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**La Familia: An Inside Look at a Co-op School Community**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this Capstone Project is to showcase the co-op school values of Hillmont Elementary as a way of highlighting the importance of parent involvement in schools. An argument is made that educators feel overwhelmed and lack support from parents when it comes to promoting the importance of their children's education. It is argued that the participation of parents as part of the school community creates a positive example for their children in how their place of learning is viewed. An evidence-based argument is offered that students gain a sense of community and responsibility through seeing their parents take initiative in volunteering for their schools. The three primary stakeholder perspectives chosen were students, parents, and educators because this is what makes up most school communities. Considerations of the issue should include the viewpoints of educators who spend the most time at school. Three themes/action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Promoting co-op school values is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of schools that are looking for innovative ways to convince parents to involve themselves in their children's school community.

*Keywords:* Cooperative learning, Cooperative schools, Parent involvement, Community

### **La Familia - An Inside Look at the Success of a Bay Area Co-op School Community**

A common problem that arises within discussions about elementary school communities is the lack of parent involvement. To combat these issues more innovative approaches to schooling have come into existence, one being Co-op schools. It is imperative that students feel supported not only by educators and staff but also by parents themselves. Parents who see the benefits of being involved in their child's education seek ways outside of the public school system to better assist the needs of their children by having them join Co-op schools that better combat this issue. When students fall behind it is common to throw around blame but what if all factors were equally responsible.

Even educators themselves regularly struggle with motivating parents to continue the work that has been done in the classroom. Before school lets out for the summer each year teachers will routinely urge that students practice the skills they have picked up. Once school resumes in the fall, indications of the practice are obvious when students are asked to show what they have retained through assessments. This is not the failure of the educator nor the parents but with their assistance, students could avoid the struggle of falling back into the school routine. Keeping the perspective that all parts of the school community, even the parents have an important role in their child's education is the key to success. Communities like Co-op schools know that education is a reflection of life, not the other way around, and therefore must reach home life as well.

Growing up and attending a predominantly Hispanic-populated school, I saw the impact that parent involvement or lack thereof could have on the quality of education. My parents were

constantly involved so much that my mother held the position of PTA president and my father was the treasurer of the school community board for quite some time. The more that their faces were shown around the school, the more staff members got to know me as well. In past conversations with my mother, she disclosed to me that she wasn't only involved to support the school but also creating a sense of community that cared whether or not their students succeeded as much as she wanted me to succeed. This attitude continued to follow me in high school as I became actively involved in different organizations meant to support the student body.

As a future Latina educator myself I believe that home life directly corresponds with the outcome and quality of a student's education. Within the Hispanic community family or "familia" is extremely important. The value of supporting loved ones goes even beyond relatives and the community. It is difficult for hardworking individuals to stand alone and therefore reach out to support or be supported by those around them. This is also how Co-op school communities function. Those who are able to provide assistance, step up for the betterment of the school. Often getting parents to support school needs in regular school systems is much like pulling teeth. Many private schools have also resulted in charging parents extra fees if they do not wish or simply do not have the time to provide in-person help. While financial support is greatly appreciated, physical presence is more impactful.

## **Literature Review**

### **Lets Begin**

While the levels of parent and child engagement have been lacking in school for decades, education researchers have been coming up with innovative ways to change the direction of education. Cooperative schools haven't been around for very long but are making small but

impactful waves on alternative education. The students and parents who participate in this form of education build skills specific to the issues that we deal with today. We know that what children deal with outside of school affects their academic performance and more importantly who they grow up to be.

### **It Starts With an Opportunity**

In the past, many researchers have discussed the implications of the lack of parent involvement and have proposed solutions to fix it. School communities work hard to entice parent participation because they know the benefits of having parents around. Everything from test scores to school funds rises when parents show their children that they are willing to support the community their children get educated in. There are three main components to US elementary schools, the students, their children, and the staff. Communication between the three of them is vital for students to get the most out of their education. Cooperative learning puts having the children learn a sense of community at the forefront of its educational values.

