Beyond Involvement and Engagement: The Role of the Family in School–Community Partnerships

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Abstract

Research indicates that partnerships between schools and neighborhood communities support student learning, improve schools, and strengthen families and neighborhoods. These partnerships expand the traditional educational mission of the school to include health and social services for children and their families and to involve the broader community. School–community partnerships typically arise out of a specific need in the community and, as such, differ across a range of processes, structures, purposes, and types of family involvement. In previous work, we developed a typology to more closely examine various school–community partnerships (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2013). From that review of the literature, we identified four increasingly complex and comprehensive partnership models. In this article, we reexamine the literature, focusing on the role of the family in those partnership models, and discuss implications for productive family–school–community relations. Our analysis of the literature indicates that the role of parents and families differed considerably across the four models. In contrast to the simple family *involvement* versus family *engagement* dichotomy found in much of the current literature, we found eight distinct ways in which family roles were envisioned and enacted. This article provides a detailed picture of those roles to guide policies and practices that strengthen the family's role in school–community partnerships.

Key Words: involvement, engagement, family role, school–community partnerships, models, parents, full service community schools, wraparound services, development, interagency collaboration, families, linked

Introduction

School–community partnerships have long been viewed as a promising way to help struggling students, families, and neighborhoods. In the Progressive Era, the local school was commonly viewed as the community's central institution (Dewey, 1902). Schools served as places where community members could hear lectures, debate about civic issues, and use the facility for recreation at night, on weekends, and during school breaks. Social reformers from outside the school system—including muckrakers, activists, public health doctors, women's clubs, and settlement-house workers—sought to improve the lives of children and families in the school setting. These reformers advocated for a larger role of government in helping poor families and for more services at the school site, both during and outside the regular school day (Tyack, 1992). A few of the many new services were vocational guidance, lunches, playgrounds, sex education, health programs, and vacation schools (Cohen, 2005; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1985; Tyack, 1992). A variety of community associations worked with and within these community schools. Sometimes these working relationships took the form of mutual partnerships; at other times, the relationship resembled a patronage system, with a foundation or influential organization bestowing aid on a needy community.

Influenced in large part by the seminal work of Joy Dryfoos, the early 1990s witnessed a resurgence of the community school movement. Working in the public health sector, Dryfoos (1994) argued that schools cannot meet the needs of students on their own, but must coordinate with social service systems and become "full-service schools." A year later, the president of the American Educational Research Association advanced this agenda, advocating for a new paradigm of schooling, a paradigm that linked "health, social welfare, juvenile justice, extended day educational opportunities, [and] community participation" (Stallings, 1995, p. 8). More recently, neighborhood transformation efforts such as the Harlem Children's Zone as well as grant competitions such as the Choice Neighborhoods, Full-Service Community Schools, and Promise Neighborhood programs have renewed interest in this paradigm. The Promise Neighborhood grant competition, for example, required school–community partners to develop an integrated system of educational programs and family/community supports "with great schools at the center" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

As Harris and Hoover (2003) have written, Dryfoos's work "became a rallying point" for those striving to advance partnership agendas (p. 206). Today, community schools and similar collaborative initiatives rely on numerous types of partners to support their efforts. In some cases, organizations such as the Children's Aid Society (Communities in Schools [CIS], 2010) take the lead in establishing the focus of the partnership. In other cases, school districts initiate partnerships with one or more organizations. In the city of Boston, for instance, the public school system has had a long-standing partnership with the Full-Service Schools Roundtable, a coalition of over 150 members (Weiss & Siddall, 2012). A driving assumption behind each of these partnerships is that the expansion of the academic mission of the school to include health and social services for children and families and to involve the broader community will benefit both individuals and society. Indeed, such partnerships have been found to support student learning, improve schools, and assist families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014; Walsh et al., 2014).

But in the struggle to define the movement, exactly how are partnership roles conceptualized and enacted? The general theory of action underlying partnerships provides the beginning of the answer: Positing that schools serve students' academic needs better if they can quickly and efficiently attend to the overall health and well-being of children and their families (Epstein, 1995; Krenichyn, Clark, & Benitez, 2008), partnership advocates push for a closer working relationship with parents and family members. In this article, we review the literature on the ways in which school–community partnerships have included families. Our goal is to provide a more detailed understanding of "closer working relationships" that, as the theory of action suggests, should result in an array of social and academic benefits. We begin with the developmental and sociological perspectives that underlie this theory of action. We then review the previous literature on parent involvement, explain the typology of partnerships we developed, and analyze findings on family roles within the four partnership models.

Perspectives and Frameworks: Family Roles

Developmental theorists emphasize the multiple and interrelated dimensions of human development: physical, psychological, social, cognitive, ethical, and linguistic. They also argue for an ecological perspective on human development, that is, examining the environmental contexts (peer, family, school, neighborhood, etc.) that support or impede healthy development and learning, as well as the interactions among them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). In their ecological orientation, developmentalists intersect with sociological perspectives that point to the persistent

impact of social capital on student achievement. Defining social capital as networks of supportive relationships and resources that make goal achievement possible (Bourdieu, 1986), sociologists argue that good health, family and community support, and employment prospects are key factors in students' academic success (Jencks, 1992; Rothstein, 2004; Wilson, 1999). Bringing those two traditions together, Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres emphasizes the importance of schools, families, and communities working together to meet the needs of children. More specifically, a central principle of the theory is that certain goals (e.g., academic achievement) are of mutual interest to people in each of the three spheres and, therefore, are best achieved through cooperative action and support.

