

Grades, Behavior, and Engagement of Adolescents With Disabilities: An Examination of Social Relationships Among Students, Parents, and Teachers

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Abstract

Parent engagement has been extensively studied, but more information is needed on how teacher–parent relationships vary for adolescents with different disabilities, varying socioeconomic backgrounds, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. This study investigates associations between teacher–parent relationships, teacher–student relationships, student’s disability, socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and school performance among 228 high school students. Cross-sectional data were gathered through student and teacher reports. Findings from correlational analyses reveal associations between (a) teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships, (b) teacher–parent relationships and students’ disability type and socioeconomic status, and (c) teacher–parent relationships and students’ grades, behavior, and engagement in school. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Key Words: teacher–student relationships, teacher–parent relationships, problem behavior, engagement, adolescents with disabilities

Introduction

Parent engagement is axiomatic in research and policy in special education (Harry, 2008). Public Law 94-142 (1975), later reauthorized as the Individual

with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), mandates parental consent in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for all students receiving special education services. How parents and teachers feel about one another can have important implications for student engagement, performance, and outcomes (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Research with children with disabilities indicates that the quality of teacher–parent relationships is a stronger predictor of academic achievement than are quantifiable behaviors such as parental attendance at IEP meetings and the frequency of contact between teachers and parents (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). Teacher–parent relationships are also a stronger predictor of academic achievement among young students with disabilities than is general parental involvement in school (Hughes et al., 2005; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Despite the importance of teacher–parent relationship quality for young students with disabilities, little is currently known about (a) associations between teacher–*student* and teacher–*parent* relationships among *adolescents* with disabilities, (b) associations between teacher–parent relationships and academic and social functioning among adolescents with disabilities, and (c) how teacher–parent relationships may vary based on students’ disability types, socioeconomic status (SES), and racial or ethnic group background. Given limited information on these topics, this exploratory study examined them with a sample of high school students with disabilities and their teachers.

Teacher–Parent Relationships

For the purpose of this study, positive teacher–parent relationships occur when parents and/or teachers feel (a) positively about their relationships with one another, and (b) that they can communicate effectively with each other (Sheridan et al., 2012). Teacher–parent relationships serve an important developmental function for adolescents with disabilities who face high levels of social, emotional, behavioral, or academic problems (Stormont, Herman, Reinke, David, & Goel, 2013). Positive teacher–parent relationships improve teacher perception and understanding of specific student characteristics such as learning needs and family background (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012; Vera et al., 2012). This deeper understanding facilitates greater individualization of support that teachers provide to students and families and also reduces negative biases on the part of teachers toward students and families (Mautone, Marcelle, Tresco, & Power, 2015; Sheridan et al., 2012). Teacher–parent relationships also provide the foundation for connecting the home and school microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). This alliance may promote students’ current and future success, as the accumulation of support across these systems may lead to greater coordination of support efforts for students with disabilities (Knopf & Swick, 2007).

Unfortunately, parents of students with disabilities may be particularly susceptible to poor relationships with school personnel due to high levels of stress associated with students' academic and behavior problems for both parents and school staff (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). These difficulties may be exacerbated for students of color or students from lower SES backgrounds (Stormont et al., 2013). In particular, teachers have identified low engagement among parents from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse backgrounds, even when those parents reported high levels of involvement in their child's education (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Vera et al., 2012).

Teacher–Student Relationships

Similar to effects of positive teacher–parent relationships, positive teacher–student relationships are linked to a range of emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes among students (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Researchers have attempted to join these two lines of research to examine the intersection between teacher–parent and teacher–student relationships. These studies investigate whether teacher–student relationships are a function or extension of teacher–parent relationships (Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009). However, this work focuses mainly on early childhood, and much less is currently known about these relationships among adolescents. In the present study, we anticipated that in high school, teacher–student relationships have the potential to influence teacher–parent relationships, instead of the other way around as in early childhood and elementary school. Reasons that may account for this reversal of influence include: (a) parental involvement in students' schooling generally declines during adolescence (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999), (b) adolescents are more autonomous as they progress to higher grade levels (Diseth & Samdal, 2014), (c) parents have the challenge of connecting with more than one teacher in high school (Adams & Christenson, 2000), and (d) teachers have more students to get to know during high school than they do during elementary school, so they may bypass parents and work directly with students when a problem emerges in high school settings (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The complex needs of adolescents with disabilities and structural changes in high school (e.g., more than one teacher for parents to know, many more students per teacher) warrants an investigation on the intersection of social relationships among students, parents, and teachers in high school.