“Cooperative learning is generally supported in the literature for two major reasons; (1) it promotes high levels of achievement, especially in children who have not traditionally done well in school ( Sharan, 1980; Towson, 1985); and (2) it promotes positive interpersonal social behavior amongst children, i.e., good communication skills, cooperative problem solving, and a sense of community (Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind, 1992) To understand why cooperative schools are helping to remedy the issue of lack of parental involvement in school we have to examine how they originated and what they were intended to achieve. The first co-op school opened in Chicago as a preschool in 1916 by a group of faculty wives at the University of Chicago. They wanted to beagle to provide an education for themselves as well as educate their

children at the same time. Shortly after, The Children's Community Center opened in Berkeley, California, and is the oldest standing co-op in the US today. (Parent Cooperative Preschools International, 2017) Interestingly enough there is only one kind of elementary school co-op in existence in the East Bay Area. It was founded in 1969 promoting a diverse learning environment and even cultivated some practices of Montessori schools by grouping students of certain age ranges to strengthen individual learning.

### **Changing the Image**

Places of community have become a shelter from the issues that plague our world today. School isn't a place to ignore real-world issues but to discuss them and how they affect communities and yet it is often depicted as so. Because issues like cyberbullying, gun violence, racial injustices, and health care impact students, schools, and the people part of their communities need to properly equip children to deal with them. Schools that are committed to teaching in a way that empowers students to grapple with real-world problems, co-create solutions, and engage in practical actions develop tools to take action in their communities. The social justice curriculum begins with issues of equity and moves up into environmental, racial, and economic justice issues. With certain values like social-emotional development, diversity, and inclusion placed at the forefront of learning, schools can develop a sense of belonging and comfort which is necessary for children to succeed. "The importance of group goals and individual accountability is in providing students with an incentive to help each other and to encourage each other to put forth maximum effort (Slavin, 1995). If students value doing well as a group, and the group can succeed only by ensuring that all group members have learned the

material, then group members will be motivated to teach each other. (Slavin, 1995) Parents are an important and necessary part of this process as they are role models for their children and how much they value their education. Teaching and learning a sense of responsibility to the communities we are participating in is an important skill for students to know. As kids develop a sense of who they are in the world they also need encouragement from their community that they are capable of making an impact. Letting students take charge of their own learning and involvement is what cooperative learning aims for. For this particular form of schooling parent involvement is necessary to build a sense of accountability and ownership. “In order for parents to become involved in their child’s life, they must have some kind of partnership with the teachers at school. This partnership can be made strong with communication between school and home”(Ilagan, 2013). Often the excuse that parents give school for their lack of involvement is that they didn’t know or they didn’t have the time. Sharing the mindset that parents have more to offer than just showing up to fundraisers or helping out in yard duty empowers parents to get creative. Schools that promote participation consistently are more likely to get a response. “Problem-solving includes many skills connected to academic success (e.g., planning, resourcefulness, and flexibility in thinking, critical thinking skills, learning how to learn skills). Strength in the category of autonomy involves development of a positive identity (including ethnic identity), internal locus of control, and a belief in one’s capacity to succeed... Finally, a sense of a bright future encompasses the development of achievement motivation, educational aspirations, and optimism and hope about one’s life.( As stated before students notice and respond to high levels of involvement from their parents. Inadvertently, parents are teaching



their children certain skills that can be useful in the classroom when they are more involved in their child's school community.

### **A Job to be Done**

In the following pages, examples of what is being done at one cooperative school will be provided from the educators' point of view. I felt that they would be able to best see these actions go past surface-level volunteer work but actually make an impact on the school community and how everyone is actively working towards making a supportive and safe environment for the children. As mentioned before places like cooperative elementary schools are extremely unique but other schools share the same values. Montessori schools for example also share some of the same values that are more common across the US but have a more radical way of teaching. Montessori schools allow for students to completely take the initiative of their own learning and therefore have children meet learning goals at different times. Teachers in the classrooms are simply there to facilitate their learning and provide them with the tools they need to be successful. While these two schools differ from each other they have taken certain values and molded them to fit specific goals.