Combined, these perspectives provide a powerful rationale for schools *not* operating as entities separate from family and community contexts, which is the current norm of U.S. public schools, especially in high-poverty neighborhoods. In addition, family involvement is supported by a substantial body of research that links it to children's academic, social, and emotional development (Banerjee, Harrell, & Johnson, 2011; Farkas & Grolnick, 2010; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Jeynes, 2012; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Weiss & Stephen, 2009). There are different frameworks, however, for describing this involvement. Gordon (1977), for example, identified six types of parent involvement: parents as bystanders, decision-makers (e.g., PTA participation), classroom volunteers, paid paraprofessionals, learners, and teachers at home. One of the most commonly used frameworks, developed from Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres, outlines six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. McNeal (2001) provided a framework that focused on four elements: parent–child discussion, monitoring, involvement in school and classroom activities, and participation in school organizations.

More recently, there has been a shift away from what some call mere parental *involvement* toward the broader, more inclusive notion of parental *engagement* (see, e.g., Harvard Family Research Project, 2014). Ferlazzo (2011) explained that a school striving for involvement "leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute" while a school aiming for engagement "lead[s] with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about....not to serve clients but to gain partners" (p. 12). Ishimaru (2014) similarly criticized the involvement approach for being based in deficit assumptions about parents and called for it to be replaced with an approach that views parents as resources and collaborators.

This shift has also been recognized in the language used by federal programs. For example, Head Start (2014) defined *parental involvement* as participation

in a variety of activities developed or implemented by family services staff and often measured by such outputs as the number of parents who attend a meeting. In contrast, *family engagement* is defined as goal-directed relationships between staff and families that are ongoing and culturally responsive; family and staff members share responsibility and mutually support what is best for children and families (Head Start, 2014). Evaluation focuses on evidence of family progress in a number of broad areas (e.g., well-being, advocacy, learning, connections). In addition, the U.S. Department of Education recently released a framework designed not only to help schools and districts engage parents as part of the process to increase student achievement, but also to provide a model for how to build effective community engagement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The authors of the framework depicted how, in effective partnerships, families negotiate multiple roles including supporters, encouragers, monitors, advocates, decision-makers, and collaborators.

As Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) described it, engagement encourages "parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching, and learning with teachers' knowledge" (p. 13); parent engagement rather than involvement, they argue, allows schools to move away from the "typical hierarchical structure of power" (p. 15). But language and practice, or conceptualization and enactment, do not necessarily change at the same time. As noted by Price-Mitchell (2009), "the shift in language [from involvement to engagement] has yet to change the fragmented focus of the research, and many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement" (p. 13). Further, to complicate the issue, researchers do not use these terms consistently, so there may be times when authors use the term "involvement" but in actuality are discussing what Ferlazzo (2011), Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005), and others would call engagement—or vice versa.

Despite the fact that families are widely viewed as an essential component of school–community partnerships, our review of the partnership literature indicates that neither the current "involvement vs. engagement" distinction nor the different frameworks of involvement (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Gordon, 1977; McNeal, 2001) fully capture the range of family roles. In this article, we argue that carefully delineating the various types of school–community partnerships is a helpful first step in obtaining a comprehensive picture of the roles families actually can fill. We first present the typology of school–community partnerships we previously developed to examine factors that facilitated and impeded partnership success (Valli et al., 2013). We then analyze family roles within each type and discuss the implications for fostering productive family relations in these types of partnerships.

Research Methodology

Even though school–community partnerships are generally inspired by a common vision, a host of terms such as *full-service schools*, *wraparound services*, and *community schools* are often used interchangeably to describe quite different types of partnerships, complicating efforts to comparatively analyze them. Therefore, when the three of us began our initial review of the literature, we identified studies related to school–community partnerships through an electronic search of ERIC and EBSCO by using this range of terms as well as broader terms such as *school–community partnerships* and *community–school linked services.*

We then conducted ancestral searches using the articles initially identified for inclusion. Additionally, when articles appeared in themed journal issues or particular journals became regular sources, we searched through those in order to identify other sources of information. Finally, we contacted several community school and partnership agencies whose work had consistently appeared in our searches to identify relevant studies and documents that had been published for the organization and did not appear in peer-reviewed journals. Throughout this process we used inclusionary and exclusionary criteria (e.g., rigor and relevance) for final selections (Boote & Beile, 2005); classified sources as descriptive, empirical, or research syntheses; and created a comprehensive table tracking research questions, methods, and findings (see Valli et al., 2013 for a detailed account).

In several instances, we found multiple articles written about a single partnership. We sorted these articles into "sets" of sources (e.g., three different studies about the implementation of the Comer School Development Program are collectively referred to as one "set"). A total of 39 sets of sources were identified through these processes. For this analysis, we draw on only those sources that explicitly discuss the role of family (i.e., functions family members are expected to perform in relation to the school) in order to ensure that the findings were drawn from specific examples rather than our own conjecture. We also included the broader school–family relationship literature discussed above to provide context for our more focused examination of the family's role in the various types of school–community collaborations. This broader literature examines how and why schools, in general, have worked to establish ties with families.

Using an inductive, grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we tracked similarities and differences on key dimensions as they emerged across those sources. We noted two broad partnership dimensions that were particularly helpful in characterizing the various models: (a) overall purpose or scope, and (b) organizational change requirements. As recommended for comparatively analyzing and interpreting sources for a literature review (Onwuegbuzie,

Leech, & Collins, 2012), we sorted the articles along those two dimensions, examining similarities and differences. During this sorting process, we found that each initiative we reviewed fit into one of four categories, distinguished by the two criteria mentioned above—purpose and change requirements. Moving from least to most comprehensive, and requiring increased degrees of commitment and change, the categories are: *Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools,* and the *Community Development* model (see Table 1).

