

## STUDY SUMMARIES

This section, excerpted from *Everyone Wins!*, contains one-page summaries of the recent and time-honored studies we highlighted and described in Chapters 1–4 of this book. Where possible, links to full studies have been provided.

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# The Schools Teachers Leave: Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools

Elaine Allensworth, Stephen Ponisciak, and Christopher Mazzeo • 2009

**SUMMARY:** This quantitative study examines the factors that affect high teacher mobility in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), including teacher and student backgrounds, school structure, and workplace conditions. Three factors are most significant: Teachers' relationships with parents, students' behavior, and a strong sense of collaboration among teachers and the principal.

**BACKGROUND:** Fewer than half of new Chicago teachers stay in their elementary or high school for more than four years. This disrupts school functioning and undermines efforts to build a high-performing team of teachers and administrators. Other problems include shortages in key subjects, loss of experienced teachers, not enough time to recruit new teachers, and lower student success.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** This study identifies school conditions that promote teacher retention or trigger departures, including leadership, the learning climate, and teachers' relationships with the principal, parents, and colleagues. The researchers used teachers' personnel records, student and school records, and surveys of almost 35,000 teachers in over 650 schools.

**FINDINGS:** Schools with high numbers of low-income, African American students have lower stability rates than schools serving other students. Two working conditions account for most of the differences in stability rates: teachers' relationships with parents and teachers' perceptions of students' behavior. Schools that have inclusive leadership and a strong sense of collaboration retain teachers; schools where colleagues resist schoolwide improvement efforts lose teachers.

In elementary schools, how teachers see parents as partners is strongly related to their decisions to remain. Even in low-income schools, teachers are much more likely to remain where most parents pick up report cards, attend parent-teacher conferences and school events, volunteer to help, and raise funds for the school. In high schools, teachers tend to leave when rates of student disciplinary problems are high. However, at both elementary and high schools, teachers are more likely to remain if there are high levels of trust with parents. In high-trust schools, teachers feel that parents respect them and support their work.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The factors that most strongly predict teacher stability reflect the control teachers have over their work environment, including conditions that limit their ability to do their jobs. Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they feel that they have influence over school decisions, supportive principals and cooperative colleagues, and families who trust, respect, and support them. These parent-teacher interactions are shaped not only by parents but also by the ways the school communicates with parents and offers opportunities for parent involvement.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** These findings point the way for measures that can improve conditions for teachers and students and promote collaboration and trust. This includes professional development for administrators in collaborative management and shared decision-making, for teachers in positive classroom disciplinary strategies, and for school staff in building trusting relationships with families.

Read the [full study](#).

## Stemming Learning Loss During the Pandemic: A Rapid Randomized Trial of a Low-Tech Intervention in Botswana

Noam Angrist, Peter Bergman, Caton Brewster, and Moitshepi Matsheng • 2020

**SUMMARY:** This rapid randomized trial, conducted in Botswana during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that low-cost interventions of text messages and phone calls to primary school parents reduced innumeracy and boosted parent engagement.

**BACKGROUND:** In March 2020, a few days before nationwide school closures were officially announced, the research team leveraged school-based staff from the NGO Young 1ove to collect 7,550 phone numbers from Botswana primary schools. All schools sampled hosted active Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) programming, an initiative that had reached 15 percent of Botswana primary schools at the time of the study and whose programming has led to marked improvements in literacy and numeracy for participating students.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Of the phone numbers collected, 4,550 households agreed to participate in the study. These families were randomized into three groups of equal size: a control group that received no intervention, a treatment arm that received weekly SMS messages only, and a treatment arm that received weekly SMS messages followed by a direct phone call. At the beginning of each week, the first intervention with text messages sent participants a one-way SMS with several simple math problems. Those receiving the second intervention with a text and phone call treatment participated in a 15–20 minute phone call with their facilitator that provided support, motivation, and accountability.

**FINDINGS:** Based on the first wave of results, students in the treatment groups made marked improvements in numeracy. More numeracy gains were made by students in the lower levels than in higher levels. Based on these findings, these low-tech interventions have the potential to close learning gaps between higher- and lower-performing students, even without pre-existing relationships with their facilitators. Overall, both interventions yielded high engagement among both students and their parents.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study is one of the first of its kind to provide experiential results on minimizing the negative learning impacts of COVID-19, with encouraging results for higher rates of learning and increased engagement through low-cost, scalable programming.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The low-cost, low-tech interventions evaluated in this study are scalable across contexts, while still holding a great deal of potential for personalization from the local to national level. While these types of interventions are not the be-all end-all of parent engagement, they are affordable, easy-to-roll-out programs to mitigate learning loss and maintain ties with students and families during school-closure shocks.

Read the [full study](#).

# Beating the Odds: How Thirteen NYC Schools Bring Low-Performing Ninth Graders to Timely Graduation and College Enrollment

Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire • 2007

**SUMMARY:** What characterizes high-performing high schools that serve low-income students? This qualitative study examined 13 high schools in New York City with graduation rates 10 points or more above the district average. All served nearly 100 percent low-income students of color. Using a four-component framework and indicators, the authors identified effective practices that include extensive and close collaboration with families.

**BACKGROUND:** At the time of this study, New York City's four-year graduation rate was 57 percent. Yet some high schools were successful in bringing students with low academic skills and high needs to timely graduation and enrollment in college. This study focused on a small group of New York City high schools that, according to 2001 data, were "beating the odds." In these BTO schools, the student poverty rate was above the district average. The students were mostly Black or Hispanic and more likely to be over age for their grade.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The authors developed an interview protocol focused on four areas of practice seen as critical to academic success among low-performing students: academic rigor, a network of timely supports, a culture of college access, and effective use of data. For each component, they developed a rubric laying out effective practices and levels of implementation. Based on interviews and observations, the rubric became a road map to how lower-performing schools could improve their practices, allowing the findings to be scaled up across the system.

**FINDINGS:** The BTO schools admitted ninth graders with low reading and math scores but produced four-year graduation rates 10 points above the district average. Thirty-five percent planned to attend the City University of New York, compared to 28.3 percent of students in comparison schools. The component with the strongest connection to families is the culture of college access. The BTO schools used a variety of practices to expose students and families to college: building relationships with a few public and private colleges, offering workshops on the college application and financial aid process, hosting visits from colleges, holding a Hispanic College Fair for undocumented students, and partnering with the city's College Now program.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study makes clear that the success of BTO schools is not a matter of chance. The schools emerged because the principals and staff boosted prospects for success. Enabling all students to graduate in a timely manner and obtain postsecondary education should not depend on a few heroic educators. Instead, high schools need resources, greater control over enrollment, recognition for their success, and a stronger system of district support and accountability.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Helping families stay engaged through high school is critical to students' staying in school, taking more challenging classes, graduating on time, and going on to postsecondary programs. Some of the changes to standard practice these 13 schools made include rigorous academics, collaboration with community resources to provide extra support for students and families, strong guidance counseling, a student advisory system, and short-term pull-outs for extra academic support.

Read the [full study](#).

## Identifying Barriers: Creating Solutions to Improve Family Engagement

Timberly L. Baker, Jillian Wise, Gwendolyn Kelley, and Russell J. Skiba • 2016

**SUMMARY:** This study examines the barriers to parents to family involvement and the solutions that could increase family engagement.

**BACKGROUND:** The authors present data collected through focus groups in six schools in a Midwestern state to examine how schools can move from parent involvement to parent engagement. The authors define parent involvement as “the focus on parents being present in the schools” while parent engagement is the “intentional efforts by the school to recognize and respond to parents’ voices and to help school staff to better understand how to address barriers that parents have identified” (p. 163).

**DESIGN OF THE STUDY:** The study focused on the following research questions: (1) What are the barriers or limitations to families attending school events?; and (2) What can be done differently to increase family involvement? Parents and staff from six different schools participated in 20 focus groups.

**FINDINGS:** Findings identified five themes across both groups (parents and staff): (1) Providing opportunities for involvement, taking constraints into consideration; (2) improving communication between parents and schools; (3) finding ways to welcome families into the building; (4) addressing parents’ time conflicts; and (5) developing strategies to move from involvement to engagement.

Two themes were identified by staff:

- 1. Overcoming Negative School Experiences:** Staff identified parents’ past school experiences as possible barriers to their involvement in schools.
- 2. Breaking Down Barriers to Access:** Staff also identified access to transportation and sustaining involvement from single family homes and foster homes. Staff also identified background checks for volunteers and the cost of involvement as other major barriers.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The authors concluded that “schools should embrace a more expansive view of parent engagement which includes multiple constructions of how parents are involved... moving from parent presence to engagement may require a profound attitude shift that focuses on the strengths and resources that families can bring to their child’s education (Peña, 2000) and intentional and consistent attention to addressing barriers with connected solutions” (p. 180).

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study provides a critical look at how schools can reframe parent involvement into a framework that encourages parent engagement. By providing data from both school staff and parents, this study provides a more holistic look at how each group understands the barriers and possible solutions needed to improve family involvement/engagement in schools.

Read the [full study](#).

# Parental Engagement Fund Study

Laura Barbour, Naomi Eisenstadt, Janet Goodall, Fiona Jelley, and Kathy Sylva • 2018

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study examined five early intervention programs that engage low-income families in strengthening home learning. The researchers offered support for the programs to design and conduct their own evaluation. The process yielded rich practice information on what works to recruit and engage families, and to sustain that engagement.

**BACKGROUND:** The Sutton Trust aims to address inequality in children’s early learning and develop effective family engagement practice in the UK. This study, funded by the Trust and conducted by the Parent Engagement Fund (PEF), compares five interventions to change parents’ home learning practices during their children’s early years. The study piloted a new model to develop the capacity of the programs to design, deliver, and evaluate their own work.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** PEF selected five nonprofit organizations that were working with parents and showed “persistent curiosity” about their impact on parents and children. Four programs work directly with parents; the fifth trains school staff to engage parents in enriching the home learning environment. PEF provided three forms of support: funding to deliver a program to a target group, a “critical friend” to coach each group in evaluation process, and practical support, such as creating a network to share ideas and results. A total of 1,329 families took part.

**FINDINGS:** The findings fell into four categories.

1. Recruiting and keeping families
2. Engaging families
3. Pros and cons of various delivery models
4. Promoting active engagement and an improved home learning environment

Educators said the experience helped them gain greater understanding of the means and value of engaging parents. This, in turn, strengthened their confidence and capacity to support that engagement. It was gratifying to observe parents and children interacting happily around learning and the greater ease parents had communicating with teachers.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Establishing trust and collaboration between parents and teachers at the outset is essential to later success. It was shown that trying new methods to engage families is an effective and gratifying form of professional development and capacity-building, builds teacher buy-in, and can lead to lasting changes in their practice.

