from Introduction block question 1]?

- » Less than 1 year
- » 1 - 2 years
- » 3 - 5 years
- » 6 - 9 years
- » 10 or more years
- » Prefer not to say

18. How long have you worked in an educational setting?

- » Less than 1 year
- » 1 - 2 years
- » 3 - 5 years
- » 6 - 9 years
- » 10 or more years

- » Prefer not to say

DEMOGRAPHICS

ABOUT YOU

19. How old are you?

- » 18 – 24 years old
- » 25 – 34 years old
- » 35 – 44 years old
- » 45 – 54 years old
- » 55 – 64 years old
- » 65 – 74 years old
- » 75 years or older
- » Prefer not to say

20. What is your gender?

- » Male
- » Female
- » Non-binary
- » Transgender
- » Prefer to self-describe:
- » Prefer not to say

21. What is your current relationship status? (This question only displays to dads only)

- » Single, never married, and not living with partner
- » In a romantic relationship, never married, and not living with a partner
- » Married
- » Separated
- » Divorced
- » Widowed
- » Other, please describe:
- » Prefer not to say

22. What best describes your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply:

- » American Indian or Alaskan Native
- » Asian or Asian American
- » Black or African-American
- » Hispanic, Latino/x, or Spanish Origin
- » Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- » White
- » Prefer to self-describe:
- » Other, please describe:
- » Prefer not to say

Strong Father Dad Interview Guide

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine fathers' perceptions about the Strong Fathers Strong Families (SFSF) program that include:

- » Initial perceptions of SFSF prior to participation;
- » Program experience (reflections during and after the program);
- » Fatherhood engagement (looking at fatherhood involvement more broadly); and
- » School climate/environment.

INTRODUCTION

Do not have to read verbatim, but say something along these lines:

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I'm a researcher at The University of Texas at Austin and our team is working with Strong Fathers Strong Families to develop a strategy that evaluates the effectiveness of their program. Strong Fathers Strong Families is a program at your school that engages fathers in their child's education. The program includes events like Bring your Dad to School Day, Dad and Kid Math, Dad and Kid Science and Dad and Kid Reading.

We are currently interviewing dads, teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel, to learn more about this program and father engagement in schools. Our interview today should take about 30 minutes and I will need to review a consent form with you and get your verbal consent if you agree to participate.

1. Review consent form
2. Answer any questions interviewee may have about project/interview prior to interview
3. Conduct interview
4. Confirm participant's email and send Tango gift card
5. Fill out information about the interview on the Strong Fathers Google Doc

PART I

OPENER

Before we start, I want to recognize that COVID-19 has had a huge impact on families and the way we do things. Many parents are having to adjust with kids at home, work additional hours, or deal with a loss of income. The way you answer some of our questions may look different than it would have six months ago. That is okay. We know that there is a lot of added stress right now.

This interview will be broken down into two parts. The first part will focus on you and your family. The second part will focus on the Strong Fathers, Strong Families program at your school. There are no wrong or right answers.

1. To start, tell me about your family.
2. What does a typical week look like for you?

FATHERHOOD ENGAGEMENT

3. When do you spend time with your child?
 - a. What do you do together?
 - b. When do you feel most connected?
 - c. Do you feel like you get to spend enough time together?
4. What is a dad's role in their child's education or learning?
 - a. What does that look like for you?
5. What is a mom's role in their child's education or learning? (May not apply?)

SCHOOL CLIMATE

I'd like to ask you about your experiences with your child's school.

We know parents aren't always able to get involved at their child's school because of work, having children at different schools, immigrations status, language barriers, not knowing about events, or not feeling comfortable attending. Dads in particular might be less likely to attend because the events seem to be focused on moms.

6. Are dads treated differently than moms at your child's school?
 - a. Who does your child's teacher reach out about school events or parent meetings?
7. How are families treated when they don't show up for school events?

8. Have you noticed families being treated differently at your child's school because of their race, ethnicity, or any other reason?
 - a. Have you or your family experienced any of this personally?
9. What can schools do to make dads feel more welcome or included?

PART II.

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about the [Bring Your Dad to School/Dad & Kids events].

PERCEPTION OF STRONG FATHERS

10. How did you first learn about Bring Your Dad to School/Dad & Kids events?
 - a. What were your initial thoughts?
11. What made you decide to participate?
 - a. What did you have to do to be able to attend? (ex. work hours, time off, etc.)
12. If you were to tell another dad about this program, what would you say?