The most basic form of partnership, *Family and Interagency Collaboration,* coordinates education, social, and health service delivery for students and families and requires organizational commitment. Going beyond collaboration, the *Full-Service School* model aims to coordinate a comprehensive array of services while, as much as possible, offering them at the school site. This expansion of purpose requires organizational change; the school actually becomes a different type of institution. *Full-Service Community Schools* continue this model but add a democratic component in which families and community members provide input as full partners, rather than simply being recipients of services. As such, these schools require both organizational and cultural change. Finally, the most comprehensive of the four models, *Community Development*, aims not only to assist students and families, but also to transform whole neighborhoods. This model goes well beyond the other three in its goals and vision and requires both interorganizational and cultural commitment and change.

Table 1. Typology of School–Community Partnerships

	Scope and Purpose	Requirements
Family and Interagency Collaboration	Coordinate service delivery	Organizational commitment
Full-Service Schools	Deliver school-based, coordinated services	Organizational commitment and change
Full-Service Community Schools	Deliver school-based, coordinated services and democratize the school with community input	Organizational and cultural commitment and change
Community Development Model	Transform the community	Interorganizational and cultural commitment and change

We are not the first to develop such a framework. Like us, others who have studied school–community partnerships have found typologizing to be a useful analytic tool for examining how various types of partnerships have been

implemented. Melaville (1998), for example, identified four approaches to school–community initiatives: services reform, youth development, community development, and school reform. More recently, Warren (2005) used the terms Service, Development, and Organizing to describe three distinct partnership models. While these and other frameworks are compelling, we decided not to simply adopt one of them for our purposes for two reasons. First, authors do not always provide the basis for their typologies (e.g., how they focused on particular dimensions to construct their categories). Second, authors develop typologies at different times and for different reasons, making their use in other contexts problematic. Melaville's purpose, for example, was to provide specific answers to policy questions such as "Who began the initiatives?" and "What activities are provided at the site level?" Warren's purpose was to identify the mechanisms by which the different types of partnerships built social capital. So instead of adopted an existing framework, we chose an inductive, grounded theory approach, described above, to develop our own.

After describing the sources we found within each of the four models, we analyzed the roles of the family within each. While the names we gave each model suggest that families are an essential component, our review made clear that the nature of the partnership constructs the role of the family in vastly different ways. And, as with the language issue described above (i.e., lack of consistency in terminology by researchers and practitioners), both our categories and the delineation of family roles within them must be considered fluid and dynamic in that various organizations (e.g., CIS) are apt to have partnerships that fit in different ways than our analysis suggests—thus, others may interchange the terms and meanings we have ascribed to them. Our goal in this article is to create a comprehensive picture of the various ways in which family roles are envisioned and enacted in order to guide successful policy and practice. Our findings indicate that as the purpose behind each of the models evolved from the coordination of *service* delivery to transforming—or *empowering*—the community, so too did the role of parents and families evolve.

Serving Parents: The Family and Interagency Collaboration Model

As described above, the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* model of partnership involves the coordination of education, social, and health service delivery for students and families. But unlike the *Full-Service* model that follows, these partnerships stop short of attempts to offer a comprehensive range of services for both family and student, focusing instead on one or two services each organization believes are most important and for which they have the resources. Also, and in contrast to *Full-Service Schools*, less attention is given to offering services directly at the school site.

Eight of our 12 total sources on the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* model addressed the role of parents and other family members (see Table 2). One source was descriptive, providing information about the Iowa School-Based Youth Services Program (Walker & Hackmann, 1999). Four were empirical studies that utilized a broad range of methodologies: a single school case study that examined the characteristics of successful partnerships (Sanders & Harvey, 2002); a three-year, quasi-experimental evaluation of afterschool programs at six Children's Aid Society community middle schools (Krenichyn et al., 2008); a statistical analysis of schools and school districts to determine the impact of leadership on family and community involvement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011); and a survey study that identified student support services and established a baseline for partnership work in the Boston Public Schools (Weiss & Siddall, 2012).

Table 2. Number of Sources/Sets of Sources (Total and Family-Related) in the Four Partnership Models

Model	Descriptive/ Conceptual		Empirical Studies		Research Syntheses		Totals	
	Total	*Family*	Total	*Family*	Total	*Family*	Total	*Family*
Family & Interagency Collaboration	1	*1*	7	*4*	4	*3*	12	*8*
Full-Service Schools	4	*0*	9	*4*	0	*0*	13	*4*
Full-Service Community Schools	3	*2*	4	*4*	0	*0*	7	*6*
Community Development Model	3	*2*	4	*4*	0	*0*	7	*6*
Total	11	*5*	24	*16*	4	*3*	39	*24*

The three remaining sources were research syntheses commissioned by sponsoring organizations. Two of these evaluated the sponsoring organization's partnership program: Communities in Schools (CIS, 2010), and Coalition for Community Schools (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003). The Communities in Schools series of studies across 5 years were conducted by an external evaluator and included a quasi-experimental design, a natural variation study, and

randomized controlled trials that examined a broad range of outcomes, while the Coalition studies were based on participant self-reports (i.e., surveys, focus groups, individual interviews) from selected partnerships. The third research synthesis, sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA), examined NEA partnership strategies to advance student learning (Henderson, 2011).

In our review of these eight total sources, we noted that the collaborating agencies emphasized two features of parent involvement over others: increased access to resources and service provision, and two-way, open communication. As we considered implications for families, we were struck by the fact that, in each case, the focus was more on serving than on involving (see Figure 1). For example, authors used language such as "provide access" (Blank et al., 2003, p. 32), "referral of families" (Weiss & Siddall, 2012, p. 2), and "[parents]…were kept aware of school activities" (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p. 1359).