Combining direct support to families in their home environment with training teachers to engage families as part of the learning process in early childhood settings appears to be more effective than one approach or the other. Parents are more likely to use what they learn with their children when they have opportunities to see how an activity is done and then practice it. In addition, parents benefit from learning from each other, creating new activities, and sharing strategies.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The goal of this study is to reduce or eliminate learning gaps between low-income and middle-class children. The findings are useful for program planning, professional development, indicators of program quality, and sharing with family networks.

Read the [full study](#).

## Teachers' Use of Social Media for Family Engagement

Gillian Baxter and Dianne Toe • 2021

**SUMMARY:** This Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) study examined Australian primary school leaders' efforts to enhance family engagement in their children's learning through classroom teachers' use of social media. The three schools are in a culturally diverse community. Careful, constant actions to modify social media posts yielded significant changes in practices, moving from rote involvement in schooling to active family engagement in learning.

**BACKGROUND:** Social media platforms offer schools opportunities to enhance communication with families. Digital platforms allow teachers to upload instructional materials that allow students, families, and teachers to interact when and where they choose. While social media can connect families to their children's learning, its effectiveness needs more study. CPAR focused on examining local practices through participants' perspectives.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The participants formed a Family School Partnership Advisory Group with a team of teachers from each school: A Cluster Engagement in Learning Leader (CELL) coordinated the work across the entire project. Each principal selected one grade to be the focus.

Participating families completed an online survey at the start of the project and midway. The group used the survey data to reflect on their social media practices. Data included student work samples and images of students engaged in school activities and discussions.

Each school selected a different social media platform but used the same five-step CPAR process: 1) Gathering history about the use of social media; 2) Sharing the history in light of the survey data and samples of recent posts; 3) Considering their practice using a local context lens; 4) Transforming the practice, using the information and reflection so far; 5) Documenting and monitoring to identify opportunities, measure success, and plan next steps.

**FINDINGS:** Early social media posts to families were mostly descriptions and images of children's classroom learning, limiting them to the classroom context. After noting this limitation, school leaders collaborated with teachers and students to highlight learning connections across home and community contexts. In two schools, teachers revised social media posts so that families could talk with their children about learning, contributing their own knowledge and experiences. At the third school, teachers enhanced students' agency in developing posts so they could discuss their learning more effectively with their families.

**CONCLUSIONS:** While using different approaches, each school sought to reframe children's learning from being school-centric to occurring across home, community, and school contexts. The schools' actions to modify social media posts showed significant changes, producing higher levels of family engagement.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Using a well-designed process of critical inquiry focused on teacher and school practice of family engagement can yield insights, improve practice, and create more authentic partnerships among school leaders, teachers, students, and families.

Read the [full study](#).

# Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement

Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider • 2002

**SUMMARY:** This rigorous, long-term study of elementary schools in Chicago found that the presence of relational trust significantly increased the likelihood of improved student achievement. Schools are social enterprises, and their success depends on a high level of cooperation among teachers, parents, and educators.

**BACKGROUND:** Too often, the lack of parent-teacher trust, often aggravated by differences of race and class, makes genuine dialogue difficult. The misunderstandings that result tend to reinforce existing biases. This study explores how trust is a key factor in improving the academic success of disadvantaged urban schools.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Using research on social trust, the authors developed a concept they call “relational trust.” In a social setting like a school, the quality of social exchanges has enormous significance. Based on this research and their observations in schools, Bryk and Schneider identified four “considerations” that underlie trust: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. Relational trust deepens when we feel that others care about us, know what they’re doing, keep their word, and will “go to bat” for us.

This study drew on data from case studies and observations of 12 Chicago elementary schools, analysis of data on 400 elementary schools, and two citywide teacher surveys three years apart, using three scales: teacher-parent trust, teacher-teacher trust, and teacher-principal trust. It compared levels of trust among the 100 top achieving schools with those in the bottom 100 and case studies of three elementary schools, two with low trust and one with a high level of trust.

**FINDINGS:** In general, higher levels of trust in schools predicted higher student performance, and lower levels predicted lower student performance. When the researchers compared schools’ productivity, another interesting pattern emerged: Schools with higher levels of trust were much more likely to improve over time.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Trust is foundational to the healthy, effective functioning of a school and cannot be achieved simply through a workshop or sensitivity training, although all can be helpful. Rather, relational trust is forged in daily social exchanges. Through their actions, members of a school community demonstrate commitment to each other and to the purpose of the school.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Teachers receive little training in how to work with parents and community members. Effective urban schools need to recruit and retain teachers who know their students well, have empathy and understanding of the parents’ situations, and have interpersonal skills needed to engage their students’ families. Parents must be able to talk with teachers and have a say in how their children are treated. Teachers need to voice their concerns to administrators and feel they will be considered. Administrators need to feel that faculty cares about the functioning of the school. As John Dewey famously said, a school should be more like a family than a factory.

## Organizing Schools for Improvement

Anthony S. Bryk, Penny B. Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu,  
and John Q. Easton • 2010

**SUMMARY:** This landmark quantitative study compared schools in Chicago that made substantial improvement with similar schools that had stagnated or declined. The authors found five “essential supports” that led to school improvement. Schools that had “strong ties to families and the community” were four times more likely to make significant gains in reading and math.

**BACKGROUND:** Using the Consortium on Chicago School Research’s deep database, the researchers identified five essential supports for school improvement present in schools that made major gains in reading and math, but had been absent or weak in schools that had not improved.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The researchers used complex statistical modeling to analyze 15 years of data from 395 public elementary schools (K–8) collected by the Consortium using surveys, field studies, school reports, and student test scores. Then they studied how the five essential supports interacted to reinforce each other to create pathways for advancing student achievement.

**FINDINGS:** The five essential supports are: a coherent instructional guidance system, professional capacity, strong parent-community-school ties, a student-centered learning climate, and leadership as a driver for change. The indicators for parent-school-community ties are teachers’ ties to the community, teacher outreach to parents, parent involvement, and relational trust. Schools with strong indicators on most supports were 10 times more likely to improve than schools with weak supports. Sustained weakness in any one support undermined improvement; those schools rarely improved.

**CONCLUSIONS:** School improvement is like baking a cake. All ingredients are needed or it flops. Local school leadership is the catalyst for change. Principals organize and allocate the resources needed to create conditions for improvement. Trusting relationships are the soil in which everything takes root. Without them, it’s nearly impossible to strengthen parent-community ties, build professional capacity, and enable a student-centered learning climate.

Truly disadvantaged school communities present unique challenges. Improving schools were found in all kinds of neighborhoods, but “stagnating schools” were mainly in poor, racially isolated African American areas. The social capital of a neighborhood where residents have a history of working together is a significant resource for improving its school. In contrast, the absence of social capital made it more likely that a troubled school would continue to stagnate.

All five essential supports are critical for school improvement. They must be especially strong for significant improvement in student learning to occur in disadvantaged communities.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study offers some of the most convincing evidence we have that engaging families in deep and meaningful ways is a core strategy for school improvement. It is not something that can be done later, or in isolation from other efforts to advance student learning. It is NOT optional. The indicators of “close ties with parents and communities” deserve our attention. They are both deeper and broader than indicators traditionally used in our field.

# Preparing the Next Generation of Librarians for Family and Community Engagement

Margaret Caspe and M. Elena Lopez • 2018

**SUMMARY:** To be successful at their jobs, librarians must engage and partner with families and communities. This qualitative study identifies the competencies and supports needed by librarians to successfully engage with families and communities.

**BACKGROUND:** In this article, Caspe and Lopez link the importance of family and community engagement to the role of libraries and librarians. Libraries are in a unique position to carry out family and community engagement work; they have access to different populations, are hubs for social services, and offer access to resources. Libraries are also spaces families visit to learn new ways to support student learning and development and connect with other families and community members. “Family engagement in libraries can be broadly defined as the process by which families and libraries join together to share the responsibility of supporting children’s learning and development, from birth through adulthood” (p. 159).

**DESIGN OF THE STUDY:** To investigate what librarians should be taught about the importance of meaningful family and community engagement, the authors conducted interviews with 11 library educators at top schools of information and library sciences in the United States. Participants were asked questions about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions new librarians should have to successfully work with families and communities. They were also asked about current training for librarians and the extent to which their education covered family and community engagement topics, and to reflect on the best teaching methods, or pedagogy, used to discuss family and community engagement topics with future librarians.

**FINDINGS:** Caspe and Lopez presented their findings in two categories: (1) the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for librarians, current and future, to develop to meaningfully engage with families and communities; and (2) the best pedagogical approaches to promote these competencies.

The three main goals to prepare librarians to meaningfully engage with families and communities are: (1) provide information to librarians about the families and communities they work with, (2) help librarians build relationships with families and communities, and (3) help librarians internalize the position that they are professionals who have the responsibility to help people. Librarians serve as advocates for the families and communities they work with.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study makes clear the importance of family and community engagement in the work of libraries and librarians. If trained on family engagement competencies—understanding families and communities, relationship-building, and professionalism—librarians can be powerful advocates in communities.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study draws attention to the importance of librarian training programs, calling on these programs to reevaluate how they train future librarians. Being that relationship-building and partnership with families and communities is of great importance, the study also serves as a call to both universities and community libraries to work together to improve how families and communities experience libraries.

Read the [full study](#).

## “Con mucho sacrificio, we give them everything we can”: The Strategic Sacrifices of Undocumented Latina/o Parents

Stephany Cuevas • 2019

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study explores how undocumented Latinx parents engage in their children’s post-secondary goals and aspirations. Undocumented parents make intentional day-to-day sacrifices for their children’s educational attainment, often prioritizing their children’s needs over their own basic needs. The findings indicate the importance of considering the impact of immigration status on Latinx parental engagement.

**BACKGROUND:** Cuevas explores how parents’ undocumented immigration status shapes their engagement behaviors. The study is based on the experiences of 10 families—15 undocumented Latinx parents (10 mothers, 5 fathers)—who live in California. Primary data consisted of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews in Spanish. Parents were asked about how they provided support to their children when they were in high school, how different life experiences impacted this support, and the challenges they faced.

**FINDINGS:** Undocumented parents intentionally engaged in behaviors that supported their children’s postsecondary aspirations. Cuevas calls these behaviors *sacrificios*, or sacrifices, which often come at a very high personal cost. Day-to-day *sacrificios* include:

- Financially prioritizing children’s needs
- Managing feelings of inferiority when engaging with schools
- Risking deportation and unemployment during daily tasks, such as driving their children to different curricular activities
- Managing limited time and risk losing jobs to attend school events

**CONCLUSIONS:** The study’s findings illustrate how parents’ undocumented immigration status impacts their engagement in their children’s education, especially their higher education aspirations. In the process, undocumented Latinx parents often engage in behaviors that are traditionally conceived to belong to upper- and middle-class parents.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Considering our contemporary political climate, in which undocumented immigrants have become scapegoats for economic decline and are victims of nativist and racialized hate crimes, it is essential that we consider how parents’ undocumented immigration status affects their engagement. How can their immigration status become a barrier to engagement? As Cuevas notes, “the consequences and limitations of parents’ illegality not only shape their engagement with their children’s post-secondary planning and success but how they live their everyday lives.” This is a much-needed contribution to immigration and family engagement practice and research.