Adolescents With Disabilities

Students with disabilities comprise approximately 13% of the U.S. public school population, and 48% of these students are between the ages of 12–21 years (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Research among adolescents with disabilities

show that key adults such as parents, teachers, and mentors contribute significantly to their academic and emotional adjustment throughout high school (Pham & Murray, 2016). Adolescents with disabilities experience a greater gap between expected and demonstrated academic skills than do students without disabilities, and support from parents and teachers is important to facilitate the attainment of students' goals for after high school (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009).

Although there are challenges, adolescents with disabilities also have unique opportunities to participate in their own transition planning process, a legal right protected by IDEA 2004, which mandates school districts to provide transition services to youth with disabilities beginning at age 16. This transition mandate provides a unique opportunity for students, parents, and teachers to collaborate and facilitate the attainment of students' post-high school goals in education, employment, and independent living. Thus, research on social relationships among students, parents, and teachers may be particularly important for youth with disabilities in the context of transition. Further understanding of the link between teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships and the implications of these associations on school performance may be particularly relevant for understanding how social support can potentially affect marginalized youth. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Do teacher–student relationships predict teacher–parent relationships beyond significant student demographics?
2. How do teacher–parent relationships vary by students' disability type, SES, and race/ethnicity?
3. Are teacher–parent relationships associated with students' grades, behavior, and engagement in school?

We anticipate finding (a) significant and positive associations between teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships, (b) significant differences in teacher–reported relationships among parents from low SES versus those from middle and high SES backgrounds, and (c) positive associations between teacher–parent relationships and students' grades, behavior, and engagement in school.

Method

Participants

Two male and 15 female special education teachers and 228 of their students participated in this study (13:1 student to teacher ratio). Teachers and students were recruited from 10 high schools in seven districts across four

states. Fourteen teachers were White, one was African American, one was Latino, and one was Asian. All had advanced degrees (16 Master’s degrees, 1 doctorate) and 4–32 years of teaching experience ($M = 14$, $SD = 9$). Students ranged from 13–19 years old ($M = 16.25$, $SD = 1.3$) and were in Grades 9–12. Table 1 summarizes additional student characteristics including disability type, gender, grade level, and race/ethnicity.

Table 1. Student Demographic Information

| Demographic Variables | <i>n</i> | % |
|---------------------------|----------|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 148 | 65.0 |
| Female | 80 | 35.0 |
| Grade | | |
| 9 | 58 | 25.4 |
| 10 | 58 | 25.4 |
| 11 | 51 | 22.4 |
| 12 | 61 | 26.8 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| White | 115 | 50.4 |
| Latino | 51 | 22.4 |
| African American | 19 | 8.3 |
| Multiracial | 18 | 7.9 |
| Others | 25 | 11.0 |
| Diagnosis | | |
| Learning Disabilities | 166 | 72.8 |
| Autism Spectrum Disorders | 19 | 8.3 |
| Emotional Disorders | 15 | 6.6 |
| Other Health Impairments | 11 | 4.8 |
| Intellectual Disabilities | 8 | 3.5 |
| Others | 9 | 4.0 |

Note. “Others” ethnicity includes Native American ($n = 9$), Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 4$), and “other” race/ethnicity ($n = 12$).