The value of community was a seed that was planted in my mind when I was in elementary school. While going to a catholic school from kindergarten to 8th grade I got to know all of the teachers and staff and become close to them because of the time my parents put into getting themselves involved in the school community. Whenever my parents would volunteer for events and fundraisers I came along too. The school would always find something for me to do and help with. However, I wasn't the only child whose parents thought to bring them along. It felt like many of my schoolmates spent a lot of their time at school even when it wasn't officially

in session. My mom always went by one saying that it takes a village to raise a child. As I grew older I could see why this was important. Now that my goal is to work in education I have a sense that I am a product of the activism my parents showed all those years ago. Even now that my brother is in elementary school I feel that the need for a strong community is more necessary than ever before. The past two years have been very hard on students. We still aren't even sure how much damage covid 19 had done to the education system and what children today are going through. However, I feel at ease knowing that my brother has one more supporter showing him to nurture his community as his community nurtures him. As far as my professional career goes and my future in education, I've always felt that it will be my job to be as flexible and supportive as possible to ensure that children not only continue to be curious but also be motivated to tackle problems that feel bigger than them. My goal has never been to end up teaching in alternative schools but to learn from their success and see what ways I can make a change. Bringing the practices of alternative schools and sharing this growth mindset to public school communities will change the way students, parents, and educators see the community they are part of.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of community is necessary for all parts of the school to understand so that the learning that goes on in classrooms can be of complete substance. Without it, children will go without developing skills of empathy and autonomy which is necessary to navigate this world. Cooperative schools create a unique setting in which students can not only learn from their teachers but from their parents as well. It also gives students the opportunity to be advocates for their own community and education. While this produces good results for this

community it may also do the same for public schools that are trying to boost their parent involvement levels.

### **Context**

I conducted interviews with covid safety protocols and the comfortability with my interviewees in mind. We met from the comfort of our own homes via zoom. All of the participants are part of the staff at Hillmont Elementary School, one of the few co-op schools located in the East Bay. This type of school community greatly encourages and is supported by staff members and parent and community involvement. It first opened its doors in 1969 at the height of several social justice movements, with its core values reflecting advocacy and an innovative approach to regular US schooling.

### **Participants**

I interviewed four staff members, one male, and three females, including myself. Two of the staff members support the classroom teachers differently. Marie is the education specialist on campus and works with every student to ensure that teachers and parents can adequately support students with their education. I also act as a classroom assistant for conjoined classrooms of grades 2nd and 3rd and 4th and 5th. Matthew is the kindergarten teacher, is one of the newer staff members I interviewed, starting his first year at the school four months ago. Alice is the 2nd and 3rd-grade teacher who has been at Hillmont for three years. She began as a parent volunteer later hired to head the art department and classroom assistant for two of the classrooms at Hillmont. Today she is the teacher for the 2nd and 3rd-grade classroom.

**Researcher**

I began working at this school at the beginning of the school year 4 months ago. When applying I was eager to be part of a community that welcomes diversity and participation. When thinking about the type of school I wanted to be part of once I start my teaching career I pictured myself at a place much like Hillmont. Working here has given me so much good field experience I appreciate the type of environment the staff and parents have worked hard to provide. Even as I conducted my interviews all the participants expressed their gratitude which I was delighted that they felt they even needed to include. One of my fears going into my teaching career is not having a supportive school environment because I know how contagious positive attitudes are. It's one thing growing up that I saw frustrated my own teachers all the way up to high school. My goal is to become a 1st-grade teacher and instill in my future students a sense of optimism when faced with challenges. I feel that the type of community created at Hillmont does that.

**Interview Questions**

1. When did you begin your teaching career here at Crestmont? What did you know about Co-op school communities prior to your employment here?
  
2. As a future educator I often reflect on my own schooling experiences and think about what I would ask of the parents in my childhood elementary school. What did parent involvement look like at your own childhood elementary school?

3. What do you see as the benefits of Co-op school communities; or What are you most excited about when it comes to diverse Co-op school communities?

4. Please share a time when you felt grateful for the volume of parent involvement that goes on here. This can be something you experienced inside or outside of the classroom.

5. What is currently being done to encourage the involvement of parents at Crestmont Elementary- by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

6. What do you think should be done to further encourage the involvement of parents at other schools that Crestmont Elementary already does?

7. What do you think are the challenges to encourage the involvement of parents in other Co-op school communities?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to say about diverse Co-op school communities?

### **Procedure**

I started off by sending an email asking for some of my colleagues to participate in an interview for my graduating project. If they were interested the email also included a google form to fill out. I included a note, thanking them for participating and asking what their availability looked like so that I could schedule a time to speak that worked best. I also included a section for participants to ask any further questions to ease the scheduling process and provide more information about the project if necessary. Once I got a sufficient amount of responses I emailed everyone back with a time to meet, the zoom link, and a copy of the interview questions so that nothing came as a surprise. Because of the level of comfortability with my colleagues, each interview took about 30 minutes to get through. At the beginning and end of the interview, I thanked them all for their time.