Read the [full study](#).

# Advancing Equity-Based School Leadership: The Importance of Family–School Relationships

Osly J. Flores and Eric Kyere • 2020

**SUMMARY:** This interpretive qualitative inquiry presents the parent engagement stories of five social justice and equity-oriented urban public school principals. This study explores what it means to move productive parent engagement from rhetoric into action, particularly for historically marginalized students and families. The study offers best practice approaches on how educators can examine, frame, and direct parent engagement in their schools.

**BACKGROUND:** Prompted by a lack of the research on the intersection between parent involvement and school leadership from an equity standpoint, the authors focus this study on identifying best practice approaches by school leaders for parent engagement in schools. The study describes the practices of social justice leadership for parent engagement by exploring the *how*, *what*, and *why* of building positive relationships with parents. The study underscores the significance for social justice and equity-oriented school leaders in urban contexts of strong and trusting parent relationships.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The study is a secondary analysis of data from a larger study of how principals direct their leadership toward equitable practices that enhance learning for all students. The research method of narrative inquiry was used to collect the lived experiences of principals.

**FINDINGS:** The findings highlight the role that relationships with parents can contribute to effective parent-school engagement in ways that are culturally and contextually responsive and empower parents to support children’s educational outcomes. The authors develop an equity-based parent engagement model of why and how the five school leaders built positive relationships with parents. The findings revealed that the school leaders practiced family/parent engagement from a social justice and equity standpoint by building trusting relationships, engaging in intentional self-reflection and the resistance of deficit-thinking, and connecting the family engagement work to equity. The school leaders saw the outcomes of positive relationships with parents as the recognition from parents of their commitment to students, the support of their school success goals, the parents’ trust of their leadership decision-making, and the greater opportunities for student success.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Trustful relationships with families and communities are key mechanisms by which school leaders can enact their practices to attend to the principles of democratic participation and the social justice needs of the families/communities they serve.

**CONTRIBUTIONS:** Few studies have captured the essence of how school leaders interpret the outcomes of positive relationship with parents. The model also contributes to the parent engagement literature by highlighting equity-minded school leaders’ practice and the underlying value of parent/family engagement.

Read the [full study](#).

## The Ripple Effect in Action: What Seven Parent Leadership Initiatives Learned from Participatory Evaluation

Joanna Geller, Jessamyn Luiz, Danielle Asher, Sara McAlister, Anne T. Henderson, Kate Gill Kressley, Wendy Perez, and Joy Sanzone, eds. • 2019

**SUMMARY:** In this qualitative study, seven parent leadership initiatives (PLIs) across the United States evaluated their work to assess impact, identify successful practices, and enhance effectiveness. Investment in family-strengthening and healing-centered engagement had a transformational impact on parent leaders and their families and communities.

**BACKGROUND:** In 2014, meetings among parent leadership initiatives, funders, researchers, and community organizations, found that initiatives to develop parent leadership had not been well documented or understood. Working with parent leaders, the authors developed and used an evaluation framework and appropriate metrics to study their work.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Partnering with Dialogues in Action, the researchers and parent leaders from the parent leadership organizations developed and applied an Indicators Framework to evaluate their work. Using an in-depth interview protocol with a purposeful, stratified sample of parent leaders, each group identified major themes and findings, and considered the implications for program improvement and innovation.

**FINDINGS:** The interviews showed that parent leaders moved from seeing themselves as just a parent or a worrier, to become change agents, role models, and the go-to person in their families and community. This transformation was the force behind significant policy wins made by these PLIs over the past few years. These include passing minimum wage increases, heading off deep budget cuts to services for children and families, and replacing “zero tolerance” school discipline policies with restorative justice programs.

The PLI teams identified five practices that led to these transformative impacts: Fostering families’ well-being and building on their strengths; creating a community that feels like a safe, supportive family; creating a sense of positive identity and pride in one’s culture; and empowering through skill- and knowledge-building.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Many evidence-based programs that focus on families produce short-term effects, but not durable change. This study concludes that longer-term investments in personal growth build power in ways that are essential to lasting, transformational change. A campaign may “win” new resources but not guarantee that the benefits will be fully and fairly implemented. There also must be a redistribution of power so that parent leaders have a voice in implementation and a role in holding officials accountable for results.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Most programs to engage families in improving children’s outcomes offer knowledge, skills, and opportunities to practice them. This study suggests that such efforts would be more successful if they also created a “second family” that can strengthen families by affirming their contributions and personal value, connecting them to economic and social resources, building their capacity to support their children’s learning and development, listening to their ideas, and developing their voices.

Read the [full study](#).

# Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers Are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart

Shawn Ginwright • 2016

**SUMMARY:** Rooted in five case studies, this ethnographic study examined how “radical healing” can change distressed urban communities. Bringing young people together to heal from trauma, identify what they want their schools and communities to be like, and taking “imaginative action” to implement their vision leads to collective well-being.

**BACKGROUND:** This book illustrates how local leaders can change their communities “from the inside out,” using radical healing that builds capacity to contribute to the common good. Developing personal well-being, community health, and broader social justice allows people to act for others “with hope, joy, and a sense of possibility.” Ginwright distinguishes this approach from trauma-informed care because it addresses what causes trauma in the first place.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Ginwright first examined how community activists are using healing strategies to support young people. Then, through observation and analysis, he showed how a focus on healing can advance civic engagement, prompting disconnected young people to take action.

**FINDINGS:** In “Radically Healing Schools and Communities,” Ginwright describes efforts in San Francisco Bay Area high schools to cool tensions, develop a vision for what could be better, and bring students, parents, teachers, and administrators together to discuss how to make it happen. A key strategy for success is forming a self-selected “critical inquiry group” of five to 10 teachers and administrators to reflect on the impact of racism and unconscious bias on student performance. and to discuss how to improve their teaching and healing practices.

The critical inquiry group worked to build more collaborative relationships among parents, teachers, and students. It used practices such as morning “community circles” to check in with students and set the tone for the day/week, documenting school values that are reflected in curriculum, teaching, assessment, and rules, and increasing student involvement via the student council. Once teachers established relationships of trust and respect with students, classroom culture began to change in positive ways.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Radical healing encourages teachers, activists, and young people to consider that the results that we seek depend on the quality of our relationships and the clarity of our consciousness. Successful policy change and interventions that create healing improve school climate and advance learning. Such interventions impact the interior condition of both adults and young people in the communities and schools we seek to transform.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Based on Ginwright’s findings: 1) Recognize signs of collective and individual harm through healing circles that bring young people together with teachers and parents. 2) Define what well-being looks like in a school and engage in imaginative action. Visiting inspiring schools and community organizations is a good place to start. 3) Implement practices that facilitate healing by infusing a worldview of well-being, healing, and joy. We may need to start with healing ourselves; only then will we experience “successful” implementation.

## The Longitudinal Process of Early Parent Involvement on Student Achievement: A Path Analysis

Momoko Hayakawa, Michelle M. Englund, Mallory N. Warner-Richter,  
and Arthur J. Reynolds • 2013

**SUMMARY:** This longitudinal study examined how early parent involvement in preschool has a lasting effect on student achievement from kindergarten through sixth grade. Nearly 1,000 low-income, mainly African American children and their mothers, took part for one or two years in the Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) program. Path analysis showed that early parent involvement directly influenced kindergarten achievement, which in turn influenced first grade student motivation. This process continued to produce better results through sixth grade.

**BACKGROUND:** Early in their lives, young children are optimistic, highly motivated, and positively inclined toward learning in school, traits that often decline in their later years. If that early receptivity can be carried forward, it is important to understand how to sustain it throughout children's academic careers. This study explores whether students' motivation influences parent involvement, which then fuels subsequent student motivation. Given the link between student motivation and academic achievement, does student motivation act as a mediating variable that can explain the persistent influence of early parent involvement on later achievement?

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The study sample was taken from the Chicago Longitudinal Study of 1,539 racial minority children (93 percent African American, 7 percent Hispanic). Children in the intervention and comparison groups were matched on child and family characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and family risk factors, such as low income and single parenthood. The sample was evenly split between males and females.

**FINDINGS:** Findings strongly suggested that early parent involvement promoted in the CPC program sets the stage for subsequent parent involvement, student motivation, and academic achievement throughout early and middle childhood. These findings confirmed the idea that motivation plays an integral role in the cycle of parent involvement and student achievement.

**CONCLUSIONS:** While some early interventions have produced initial gains, they failed to sustain increased achievement later in school. Findings from this study not only provide a potential solution to decreasing the early achievement gap, but more important, provide a mechanism through which the early effects of parent involvement and achievement can be carried forward through elementary school and beyond.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This is yet another important study showing the lasting impact of high-quality early childhood education programs that incorporate robust family engagement. Its unique contribution is revealing the pathways of effects that create the strong, positive outcomes for children's achievement. As suggested by several other studies, what counts is the quality and sustained continuation of involvement. Investment in well-designed programs yields lasting effects and long-term cost savings.

Read the [full study](#).

# A Cord of Three Strands: A New Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools

Soo Hong • 2011

**SUMMARY:** This two-year ethnographic study is an analysis of the evolution of one model of parent engagement developed by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), a community organization with deep ties to the Latino immigrant families on Chicago's Northwest Side. The study offers a three-part *ecology of parent engagement* to conceptualize and design successful parent engagement strategies, practices, and initiatives.

**BACKGROUND:** Many techniques used by schools to engage parents are rooted in traditional notions of parent involvement where schools design activities and parents are asked to endorse and fall in line with the programs. Whether these activities involve classroom volunteering, fundraising activities, parent conferences or open houses, in schools that have strained or distant relationships with families, attendance or participation is often low, leaving educators to often develop problematic and deficit-based reasons about the lack of involvement within the community. Through a focus on the LSNA and its work in one school, this study was designed to provide a rich, in-depth discussion that joins theoretical concepts with the process necessary for change.

**DESIGN OF THE STUDY:** Hong developed a qualitative methodology for this project called *layered ethnography*. She structured the study as a multiyear ethnography, and over a four-year period developed relationships with community organizers, parents, and school staff in the Logan Square neighborhood. Hong conducted interviews with parents, attended training sessions and leadership workshops, visited classrooms and walked the school hallways, and met with organizers.

**FINDINGS:** Hong designed a framework called *the ecology of parent engagement*: a three-part model considering the multiple contexts, interactions, and experiences that shape parent engagement:

- 1. Parent engagement as induction:** developing engagement and participation opportunities that are designed to introduce parents to school environments and practices.
- 2. Parent engagement as integration:** highlighting the ways engagement strategies can connect parents to other individuals in the school.
- 3. Parent engagement as investment:** envisioning parent engagement in ways that build parents as leaders and active decision-makers within schools.

