Reframing Family Engagement: Inclusive Strategies That Elevate and Validate

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Abstract

Educational research consistently underscores the significance of family engagement in children's education. However, diverse ideals regarding family involvement often constrain the potential for meaningful school–home interactions within culturally diverse urban communities. Amidst education reform priorities such as high-stakes testing and teacher accountability, the crucial connections between schools and families are frequently overlooked. In this essay, we explore strategies for urban schools to foster partnerships with families and communities that leverage the full range of urban families' literacies, knowledge, resources, and experiences. Informed by findings from our previous research, we propose an approach that encourages teachers to critically examine their assumptions and biases regarding family engagement in schools. Through reflective practices, educators can discern how their mindsets, language, and actions influence the perceptions of families as valued stakeholders in their children's education. By embracing a shift in perspective, teachers can develop more inclusive and respectful family engagement strategies tailored to the unique needs of urban schools and communities. This framework equips educators with the tools to design initiatives that honor the diverse backgrounds and contributions of families, ultimately fostering stronger partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

Key Words: family–school–community partnerships, family engagement, urban education, partnerships, respectful strategies, home, parents

Introduction

> Teachers often see parents' goals and values as impediments to students' academic accomplishments. Parents in turn believe that teachers are antagonistic toward them and fail to appreciate the actual conditions that shape their children's lives. This lack of trust between teachers and parents—often exacerbated by race and class differences—makes it difficult for these groups to maintain a genuine dialogue about shared concerns. The resultant miscommunications tend to reinforce existing prejudices and undermine constructive efforts by teachers and parents to build relational ties around the interests of children. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 6)

The task of educating children can involve multiple stakeholders which include school staff and the children's families. As Bryk and Schneider (2002) highlight in the above quote, school staff and children's parents do not always agree on the goals, values, educational approaches, or school happenings. This lack of trust can inhibit teachers' and school leaders' abilities to foster effective family–school partnerships and function as a community. Sheridan and colleagues (2012) defined family–school partnerships as a cross-systems and cross-contextual approach "wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains" (p. 3). We extend this definition to recognize that effective partnerships are truly family–school–community partnerships since families and schools are situated within community contexts. Thus, the historical, cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors of the families, school staff, and communities influence the interactions amongst the three entities. We also assert that one hallmark of effective family–school–community partnerships is their ability to function as a community—elevating and validating the roles and contributions of all members.

When designing family–school–community partnerships, it is essential to consider how the partnership will support family engagement. Educational research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of family engagement in a child's education (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement [NAFSCE], 2022). While connecting families with school-based learning may seem obvious, varying ideals

and visions of family engagement limit the ways in which school communities understand, encourage, and benefit from meaningful school–home interactions. This is frequently the case in culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse urban communities where education reform has focused on high-stakes testing, teacher accountability, and school choice, but less on the fragile connections between schools and the families they serve (Gay, 2018). What many urban schools have designed and implemented are one-way initiatives that position school staff as the experts and providers of resources (Edwards, 2004, 2016). These types of one-way initiatives devalue the knowledge and resources that families possess.

In this article, we examine how urban schools can (re)frame family engagement initiatives in ways that build upon urban families' full repertoires of literacies, knowledge, resources, and experiences as one step towards developing effective family–school–community partnerships. First, we define how family engagement can be broadly conceptualized and discuss specific considerations for urban educational contexts. Then we define the types of urban spaces that schools and families may experience within contemporary society. Informed by our research, we then describe critical cognitive flexibility—an approach that engages school staff in critical reflection about their assumptions and biases pertaining to families' engagement with schools. Lastly, we share how school leaders, teachers, and the broader community can use critical cognitive flexibility to consider why and how they can shift their mindsets, words, and actions so that families feel valued and respected as legitimate stakeholders in their child's education. We detail family engagement strategies that are more inclusive and validating for urban schools, families, and communities. To note, we use the terms family, caregivers, and parents interchangeably throughout the article.