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

13. What did you like most about the program?
14. What did you not like as much about the program?
15. What would make the program better?
16. What was it like being with other dads?
17. Did you feel like you could relate to the facilitator?
 - b. Do you think your experience of this program would be different if it was delivered by a dad of your same race or ethnicity, who is from your community, or who speaks the language you are most comfortable with? If so, how?
18. Would you recommend this program to other dads? Why or why not?

PROGRAM IMPACTS

19. Tell me about your involvement in your child's education and learning before participating in the Strong

Fathers program?

- a. How comfortable were you participating in school events (ex: PTA, parent groups, field day)?
- b. What has changed, if anything, since you've participated in Strong Fathers?

20. Have you met your child's teacher?

If yes:

- a. Was this before or after participating in the program?
- b. Do you have regular contact with your child's teacher? What does that look like?

If no:

- a. What gets in the way?
2. Can you tell me about your relationships with other dads at your child's school before and after participating in Strong Fathers?

WRAP UP

1. Lastly, is there anything else you would like us to know about?
21. Do you have any questions for us?

Thank you for your time.

Non-Strong Father Dad Interview Guide

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine fathers' perceptions about the Strong Fathers Strong Families (SFSF) program that include:

- » Awareness and initial perceptions of SFSF;
- » Interest in future participation in SFSF;
- » Fatherhood engagement (looking at fatherhood involvement more broadly); and
- » School climate/environment.

INTRODUCTION

Do not have to read verbatim, but say something along these lines:

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I'm a researcher at The University of Texas at Austin and our team is working with Strong Fathers Strong Families to develop a strategy that evaluates the effectiveness of their program.

We are currently interviewing dads, teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel to learn more about this program and father engagement in schools. Our interview today should take about 30 minutes. Before we begin, I will go over the consent form with you and give you an opportunity to ask any questions.

1. Review consent form
2. Answer any questions interviewee may have about project/interview prior to interview
3. Conduct interview
4. Confirm participant's email and send Tango gift card
5. Fill out information about the interview on the Strong Fathers Google Doc

PART I.

OPENER

Before we start, I want to recognize that COVID-19 has had a huge impact on families and the way we do things. Many parents are having to adjust with kids at home, work additional hours, or deal with a loss of income. The way you answer some of our questions may look different than it would have six months ago. That is okay. We know that there is a lot of added stress right now.

This interview will be broken down into two parts. The first part will focus on you and your family. The second part will focus on the Strong Fathers, Strong Families program at your school. There are no wrong or right answers.

1. To start, tell me about your family.
2. What does a typical week look like for you?

Fatherhood Engagement

3. When do you spend time with your child?
 - a. What do you do together?
 - b. When do you feel most connected?
 - c. Do you feel like you get to spend enough time together?
4. What is a dad's role in their child's education or learning?
 - a. What does that look like for you?
5. What is a mom's role in their child's education or learning? (May not apply?)

SCHOOL CLIMATE

I'd like to ask you about your experiences with your child's school.

We know parents aren't always able to get involved at their child's school because of work, having children at different schools, immigrations status, language barriers, not knowing about events, or not feeling comfortable attending. Dads in particular might be less likely to attend because the events seem to be focused on moms.

6. Are dads treated differently than moms at your child's school?
 - a. Who does your child's teacher reach out about school events or parent meetings?
7. How are families treated when they don't show up for school events?
8. Have you noticed families being treated differently at your child's school because of their race, ethnicity, or any other reason?
 - a. Have you or your family experienced any of this personally?
9. What can schools do to make dads feel more welcome or included?

CURRENT CHILD EDUCATION INVOLVEMENT

10. Tell me about your involvement in your child's education and learning?
 - b. How comfortable are you participating in school events (ex: PTA, parent groups, field day)? What

have you participated in?

11. Have you met your child's teacher?

If yes:

a. Do you have regular contact with your child's teacher?

b. What does that look like?

If no:

c. What gets in the way?

12. Can you tell me about your relationships with other parents at your child's school?

PART II.

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about fatherhood programs.

FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS

13. Have you considered participating in a fatherhood program at your child's school? Why or why not?

14. What are some reasons you or other dads might not participate in a school event for dads?

15. What are some reasons you or other dads might chose to participate?

If school implements SF:

Over the [last year(s)], your child's school has been implementing a fatherhood program called Strong Fathers Strong Families that includes events like Bring your Dad to School and Dad & Kid Math events.

16. What, if anything, have you heard about this program or these events?

WRAP UP

17. Is there anything else you would like us to know about?

18. Do you have any questions for us?

Thank you for your time.