**CONCLUSION:** Hong warns readers not to view the elements of induction, integration, and investment as independent or sequential processes, but to see the power of the model in its recognition that the three processes are interactive, connected, and developmental.

**CONSIDERATION FOR THE FIELD:** This book presents an analysis of the issues that many schools face as well as effective practices in promoting meaningful change. This book offers current and future practitioners concrete ideas in working with families and communities.

## Natural Allies: Hope and Possibility in Teacher-Family Partnerships

Soo Hong • 2019

**SUMMARY:** This ethnographic study examines the motivations and experiences of five teachers in Boston and Washington, D.C., who create meaningful and productive relationships and partnerships with students' families. The portraits of teachers and their experiences with students' families demonstrate how a commitment to cultivating and maintaining meaningful relationships with families and community should be a central part of educators' practices. The study provides insights on how the dynamics of race, class, culture, and family history with schools shape the interactions and potential for relationships between families and educators.

**BACKGROUND:** Hong examined the motivations and experiences of five urban teachers committed to partnership with families. Hong studied how teacher practices with families are shaped by their beliefs about families and communities, seeking to understand what teachers must do to cultivate such relationships with trust, care, and respect.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Hong used the qualitative methodology of portraiture to conduct her three-year ethnographic study. Key to her study was the selection of five teachers who developed and strengthened their ability to work with parents. The teachers reflected: 1) a long-term commitment and proven track record of success in engaging families and communities; 2) engagement with low-income urban communities typically viewed as "hard to reach;" and 3) diversity of age, years of experience, and race/ethnicity. Teachers also represented a range of pathways into the profession and taught in elementary and middle school classrooms, working with both native speakers and emergent bilinguals.

**FINDINGS:** The findings challenged the longstanding depiction of families and educators as "natural enemies," showing how through intentional practice grounded in trust and ongoing communication, families and educators can become natural allies instead. Hong argues that schools should become "grounded institutions"—"schools that are rooted in and reflect the full lives and experiences of students' families and communities" (p. 160). To move beyond superficial interactions into more meaningful commitments to families, this study found teachers must develop a sense of trust and shared purpose.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study illuminates the importance of teacher competency in family and community engagement as a fundamental element of high-quality teaching. The study offers new ideas on family engagement grounded in an analysis of the deep contours of the parent-teacher relationship.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study offers a practice-based model to guide conversations and reforms necessary in family and community engagement. As school systems grapple with policies to drive and shape effective family and community engagement practice and capacity building, this study is an effective guide in establishing a strategic vision and plan.

# Achievement for All National Evaluation: Final Report

Neil Humphrey and Garry Squires • 2011

**SUMMARY:** This mixed method study evaluated the *Achievement for All* (AfA) program in the United Kingdom, aimed at improving opportunities for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Over two years, 454 schools piloted the program, which included “structured conversations with parents,” realizing significant gains in academic outcomes.

**BACKGROUND:** In the UK, “special educational needs” is defined broadly to include students from vulnerable groups, such as those whose first language is not English, are in foster care, or are eligible for free school meals. The 454 schools that participated received funding from the Department for Education for two years (2009–2011). AfA has three main strands: 1) Assessment, tracking and intervention; 2) Structured conversations with parents for an hour three times a year; and 3) “Wider outcomes” (attendance, behavior, and relationships).

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Humphrey and Squires posed two main questions: What is the impact of AfA on SEND students? And what processes and practices are most effective in improving outcomes? They used quantitative analysis of attendance and academic progress data in AfA and comparison schools, teacher and parent surveys, interviews and focus groups, observations, case studies, and school documentation. They tracked changes over three years, from the year before implementation through pilot completion.

**FINDINGS:** The program narrowed the achievement gap between students with and without SEND. AfA schools saw marked improvements in English and Math scores compared to the national average for SEND students and even for all non-SEND students. “Wider outcomes” in non-academic areas such as confidence, behavior, and social relations, also significantly improved. Structured Conversations with Parents was the most successful strand, or as one school declared, “an absolute roaring success” (p. 58). Teachers deeply appreciated what they learned about their students from talking with parents. This component accounted for 43 percent of the variance in scores at the end of the pilot, making it central to student success (p. 60).

**CONCLUSIONS:** Anticipating that schools might water down the program, the authors strongly cautioned that the structured conversations with parents be fully supported and faithful to the original guidance. They also emphasized the role of parents in generating positive outcomes for SEND students, and “the need to view ‘education’ as encapsulating school and home, and the relationship between them” (p. 115).

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study gives ample evidence that close parent-teacher collaboration is a critical component of success in a program to improve outcomes for all students. Especially for students with special needs, positive relationships and welcoming school culture are integral to success. Individual student profiles illustrate how well students responded when teachers collaborated closely with their parents and used the information gained to meet their needs.

Read the [full study](#).

## From Family Engagement to Equitable Collaboration

Ann M. Ishimaru • 2019

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study used an equity-based framework to examine cross-sector collaboration initiatives to engage families and communities in their children’s education.

**BACKGROUND:** This nested, comparative qualitative case study examines three initiatives within the Pathways Project, “a cross-sector collaborative initiative comprised of education, community, health, and other organizational partners located in a region of concentrated suburban poverty in a Western region of the United States” (p. 357). The three initiatives, two school-based and one neighborhood-based, were identified by the Pathways Project for their leadership in parent engagement, and they received funding and support to improve their programming.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with program leaders and providers, district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and family support staff, collected 115 hours of observations at various meetings and events, and compiled extensive documentation. Analysis included multiple rounds of coding, sharing initial findings with sites and incorporating feedback, constructing case studies, and applying the dimensions of the conceptual framework.

**FINDINGS:** The three sites nested within the Pathways Project were working to improve equitable engagement practices through parent/family capacity-building, parent-school and parent-parent relationship-building, and systemic change and capacity-building. While their practices were still rooted in traditional involvement approaches that did not challenge power asymmetries between families and schools, the organizations initiated promising equitable strategies that focused on building relationships, parent capacities, and systemic capacities.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The study highlights the promises and limitations of efforts to foster more equitable relationships between schools, families, and communities in the context of cross-sector collaboration initiatives. The findings suggest policy implications for engaging in collaborative strategies that are jointly crafted by all stakeholders—education professionals, community leaders, and nondominant families alike. Ishimaru closes by inviting future research that explores “how we move from promising, but fragmented, schoolcentric strategies to integrated and systemic approaches that prioritize nondominant family and community goals and influence in pursuit of equity-based transformation and educational justice” (p. 380).

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** By drawing the focus away from traditionally individualistic, deficit-based efforts, the study hones in on galvanizing families as equal partners in power with schools. It highlights how cross-sector collaborations are susceptible to the trappings of top-down initiatives that push nondominant families out.

Read the [full study](#).

# Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations With Families and Communities

Ann M. Ishimaru • 2020

**SUMMARY:** In *Just Schools*, Ann Ishimaru brings together research, theory, and practice to construct a road map to equitable collaboration with families and communities for educational justice. Ishimaru explores the ways in which systemic racial inequities play out in schools and provides guidelines for educators and community members to approach their work critically, shift power imbalances between schools and communities, and build solidarity for sustainable change.

**BACKGROUND:** *Just Schools* examines the complex intersecting dynamics that feed into common policies and best practices, particularly along lines of race, class, language, power, and privilege.

Ishimaru approaches this entanglement through a lens of equitable collaboration, which builds on critical race theory, community organizing, and sociocultural learning theories.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** This book shares methods and evidence from empirical studies over the past decade, including qualitative, mixed method, and critical participatory action research.

**FINDINGS:** Throughout the chapters, the book analyzed how dynamics between nondominant communities and educational institutions play out at systemic, organizational, and individual levels. Dr. Ishimaru lays out her framework for navigating these interactions equitably through four inquiry-driven and ongoing principles: 1) Begin with family and community priorities, interests, concerns, knowledge and resources; 2) Transform power; 3) Build reciprocity and agency; 4) Undertake change as collective inquiry (p. 2). Rather than one-time goals to achieve or check off for completion, these guidelines are “starting places, strands of DNA for growing our practices and expanding our collective capacity” (p. 162). *Just Schools* includes several case studies that illustrate the ways in which these guidelines play out in different contexts, including the imperfections and mistakes that come with the territory.

**CONCLUSION:** Equitable collaboration with families and communities is not about checking boxes for completion or making it to a predetermined destination. It’s about continuous work and inquiry to build an education experience that is in and of its community—every effort is unique and escapes the constraints of scalability. Dr. Ishimaru encourages solidarity and creation in these efforts by reminding readers to reject the binaries of an either/or mentality. Instead, embrace both/and. This continuous process of building solidarity with nondominant families and communities is essential to not only imagine systems and practices of true educational justice, but to build the collective capacity to make it real.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Dr. Ishimaru lays out the guidelines for equitable collaboration that tap into the uncertainty and opportunity of creation when enacting systemic change—each effort must begin with and be unique to its families and communities, which means that no successful, sustainable process is truly scalable. *Just Schools* ushers in the next evolution of the family and community engagement field by pushing past school-centric best practices and opening the imagination for collaborative, transformative change that reaches beyond education.

## Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: An Underused Resource for Student Success

Krista L. Jensen and Kathleen M. Minke • 2017

**SUMMARY:** In this study, Jensen and Minke conduct a literature review of parent engagement research that focuses on the importance of engagement at the secondary level as it relates to positive outcomes for academic achievement, high school completion rates, and social-emotional functioning.

**BACKGROUND:** The article highlights the gaps in literature to address the notions that there are benefits and risks to parent engagement for older students and the expectations that high schools engage parents without as much research to inform practices.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Using online primary search databases, Jensen and Minke searched for studies that “included combinations of the following terms: parent involvement, parent engagement, parent participation, high school, secondary school, elementary school, academic/educational outcomes, high school completion, school dropout, and social/emotional outcomes” (p. 168).

**FINDINGS:** While the types of behaviors are different from those traditionally performed at the elementary level, parent engagement maintains a positive relationship with academic achievement through high school. Parents’ decisions to become engaged are motivated by role construction and self-efficacy, or their beliefs about what responsibilities they have toward their child’s education and whether their actions have a positive influence on outcomes. Notably, parents are more likely to engage in education when they feel they are welcomed and desired to do so.

**CONCLUSION:** This literature review compiles evidence that parent engagement is a significant factor in secondary education, as it influences academic achievement, graduation rates, and social-emotional outcomes. There is much research to be done at the secondary level, and “as we develop our understanding of adolescents’ perceptions of and preferences for parent engagement and the roles that variables such as parent-adolescent relationship quality, adolescents’ invitations for engagement, and family resources play in predicting parent engagement, we will be better positioned to produce positive outcomes for all students” (p. 185).

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Despite some overemphasized popular examples of over-engagement (e.g., helicopter parents), parental engagement continues to have a positive relationship with student outcomes through secondary school. It takes different forms with adolescents than with younger children, such as more age-appropriate focuses on respecting and supporting autonomy, as well as navigating complex systems like high schools and colleges. School-family partnerships continue to be necessary components of education as students grow older, and secondary institutions can further increase equity by engaging all parents in planning their children’s futures.

