



Indicator Explanation



DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Culture	Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning	4A.1 A team led by a member of the administration and including teacher and family representatives oversees school-home relationships, especially policies and practices that engage families in support of student learning.

Comprehensive engagement of students' families, including seeking parental input for the School Leadership Team/School Improvement Team, exerts influences on the individual families of students and on the operation of the school itself, resulting in positive learning outcomes for both individual students and the for the student body as a whole.

Are family members of currently enrolled students (who are not school or district employees) included on the School Leadership Team? How well do we listen to the voices of parents/family members when making school leadership decisions?

Partnership requires sharing power. The starting point for teachers and administrators is to see families as partners and not simply as clients or guests. All partners must have a voice in school affairs, including decisions about budgets, school programs and personnel, changes in curriculum and instruction, and student behavior. (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 188)

Sheldon (2016) notes, "Efforts to improve schools and student achievement need to devote attention to the manner in which schools are communicating and engaging families and to consider these practices an important part of any movement to reform and improve school systems." (p. 46). Research and best practices from exemplary districts exhibit the need for all schools, whether they are under Title I regulations or not, to develop a shared vision of family engagement (Henderson et al., 2007; Westmoreland et al., 2009). It is necessary to go beyond a compliance-driven approach; schools that lack a systematic approach to design and implementation of parent/family involvement efforts will be ineffective in improving student outcomes (Mattingly et al., 2002; Paredes et al., 2012). Listening to the voices of both satisfied and dissatisfied parents can help schools recognize areas of strength and areas in need of improvement (Wanat, 2010). In a study by Leithwood and Mascall (2008), higher-achieving schools shared leadership to a greater degree than lower-achieving schools, and the differences were most significant when examining leadership exercised by school teams, parents, and students.

Research has established the important role of the family in student learning, achievement, and mental health/social and emotional adjustment (Barger et al., 2019; Castro et al., 2015; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Redding et al., 2004; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Further, studies "reveal that there is a demonstrable connection between family engagement, school improvement, and student outcomes" (Wood & Bauman, 2017, p. 21). The figure below depicts relationships among student, family, and school variables and their effects on student learning outcomes (from Redding et al., 2004):

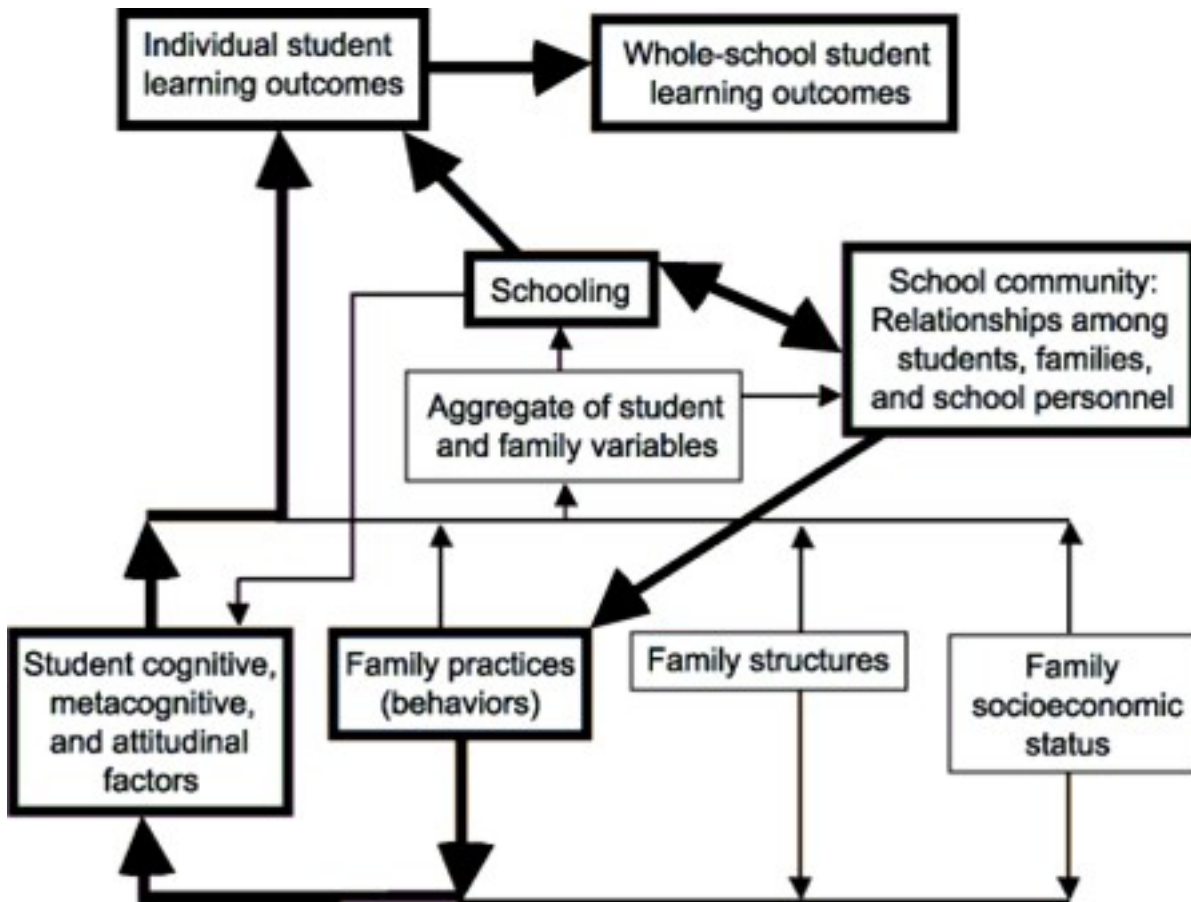


Figure 1. Note: Bold lines show path of malleable variables the school can influence to improve student learning outcomes.