Conceptualizing Family Engagement

When considering how to draw in community assets to support family–school–community partnerships across varying urban education typographies, it is helpful to define family engagement so that teachers and school leaders can plan validating and respectful family engagement. Many school administrators and teachers recognize Joyce Epstein as one of the leading authorities on family involvement in schools. Thus, Epstein's (1991) scholarship around family and parental involvement in schools is foundational to understanding how the roles of families within urban school contexts have shifted across time. In her initial parent involvement framework, Epstein (1995) defined the following six key components:

- Parenting: Support families to create home contexts that support learning
- Communicating: Design bidirectional communication between home and school contexts about student learning and school programs
- Volunteering: Secure and organize caregiver volunteers
- Learning at Home: Provide one-way communication from the school describing how to support student learning at home
- Decision-Making: Include caregivers in school-based decisions and develop their leadership abilities
- Collaborating with Community: Integrate community assets into schools

Since 1995, schools have used Epstein's framework to conceptualize family involvement and guide how they create opportunities for families to interact with the school. Typically, when schools work from a parent involvement stance, they plan and implement opportunities and events with minimal to no input or guidance from families (Edwards, 2016; Zeichner et al., 2018). These parent involvement opportunities are typically one-directional with the flow of information going from the school to home contexts. Schools are positioned as experts who have complete knowledge of what should be taught and the approach that should be used. Schools possess all decision-making power and access to the financial resources necessary for implementation.

As schools have used Epstein's initial framework to guide their family involvement approaches, there has been growing criticism around how families' roles and contributions are diminished and devalued. The consensus position is that caregivers should not just be positioned as passive receivers of information and knowledge from the schools, but rather interactions amongst families, schools, and the communities should mutually inform each other. In agreement with this position, Epstein and her colleague (2006) suggested that parent involvement should be replaced with the concept of families, schools, and communities working as partners. Furthermore, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) emphasized that shifting away from parent involvement involves "both parents and school staff undergo[ing] a reinterpretation of both their own and the other's role and agentic positions" (p. 401). Stakeholders have termed this reinterpreted form of participation as family engagement or family–school partnerships.

Since the process of replacing longstanding views of parent involvement is not a simple or quick process, we use this article to continue to advance reinterpreted ways of family engagement. In this article, we endorse NAFSCE's (n.d.) definition of family engagement as being a

> shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families

> in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development. Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn—at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in afterschool programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community. (para. 1)

This conceptualization of family engagement thus contrasts family involvement in that it focuses on engaging families in ways that draw in their knowledge, expertise, and experiences to design and implement opportunities. As this definition indicates, power, prestige, position, and access are shared amongst the families and the school. Schools actively position families as possessing knowledge and expertise that are valuable for school-based learning. In addition, the flow of information is bidirectional between the school and home contexts. This instills collaboration between all stakeholders to construct learning goals and engagement opportunities.

Especially within urban school contexts, there is a need to acknowledge how politics, culture, race, ethnicity, and linguistic histories influence the conceptualizations and enactments of family engagement within the contexts of the family, school, and community. For instance, while the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) required parent involvement, it did so in ways that reflected White, middle-class forms of involvement; namely, the school retained the power, positioning, and access to design these forms of involvement (Hursh, 2007; Nygreen, 2019; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Illustratively, Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) found that their participant educators still preferred school-centric and teacher-initiated family engagement—engagement that often required families' physical presence and inflexibility to families' schedules. Current research has indicated that these recent educational policies emphasizing achievement coupled with punitive accountability measures have in fact reduced and even eliminated the limited number of family-centric or relational approaches to family engagement that some schools were attempting to implement (e.g., Ahmann, 2017; Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Mediratta et al., 2009). Furthermore, as members of NAFSCE (2022) recently noted, "The role of systemic racism, implicit bias, and income inequality in shaping educational and opportunity disparities are more pronounced than ever before and require mutual reciprocal relationships among families, communities, and institutions to rebuild trust and equity in our society" (p. 3). Therefore, there is a clear need to identify effective family engagement strategies that draw in the assets of the family and community into urban educational spaces in ways

that honor, validate, and uplift the children, families, and community. Identifying these types of strategies holds the potential to promote the cultivation of school communities that draw on family–school–community partnerships for the benefit of student learning.