We would argue that increased access to resources is the foundation of all school–community partnerships; in other words, connecting students and families to various resources and providing additional services occurs at every level in our typology. For schools within the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* category, this involves developing partnerships with the community in order to connect students and families with needed services. For example, parents whose children participated in the Communities in Schools program reported receiving direct benefits through referral to individual, case-managed social services, many of which they would not have known existed without the referral from Communities in Schools (CIS, 2010).

Blank and colleagues (2003) have asserted that these schools "typically arise as unique responses to the specific needs of their communities, [so] no two are exactly alike" (p. 2). The organizations described in this section reflect that assertion, varying largely from one to another, with one major commonality: they exist primarily to provide services to parents, rather than to work at involving parents in the school or in partnership activities. There are a few exceptions, such as the incorporation of parents on advisory councils that monitor the integration and collaboration of agencies in the Iowa School-Based Youth Services Program (Walker & Hackmann, 1999), but by and large, parents and families are passive recipients of services under *Family and Interagency Collaboration*.

Although each organization provides services specific to the community in which it is situated, in general, these services focus on parental support or development, literacy, recreation, counseling, and health care. In reviewing evaluations of 20 partnerships across the country, Blank et al. (2003) reported, for example, that typical activities included adult education and career development, child care, mental health and nutrition counseling, crisis intervention, dental and health services, and family support centers. Reports on initiatives in

Iowa (Walker & Hackmann, 1999) and Boston (Weiss & Siddall, 2012) also noted a range of social services available to families (e.g., mental health and substance abuse counseling, violence and suicide prevention, legal advice, primary and dental health care, job training).

Although some articles briefly mentioned parent involvement, such as feeling welcome at the school (CIS, 2010) or participating in school events (Henderson, 2011), only one (Sanders & Harvey, 2002) elaborated on a parent role that went beyond being served: a four-hour per month volunteer requirement in an afterschool program that could be fulfilled by parents or their representatives (e.g., older siblings, grandparents). In the same vein, Blank et al. (2003) were the only authors to report on specific impacts on families, including greater attendance at school meetings, increased knowledge of child development, and increased confidence in their role as the child's teacher, among others.

In addition to increasing access to resources and providing services to parents, another way that partnerships under the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* model serve parents and families is through the use of open, two-way communication, a theme that reoccurs throughout the broader literature on school–family relations. In the NEA's review of family–school–community partnerships, the authors identified 10 strategies as essential for success (Henderson, 2011). Of those, two referenced involving parents in key conversations, while two others had to do with building relationships between educators and families.

Other studies similarly discussed the importance of a climate of mutual respect and two-way, open communication among all partners (Blank et al., 2003; Krenichyn et al., 2008; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). In some cases, this communication was facilitated by a family outreach or parent coordinator (Blank et al., 2003; Krenichyn et al., 2008; Weiss & Siddall, 2012); other initiatives made sure parents were on teams that focused on open communication among partners (Krenichyn et al., 2008; Walker & Hackmann, 1999). More specific ways to increase open communication included reaching out in various languages (Epstein et al., 2011), parent groups based on cultural backgrounds (Henderson, 2011), home visits (Blank et al., 2003; CIS, 2010; Henderson, 2011), and parent conferences (Blank et al., 2003; Henderson, 2011; Weiss & Siddall, 2012).
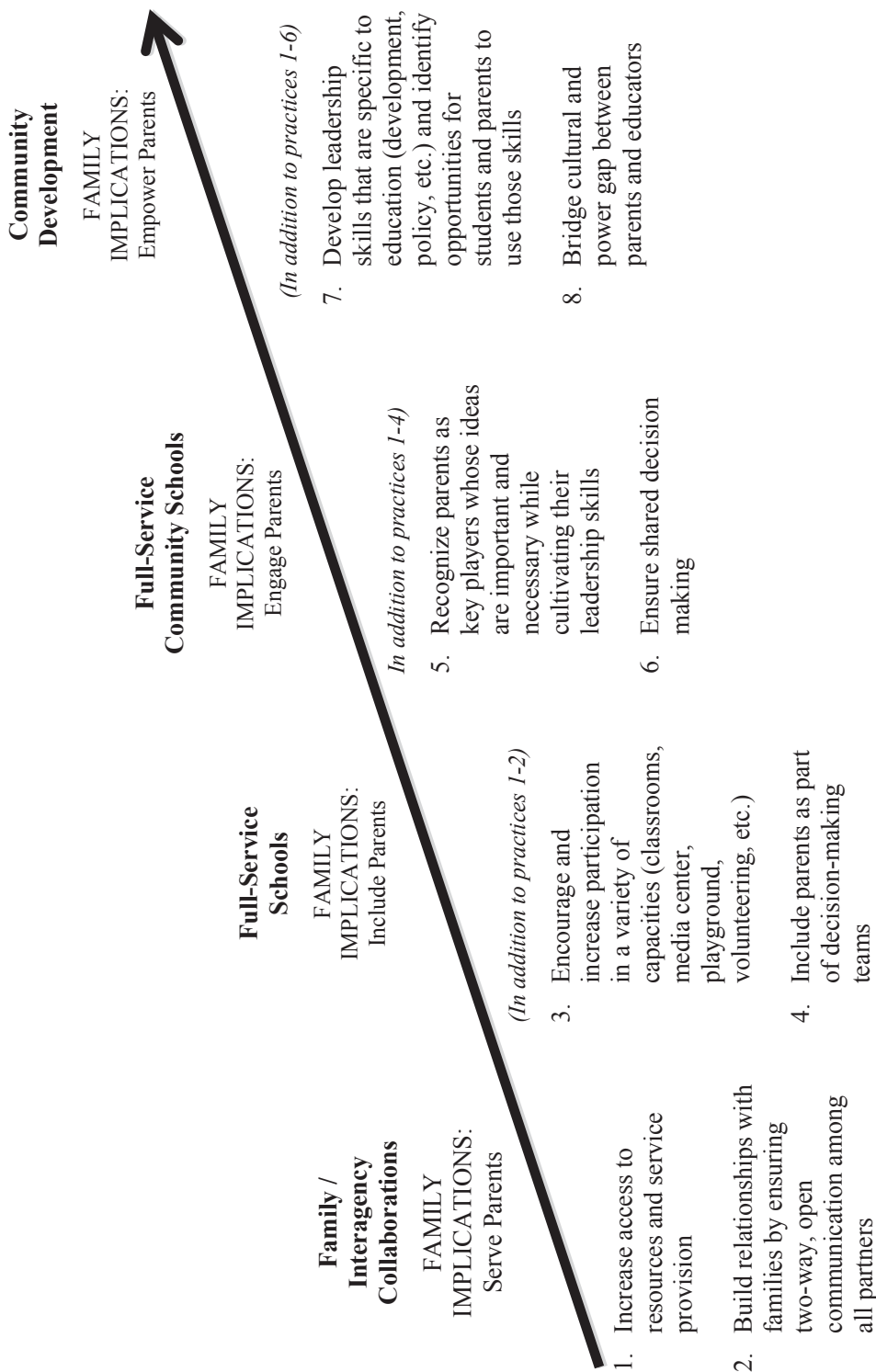
Family / Interagency Collaborations