### **Data Analysis**

My goal was to shed light on how parent involvement contributes to school communities through the eyes of the teachers and staff who work at Hillmont. When asking the questions I wanted to ensure a comfortable space so I made sure that all my questions were consistent and flowed. I did this so that the interview felt more like a conversation rather than a question that was thrown out expecting a specific answer. This data was used to provide different and raw perspectives on the sense of community this school brings. When analyzing the data I also wanted to pay attention to all the key differences in perspectives. Many of the participants started their careers at Hillmont at different times. While those who have been part of the community the longest said that it has changed over time, they also did mention that this change is for the best. They also said that the community's ability to adapt and find ways around problems like those

that arose during the quarantine made their experience teaching and working much more enjoyable. This was the main pattern I found in my responses.

## **Results**

For this Capstone Project, Hillmont co-op school educators and staff were interviewed to see what they think the benefits are to parent involvement and their experience working in a co-op community. This is important because lack of parent participation within schools is a common issue public schools seek to find solutions for. The following results are actions already in place at Hillmont co-op school that work well for the community. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time, money, and impact. The importance of time as the first evaluation criteria is to show an understanding that parents do lead busy lives trying to provide for their children while in school. Time is included to show consideration for those who have highly demanding jobs and can not afford to be on the school's campus to volunteer during hours of operation. Money was chosen as the second criteria because the inclusion of all social classes no matter the financial situation is important. Lastly, the impact of each of the following action options is important because it gauges the school's success in upholding its values and ability to function. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

	TIME	MONEY	IMPACT
PARENT HOURS	HIGH	MEDIUM	HIGH
FAMILY INTERVIEW	LOW	LOW	HIGH
OPPORTUNITIES AND REMINDERS TO VOLUNTEER	HIGH	LOW	HIGH

**Parent Hours**

While conducting my interviews with the staff, all agreed that they appreciated how the school has found a way to keep families accountable for the amount of time they spend contributing to this community. While this solution is commonly used in private schools, it is also successful in bringing results. Each family is assigned thirty hours of volunteer work to complete for the school year. The school keeps track of the hours through a time log provided on the school’s networking website. This website also provides the option for families to pay a fee for a certain amount of hours they choose not to volunteer for. Of course, this isn’t the ideal option that the school would have the parents take but they do understand that parents have other



things to do like work and sometimes can't afford to take time off. While thirty hours seems like a lot of time for parents to be accountable for, they have the whole school year to complete these hours as well as several ways to complete these hours. In the interview I conducted with Marie, the education specialist on campus, she said "Its convenient to have parent hours because it's one less thing our staff has to worry about. Everyone is kept accountable in one way or another." If parents choose to complete all of their hours on campus, the school provides many opportunities, from lunch duty and classroom assistance, to field trip chaperones and even opportunities to teach electives to certain classes. The result of this is parents being actively involved in their school community getting to show their children and their peers how much their education means to them. Alice the 2nd and 3rd-grade teacher who just went on a field trip to The Family Disney Museum said "If you go on field trips as a parent you are considered one of the cool parents to the class. Especially if you can fit more kids in your car because everyone gets to spend time with each other while going on an adventure." The great thing is that the school also doesn't turn away families who would like to continue to volunteer even if they have completed their hours. This is becoming a good example for the students as well, showing them a sense of community service and accountability.

### **Family Interview**

Because of the size of the school and classrooms, the school can only admit so many families into its co-op community. Special consideration is taken during our admittance process. The school does its best to get to know its future students as well as their families. A mutual understanding that there are certain values to be maintained in order to contribute to a

community as special as this one. These interviews are also an opportunity for families to get to know many of the teachers and lead members of the staff. This is one of the school's many first attempts to create a bond with the family. As a school, we want to make sure that we have the resources to best serve our prospective families as well as find out what services and talents could be useful to the school. Also, a plus for conducting these interviews is that it's completely free! For other schools looking to improve their own rates of school involvement, these interviews can be done on a smaller scale within classrooms. Teachers can opt for sending out the beginning of the year surveys or, if their schedule allows, finding a time to get to know their class families in person. Matthew, the kindergarten teacher I interviewed said "I enjoy this process because it sometimes lets them get to know a little bit more about the family before having to wait to speak with them during parent-teacher conferences which sometimes can be a drag" For instance, we have several benches for students to sit on in the play yard that is becoming old and not suitable to use anymore. While interviewing one of the prospective families the school finds out that a new coming parent has a talent for woodwork and carpentry and another parent works at a lumber yard. With the connections of the school, these two parents have agreed to work together to create lovely new benches for the community to enjoy.