Procedures

We acquired research approvals from the university and school districts, then requested consent from school principals, special education teachers, parents, and assent from students prior to sending out surveys to students and teachers. In an effort to gather data from multiple settings in multiple states,

the first author contacted school districts to request permission to contact special education teachers. In the seven cases where that permission was granted, we then contacted special education teachers via email. Teachers who consented to participate then recruited students who met the following criteria: (a) had an IEP, (b) could read and comprehend fourth grade level materials, and (c) completed student assent and parental consent forms. Using this process, the final sample represents a convenience sample. Data were gathered between December and May in a single school year. Teachers rated teacher–parent relationship items, student GPA, behavior, (academic) engagement, SES, and disability type as reported on IEPs. Students rated teacher–student relationship items and their own demographics.

Measures

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Teachers reported SES for each student as: low (44%), middle (34%), high (3%), or unknown (19%). Teachers reported SES based on a combination of students' free and reduced lunch status and their knowledge of students' family background (e.g., parent's occupation and highest level of education). We combined the middle and high SES groups into one category due to the small sample of students from high SES. We kept the "unknown" category intact rather than coding it as missing data, because it reflects a meaningful indicator of teacher perception of students' SES and may be an indirect indicator of the teacher's knowledge of the family background (or lack thereof).

Teacher–Parent Relationships

Teachers rated their relationships with parents of each student with eight items from the Teacher–Parent Involvement Questionnaire—Parent Comfort and Endorsement of School (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991). Sample items include "How much is this parent interested in getting to know you?" and "How well do you feel you can talk to and be heard by this parent?" Table 2 lists the means and standard deviations of all items by SES. Teachers rated all items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* or *never* to 5 = *very often* or *a whole lot*. This measure has strong evidence of internal consistency. Other researchers reported an internal consistency coefficient of .90 for two samples of children in kindergarten through third grade (Stormont et al., 2013; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Cronbach's alpha was .95 for this sample.

Table 2. Means (*M*) and Standard Deviations (*SD*) for Items of Teacher–Parent Relationship Measure

| Items | Low (<i>n</i> = 101) | | Mid/High (<i>n</i> = 83) | | Unknown (<i>n</i> = 44) | |
|---|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| 1. How much is this parent interested in getting to know you? | 2.43 | 1.14 | 3.01 | 1.14 | 1.84 | 1.03 |
| 2. How well do you feel you can talk to and be heard by this parent? | 3.01 | 1.19 | 3.60 | 1.09 | 2.61 | 1.21 |
| 3. If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable would you feel talking to his/her parent about it? | 3.61 | 1.12 | 4.02 | 0.95 | 3.11 | 1.13 |
| 4. How often does this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child? | 2.11 | 1.20 | 2.75 | 1.31 | 1.80 | 1.00 |
| 5. How much do you feel this parent has the same goals for his/her child that the school does? | 2.95 | 1.16 | 3.73 | 1.08 | 2.75 | 1.18 |
| 6. How much does this parent do things to encourage this child’s positive attitude towards education? | 2.58 | 1.15 | 3.54 | 1.15 | 2.48 | 1.13 |
| 7. How involved is this parent in his/her child’s education and school life? | 2.54 | 1.29 | 3.29 | 1.21 | 2.43 | 1.28 |
| 8. How important is education in this family? | 2.93 | 1.11 | 3.99 | 0.94 | 2.92 | 1.12 |

Note. Response options for the eight items ranged from 1 = *not at all/never* to 5 = *a whole lot/very often*.

Teacher–Student Relationships

Each student rated their relationships with teachers on a 19-item Inventory of Teacher–Student Relationship (IT-SR; Murray & Zvoch, 2011) on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *almost never or never true* to 4 = *almost always or always true*. The IT-SR assesses student perceptions of trust (e.g., “I tell my teachers about my problems and troubles”), communication (e.g., “If my teachers know something is bothering me, they ask me about it”), and alienation (e.g., “My teachers don’t understand what I’m going through these days”) with teachers. The IT-SR has strong evidence of internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas of .85 (trust), .88 (communication), and .73 (alienation) on a sample of early adolescents in urban schools (Murray & Zvoch,

2011). In the current sample, Cronbach's alphas were .85 (total scale), .79 (trust), .89 (communication), and .81 (alienation).

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Teachers reported student GPAs over the most recent grading period during the school year from official school records. GPA data were scaled to range from 0 = *F* to 4 = *A*. In the current sample, GPAs ranged from 0.50 to 3.95 ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.74$).