Types of Urban Spaces

Urban education is an elusive term. In his research, Milner (2012) described how urban education definitions tend to be disconnected from other discourses and research in related disciplines (e.g., urban sociology, urban geography). In an attempt to add clarity to the field of urban education, Milner provided a three-level examination of "urban" contexts to include *urban intensive, urban emergent,* and *urban characteristics* based on the school community's population size and infrastructure. In Table 1, we apply Milner's classifications to a selection of school districts. Since our focus for this article is on family–school–community partnerships, we present the school district population numbers in the table rather than general population numbers for the urban context.

As the exemplar cities featured in Table 1 reveal, *urban intensive* school districts are located within large cities that offer a different way of living such as opportunities for using mass transportation, living in close proximity to others, and neighborhoods containing shopping, entertainment, and churches. Not only are there strong cultural bonds, but there are also a myriad of cultures living together within the same proximity. For instance, New York City Public Schools consists of a large Latino/a population and a larger Asian population than Los Angeles Public Schools. In fact, there are 176 different languages spoken among students in New York Public Schools. This equates to about 20% of students identifying as speaking a language other than English as their first language.

Urban emergent, according to Milner (2012), includes school districts within medium sized cities or areas. One example may be Maryland's Prince George's County Public Schools with enrollment of 131,000 students. The district's schools are situated in areas that have characteristics similar to *urban intensive* spaces, but with key differences. For example, some urban emergent spaces are close to mass transportation and in walking distance to stores and services, while others require a car to access jobs, schools, and business due to these spaces being spread across suburban and/or rural settings. Wealth and poverty are scattered throughout the district as found in most public school districts, with some schools providing close to 100% free and reduced-price lunches while others have little to no need for these services.

Within *urban characteristic* schools, school districts are smaller but may have characteristics found in larger districts. Examples might include districts such as Lansing, Michigan; Portage, Indiana; Kansas City, Kansas; or Portland, Oregon. Urban characteristic schools are mostly spread across rural and suburban communities. Urban characteristic schools may be beginning to experience some of the barriers, challenges, and differences associated with urban intensive or urban emergent schools.

Table 1. Applying Milner's (2012) Evolving Typology of Urban Education

Typology	School District	Total Student Enroll-ment	% of Student Body				
			Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black	Lati-no/a	Native Amer-ican	White
Urban Intensive	Los Angeles Unified District (CA)	548,338	3.5	7.3	74.5	.1	9.7
	New York City Public Schools (NY)	938,000	17	25	42	1	14
	Chicago Public Schools (IL)	322,106	4.5	35.8	46.5	.1	11
	Miami-Dade County Public Schools (FL)	325,000	1.1	19.1	72.7	0	6.4
Urban Emergent	Prince George's Co. Public Schools (MD)	131,646	2.76	52.23	36.46	.29	3.82
	Tucson Unified School District (AZ)	122,021	2.1	6	63.8	3.6	20.5
	Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)	80,494	4	37.9	29	.1	26.4
	Charlotte-Mecklenburg S. District (NC)	142,536	7	37	27	n/a[a]	26
Urban Characteristic	Lansing Public Schools (MI)	9,989	6	39	19	n/a	24
	Portage Township Schools (IN)	7,046	.7	14.5	26.5	.2	52.8%
	Kansas City Kansas Public Schools (MO)	22,140	n/a	54	27	n/a	11
	Portland Public Schools (OR)	49,000	6.3	8.3	17.3	.5	55.2

Note. [a]The school district's website does not provide student enrollment data for this racial/ethnic identity.

Even though Milner (2012) introduced his conceptualization of the three types of urban typographies more than a decade ago, it tends to be underutilized in contemporary research literature. Notably, Welsh and Swain (2020) conducted a comprehensive literature review examining how the term *urban education* was used. They noted that urban education continues to be defined in different ways and generally described from a deficit position. Furthermore, there was a tendency to depict urban schools as being located in large metropolitan areas experiencing high levels of poverty, and residents were traditionally marginalized due to their racial, cultural, and linguistic differences. These depictions typically did not recognize how the residents provided resources or their possessed assets.