Read the [full study](#).

# The Effects of Teacher-Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment

Matthew A. Kraft & Shaun M. Dougherty • 2013

**SUMMARY:** This randomized field experiment evaluated the relationship between teacher communication with parents and students and student engagement. Assigning a group of sixth- and ninth-grade students who attended a mandated summer school program to receive a daily phone call home and a text/written message from teachers, the authors examined the causal relationship between teacher-parent communication, teacher-student communication, and student outcomes.

**BACKGROUND:** To show a causal relationship between teacher communication with families and students and student engagement, Kraft and Dougherty conducted a randomized field experiment during the 2010 summer academy at the MATCH Charter Public Middle School and High School in Boston, Massachusetts. MATCH predominantly serves low-income students of color. All students in the treatment group were assigned to receive one phone call home per day for one week from either their fiction or nonfiction teacher and a text/written messages from their mathematics teachers. Teachers were given a common protocol to follow. The protocol asked teachers to communicate positive, neutral, or negative information as they saw fit but asked them to end the communication affirming that the student could be successful and offer one specific way the student could maintain or improve his or her effort.

**FINDINGS:** Kraft and Dougherty found that on average, students in the control group became less engaged over time: Their homework completion rate decreased by more than 6.5 percentage. Students in the treatment group maintained their initial levels of engagement and improved their behavior: Their homework completion rate only dropped by 0.6 percentage points. Across all measures, teacher-family communication had a large and positive effect on student engagement.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study found large and immediate effects of daily teacher-parent and teacher-student communication on homework completion rates, classroom behavior, and participation in class. These are outcomes that have been found to be key in student academic achievement. Nevertheless, the authors note that the context in which their study and experiment took place is particular: It occurred during the summer, a time when teachers may have more time to make phone calls home to their students' families. Also, they were only able to observe the impact of the communication for a short period of time. They suggest that follow-up studies and experiments take a longitudinal look—to see if constant communication throughout the academic year has similar effects on student engagement. As they note, "Although we do not yet know the parameters of an optimal communication strategy, these findings strongly suggest that formalized and frequent teacher-family communication can have an immediate effect on important mediators of student academic achievement" (p. 220).

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study shows a promising blueprint for conducting randomized casual experiments in family engagement. The authors chose a particular outcome (student engagement) and, informed by existing research, developed an experiment that isolated the effects of teacher-family and teacher-student communication.

Read the [full study](#).

## The Underutilized Potential of Teacher-to-Parent Communication: Evidence From a Field Experiment

Matthew A. Kraft and Todd Rogers • 2015

**SUMMARY:** While several publications have established the positive association between parent involvement and student success, this article explores the causal mechanisms behind the relationship. The study examines a light-touch communication intervention that sent weekly messages from teachers to parents of high school students attending a summer credit recovery program in a large urban school district in the Northeastern U.S., with aims of “increasing parents’ efforts and effectiveness at supporting their child’s success in school.”

**BACKGROUND:** This study explores how parent-child interactions can increase student performance with weekly parent-teacher communications as the mechanism. Students and their parents were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: positive information, improvement information, and control. Every family, regardless of treatment, received an introductory phone call in the first week. In the following weeks, those assigned to the positive and improvement treatments received weekly messages by either phone call, email, or text. The research team contracted translators to communicate messages in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cantonese, and Vietnamese for parents who did not speak English.

**FINDINGS:** Most students in the control group (84.2 percent) earned the credits for which they were enrolled. Overall, both the weekly messaging interventions decreased the percentage of students who failed to earn course credit from 15.8 percent to 9.3 percent, or a 41 percent reduction. This was primarily the result of decreasing the dropout rate.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Through its success in improving student attendance and passing rates, this intervention highlights the potential to increase parental involvement in their children’s education through policy initiatives. Kraft and Rogers note the significance of designing policies that set specific, achievable expectations for teachers in systems that allow for efficient, effective communication, and their study provides evidence that these conditions are not only possible, but impactful and cost-effective.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study highlights strategies to increase equity by providing a simple, technologically efficient way to communicate with all families regularly, especially by reaching across linguistic divides. The intervention invites emergent bilingual parents into the conversation by translating messages to accommodate the languages of all families, forming a line of communication between school and family, and stimulating conversation at home. In addition, the communication is relatively standardized, requiring little extra time and effort from the teacher to get conversations started.

Read the [full study](#).

# The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn From Each Other

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot • 2003

**SUMMARY:** Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot takes a deep look into interactions during parent-teacher conferences. She finds that both parents and teachers are often unprepared, nervous, and anxious during the semi-annual meetings. Lawrence-Lightfoot proposes: (1) The first conference should be a “listening meeting,” where teachers learn from parents about their children; (2) Teachers should present stories and anecdotes to give parents insight into their children as students; and (3) The best conferences include the child/student.

**BACKGROUND:** This book explores the underlying narratives, expectations, and assumptions that shape parent-teacher conferences, and consequently other parent-teacher interactions and relationships. It is based on the experiences and perspectives of ten female teachers and parents of the children in their classrooms and seeks to provide a more detailed and deep understanding of intimate and personal interactions between parents and teachers.

**DESIGN OF THE STUDY:** Lawrence-Lightfoot uses the method of portraiture to weave together stories and experiences of teachers and parents in schools across the United States. She conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers and parents, and observed conferences. Teachers selected for the study were not only good at their pedagogical practices, but also demonstrated skills, empathy, and care when interacting with parents.

**FINDINGS:** Findings revealed three “central domains” that impact parent-teacher interactions:

- 1. Autobiographical and psychological scripts:** Broader historical and personal narratives influence parent-teacher encounters. Lawrence-Lightfoot calls those narratives “ghosts in the classroom,” and they are present without either party knowing. When adults meet in the classroom, their autobiographical experiences unknowingly influence how they relate to one another.
- 2. Double-edge nature of conferences:** Parent-teacher conferences can either create a welcoming environment or limit parents and teachers to connect genuinely. The “double-edged nature” is magnified because so much is at stake during the relatively brief interactions.
- 3. Variation in relationships:** There is wide variation in parent-teacher interactions depending on matters such as race, class, educational backgrounds, and immigration status. Nevertheless, all parents have educational expectations for their children. Conferences need to address the specific context of families.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Parent-teacher conferences are embedded with hidden messages, narratives, and unconscious expectations. Lawrence-Lightfoot reveals the dynamics that emerge from them: the “ghosts” that shape how parents and teachers understand each other, the inclination of ritual, and the importance of considering context. Becoming aware of these dynamics, Lawrence-Lightfoot notes, is essential to maximize the potential of parent-teacher conferences, and concludes that teachers need: (1) to be trained in the art of observation; (2) to be trained in record-keeping or journaling; and (3) to learn to listen to parents and be open and receptive to parental insights.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Developing authentic relationships and trust with parents begins with open lines of communication. Teachers bear the responsibility of easing tensions and welcoming parents into their classrooms. They can acknowledge their “ghosts” and interrogate them to understand how they may be unconsciously shaping interactions with parents. This reflective work can and should happen in teacher training programs and professional development sessions.

## Parents 2018: Going Beyond Good Grades

Learning Heroes, Edge Research • 2018

**SUMMARY:** This mixed method study conducted by Learning Heroes examined the disconnect between parents' perceptions of their children's academic proficiency and the reality, and provided engagement tools to help parents and teachers communicate effectively.

**BACKGROUND:** Learning Heroes gathered data on parents' attitudes and perceptions to better understand how best to equip them with the information they need to help their children succeed (p. 4). The organization's 2018 research sought to address this widespread misconception by identifying the drivers behind the disconnect, as well as exploring what information parents need to have a more accurate, holistic view of their children's progress, and how best to communicate it. Closing this disconnect by giving parents the resources they need may help them to better assist their children in attaining goals and aspirations.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Researchers gathered qualitative data from across nationwide contexts in Grades 3–8 through parent focus groups and educator interviews, and conducted two national online surveys of parents and educators of students in Grades 3–8.

**FINDINGS:** While most parents were generally overconfident in their child's academic performance, they differed in terms of how they engage with education and their openness to new information. Both parents and teachers recognize the importance of parent involvement, but they have different perceptions of what strong involvement looks like and how much of it is happening. This disconnect is present in how teachers and parents evaluate report cards as well—teachers use a variety of data points to measure student performance that are not laid out on a report card itself, leading some parents to interpret a higher grade as academic proficiency. Most teachers agree that communicating with parents to provide a clear picture of their child's performance is important, but barriers such as lack of training or administrative support make this a challenge.

**CONCLUSION:** This report finds three key insights: that different parenting styles affect how parents engage in their children's education, report cards are a central source of disconnect between parent and teacher concerns and priorities, and that bridging this disconnect is achievable.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This report emphasizes the necessity for effective parent-teacher communication and how equitable partnerships with families can engender mutual understanding between teachers, students, and parents. Competing definitions of engagement and proficiency come into play, and school-family partnerships should incorporate interpretations from different spheres of influence in order to build equitable relationships. Bridging the divides between families and school staff is essential to truly shared investment in student success.

Read the [full study](#).

# Engaging Families to Support Students' Transition to High School: Evidence from the Field

Martha Abele MacIver, Joyce L. Epstein, Steven B. Sheldon, and Ean Fonseca • 2015

**SUMMARY:** This correlational study found that efforts by middle and high schools to help students and families prepare for the transition from one to the other significantly reduce the proportion of ninth graders who are struggling academically.

**BACKGROUND:** Ninth grade is a critical year in students' school careers. Adjusting to a more complex school environment is a challenge that vulnerable students need extra support to meet. This study explores how middle and high schools can partner with families to help their students successfully navigate this transition and stay engaged through graduation.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** This exploratory study examines how middle grades and high schools engage families as their students made the transition to high school. The authors analyzed variations in schools' implementation of transition activities, including the following:

- Inviting incoming students and parents to visit the school before the start of the year.
- Communicating with parents before the start of the year about the high school's expectations for students' attendance, behavior, and achievement.
- Communicating with parents during the year on how to monitor their child's progress.
- Informing parents about the school's family engagement program, including the ATP.
- Joining with sending school to prepare students and families to move on.
- Communicating with families about how to support their child's transition to high school.

**FINDINGS:** The most significant finding was that the percentage of students who struggle academically was highly related to the extent and quality of the schools' transition programs and the percentage of parents who were able to guide their children's learning.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Family engagement in high school is far more than just checking on attendance and homework. It also entails coaching and guiding students to construct their identities as students, set goals for earning the credits to graduate, and plan for their futures. When parents understand the importance of a smooth transition to ninth grade, the courses students must pass to qualify for a postsecondary program, and the requirements for on-time graduation, the better they can encourage and guide their students toward meeting their goals. Districts and schools must take responsibility for building families' capacity to be partners with schools in ensuring all students can have a productive future.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study suggests that helping middle and high schools develop better transition programs for students and families can improve student outcomes in all types of school settings, especially those serving low-income areas. At least part of the persistent achievement gap stemming from income inequality can be explained by disparities in families' understanding of how to help their students navigate high school. It is incumbent upon schools to remedy this disparity. Where else will families get the information, access, and support they need to work as partners with educators?