FAMILY IMPLICATIONS: Serve Parents

1. Increase access to resources and service provision

2. Build relationships with families by ensuring two-way, open communication among all partners

Full-Service Schools

FAMILY IMPLICATIONS: Include Parents

(In addition to practices 1-2)

3. Encourage and increase participation in a variety of capacities (classrooms, media center, playground, volunteering, etc.)

4. Include parents as part of decision-making teams

Full-Service Community Schools

FAMILY IMPLICATIONS: Engage Parents

In addition to practices 1-4

5. Recognize parents as key players whose ideas are important and necessary while cultivating their leadership skills

6. Ensure shared decision making

Community Development

FAMILY IMPLICATIONS: Empower Parents

(In addition to practices 1-6)

7. Develop leadership skills that are specific to education (development, policy, etc.) and identify opportunities for students and parents to use those skills

8. Bridge cultural and power gap between parents and educators

Figure 1. Implications for families in the four partnership models.

Including Parents: The Full-Service School Model

While the organizations described in the previous section connected parents to a range of academic, health, or social services, the *Full-Service School* goes beyond that basic connection in an attempt to literally "wrap" services around and into the school itself, expanding the use of the school's physical space for services beyond the academic and expanding the school schedule beyond a typical school day or week. Pointing to the necessity for organizational change within this model, Dryfoos (1995) used the word "seamless" to describe the new type of institution she envisioned that would provide a comprehensive set of services to children and families. Of the 13 sources we identified in our initial review (Valli et al., 2014), only four addressed specific ways that parents and families are included in this model.

These four sources (three sets and one single) incorporated various methodologies in order to determine how well the *Full-Service* model was implemented and its impact on students, parents, and the organization of the school. The Comer studies, which collectively compared 45 Comer schools to no-treatment control schools, were based on implementation of the School Development Program in three school districts: Prince George's County, MD (Cook et al., 1999), Chicago, IL (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000), and Detroit, MI (Millsap et al., 2000). The authors who studied Linkages to Learning, a school district's collaboration with community-based service providers, employed a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design, with a control school, four years of data, psychometrically validated instruments, and a high rate of participant response (Fox et al., 1999; Leone & Bartolotta, 2010). The Eisenhower Grant studies (LaFrance Associates [LFA], 2005a, 2005b, 2006) were process and outcome evaluations of single school sites wherein researchers gathered a wide range of data, such as school records, beginning- and end-of-year surveys, site visits, and participant interviews. Finally, evaluators of the Kent School Services Network (KSSN) of eight public schools used a mixed methods approach of surveys, interviews, discussions with parent groups, and administrative data to examine program implementation, impact, and costs (Public Policy Associates [PPA], 2009).

An analysis of these sources indicates that *Full-Service School* partnerships continued to serve parents and families in the two ways identified in the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* model. But these partnerships also engaged in practices that would promote deeper levels of involvement. First, they encouraged parents to increase their participation in schools in a variety of capacities. Second, they explicitly sought to include parents on the decision-making teams within the school.

Of the four sources we identified, the Comer School Development Program (SDP) best exemplifies what these two practices look like. The SDP's Parent

Program operates at three levels of involvement. Its two lower levels attend to the first practice of increasing parent participation in a variety of capacities. At the most basic level, parents attend school social activities and meetings of the school's parent group. One tier above this, parents work in the school as volunteers or as paid assistants, directly collaborating and interacting with teachers and students in classrooms, hallways, libraries, and cafeterias, in addition to serving as Parent Center hosts and guides to new parents, staff, or other guests (Haynes & Comer, 1996).