Problem Behaviors

Teachers completed the 30-item Problem Behaviors subscale of the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) for each student. Problem behaviors included ratings of externalizing (e.g., "Talks back to adults"), bullying (e.g., "Bullies others"), hyperactivity/inattention (e.g., "Gets distracted easily"), internalizing (e.g., "Acts sad or depressed"), and autism spectrum behavior markers (e.g., "Becomes upset when routine is changed"). Teachers rated these items based on how often students display the behavior, ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *almost always*. The SSIS has strong evidence of reliability and validity (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The internal consistency alpha for this scale in this study's sample was .95.

Engagement

Teachers rated three items measuring student academic engagement (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 1998). Items were "In my class, this student seems tuned-in," "This student comes to class unprepared" (reverse coded), and "This student does more than required." The response scale ranged from 1 = *almost never or never true* to 4 = *almost always or always true*. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of these items from this sample was .77.

Results

Research Question 1

Do teacher–student relationships predict teacher–parent relationships beyond significant student demographics? Univariate analysis revealed no significant group differences in teacher–student relationships on student disabilities, SES, race/ethnicity, or grade level. As a result, we regressed teacher–parent relationships on the three subscales of teacher–student relationships (i.e., trust, communication, alienation) to test the first research question without controlling for any student demographics. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .047$, $F(3, 224) = 3.714$, $p = .012$ and showed that teacher–student relationships accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in teacher–parent relationships, a small to

medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). Specifically, trust, $b = -.39$, $t(224) = -2.65$, $p = .009$, and communication, $b = -.42$, $t(224) = 3.25$, $p = .001$, between students and teachers significantly predicted teacher–parent relationships but not alienation, $b = -.01$, $t(224) = -0.11$, $p = .909$.

Research Question 2

How do teacher–parent relationships vary by disability type, SES, and race/ethnicity? Univariate analysis of variance revealed significant differences in teacher–parent relationships among different student disabilities, $F(5, 222) = 2.53$, $p = .03$, and SES, $F(2, 225) = 19.86$, $p < .001$, but not among different racial/ethnic groups. Specifically, families of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD; $M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.82$) received higher scores than families of students with specific learning disabilities (LD; $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.04$). Families from mid/high SES received higher scores than families from low and unknown SES backgrounds. As shown in Table 2, parents from “unknown” SES families had the lowest ratings on all teacher–parent relationships items. This means that when teachers indicated that they could not determine a student’s SES, they rated their relationships with this student’s parents poorly.

Research Question 3

Are teacher–parent relationships associated with students’ grades, behavior, and engagement in school? Since findings from the first two research questions showed that disability type and SES were significant demographic variables, we regressed school performance variables on teacher–parent relationships controlling for disability type and SES. Results are summarized in Table 3. Teacher–parent relationships accounted for a small proportion (3.4%) of the variance in GPA, $\Delta R^2 = .034$, $F(1, 222) = 8.90$, $p = .002$, approximately 4% of the variance in student problem behaviors, $\Delta R^2 = .039$, $F(1, 222) = 11.61$, $p = .001$, and 2.4% of the variance in academic engagement, $\Delta R^2 = .024$, $F(1, 222) = 5.57$, $p = .019$.

Discussion

Findings from this exploratory study add modestly to the research investigating social relationships among students, parents, and teachers of adolescents with disabilities. We found (a) trust and communication between students and teachers was associated with the quality of teacher–parent relationships; (b) teachers rated their relationships with parents from mid/high SES more positively relative to parents from lower SES; and (c) teacher–parent relationships made a small but significant contribution to students’ GPA, behavior, and en-

gagement in school after controlling for disability status and teacher ratings of students’ socioeconomic status.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results of Associations Between Disability, SES, and Teacher–Parent Relationship With GPA, Behavior, and Engagement