### **Opportunities and Reminders to Volunteer**

Consistent communication about the school's happenings inside and outside the classroom is very important. While each class at Hillmont sends out their own individual newsletters to parents they also are informed with weekly newsletters from the school as a whole. Not only do I, as a part of the staff get included in these weekly newsletters but so do th

rest of the staff. There's a specific section in the newsletter where parents can find out what opportunities are available to earn parent hours as well as any fundraising opportunities as well. Responding to these newsletters has been made easy to do as well. School Speak is a useful tool that Hillmont uses to communicate with the entire school community. Each family when first attending Hillmont creates a profile. This gives them access to all contact information of the staff as well as chat rooms within their child's classroom. The interesting thing about our school newsletters is that they are actually generated by our parent members committee who acts as our secretary and PTA Council.

### **Conclusion**

While all three actions have already been implemented in our school community and work very well, getting to know the new members of our community by conducting family interviews best fulfills my chosen evaluation options. I believe this is so because new families often haven't experienced being part of co-op communities before so they don't know what to expect except the research they may have done online or what they have heard from friends and family. Being able to have a discussion about expectations, needs, services, and values is what makes this action so successful in bringing parents to participate within their child's school.

### **Recommendation**

Because these actions are already taking place within this school I feel that if another school is looking for innovative ways to create a better and more involved community they should try conducting family interviews and embedding a sense of community involvement

within their school values. This shows others how much educators and students value the presence of parents and other community members.

### **Concessions**

The understanding that there may be some opposition to parent involvement because of the worry of being too on top of children is valid. However, when children see that their parents are consistently making an effort to make their school a better place it inclines children to do so as well. It blurs the lines between the child and the school making them one and creating a sense of community and pride in their education. At a young age, children get to understand the importance of taking ownership in their education and that is an important skill to teach and has been implemented in more than just co-op schools. The reason why I chose the interviews as the best possible option for gathering more parent involvement is that I feel that it is the initial connection that is most important when meeting new families. Without these interviews, the school wouldn't get to know families on a deep and personal level. The lack of communication could also lead to a distant attitude between being active in the school community. In order for the implementation of parent hours and the weekly newsletters to be the most effective parents need to know why they matter so much to the community and why it's important for their kids to see their presence on campus.

### **Limitations**

A possible limitation could be a language barrier between an only English-speaking educator and a family who doesn't speak English. This could make conducting effective

interviews a little difficult but can be helped with the use of a translator. Another possible limitation is that teachers could not have the time to speak to families individually before the school year starts. A solution could be sending out a google form for parents to fill out. The questions could communicate as an interview and teachers can gather responses to keep in their files so that they may come back to them at any time.

### **Potential negative outcomes**

Essentially the goal of these interviews is for families to realize the responsibility that goes into being part of their child's school community. A potential negative outcome from interviewing new families is that the families will come to the realization that school involvement isn't something that they are interested in doing and don't see the benefits of having their presents on the school campus.

### **Conclusion**

Conducting interviews staff members shared that implementing parent hours, informing parents about the school's goings-on through weekly newsletters and initial family interviews make the most impact in our school community. While not only being cost-effective it also proved to be helpful to our classroom teachers. Having a consistent presence of parents on campus also build a sense of community between my three original stakeholders. Students, Educators, and parents are able to enjoy each other while building bonds and being active parts all their school community. If there is anything that other school communities looking to build

their parent involvement committees they should pay attention to the work being done at Hillmont Elementary.