Read the [full study](#).

## Mindset Shifts and Parent-Teacher Home Visits

Katherine McKnight, Nitya Venkateswaran, Jennifer Laird, and Jessica Robles • 2017

**SUMMARY:** The Parent-Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) model is designed to promote a trusting, mutually supportive relationship between educators and families. This qualitative study, based on interviews with 175 teachers and parents, found that PTHV helps to interrupt implicit biases that educators and families may have about each other. These mindset shifts operate to improve partnerships between educators and families and support student success.

**BACKGROUND:** In this study, the authors examined whether and how the Parent-Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) model helps to interrupt implicit biases. Referred to as “mindset shifts,” these changes may enable educators and families to partner more effectively to support student success, especially when they come from a different race, class, or cultural background than their students. In the PTHV model, educators are trained and then invite their students’ families to host a home visit. All visits are done by a team of two teachers who discuss hopes and dreams that family members have for their students.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The study relies on three sources of data: 1) research on implicit biases; 2) a field scan of other home visit programs; and 3) qualitative data collected from two or three schools in each of four large districts implementing PTHV. Each district serves a majority of students who are of color and from low-income families. The authors interviewed the principals and did focus groups with educators and families at each school, totaling 175 PTHV participants.

**FINDINGS:** Families shifted beliefs and actions about educators and schools, realizing that interactions with educators did not have to be negative or uncomfortable. This built families’ confidence and comfort in reaching out to educators about students’ needs. Educators shifted beliefs and actions related to both families and students, recognizing that many assumptions they held were unfounded. This new understanding and empathy changed educators’ behaviors, allowing them to use information obtained from the home visits to improve student engagement and motivation, use less punitive discipline, and communicate effectively with families.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Counteracting implicit biases is essential to building successful relationships across boundaries of class, race, education, gender, and culture. Creating opportunities for families and educators to meet outside of school, and to get to know each other, breaks down traditional barriers to partnerships. This study suggests that PTHV has strong, research-supported elements for counteracting biases, reducing discriminatory behaviors, and building positive school-family partnerships that center on student success.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** As the Sheldon and Jung (2018) and Venkateswaran (2018) studies on PTHV show, PTHV is a well-designed model with significant benefits for students, teachers, and families. In particular, the effect of PTHV on implicit bias could prove useful to other programs that are designed to build family-school partnerships. For example, debriefing is a critical component of building self-awareness and motivation to address implicit biases and discriminatory behavior. PTHV should be a core component of a systems approach to decreasing implicit biases and fostering school and family partnerships.

Read the [full study](#).

# The Way We Do School: The Making of Oakland’s Full-Service Community School District

Millbrey McLaughlin, Kendra Fehrer, and Jacob Leos-Urbel • 2020

**SUMMARY:** This mixed-methods study examined how the Oakland Unified School District developed an enduring system of full-service community schools (FSCS) from 2011–2019. Using the FSCS whole-child model as a system change strategy profoundly altered structure and practice at both district and school levels. Student outcomes have slowly but steadily improved.

**BACKGROUND:** This book covers the Oakland Unified School District’s (OUSD) effort to transform the system, using a whole-child approach as “a way of doing school.” Oakland leaders focused on system change to “disrupt inequities” in opportunities available to students and by integrating community resources into the school’s academic program. All community schools provide expanded learning opportunities, health and social services, and family/community engagement.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The authors explore whether the FSCS model can produce system change, and if so, how. In the system-level study, McLaughlin’s team conducted over 90 interviews with OUSD educators, administrators, community partners, and civic leaders, and analyzed outcome data to create a long-term account of implementation issues and outcomes. In the site-level study, Fehrer and Leos-Urbel interviewed and observed in nine schools, elementary to high school.

**FINDINGS:** Since 2011, Oakland has created an effective, expanding FSCS initiative, despite five leadership turnovers and budget crises. By 2019, 42 of 86 district schools had a full-time community school manager. By that year, students were visiting 16 school-based health centers; 75 after-school programs attracted 8,000 students a day; and partnerships with 215 community organizations were enriching the school day. All district schools included elements of a FSCS model, such as social-emotional learning strategies and Coordination of Services Teams (COST).

The data show that the FSCS initiative has led to many benefits for students: reduced suspensions and high-risk behaviors, improved school climate and culture, increased family and youth involvement in site-based decisions, and positive student health outcomes. The high school graduation rate increased from 59.3 percent in 2011 to 73.5 percent in 2019.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study shows how a community school model can drive change by infusing a “community school mindset” throughout an entire school district. The key is to transform the underlying structures that reinforce the inequities students experience. Taking 18 months to develop a comprehensive plan, in collaboration with families, community members, and local partners, was critical to the success and sustainability of Oakland’s FSCS initiative.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Community schools offer an “expanded vision of schooling.” They see physical and mental health, safety, positive adult connections, expanded learning time, and social supports as integral to children’s learning and development. Disparities in resources and opportunities available to young people growing up in concentrated poverty, such as food insecurity, homelessness, and lack of medical care, explain much of the achievement gaps in student outcomes. In short, students can’t learn if their basic needs are unmet.

## Building Partnerships to Reinvent School Culture: Austin Interfaith

Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah, and Sara McAlister • 2009

**SUMMARY:** This multi-method case study describes how the Austin Interfaith (AI) Alliance Schools parent and community organizing effort yielded new resources for high-poverty, low-performing schools, as well as new skills and relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators. In schools with high-level involvement in the Alliance Schools initiative, students gained from 15 and 19 percentage points on the Texas state assessment, compared to a four percent gain in schools with minimal involvement.

**BACKGROUND:** Affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national organizing network, AI builds local networks of faith-based institutions and community members to improve local neighborhoods. Aiming to improve low-performing schools in East Austin, AI created a network of “Alliance Schools” in low-income areas. Using community organizing tactics, AI provided leadership training to parents, teachers, and administrators, and developed relationships with the superintendent, school board, and municipal leaders.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The authors focused on how AI influenced schools’ capacity to educate students successfully and whether those efforts produced measurable gains in student outcomes. The authors interviewed school and district leaders, local education experts, AI staff and members, and reviewed AI documents and media coverage, responses to teacher surveys, and student outcome data for all schools in the district.

**FINDINGS:** AI worked with district leaders to create an ESL teacher pipeline program, after-school and summer programs, adult ESL programs, and professional development for teachers and administrators. In schools that were highly involved with AI, teachers rated their school’s climate, professional culture, and leadership more highly. Parents reported having greater access to important information, opportunities for communication, and respect from school staff. Students made gains ranging between 15 and 19 percentage points on the state assessment.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Through the Alliance Schools network, Austin Interfaith engaged in a long-term effort to recruit and train parents and teachers to work together as leaders in a participatory, action-oriented, problem-solving process. Organizers helped to build a collaborative culture in schools that energized the school community with a sense of shared purpose and power.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** In districts with chronically underperforming schools, a higher level of intervention is required to improve. Working with outside organizers can help create a community with shared purpose. District support and partnerships are essential to sustain the work over the long term. “Reinventing” the culture of failing schools was a useful lens because it allowed the school community to avoid laying blame and share a common purpose.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY STARTS WITH LISTENING.** To create consensus, teachers and parents embarked on a listening campaign through neighborhood walks and house meetings. The understandings gained transformed the way they saw each other, which altered the way they understood their roles in school improvement and, consequently, how they worked together.

# Springboard Summer Reading Program Evaluation Report

Kelly Piccinino, Sarah K. Pepper, Hanna Salomon, Sara Greenfield,  
and Wendy McClanahan • 2020

**SUMMARY:** This quasi-experimental study is an external evaluation of Springboard Summer, an intensive, five-week program designed to close gaps in grade-level reading performance by building lasting capacity among students, parents, and teachers. On average, participants across all grades improved their reading scores from the end of the school year by the beginning of the next school year.

**BACKGROUND:** The Springboard Collaborative approach to reducing literacy gaps aims to close the gap between home and school. Programming provides intensive coaching for both teachers and families to help their primary school students cultivate successful reading habits. Springboard Summer is a five-week summer program that works to reverse summer slide/learning loss in rising kindergarten through fourth-grade students.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The study sought to determine how participation in Springboard Summer is associated with reading growth and how participants' reading achievement compares to that of non-participants. 673 Springboard Summer scholars in Grades TK–4 from five districts from across the country were included in the study. Programs took place in either 2018 or 2019.

**FINDINGS:** On average, scholars across all grades showed improvement in reading assessment scores after completing Springboard Summer. In some instances, all scholars showed significant improvement, while in others, only those starting behind grade level showed it. Generally, though, scholars who started below grade level showed the largest gains. On average and across all grades, Springboard Summer scholars showed significant improvements between end-of-year and beginning-of-year outcomes as compared to matched comparison students.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Springboard Summer produces marked improvements in literacy for elementary students, especially those that are behind grade level. This is bolstered by a strong focus on family engagement, which engages caretakers as fellow educators essential to their children's academic success.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Springboard Summer approaches bridging gaps in literacy with an all-hands-on-deck attitude—intensive capacity-building for not just students, but families and teachers as well. This model uses families as an essential component of academic success.

Read the [full study](#).

## “Contra la corriente (Against the Current)”: The Role of Latino Fathers in Family-School Engagement

Sandra Quiñones & Judy Marquez Kiyama • 2014

**SUMMARY:** This study examined the role and perspectives of Latino fathers in family-school engagement. Focusing on the experiences of eight Puerto Rican fathers with children in a low-performing urban school district in New York State, the study looked at how Latino fathers’ engagement in their children’s education could be understood as moving *contra la corriente*, or going against the current: they reported constantly navigating people and systems that seemed to push back. Yet, they refused to give up and the findings reveal that school systems need to collaborate with them to ensure educational equity.

**BACKGROUND:** To improve the educational outcomes of Latino students, Quiñones and Kiyama specifically focused on the role and perceptions of Latino fathers regarding family-school relationships. Existing research has rarely focused on Latino fathers and the authors point to them as important “untapped resource” to positively impact educational outcomes.

**FINDINGS:** During the focus groups, the Latino fathers shared their educational aspirations for their children: They wanted their children to have access to a good education and to have a prosperous future. They engaged in what Quiñones and Kiyama call “dominant middle-class approaches to parental involvement,” such as monitoring their children’s grades, assisting them with homework when possible, and attending in-school events. All the participants believed that a good education, a *buena educación*, begins in the home and extends to the schools, highlighting the importance of home-school-community relationships. Quiñones and Kiyama note that Latino fathers take the roles of cultivators, critics, defenders, and advocates in their children’s education.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The study’s findings illustrate how Latino fathers are engaged in their children’s education and how they perceive their roles. As the authors note, the fathers did not always trust schools to have their children’s or the broader Latino community’s best interests at heart. The fathers believed they had to be extra vigilant and critical of school and district personnel to counter the invisibility they perceived. As the authors note, the fathers “were intentionally playing ‘the game’ not just because someone told them they should be involved, but because they understood that in order to progress, they had to play by the rules of the middle class, while at the same time critiquing in and their place in it.”