The authors of the Comer articles made clear that while the level of implementation may vary from one school site to another, the *goal* to involve parents in a variety of ways was the same at each site. This notion occurred across the other *Full-Service School* evaluations as well, with the intention of having parents play different roles often outweighing the actualization. For example, General Smallwood Middle School, one of the schools evaluated for the Eisenhower Grant program, identified three opportunities for parent involvement: volunteering, participating in programs and activities, and awareness of available opportunities (LFA, 2005a). Each of these fall under the same umbrella as the two lower tiers of the Comer SDP—increased participation in a variety of capacities. Despite the fact that parental involvement was highlighted as "an important component of the *[Full-Service]* vision" (LFA, 2005a, p. 65), with examples of attempts to encourage participation such as the Family Literacy Center and the Parent Café (LFA, 2005b), all of the Eisenhower evaluations reported only minimal parental participation. Similarly, principals and Community School Coordinators for the KSSN stated that increased "parent involvement" was not a main priority during the first three years but that the Initiative planned to focus more attention on fostering more participation in coming years (PPA, 2009).

In terms of the second type of inclusion—that is, parents as a part of school decision-making teams—the third tier of the Comer Parent Program demonstrated what this could look like. At this level, parents were members of the School Planning and Management Team alongside school administrators, teachers, other staff, and sometimes students. Through their membership on this team, parents were not only involved in the planning and monitoring of school activities, but also were given the responsibility to take information back to the parent organization (Cook et al., 1999; Cook et al., 2000). Millsap and colleagues (2000) described the inclusive, consensus decision-making model of Comer's SDP as an important element that "validates parents' input into critical school decisions so that parents become more invested in the pedagogical aspects of schooling" and involves them in "shaping policy" (pp. 1–2).

In the same manner, in addition to including representatives from partner agencies, local businesses, civic organizations, and faith groups, the Linkages to Learning organization had parents on its Advisory Group (Fox et al., 1999; Leone & Bartolotta, 2010). The Advisory Group was responsible for several aspects of strategic planning, such as site selection and policy development. Only one set of studies in this model category reported on parent outcomes. Linkages to Learning researchers reported a greater sense of family cohesion, more consistency in parenting practices, increased consensus within couples about those practices, decreased rates of depression, and less use of physical punishment than parents in the control school (Fox et al., 1999). Parents also mentioned the impact of specific services—namely, parenting and English language classes and greater access to other social service agencies—as being the most helpful to their own development and well being (Leone & Bartolotta, 2010).

Engaging Parents: The Full-Service Community Schools Model

Full-Service Community Schools differ from *Full-Service Schools* by striving for cultural as well as organizational change. In this model, parents and family members, as well as community organization members, become valued partners rather than simply recipients of services and are encouraged to take part in greater decision-making. Implications for changed policies and practices in this model are clear: democratize schools by opening them up to the community and by fully engaging parents in decision-making processes.

From our review of the literature on *Full-Service Community Schools*, we identified six out of the original seven sets of articles that specifically discussed the roles of parents and families. Two were conceptual and four empirical. Both conceptual articles described the process of building and the benefits of these schools. In a comprehensive handbook, Melaville (2004) laid out the ways in which the Bridges to Success partnership developed and scaled up *Full-Service Community Schools* in Indianapolis (IN) public schools, starting with six and expanding to 44 between 1993 and 2002. In a report for the Center for American Progress, Williams (2010) detailed the ways that community schools can transform the educational landscape of rural schooling.

In the first of the four empirical studies, Abrams and Gibbs (2000) conducted a qualitative case study of the Washington School Collaborative—a board of community members, school staff, and parents charged with governing school-linked service grants and programs. Whalen (2002) presented findings from a three-year matched comparison study of Chicago public elementary schools. Interested in the impact of the *Full-Service Community School* model on student achievement and behavior, the evaluation examined both qualitative and quantitative data: attendance, standardized test scores, surveys of parents and

teachers, and individual and focus group interviews. Using a cross-sectional, *ex post facto* design and correlational analyses, Adams (2010) compared data from 18 schools in the Tulsa (OK) Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) to 18 non-community schools to examine whether there was an achievement difference, whether diffusion made a difference to achievement, and what social conditions might contribute to differences in achievement. Lastly, Castrechini (2011) and Castrechini and London (2012) drew on a range of quantitative measures to investigate the types of students and families accessing programs and the relationship between services and student outcomes in five *Full-Service Community Schools* in Redwood City, CA, a community south of San Francisco.

In our review of these six articles, we noticed a shift in language that signals implications for *Full-Service Community Schools* as they move from serving or including parents to engaging them. Rather than simply being members of decision-making teams, parents are seen as key players whose ideas are valued and who should be equal participants in a shared decision-making process. For example, in her description of three successful rural *Full-Service Community Schools*, Williams (2010) referred to parents being part of the team who "invest in the school" and used words such as "co-creating" and "owning" for parent relationships with the school (p. 10). She cautioned against schools reducing involvement to superficial levels, instead encouraging partnerships to provide a variety of ways for parents to engage in decision-making. Similarly, Whalen (2002) suggested recruiting and supporting parents for leadership roles within school programs.

In terms of recognizing parents as key participants with important and valid ideas, multiple authors underscored the importance of building relationships, collective trust, and mutual respect for and with families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Adams, 2010; Castrechini & London, 2012; Melaville, 2004; Williams, 2010). While some authors made these assertions in connection with parents' roles on decision-making teams (e.g., Melaville, 2004), others connected it to building social capital (Adams, 2010; Williams, 2010), enhancing student performance (Adams, 2010), or improving school and parent perceptions (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). In the study of 18 TACSI schools, for instance, Adams (2010) found that collective trust of students toward teachers and of teachers toward students and parents was the most important school condition for student learning. These trusting relationships were, in fact, stronger predictors of math and reading achievement than the schools' SES. To create such trust, schools needed strong leadership, commitment to shared responsibility, open communication, and time to build capacity.