Comprehensive engagement of students' families, including seeking parental input for the School Leadership Team/School Improvement Team, exerts influences in two directions (see the box titled "School community: Relationships among students, families, and school personnel" in the above figure): on the individual families of students, and on the operation of the school itself. "The cumulative effects of more frequent and higher quality interactions among teachers and parents are a greater reservoir of trust and respect, increased social capital for children, and a school community more supportive of each child's school success. Community-based organizations and schools will be most effective in engaging families in their children's education if their efforts are comprehensive, focused, and coherent," resulting in significant learning gains (Redding et al., 2004, p. 6). Schools can cultivate justice-based approaches to family engagement that position parents and families as fellow leaders in transforming schools and school systems to better serve children, families, and communities (Ishimaru et al., 2019).

Representation before the School Leadership Team may be individual parents/family members of currently enrolled students (not employees of the school district) or may be representatives from a School Community Council or similar school-based team that has a majority of members being parents, along with teacher, administrator, and community representatives. The National Network of Partnership Schools calls their version an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and recommends that:

At least one member of the ATP should also be a member of the School Improvement Team (SIT) so that partnership efforts are in concert with other school improvement efforts. The ATP chair should



communicate with the school principal and attend SIT meetings. A primary responsibility of the ATP is to construct an annual action plan in the spring that will coordinate, guide, and document the family and community engagement efforts the following school year. (Sheldon, 2011, p. 100)

In research conducted with exemplary School Community Councils (or SCCs) in middle schools in Utah, it was found that administrators' leadership—including providing timely data and sharing decision-making—was a key factor in success. At one such middle school:

All SCC members were able to engage in questioning proposals, obtain expert opinions, openly discuss, and members were empowered to make the decisions. Of critical importance to building confidence in the M2 SCC was the principal's leadership in supporting the SCC and the members' engagement in the school improvement process. (Nygaard, p. 151)

The School Community Council can look at the connections between the school and the families it serves and make recommendations for strengthening the School Improvement Plan's emphasis on family-school connections (ADI, 2011; Latunde, 2018). This council works in cooperation with other groups and organizations in the school, and the work is typically behind the scenes, planning activities and maintaining a focus on the mutual roles of the family and the school in promoting school community goals such as reading, studying, and responsible behavior (ADI, 2011). Henderson et al. (2007) offer the following suggestions to begin to involve parents in leadership and to engage a greater number of families:

One way for your action team to start is to hold a town meeting or a series of discussion groups to plan workable ways for teachers and other staff, parents, and students to express concerns and take part in decision making.... Ask all participants for their ideas about how to strengthen the school's links to families and community members. Offer other opportunities to invite suggestions such as homeroom discussions, parent association meetings, or surveys that older students or parents could design and administer. (p. 188)

Shared or distributed leadership is a common element in school improvement research and practice (Stefanski et al., 2016; Walberg, 2007). Unfortunately, too often this merely means distributing decision-making among various administrators and perhaps a few lead teachers.

Sharing leadership with parents breaks new ground in many schools, but where it is prevalent, research demonstrates its power in boosting school improvement (Moore, 1998; Redding & Sheley, 2005). (Henderson & Redding, 2011, pp. 105)

Henderson & Redding (2011) go on to describe how parents or other family members may be nurtured as leaders for a variety of purposes:

Deciding

1. Providing input to critical school decisions about curriculum, instruction, schedules, resource allocation, student services, school leadership, and co-curricular programs.
2. Making decisions, setting guidelines, developing plans, and implementing activities related to areas where the responsibility of the school and the home overlap.

Organizing

1. Planning and administering open houses, family-school nights, transition nights, college and career fairs, and other school events.
2. Building a strong, broad-based parent organization that can serve to create an inclusive school community, formulate positions, build consensus, develop proposals, and select leaders to serve on decision-making groups such as a school council or school improvement team.

Engaging

1. Providing outreach to engage other parents in support of their children's learning and in assisting with the school's functions.



2. Convening groups of parents in homes to meet with teachers in “home gatherings.”
3. Organizing and conducting home visits, community walks, and other opportunities to build collaborative relationships between families and school staff.

Educating

1. Serving as leaders to facilitate workshops and courses for parents.
2. Participating in professional development for teachers related to teachers’ work with families
3. Planning and providing training for school personnel to make the school a more welcoming place.
4. Planning and providing training for volunteers who work in the school.

Advocating and Connecting

1. Advocating on behalf of the school and families with community and political leaders and groups.
2. Connecting school staff, students, and families to community resources for the benefit of the school and its families.

The personal benefits derived by parents in leadership roles also flow to their children and to the school itself. Parents and families acquire skills, confidence, and a sense of self-efficacy. Researchers Lee Shumow and Richard Lomax, in *Parental Efficacy: Predictor of Parenting Behavior and Adolescent Outcomes* (2001), show the connection between parents’ sense of efficacy and their children’s higher achievement in school. (Henderson & Redding, 2011, pp. 105–106)

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