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study not only showed how many Latino fathers are engaged in their children’s education, even if they have to fight *contra la corriente*, but also the different roles they take on: cultivators, critics, defenders, and advocates. To further support the educational outcomes of Latina/o students, it is important for schools and communities to intentionally partner with fathers. Understanding these different roles serves as a necessary first step to accomplish this.

Read the [full study](#).

# The Development and Sustainability of School-Based Parent Networks in Low-Income Latinx Communities: A Mixed Methods Investigation

David Rangel, Megan N. Shoji, and Adam Gamoran • 2020

**SUMMARY:** Interviews and survey data with 3,000 low-income, Latinx families reveal how the size and quality of parent networks change over time in the presence of Families and Schools Together (FAST), a family engagement program. This study identifies the factors that lead to building high-quality networks of mutual support: trust, expressing care and respect, and reciprocity.

**BACKGROUND:** Although schools play a central role in connecting families, there appears to be a disconnect between schools and low-income Latinx families. This study addresses two questions: How do parents meet other parents—and does a program designed to facilitate their connections make a difference? What conditions nourish more trusting relationships among parents?

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** To investigate how parents describe meeting other parents in the elementary school community, the authors used in-depth structured interviews and quantitative survey data. In the parent interviews, the authors asked about what conditions they feel are critical for trusting relationships to develop. The data came from a randomized controlled trial of FAST, an after-school program that engages families in group activities.

**FINDINGS:** When people say they “know” another person, they still might not be “friends.” Friends have trusting relationships and provide each other material, social, or emotional support.

In a typical school, parents meet others as they pick up and drop off their children at school. Schools are rarely mentioned as connectors to other families. FAST increased the quality of relationships among parents from first through third grade. Once parents no longer took part in the FAST program, however, the ratings of quality relationships reverted to about the same as the comparison schools. This suggests that few schools provide opportunities for parents to meet and interact in ways that yield supportive networks.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The struggle that urban schools face to engage parents may stem from relying on traditional forms of engagement, such as parent-teacher organizations and school volunteer programs. Such efforts fail to address structural obstacles, such as language barriers, trouble navigating complex institutions, and economic constraints. To build families’ social capital by developing networks of close friendships requires a level of connection that allows parents to determine trustworthiness, express care and respect for one another, and exchange favors. Most common events at school are not designed to do this, and parents report they rarely talk to others at such events.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The authors exhort schools to provide frequent opportunities for parents to meet and interact throughout the year, including facilitated get-to-know-you activities. Schools can also open a parent room with books and toys to borrow, informational materials, and informal discussion groups where families can gather when they come to school.

Read the [full study](#).

## Parental Involvement and Children's School Success

Arthur Reynolds and Melissa Clements • 2005

**SUMMARY:** This long-term, quantitative study of the Chicago Parent Centers documents a significant, even dramatic, relationship between parent engagement and positive social and academic outcomes for children. Children whose parents took part in the program had a 21 percent higher graduation rate than children who did not have that advantage.

**BACKGROUND:** Chicago Parent Centers (CPC) is a center-based, early intervention program that provides education and family support services to low-income children and parents from ages 3–9. The theory of change is that children's readiness for school can be enriched through family support and language-learning activities. Direct parent involvement in CPC is designed to enhance parent-child interactions, parent and child attachment to school, social support among parents, and children's school readiness and social adjustment.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The Chicago Longitudinal Study data base for this study consists of 1,539 low-income children—93 percent African American—who took part in Chicago Child-Parent Center program (beginning in 1983–84) and a matched comparison group enrolled in an alternative kindergarten intervention. The study continued for 17 years.

**FINDINGS:** CPC participation at ages three or four is associated with educational and social outcomes that continue up to 18 years after the end of intervention. The longer parents took part in the program, and the more they were involved at school, the more likely their children were to complete high school, and the less likely they were to repeat a grade, be arrested, or require special education. Participation in the CPC program contributed to children's motivation, cognitive ability, social adjustment, family support, and school support.

The researchers estimate that the cost-benefit of the CPC program would save seven dollars for every dollar invested in the preschool component, through reductions in remedial education and criminal justice costs. About \$2 out of the \$7 can be attributed to the family support program. Every year that a parent remains involved in their child's learning (as rated by teachers) brings a 16 percent increase in the odds of high school completion.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Reynolds and Clements find that programs that provide child education and intensive resources for parent engagement yield greater and longer-lasting benefits than many efforts that consume a larger share of public spending (e.g., small class size, after-school programs, and dropout prevention). It is important, however, that early education programs be high quality: they should span at least the first five years of life, include well-trained preschool teachers and content to promote children's literacy learning, and feature intensive family involvement activities.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The striking results of this study have deep implications for how districts and schools use their federal Title I funds, at least one percent of which must be used to engage families. The Chicago Parent-Child Centers program is funded largely from this source. It is important to ask how a school district is using its Title I money, and what impact on children's learning and development is the current strategy having.

# Principal Leadership for School, Family, and Community Partnerships: The Role of a Systems Approach to Reform Implementation

Mavis G. Sanders • 2014

**SUMMARY:** This article depicts how two school districts (one urban, one suburban) engaged in a systems approach to family-school-community engagement reform developed by the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). The author describes how district-level expectations, policies, and practices affected principals' leadership and action around family and community engagement.

**BACKGROUND:** To understand how district leaders implemented and scaled the NNPS approach to family-school-community partnerships, Sanders designed a five-year qualitative study in four districts across the United States. The focus of this article are District 3, an urban district, and District 4, a suburban district. Data collection included a phenomenological, semi-structured focus group and informal interviews; observations of workshops, meetings, presentations, and other work-related activities of district-level participants; district and NNPS document collection and review; and site visits to schools participating in the NNPS programming.

**FINDINGS:** Sanders found that superintendents and school board members in District 3 and District 4 supported systemwide implementation of the NNPS reform in multiple ways, including attending NNPS district events and activities, using NNPS language and principles in districtwide communications and policies, and allocating funding for NNPS coordinators. Principals who embraced the NNPS reform did so to improve their schools around school climate, student grades, and student attendance. Sanders notes that this buy-in did not occur overnight. Instead, they were facilitated by district coordinators, with the support of superintendents and school board members, and their in-depth professional development sessions where they informed principals about the different elements of the NNPS reform. Buy-in was also sustained by publicly celebrating efforts and achievements.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study underlines the importance of a systems-level approach to educational reform: The investment of district leadership in the work of the NNPS led to improved family-school-community partnerships. Additionally, the essential role of NNPS coordinators in this reform highlights the importance of having individuals at the district level focus on partnership work. Their work modeling collaborations with families and community members, doing professional development sessions, and holding principals accountable to school goals led to positive outcomes. This is how, according to Sanders, external reforms can be established and scaled up. Regarding the role of principals, within a systems approach, principal resistance can be reduced and buy-in increased by establishing systems of support and setting accountability measures.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study illustrates the importance of district-level leadership in the implementation of school reforms: it shows that when school-family-community is valued and invested in at the district level, positive outcomes emerge.

## Student Outcomes and Parent-Teacher Home Visits

Steven B. Sheldon and Sol Bee Jung • 2018

**SUMMARY:** This report is the final in a three-study national evaluation of the Parent-Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) model. Schools that systematically implemented PTHV saw decreased rates of student chronic absence and increased rates of ELA and math proficiency. Students whose families were visited were less likely to be chronically absent and to reach proficiency on ELA tests, compared to students whose families did not receive visits. Findings support the implementation of PTHV as an evidence-based family engagement approach to student outcomes.

**BACKGROUND:** At the center of the PTHV model is the essential role of family-school partnerships. The model focuses on developing and nurturing these relationships and partnerships by building trust and communication and collaborating for student success. PTHV is implemented in over 700 communities in 25 states. Each of these locations develops its own context-specific collaboration between local partners and school districts, community organizations, and teachers' unions. This study focuses on student chronic absenteeism and proficiency in reading and math.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** This study focuses on four large, highly diverse districts across the United States. One district is in the Mountain region, one in the Mid-Atlantic region, and two in the West. Researchers had access to data for over 100,000 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, attending hundreds of schools. The first analysis compared outcomes of schools that conducted home visits with at least 10 percent of students' families to those of schools that conducted fewer or no home visits with families. The second focused on the relationship between individual student outcomes and home visits.

**FINDINGS:** Sheldon and Jung found that the implementation of the PTHV model can support positive outcomes for students and improved rates of attendance and learning at schools. School-level outcomes included decreased chronic absence, improved ELA performance, and improved math performance.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study, along with the two previous studies evaluating PTHV, support existing research that suggests that family engagement supports student success. Specifically, these studies support the implementation of the PTHV model which focuses on the development of relationships, trust, and open communication between schools and students' families. Put differently, these studies support the implementation of the PTHV model as an evidence-based family engagement approach to improve student outcomes.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This study further illustrates the potential of home visits. A key element to remember about the PTHV model is the importance of fidelity to the five core elements—these set the foundation of the development of relational trust between educators and families. Future studies should consider evaluating other student outcomes.

# Family Engagement and Its Impact During Distance Learning: Follow-up Report

TalkingPoints • 2021

**SUMMARY:** TalkingPoints, a multilingual platform that helps parents and educators communicate, conducted a survey in June 2021 to gauge how family-teacher communication impacted the learning experience after a year of distance learning.

**BACKGROUND:** TalkingPoints' mission centers around advancing effective family-school partnerships by facilitating meaningful relationship- and capacity-building between parents and teachers. It is a two-way messaging and personalized content platform that helps parents and teachers communicate in more than 100 languages.

**STUDY DESIGN:** TalkingPoints conducted a survey in June 2021 of 940 families and 497 teachers, all of whom were users of the TalkingPoints platform and generally reflected the nonprofit's clientele demographic. English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking families were surveyed for their perspectives on communication, family engagement, and the value and impact of family-teacher relationships over the recent period of distance or hybrid learning.

**FINDINGS:** Survey results yielded four key findings: 1) Both teachers and families view family-teacher communication as a top priority; 2) Frequent communication helps student learning and well-being, especially for students from non-English-speaking families; 3) Conversations that built a deeper understanding of family needs and circumstances increased student success; and 4) There are disconnects and areas for improvement in communication between teachers and families.