School Staff Interview Guide

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine school personnel perceptions about the Strong Fathers Strong Families (SFSF) program that include:

- » Awareness and initial perceptions of SFSF;
- » Impact of SFSF program at school
- » Fatherhood engagement (looking at fatherhood involvement more broadly); and
- » School climate/environment.

INTRODUCTION

Do not have to read verbatim, but say something along these lines.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I'm a researcher at The University of Texas at Austin and our team is working with Strong Fathers Strong Families to develop a strategy that evaluates the effectiveness of their program. Strong Fathers Strong Families is a program at your school that engages fathers in their child's education. The program includes events like Bring your Dad Day, Dad and Kid Math, Dad and Kid Science and Dad and Kid Reading.

We are currently interviewing dads, teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel to learn more about this program and father engagement in schools. Our interview today should take about 30 minutes. Before we begin, I will go over the consent form with you and give you an opportunity to ask any questions.

1. Review consent form
2. Answer any questions interviewee may have about project/interview prior to interview
3. Conduct interview
4. Confirm participant's email and send Tango gift card
5. Fill out information about the interview on the Strong Fathers Google Doc

PART I.

FATHER ENGAGEMENT / SCHOOL CLIMATE

Before we start, I want to recognize that COVID-19 has had a huge impact on schools. Many teachers are having to adjust to teaching online, work additional hours, or deal with a loss of income. The way you answer some of our questions may look different than it would have six months ago. That is okay. We know that there

is a lot of added stress right now.

The interview will be broken down into two parts. The first part will focus on father engagement and school climate, and the second part will focus on Strong Fathers Strong Families program [fatherhood programs] at your school. There are no wrong or right answers.

1. Tell me a little bit about your role at (school name).
 - a. How long have you been working at this school?
2. How does your school engage dads in their children's education and learning?
 - a. What role do dads typically play in their child's education or learning?
 - b. What activities or programs are dads most involved with?
 - c. How and when do you interact with dads?
4. How does your school engage moms in their children's education and learning?
 - a. What role do moms typically play in their child's education or learning?
 - b. What activities or programs are moms most involved with?
 - c. How and when do you interact with moms?
5. Do you think that there is more of an emphasis on engaging moms in school activities than dads?
6. What are some reasons why families don't show up to school events?
7. Do families from different cultures or backgrounds engage differently with your school? If yes, how?
8. Since COVID-19, have you noticed any changes in the way moms and dads are involved with their child's learning? (e.g., zoom calls, distance learning) If so, how?
9. What can schools do to make dads feel more welcome or included?

PART II.

FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS

For the second part, I will be asking about the Strong Fathers program [fatherhood engagement programs].

Strong Father Schools only:

10. How familiar are you with the Strong Fathers program at your school?
 - a. If you were to describe Strong Fathers to a dad at your school, what would you say?
 - b. Is this program helpful? Why or why not?

Strong Father Schools [Non-Strong Fathers]

11. Are there certain types of families who benefit more from this program? [from fatherhood programs]
 - c. If yes, who & why? (i.e. young dads, single-parent homes, non-residential dads, children with academic/behavior issues)
12. Have you encouraged or reached out to dads about participating in Strong Fathers? [in a fatherhood programs]? How?
13. What do you think motivates dads to participate in the program [in fatherhood programs]?
14. What do you think gets in the way of dads participating?

WRAP UP

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about father involvement or fatherhood programs at your school?
16. Do you have any questions for us?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYERS

WE KNOW DADS SHOW UP FOR THEIR KIDS.
 Get \$25 for telling us how YOU show up.

"Anything I can do to further my relationship with my daughter or my boys, I am always into doing that."

Get a **\$25 gift card** for **25 minutes** of your time!



SABEMOS QUE LOS PAPÁS SE CONECTAN CON SUS HIJOS
 Recibe \$25 para decirnos cómo se conecta con sus hijos

"Cualquier cosa que pueda hacer para fortalecer mi relación con mis hijos, quiero hacerlo."

¡Recibe una tarjeta de regalo de \$25 por 25 minutos de su tiempo!



WE KNOW DADS SHOW UP FOR THEIR KIDS.

GET \$25 FOR TELLING US HOW YOU SHOW UP.

✓ **Fill out this contact form:**
bit.ly/dad-signup

✉ **Or email / text:**
kaitlyn.doerge@austin.utexas.edu
 469-789-6295

📇 Get a **\$25 gift card** for **25 minutes** of your time!