| Variable | GPA | | | Behavior | | | Engagement | | |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|--------------|----------|---------|--------------|------------|---------|--------------|
| | β | $SE(B)$ | ΔR^2 | β | $SE(B)$ | ΔR^2 | β | $SE(B)$ | ΔR^2 |
| Disabilities | | | .05** | | | .19*** | | | .01 |
| LD | .03 | .12 | | -.43*** | .06 | | .03 | .07 | |
| ASD | .19* | .20 | | .05 | .10 | | -.13 | .12 | |
| Social Class | | | .06** | | | .03** | | | .03* |
| Low SES | -.23** | .07 | | .14* | .03 | | -.15* | .04 | |
| Mid/High SES | -.003 | .07 | | -.07 | .04 | | .03 | .04 | |
| Teacher–Parent | .20** | .05 | .03** | -.21** | .03 | .04** | .17* | .03 | .02* |
| <i>Total R²</i> | .14 | | | .26 | | | .04 | | |

Notes. LD = learning disabilities. ASD = autism spectrum disorder. SES = social economic status. SES was effect-coded with “unknown” as the reference group. Teacher–Parent = teacher–parent relationship. GPA = grade point average. Behavior = problem behavior. Engagement = academic engagement. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Explanation of Findings and Implications for Research

The first finding—that trust and communication between students and teachers are associated with teacher–parent relationship quality among adolescents with disabilities—has not been established in prior research. Although it is important to recognize that our findings are correlational in nature and in no way indicate causality, one plausible explanation for this finding is that qualities in teachers that make them approachable to students also help to improve the quality of their relationships with students’ parents. Items on the IT-SR measure pertaining to trust and communication show these qualities to include being nonjudgmental and approachable, respecting students’ feelings, being successful as teachers, and talking with students about difficulties in their lives. Trust and communication with students may also help teachers to develop positive expectations and responsiveness when engaging with students’ parents, such that positive teacher–student relationships may have a compounding positive effect on teacher–parent relationship quality. Alienation between students and teachers was not a significant negative predictor of teacher–parent relationships in this study. Future research may consider other dimensions of teacher–student relationships and investigate their impact on teacher–parent relationships.

The second finding—that teachers reported more positive relationships with parents from mid/high SES relative to parents from low SES—corroborates previous studies that found significant associations between family SES and teacher–parent relationships (Stormont et al., 2013; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Stormont et al. (2013) found that teachers reported low comfort level with parents who were experiencing significant stressors, which included coming from low SES background and having children with disabilities. This finding has significant practical implications because low SES is common among families and youth with disabilities (O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006). Future research might consider examining the link between teachers’ disposition and their relationships with students and parents and whether high quality teacher–student relationships in high school can buffer the strain of family SES on teacher–parent relationships. Also in relation to SES, we found that parents from “unknown” SES families had the lowest ratings on all teacher–parent relationships items. One possible explanation for this finding is that teachers who know less about students’ SES background may also be less familiar with the student’s family overall, thus explaining the lower ratings on teacher–parent relationships items. Future research targeting preservice and in-service teacher training might investigate strategies to help teachers establish more effective relationships with families under significant stress.

Equally important, we did not find significant differences in teacher–parent relationships among students from disparate racial/ethnic backgrounds. This is different from previous studies with students in elementary schools, where Wong and Hughes (2006) found that teacher ratings of teacher–parent relationships for African American students were lower than for White and Latino students in primary grades. Although teacher–parent relationships did not differ significantly by students’ race/ethnicity, there were more African American (78.9%) and Latino (51%) families than White families (40.9%) from low SES background in this study’s sample. With SES being a significant influence on teacher–parent relationships and with more African American and Latino parents from low SES families in this analysis, the impact of race/ethnicity on the quality of teacher–parent relationships may have been subsumed under the impact of SES. Additional research with greater sample sizes for each subgroup is needed to clarify the distinctive impact of these demographic variables on teacher–parent relationships.

One surprising finding was that teachers rated more positively their relationships with parents of students with autism spectrum disorder than with parents of students with learning disabilities. Students in these two categories of disabilities have complex and diverse profiles of strengths and needs, so it is

difficult to ascribe a reason to differences in teacher–parent relationships quality between these two groups of students. One possible explanation could come from the literature on disproportionality. The longstanding overrepresentation of poor and racial/ethnic minority students in high-incidence categories of special education has been attributed to school practices (e.g., institutional bias, assessment bias, teacher bias) and to the impact of poverty on student development (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). Learning disabilities is one of these high-incidence categories. Additional research is needed to examine how and why disability type would influence the quality of teacher–parent relationships.