**CONCLUSION:** Through TalkingPoints' multilingual platform, teachers and families were able to strengthen communication and build relationships during the pandemic. Educators increasingly see the value of family-school partnerships in supporting student learning, particularly for families who do not speak English at home, and the distance learning conditions highlighted how this engagement led to improvements in student learning and holistic development. Increasing equity and understanding through accessible, empowering communication across language barriers is key to student success.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This report captures the experiences of teachers and parents on either side of these relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they leveraged their learnings for more collaborative and supportive relationships in the future. Connections could be built remotely, and two-way lines of communication were more important than ever before as students returned to the classroom after more than a year of alienation and trauma. Remote learning was able to bridge the gap between home and school through teacher-family communication. Moving in the direction of post-pandemic education, the key will be to maintain and strengthen school-family relationships for more equitable and effective schooling environments.

Read the [full study](#).

## The Impact of Family Involvement on the Education of Children Ages 3 to 8: A Focus on Literacy and Math Achievement Outcomes and Social-Emotional Skills

Francis L. Van Voorhis, Michelle F. Maier, Joyce L. Epstein, and Chrishana M. Lloyd • 2013

**SUMMARY:** This literature review summarizes 95 research studies conducted between 2000–2012 “on how families’ involvement in children’s learning and development through activities at home and at school affects the literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional skills of children ages 3 to 8” (p. iii).

**BACKGROUND:** While the positive link between family involvement and student outcomes is well-established, it is still unclear how exactly family influence at home affects children’s learning, as well as how the establishment of family-school partnerships can lead to positive outcomes. This report reviews the existing research on how family involvement activities at both home and school, including family-school partnerships, affect young children’s literacy, math, and social-emotional skills.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Comprising the sample are 95 studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2012 with samples of more than 30 subjects. These include nonexperimental, experimental, and quasi-experimental studies that examined aspects of family involvement in literacy, math, and social-emotional development for children ages 3–8.

**FINDINGS:** Overall, studies indicate that family involvement positively trends with literacy and math skills in preschool, kindergarten, and early elementary grades. Future research is needed to better understand the impact of family involvement on young children’s literacy and math skills, as well as their readiness for school. Parents engaging with their children in a variety of reading and math activities trended with improved outcomes in each subject. Parents from all backgrounds across the studies showed that, with guidance, they were “interested in and able to conduct learning activities at home with their young children” (p. ES-3). In order to guide parents in how to best support their children’s learning, schools and stakeholders must actively engage all families, and make this inclusion part of schools’ or programs’ guiding philosophies.

**CONCLUSION:** The collection of studies in this review conclude that parent involvement is possible and beneficial across all family backgrounds, and they highlight which areas could be improved and better understood through further research, as well as how this research should inform practice.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** This meta-analysis establishes that across studies, intervention efforts to engage parents from all backgrounds can be effective when providing them guidance and direction on how to support their children’s learning. Schools should focus on equitably engaging all families in order to achieve early childhood development outcomes across the board, which may work to shrink and eliminate achievement gaps.

Read the [full study](#).

# Parent-Teacher Home Visits Implementation Study

Nitya Venkateswaran, Jennifer Laird, Jessica Robles, and Jennifer Jeffries • 2018

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study, done in four large urban school districts, explored the effectiveness of five core practices that define the Parent-Teacher Home Visits model. Most educators, administrators, and family members agreed that all five practices were key to creating positive, collaborative relationships between families and educators. The report also includes useful implementation tips for each practice, which could be broadly applied in the family engagement field.

**BACKGROUND:** The Parent-Teacher Home Visits (PTHV) program is spreading rapidly across the United States. The second in a series of three, this study examines the program's effectiveness in building productive relationships between families and educators, and in improving student outcomes as a result. All three studies were done in the same four urban school districts, all serving mostly students of color from low-income families. All participating sites follow five core practices:

- Visits are voluntary for both educators and families.
- Teachers are trained in how to make the visits and compensated for their time.
- The focus of the first visit is relationship-building, not solving academic or behavior issues.
- Students are not targeted. All students, or a cross-section, receive a visit.
- Educators conduct visits in pairs and reflect afterwards with their partners.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The authors collected data from two main sources: (1) interviews from three or four schools in each of four large districts implementing PTHV, and (2) video observations of a PTHV training from each district. Participating in interviews were a total of 187 people: 105 teachers and staff members, 59 adult family members, 13 school administrators, 8 central office administrators, and 2 PTHV founders.

**FINDINGS:** Most educators, administrators, and family members agreed that the five core practices ensured that home visits resulted in positive relationships between educators and families. The interviews and observations yielded useful information about how to implement PTHV, from the district level to individual schools.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The interviews with teachers, family members, and administrators affirm the importance of the model's five core practices. As a result, the authors conclude that these practices should remain "non-negotiables" of the model. Not only are these practices central to the PTHV design, but they also are essential to its successful implementation.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The trust that emerges from deep and respectful conversation between families and teachers is the soil in which other efforts to improve student learning can take root. These studies on PTHV strongly suggest that taking the time to have one-on-one, relationship-building conversations centered on the shared goal of student success is well worth the investment.

## A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform

Mark R. Warren and Karen L. Mapp • 2011

**SUMMARY:** This multi-case qualitative study provides an understanding of the methods, processes, and capacities through which community organizing works to create and support equity- and justice-oriented school reform. The study reveals how organizing groups build the participation and leadership of parents and students to become powerful actors in school improvement efforts and how community organizing builds powerful relationships that lead to the transformational change necessary to advance educational equity and a robust democracy.

**BACKGROUND:** The study was designed to build on and add to existing research by identifying and examining the key processes through which organizing groups worked to bring parents, young people, community residents, and educators together to build the capacity for change. The purpose of the study was to dig deeply into the “how” of organizing and gain a deeper understanding of the definition, traditions, processes, and strategies of education organizing.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** The study was undertaken as a collaborative qualitative effort among faculty members and graduate students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Student researchers formed six case teams and shaped a research process authentic to each locality. On average, each team conducted about 50 formal, one-hour, in-depth interviews with participants at the research sites. Teams also spoke informally with individuals and conducted a small number of focus groups. Teams analyzed their data and wrote the case chapters for the book.

**FINDINGS:** The book offers a framework to help understand different forms of community organizing. The researchers chose the metaphor of a tree to represent aspects of community organizing, for example, that organizing is a phenomenon that grows and develops and that organizing efforts take time to mature through intentional cultivation and nurturing.

The study found that strong forms of organizing achieve transformation at three levels: the individual, the community, and at the institutional level.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The study argues that community organizing offers a powerful alternative to the top-down, expert-driven approach typical of many educational reform efforts. Contrary to some views of community organizing efforts, organizing begins with conversation at the ground level, and builds broad participation among parents, young people, and community residents, as well as teachers and educators who often feel voiceless during reform initiatives. Through the process of organizing, all members of a school community have an opportunity to have “ownership of the process of change,” resulting in change efforts that are deep and lasting.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Organizing provides the “how” of connecting reform to the process of achieving social justice. This analysis of the six community organizing groups in this study offers important lessons and strategy examples for those serious about co-design, inclusivity, and how to engage and include families, young people, and community members in the process of educational reform meaningfully and equitably.

# From Private Citizens to Public Actors: The Development of Parent Leaders Through Community Organizing

Mark R. Warren, Karen L. Mapp, and Paul Kuttner • 2015

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study explores how community organizing strategies can help individual parents activate their capacities to be leaders in schools and communities. Through the stories of two parent leaders, the authors identify six key processes through which parents emerged as public leaders and advocates in their school communities.

**BACKGROUND:** A growing body of research looks to community organizing strategies as ways to meaningfully engage families in education, as these groups focus on helping people build the capacity to work together and make change for themselves. This emphasis on building social capital and fostering leadership development with parents is particularly effective in communities that face structural racial and class inequalities that limit engagement with their public schools.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** Data is drawn from research conducted as part of a multicase study on community organizing and school reform that culminated in Warren and Mapp's *A Match on Dry Grass* (see Warren et al., 2011). "From Private Citizens to Public Actors" explores the experiences and reflections of two parents in the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. Analysis is supplemented by quotes from other parents who participated in the larger study.

**FINDINGS:** Organizing groups enabled parents to undergo transformational change from private citizens to public actors and change agents through six processes: listening, building parent community, mentoring, encouraging risk-taking, learning through action, and linking the personal and political.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This study highlights the importance of engaging families on a personal, collaborative level in order to work toward educational equity. The study illustrates how the problems in public schools are rooted in structural inequalities that need to be addressed by organizing from the ground up. Community organizing strategies that offer parents avenues to personal transformation and solidarity-building lay the groundwork for educational improvement through shared collective power.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** The insights laid out here provide a road map to scaffolding transformational change in parents by centering their voices and experiences. Their stories provide lived examples of how community organizing strategies can activate the capacities of the actors necessary to organic change in both schools and the community at large.

Read the [full study](#).

## Evaluation of the FASTalk Program in Oakland Unified School District

Keith Welch • 2018

**SUMMARY:** This quasi-experimental study evaluated the impact of FASTalk, a school-home text-messaging program designed to improve English Language learning. During the 2017–2018 school year, teachers in 11 mostly Latinx kindergarten and transition-K classes in Oakland, California, sent parents text messages three times a week with tips and activities. After seven months, FASTalk students made between 0.5 and 1.1 months of additional growth compared to students in a matched group whose families did not participate. Students whose home language was different from their teacher’s made even greater gains. Finally, students whose families participated more fully, sending at least five messages back to teachers, did better than FASTalk students whose families responded less often.

**BACKGROUND:** The FASTalk program in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) used text messages to help families learn strategies to support literacy development in their pre-K and kindergarten children. At the beginning of the 2017–18 school year, Family Engagement Lab trained 41 OUSD transitional kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Each teacher personally signed up families to participate in the program. FASTalk then developed three text messages per week that teachers sent to enrolled parents. These messages contained developmentally appropriate literacy information and activities for parents to engage with their child. All messages were translated into the family’s home language.

**DESIGN OF STUDY:** This evaluation used a quasi-experimental research design called “propensity score matching” to estimate the effect of the FASTalk program on the students’ early literacy development. The evaluation examined the effect of the program on student growth using an index of early literacy–related standards-based report card scores over seven months, from November 2017 to June 2018.

**FINDINGS:** The estimated effect of FASTalk was between 0.5 and 1.1 months of additional growth. Students whose home language differed from their teacher’s language grew by an estimated 1.64 to 2.78 more months on the literacy report card index. Students whose parents sent at least five messages to the FASTalk program grew by an estimated 1.94 to 2.14 more months on the literacy report card index than a matched comparison group whose parents sent fewer messages.

**CONCLUSIONS:** FASTalk appears to be as effective with ELL students as with English-speaking students. Not only did students in the program make gains significantly greater than matched comparison group students, but also those students whose parents participate more frequently made even greater gains.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIELD:** Text-messaging communications programs can build parent-teacher collaboration to foster young children’s literacy skills, if they are aligned with the school’s literacy program and foster two-way exchange. Teachers can implement these programs easily and with little effort.

Read the [full study](#).