These sources also provided concrete examples of how *Full-Service Community Schools* actively engaged parents and families in shared decision-making

processes. In the Bridges to Success (BTS) model, school site teams were made up of school staff, families, and community representatives to "set priorities and take action consistent with the BTS vision and based on the specific needs of their students, school, and neighborhood" (Melaville, 2004, p. 14). In Tulsa, TACSI included cross-boundary leadership as a core component, involving "the civic and business community, the local neighborhood, and different school role groups (i.e., teachers, support staff, parents, students, administrators)" as key participants (Adams, 2010, p. 12). In their case study, Abrams and Gibbs (2000) described how parents participated in electing an official "Washington School Collaborative": a board consisting of three community members, three school staff, and six parents. This board had numerous responsibilities, such as oversight of service grants, extracurricular and recreation programs, adult education and parent advocacy, and health referrals. In addition to engaging parents through education and volunteer opportunities, the Redwood City community schools (Castrechini, 2011; Castrechini & London, 2012) also included parents as leaders on school site councils. Through such engagement, *Full-Service Community Schools* sought to cultivate mutual respect and trust, develop parents' leadership skills, and expand school and partnership capacity.

Empowering Parents: The Community Development Model

In the *Community Development* model, schools become not only places of continuous intellectual growth for both children *and* adults, not only sites for extended agencies and social services, but also the places in which parents and community members gather to discuss and deal with civic matters of mutual interest. Participating in a *Community Development* initiative can result in parents and neighbors working together to strengthen social networks, the physical infrastructure, and the community's economic viability (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000).

In our literature search, we found seven sets of sources—three descriptive, four empirical—on the *Community Development* model, each of which discussed the role of the family. One of the descriptive articles, a report from the Center for Cities and Schools, distilled interviews with civic and educational leaders and policymakers around the country in order to help them identify "the mechanisms to tangibly link their work to educational improvement efforts to create cross-sector 'win-wins,' increase productivity, and foster social equity" (McKoy, Vincent, & Bierbaum, 2011, p. 1). Another descriptive article (Proscio, 2004) provided detailed portraits of successful cases from which the author derived principles and lessons to guide the development of this model. Both Dryfoos's (2005) descriptive article and Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy's (2009) empirical case study had examples from the same partnership

initiative (Quitman Street) to illustrate parent involvement efforts. The Warren et al. article examined two additional cases in order to see how community-based organizations fostered "parent engagement in schools" (p. 2209). Two other empirical articles (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Oppenheim, 1999) are similarly case-based studies that examined the relationship between community and school development and provided details about case selection criteria, data sources, and data collection and analysis methods. The one quantitative study, a causal design, compared students who attended Harlem Children's Zone's Promise Academy charter schools in New York City with a matched set of lottery losers (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009). Collectively, these sources provide rich detail from over a dozen cases and a broad base of expert judgment about the challenges and possibilities of a *Community Development* model.

Findings from these seven sets of sources signal that, in the *Community Development* model, parent roles are expanded beyond being served, involved, and engaged. In addition, *Community Development* collaboratives seek to empower parents and family members. This empowerment primarily occurs by (1) helping parents, as well as adolescents, develop their leadership skills, and (2) working to bridge the culture and power gap that typically exists between family and local community members, on the one hand, and the professional educators employed in the neighborhood schools on the other.

Leadership development was a theme in all the sources. Authors discussed the importance of developing leadership within the community (Gold et al., 2002; McKoy et al., 2011; Warren et al., 2009) and helping communities become more self-reliant through this leadership development (Oppenheim, 1999). In their theory of change, Gold and colleagues (2002) viewed leadership development as one of three essential components of a community's capacity to effect school reform. Warren and colleagues (2009) also found that leadership development was a core practice through which community-based organizations (CBOs) successfully engaged parents in school reform and community development efforts.

Although the articles do not provide a blueprint for leadership development, they do offer descriptive cases as guides. In their study of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), Dobbie and Fryer (2009) described the Harlem Gems, an intensive preschool program that strongly encourages parents to volunteer and become more involved in their child's education. HCZ regularly prepares and hires members of the community to be part of its leadership team (see, as an example, Betts, 2013).

Other authors similarly provided examples of parent leader programs, volunteer and paid positions within classrooms and the community that develop leadership skills, and opportunities that enable parents to develop a sense of

efficacy (Gold et al., 2002; Warren et al., 2009). Describing the leadership role of parents as advocates in one project, Proscio (2004) wrote,

> It's not uncommon for advocates to provide referrals for job training, debt management, addiction counseling, or other social services, to make parents aware of community events or local issues, and to follow up afterward to see whether needs are being addressed….[T]he advocates come from the neighborhood and see themselves in the families [they work with]. (p. 15)

Participation in setting a shared vision for the collaborative is another means by which parent leadership is developed and acknowledged. McKoy et al. (2011) argued the necessity of establishing a shared vision and performance metrics through a robust, collaborative process that would "inspire all stakeholders—elected leaders to district and city staff members, parents, and students—to hold, carry, and advocate for the articulated vision" (p. 25). In the *Community Development* model, parents and family members are not outsiders but rather key members of the committees that set the vision and participate in the "collective ownership" of the organization (Oppenheim, 1999, p. 153).

The second, and closely related, parent role theme in this set of articles is the emphasis on overcoming the power gap between family/community members and school-based educators/service providers. Stressing the importance of relationship building, Warren and colleagues (2009) presented three cases in which a focus on parent collective bonding helped the groups become powerful actors within the school. At the Quitman Street Community School, for example, parents confer and work with teachers and school and agency support workers "to ensure that every child can function well within the school system" (Dryfoos, 2005, p. 10).