SABEMOS QUE LOS PAPÁS SE CONECTAN CON SUS HIJOS

RECIBE \$25 PARA DECIRNOS CÓMO SE CONECTA CON SUS HIJOS

✓ **Llene este formulario de contacto:**
bit.ly/padre-participar

✉ **O comuníquese por correo electrónico/texto:**
kaitlyn.doerge@austin.utexas.edu
 469-789-6295

📇 ¡Recibe una tarjeta de regalo de \$25 por 25 minutos de su tiempo!

**WE KNOW SCHOOLS SHOW
UP FOR KIDS.**

GET \$25 FOR TELLING US HOW YOU SHOW UP.



Fill out this contact form:
bit.ly/dad-signup



Or email / text:
kaitlyn.doerge@austin.utexas.edu
469-789-6295



Get a **\$25 gift card** for **25 minutes** of your time!

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table C1. Types of Events Attended by Strong Father Dads

STRONG FATHERS EVENTS	N	%
Bring Your Dad to School	13	81%
Science Event	9	56%
Math Event	6	38%
Reading Event	6	38%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Strong Father Dad Responses, N = 16

Table C2. Number of Events Attended by Strong Fathers Dads

NUMBER OF STRONG FATHERS EVENTS ATTENDED	N	%
1 Type of Event	4	25%
2 Types of Events	4	25%
3 Types of Events	6	38%
4 Types of Events	2	13%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Strong Father Dad Responses, N = 16

Table C3. Age Range of Dads

AGE RANGE	N	%
25 - 34 years old	11	41%
35 - 44 years old	10	37%
45 - 54 years old	5	19%
55 - 64 years old	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C4. Race/Ethnicity of Dads

RACE/ETHNICITY	N	%
White	18	67%
Hispanic	6	22%
Black	2	7%
Prefer not to say	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C5. Current Relationship Status of Dads at Time of Study

RELATIONSHIP STATUS	N	%
Married	23	85%
Divorced	2	7%
Separated	1	4%
Single	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C6. Number of Adults in Dads' Household

NUMBER OF ADULTS	N	%
1 adult	2	7%
2 adults	23	85%
3 adults	2	7%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C7. Total Number of Children under Age 21 in Dad's Household

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	N	%
1 child	1	4%
2 children	14	52%
3 children	6	22%
4 children	5	19%
5 children	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C8. Total Number of School-aged Children among Dad Participants

NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN	N	%
0 school-aged children	2	11%
1 school-aged child	14	52%
2 school-aged children	10	37%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C9. Child Residency Status with Dad

CHILD RESIDENCY STATUS	N	%
Child lives all the time with dad	21	78%
Child lives some of the time with dad	6	22%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C10. Other Caregivers in the Child's Life

OTHER CAREGIVERS	N	%
Child's Biological Mom	20	74%
Child's Grandparents	3	11%
Child's Stepparents	2	7%
Child's Biological Mom, Child's Stepparents	1	4%
Child's Biological Mom, Grandparents	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C11. Dads' Employment Status at Time of the Study

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	N	%
Full-time	22	81%
Self-employed	1	4%
Part-time	1	4%
Retired	1	4%
Unable to Work	1	4%
Receiving Worker's Compensation	1	4%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C12. Dads' Household Income in 2019

INCOME RANGE	N	%
Less than \$20,000	1	4%
\$20,000 - \$34,999	6	22%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	4	15%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	5	19%
\$75,000 or more	8	30%
Prefer not to say	3	11%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C13. Housing Instability Among Dads

ARE YOU WORRIED OR CONCERNED THAT IN THE NEXT 2 MONTHS YOU MAY NOT HAVE STABLE HOUSING?	N	%
Yes	1	4%
No	24	89%
Prefer not to say	2	7%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, Dad Responses, N = 27

Table C14. Gender of School Staff

GENDER	N	%
Female	11	79%
Male	3	21%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

Table C15. Age Range of School Staff

AGE RANGE	N	%
25 - 34 years old	1	7%
35 - 44 years old	6	43%
45 - 54 years old	7	50%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

Table C16. Race/Ethnicity of School Staff

RACE/ETHNICITY	N	%
White	11	79%
Hispanic	2	14%
Hispanic, White	1	7%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

Table C17. School Staff's Length of Time Working at Current School

LENGTH OF TIME AT CURRENT SCHOOL	N	%
3 – 5 years	9	64%
6 – 9 years	2	14%
10+ years	3	21%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

Table C18. School Staff's Length of Time Working in Education

LENGTH OF TIME IN EDUCATION	N	%
3 – 5 years	2	14%
6 – 9 years	2	14%
10+ years	10	71%

Data Source: Pre-Interview Survey, School Staff Responses, N = 14