Finally, our third finding that teacher–parent relationships made small but significant contributions to students' GPA, behavior, and engagement in school is consistent with prior research. Positive teacher–parent relationships may lead teachers to perceive parents as concerned about their children's education, which might lead to greater teacher investment in students, a finding that has some prior support among students without disabilities as Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) suggested. As their relationship develops, teachers and parents may learn important information about activities at school and home through their connection with one another, which in turn may affect each party's attitudes and behaviors toward students. Similarly, teachers might gain new insights regarding students through their interactions with parents, which may contribute to greater responsiveness to students' individual needs (Hughes et al., 2005; Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012; Vera et al., 2012). In this way, teacher attitudes about parents may affect how teachers treat and attempt to involve parents and, subsequently, how they treat and respond to students in the school. Positive teacher–parent relationships may contribute directly to students' grades, behavior, and engagement because students may be more willing to adopt teacher directives and school norms when they perceive strong connections between their home and school environments (Sheridan et al., 2012). This study's result is consistent with research on the importance of teacher–parent contacts and home–school involvement (Epstein, 2008) but extends existing research by highlighting the importance of the triadic relationships between students, teachers, and parents of adolescents with disabilities.

Limitations and Merits

Three important limitations constrain this study's findings. First, we did not examine how teachers attempted to build an alliance with adolescents with disabilities and their parents. While our findings suggest that strong teacher–parent relationships can be a component of an effective primary prevention strategy for students with disabilities, it does not clarify specific teacher practices that lead to a strong teacher–parent alliance. However, as we have discussed

in the previous section on teacher–student trust and communication, qualities that help to strengthen teacher–student relationships include being nonjudgmental and approachable, being successful in teaching, and reaching out to students when they have problems. These qualities are important for teachers who work with adolescents with disabilities to consider adopting, as they can also help to strengthen teacher–parent relationships.

Second, we examined social relationships from the perspectives of students and teachers but not parents, and this limitation might bias our results. Prior research suggests that teachers and parents can have differing views regarding parent involvement (Geenen et al., 2001), so research that examines both groups of adults’ perspectives would be more informative. However, our study accounted for student perception of their relationships with teachers and the impact of teacher–student relationships on teacher–parent relationships, which is uncommon in studies on family–school dynamics. Finally, this study only included students with disabilities who could read at the fourth grade level, so students with more severe disabilities and their families were excluded. Research that focuses on students with severe disabilities and their families might have additional insights to contribute to the literature on teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships.

Implications for Practice

Despite these limitations, our study contributes to emerging research that examines associations of social relationships among students, parents, and teachers for adolescents with disabilities. Findings suggest that teacher–parent relationships are associated with grades, problem behaviors, and engagement among adolescents with disabilities. These findings are anomalous to results in prior research with younger children, suggesting that teacher–parent relationships operate differently in high school, a time period when students are making a transition from childhood to adulthood. Factors such as low SES and having children with learning disabilities may negatively influence teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with parents. However, trust and communication between students and teachers may positively affect teacher–parent relationships. In particular, students with learning disabilities and those whom teachers perceived to come from low or unknown SES families may benefit from more social and relational opportunities with teachers. Further longitudinal and experimental research is needed to better understand the causal relationships between the variables studied here, but our findings in this study provide initial support for the need to develop further understanding about potential benefits of strengthening teacher–parent as well as teacher–student relationships. Future efforts that investigate important questions such as the

potential importance of frequency versus quality of contacts, factors that affect the quality of teacher–student relationships (e.g., placement settings, teacher warmth, teacher responsiveness), and other potential social and contextual contributors to positive or negative relationships are needed. Expanding strategies and practices to capitalize on this social and human capital might boost positive outcomes for special education teachers, adolescents with disabilities, and their parents.

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