### **Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

When interviewing 4 of Hillmonts staff, including myself, about parent involvement and the experience we have had working at a small community co-op, there was a unified conclusion of a sense of gratitude. Other ideas about why the co-op works so well emerged too. One of my interviewees mentioned that when interviewing families interested in joining this community, they are asked if they have any hobbies or talents that they would be willing to share with the school. The question is proposed so the community knows how they can help when the time comes. Because of all the support that the school asks, we rely on an organized school forum called the School Speak, in which everyone that is part of the community creates a profile and receives newsletters and emails, keeping them up to date with the happenings of the school. This forum is also helpful because it contains different ways to contact all the school staff. The school also provides various ways to show support and earn parent hours every year. Some hours are made by showing up to do yard duty for a particular class or helping out at a fundraiser or school event. However, the school also offers parents to get their hands dirty by teaching a specialty class to a particular grade for a few weeks out of the year. A parent from the 3rd-grade class currently knows a lot about gardening and has volunteered to teach a few lessons. With supplies brought from home and some provided from the school, this parent can teach a gardening class to 7th and 8th graders. It's not common for teachers and staff to share their hobbies with certain classes they work with, but we find it enlightening for parents to want to share their interests with the school community. From the data collected, it seems like we have never worked in a

place quite like this one. I think it is because of the help of the parents and the dedication of the staff that our little community works so well. The topic of elementary school systems surrounds so much worry but having the support of countless families makes our job more enjoyable and meaningful.

### **Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection**

I began collecting my data by sending out a staff-wide email asking for participants to be interviewed to discuss their perspectives of working in a co-op school. In the email, I described how I would be conducting interviews and, through a google, form asked what time and day worked best for the participant. This is the google form I used to gather my participants for the interview process.

Once I had a few responses, I replied to them individually and provided them with a meeting time, a zoom link, and a google doc with all the questions included in the interview so that they could have time to look them over. The interview process was new to me, but my colleagues were kind and patient. When I interviewed my first candidate over zoom, I could not figure out how to get the zoom to record the interview, so I had to set up my phone to record it for me. Also, I noticed the interview itself was a bit choppy. I wasn't used to asking questions and not having an actual conversation with someone I see daily. After the interview was over, we did discuss more personal things and got to catch up, which eased my worry about the interview feeling so structured. My second interview was a big turnaround. I had figured out how to record and save the interview on my computer and practiced my questions. I realized that if my

candidate's response was a good segway to another question, I could jump around and didn't need to ask the questions in order. This also helped take off the stress of interviewing because it felt like I could participate in the conversation. At the end of the interview, I felt glad to have had the opportunity to speak with this person and felt that their responses would help me later on. My third interview went equally as well. This interview was a little different because I wasn't interviewing a classroom teacher but the learning specialist on campus. In her particular line of work, she can interact with students and staff from every classroom. Because of this, she gets to interact with parents to find ways to support the children of this community better. I appreciated her responses because she provided something that the teachers could not, and that is a birds-eye view of this school. Each of my interviews had something extraordinary and individual to share while also having some responses that paralleled each other.

While I'm an advocate for small classrooms to ensure more one-on-one time with teachers, I know that school populations as small as this one can still fluctuate. This school is private, so they rely solely on the tuition that parents pay and the participation of the community. The school does have a website and scheduled school tours to help the market to new potential families. Still, I think tangible take-home reading and visual aids can be helpful to remember the gist of what type of community Hillmont has. That is why I've created an informational pamphlet for the school to use during tours the school holds to showcase its beautiful campus and the strength of its community. The great thing about the booklet is that colleges can also use it to recruit teachers at nearby colleges. Many new teachers don't have the experience of working in co-op schools and could benefit from knowing what types of schools are out there to support their teaching journey better. I intend that this pamphlet could be circulated in nearby college



education departments and the neighborhood near the school to gain the interest of new families.

Below is the link to the pamphlet I created with Google Docs.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QjHmx6fxtOVKDyGz5SuOkAg-eJpC0wo752Mrdk8a-1w/edit?usp=sharing>

### **Critical Reflection**

This process has helped me in my interview, organizational, creative, and technical skills and made me realize some things about the type of community I'm part of. While it's important to keep conversations professional during interviews, a part of me feels that the natural follow of a conversation produces better quality answers while making the discussion more enjoyable for both parties. Through the interview process and speaking with my colleagues, I also learned that the school provides many opportunities for parents to volunteer. Still, when that falls short, the earned hours system helps parents be accountable. I think this is helpful because parents lead busy lives and sometimes need to remind them of the things they can do to help the school out. Below are some of the artifacts used in gathering my data and what I decided to do as part of the action portion of this project. Part of the reason why I was so eager to do my action project is that this community welcomes and supports those who want to contribute and create. Having that support has made this project enjoyable. Not only that, but it allows me to discuss the work I get paid for and the work that I produce in school, forming a bridge between the two. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to discuss a job that I appreciate and learn from it and talk about it from a theoretical point of view.