Warren et al. (2009) found in their study of this same case (Quitman) that parent leaders helped bridge the culture and power gap between school educators and the broader population of parents:

> As teachers get to know parent leaders, they can develop a better understanding of family culture and a concrete sense of how parents can be assets to, not problems for, the school. Meanwhile, parents can use parent leaders, with whom they feel comfortable in their common identity as lay people, as go-betweens to facilitate relationships with professionally oriented teachers. (p. 2240)

In their theory of change, Gold and colleagues (2002) similarly highlight community power as an essential component of a community's capacity to reform schools.

Commenting on the common inequitable distribution of power between family and community organizations and the bureaucracy of large school systems, several authors provided compelling cases of successful collaborations in which partners worked through power struggles, built trust, and arrived at a common agenda. In his analysis of the *Community Development* model in the Vaughn Family Center and Pacoima Urban Village, for example, Oppenheim (1999) credited family and community members as being "the primary agents in a process of transformation" (p. 137). Empowered as co-equal leaders, these family and community members increasingly became more self-reliant. As Gold et al. (2002) explained in their theory of change, leadership development is inherently empowering. The new roles that parents and community members take on enable them to hone their leadership skills, represent the community at public functions, and negotiate with those in power.

Discussion

This paper furthers theoretical and practical understandings of types and dimensions of school–community partnerships, especially providing implications for school–family relationships. Too often, work in this genre is grouped together under generic headings of "partnerships" or "full-service schools." Our more carefully delineated analysis allowed us to determine how and why school–family relationships might differ across varying models. Key to partnership building is clarifying power-sharing boundaries and responsibilities as well as recognizing that more comprehensive forms of partnership require a radical transformation of traditional school structures and norms. Although the research on these four models does not prescribe the role of the family in these partnerships, it does provide guidelines, successful cases, and problems to avoid. One problem is the limitation placed on families, whose role is often conceived or enacted in superficial and condescending ways.

Through this review, we found that the roles of parents and families in school–community partnerships evolved along a continuum from being served to being empowered, with involvement and engagement falling in the middle—rather than acting as either/or endpoints. Generally speaking, this evolution occurred alongside an increasing complexity in terms of each model's purpose and requirements. As noted above, however, we would argue that this continuum only documents examples of what currently exists, not prescriptions for how to incorporate families or recommendations for what organizations at each level are expected to do. In fact, the limited number of examples across all four categories suggests the need and potential for partnerships to focus more explicitly on the inclusion of parents and families.

There was some evidence of that realization within the various models. For example, as part of the Iowa School-Based Youth Services Program—a program we categorized as a *Family and Interagency Collaboration* based on its scope and requirements for change—there is an advisory council that "must include…parents of children in the youth service program or school district" (Walker & Hackmann, 1999, p. 33). Similarly, the School Planning and Management and Parent Teams in Comer's School Development Program seem to not only include parents, as described for the *Full-Service School* model, but also to underscore the importance of parents as key contributors, in a way that is more consistent with the practices of organizations in the *Full-Service Community School* model. In these two programs, the role of parents and families moved toward engagement, highlighting the fluid continuum of family involvement in the partnership models.

But as these and other examples demonstrate, the shift from families as "clients" to full "partners" is challenging. As Keith (1999) found, "Building alternative mediating institutions that are truly democratic" means "intensive personal interaction, including one-on-one meetings; a strategy of social action that understands the importance of conflict properly addressed; and a long-term commitment to broad-based community empowerment" (p. 232). To meet these challenges, those interested in fostering lasting partnerships should focus on relationship building, bridging culture and power gaps, and cultivating leadership among parents. These occur by partnering with groups that have community roots, credibility, and the capacity to bring in a large, diverse part of the community. It generally means working with and cultivating a core group of family members who represent and advocate for their broader constituency.

While we have descriptions and nascent theories on which to draw, we do not yet have a comprehensive picture of how family roles play out in school–community partnerships. Our review of the partnership literature indicates that the two terms used in most of the literature—*parental involvement* and *engagement*—do not adequately depict the full range of roles. More often than not, whether by intent or organizational inertia, the role remains one of passive client. Although efforts to transform schools into more inclusive, democratic, community spaces might seem too difficult for the benefits derived, the research suggests otherwise. A significant consequence of efforts to cultivate strong, trusting relationships with families is the positive impact on student outcomes (e.g., Adams, 2010; Castrechini, 2011). This finding is consistent with the underlying theory of action for school–community partnerships: that schools should not operate as entities separate from the family and community contexts and that certain goals (e.g., academic achievement) are best achieved through collaborative action and support (Epstein, 1995; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Conclusion

Through this comparative analysis of the four partnership models, we sought not only to provide a clearer picture of the possibility of expanded family roles, but also to offer examples for schools and organizations searching for ways to create more inclusive and collaborative family–school–community partnerships. As depicted in Figure 1, the implications for partnership policies and practices differ across the four types. At the first level, partnerships must strive to increase family access to resources and build trusting relationships through open communication. More complex and comprehensive forms of partnerships must build on this foundation by first increasing ways in which family members can meaningfully participate in school–community partnerships and have a voice in decision-making, then by supporting leadership development and bridging the traditional power gap that too often exists between public institutions and families, especially those who live in high-poverty neighborhoods. Although establishing more meaningful roles for families requires time and resources, the literature we reviewed indicates that the rewards for students, families, and schools are well worth the investment.

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