Synthesis and Integration

As my time in undergrad is nearly up, it's hard not to fantasize about the type of classroom I'll have, what my students and their parents will be like, and what kind of support I'll receive, if any, from the district. I'm sure when new teachers begin to look for schools to start their careers at, the thought of alternative education runs through their minds. Even if the goal is to teach at public schools, the mentality and practices of a co-op like Hillmont can be used in the classroom. The ability to ask for the participation of parents is one of the many qualities I would like to have as a teacher. While co-op schools and public schools exist on two different sides of the river, ideologies on a smaller scale can be emulated in public school communities. The push for parent involvement and enthusiasm can still be worked for within public schools.

I haven't had the pleasure of working in many schools within my career. For a while, a lot of my income went into paying for school, which meant I needed to get paid well. However, those in education don't go into it expecting the jobs offered to pay well unless one decides to teach in private schools. After working jobs, I knew that I couldn't put my heart into quitting in search of experience with students. It was an experience that I felt ready but also afraid of. Being a Latina woman, searching for often have to demand respect and show that I can handle leadership before it is simply given to me. I'm also young, so to be amongst colleagues who have years of experience ahead of me, I have been paying my dues. With my inviting demeanor, many of the students I work with now have found it easy to forget that I am a future educator and someone who is there to guide them. For the little Latina girls that I work with, I'm there to inspire them and show them an example of someone who can get through complex challenges, especially when it comes to education. I'm also there to lead them to be proud of our familia and participate in our community so that we may watch it flourish. While growing up, I was fortunate

to have that type of support system. My parents had the time to attend PTA meetings and fundraisers, showing me an example of how much can get done in a school with the support of its community. That's why I feel the need to pass it on, building my own type of familia at school.

Covid-19 has brought us many challenges and opportunities. While conducting academic research was not a new skill I have acquired, doing field research and incorporating it with my job was a unique experience. Creating solid, in-depth interview questions allowed me to critique my own work experience and will enable me to pick the minds of my colleagues. I wanted these questions to make my interviewees thoroughly examine their experience so far. The use of zoom and google allowed this to occur with ease. Zoom let me respond and partake in conversation during my interview without being preoccupied with writing down responses. I was able to watch interviews over and read the transcription so that I could come up with a conclusion to my findings. As we have experienced, zoom became popular during the pandemic to still communicate and see each other's faces. This project also allowed me to have my first experience with google forms. It took me a while to figure out how to word and format the purpose of the request and how to schedule times to meet in an orderly manner. I've seen other professors use this tool in school in past classes and work emails. Even within my presentation, I'll be using a new tool that will help me organize my thoughts and create a capstone that is pleasing to the eye.

I can't speak for how public school students feel now, but I can say how I want to run my classroom in the future. While I don't know what type of school I'll end up at, I do know what the energy and lessons I teach in the classroom are up to me. My experience while working at

Hillmont and talking to my colleagues who have been part of this community longer than I have is something that I'll forever be grateful for. While we as a staff all come together to support each other, that is the same attitude that the rest of the community has for its students. A school like this urges its members to get their hands dirty in any way they can. Turning away from help isn't something that Hillmont is known for, and that's a quality that many people spend their lives trying to achieve. I have felt growth when working in a community like this one. On the one hand, I've watched as colleagues shine in their classrooms as they enable their students to feel like they can take on the world as long as they support one another. Also, on the other hand, they have set the stage up for me to do the same, teaching me how to grow so that I will be able to teach in impactful ways. While I'm grateful for the experience that I've had and schooling and while working out of school, I think I have a lot of growing to do as a teacher. I plan on carrying out the rest of the school year at Hillmont to continue to learn from my colleagues and the community members. After graduation, I plan to continue working at Hillmont while also attending a credential program that best expresses the same value in the community as I do.

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