In this article, we combine Milner's (2012) three categories of urban contexts with the six descriptive categories of urban contexts that Welsh and Swain (2020) identified in their literature review. These categories include: (a) population, location, and geography; (b) enrollment; (c) student demographics; (d) school resources; (e) educational inequality; and (f) social and economic context. We suggest that teachers should reflect upon the types of community spaces in which their school exists—a reflection that moves beyond student demographics and the types of school resources. Teachers and school leaders could contextualize what they know about their school context within the broader community context, identifying how the community population, geographic location, historical educational inequality, and community socioeconomics intersect with students' learning and how families might engage with the school.

The changing composition of school districts may provide us with pause. Teachers and school leaders ought to recognize that each of these community spaces, regardless of the "urban" categorization into which it falls, possesses a different array of community assets and needs which, in turn, informs how schools' teachers and leaders might conceptualize family engagement that includes and validates all community members. For example, teachers employed by school districts with an increasing number of children whose first language is not English may see language as a barrier to family engagement and school success. Instead, if teachers and school leaders understand the contemporary cultural context of their schools, they can plan the best strategies to meet the needs of students and families. Armed with this insight, teachers and school leaders can better connect students to language resources so that their heritage language is maintained and becomes a resource students can draw upon when learning English. In summary, community knowledge can assist teachers and school leaders in planning for ways to provide parents with the cultural, linguistic, and social

capital (Bourdieu, 1986) needed to navigate the educational system. This, in turn, may help extend quality connections between families, teachers, and leadership. Before we turn to sharing some effective strategies, we briefly discuss the educational theory of cognitive flexibility—a theory that undergirds the approaches and mindsets teachers and school leaders can employ when engaging families in urban school contexts.

Conceptual Framework

According to NAFSCE (2022), family engagement efforts are most successful when school staff and families form family–school partnerships that co-construct learning outcomes for children through the identification of equitable teaching and learning approaches. To create effective family–school partnerships, one must remember that no family, school, or community is the same. Thus, members of family–school partnerships need to think flexibly when approaching each situation rather than treating it as a stagnant case. Cognitive flexibility theory (Spiro et al., 1987) has many affordances for teachers who desire to think flexibly and want to develop this ability. Cognitive flexibility theory emphasizes that every situation has variations. One must first think flexibly about how to integrate prior knowledge and experiences with the current situation's unique variables. For instance, a teacher who has encountered a family who is multilingual may draw upon their prior interactions with other multilingual families, knowledge from teacher preparation coursework about multilingual learners, and informational websites such as Colorín Colorado (i.e., https://www.colorincolorado.org/, a website synthesizing information and resources about multilingual learners and families). Drawing upon all these interactions and knowledge, the teacher can then craft a plan for how to interact and respond to the current situation in an individualized and informed way.

In our research, we have theorized how teachers might engage in the critical application of cognitive flexibility theory (Edwards et al., 2019, 2023). We suggest that the critical application of cognitive flexibility theory involves more than simply identifying and integrating prior knowledge and experiences. When teachers engage in cognitive flexibility theory from a critical approach, we mean that they consider how their past experiences and knowledge intersect with the current situation. They then critically reflect on how power, prestige, position, and access influence the actions, thoughts, and words of all participants. By *power,* we mean the degree of control an individual experiences in designing, implementing, and evaluating the forms of family engagement. *Prestige* relates to the degree of

power and the related status that an individual experiences. An individual's *positioning* includes the types of roles that are available, ascribed, or denied within a specific interaction or context. Lastly, *access* is the ability to obtain and use the necessary resources for engaging in designing, implementing, or evaluating family engagement opportunities. It is important to remember that how power, prestige, positioning, and access are enacted or experienced does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, politics, culture, race, ethnicity, and the linguistic histories of the individuals involved influence these factors.

Inclusive Family Engagement Strategies

We now turn to discussion of inclusive family engagement strategies that elevate the voices, knowledge, and experiences of families who live within urban spaces. As Epstein (2011) suggested, "The way schools care about children is reflected in the ways schools care about the children's families" (p. 389). For the school to function as a community, it takes all members of the school to care about families and support student success, so we describe what each stakeholder can do to promote effective family engagement that validates and uplifts families.

School Leaders

Reynolds (2010) contended that many urban school leaders, in concert with policymakers, have come to accept the idea that urban parents are more of a hindrance than an aid in their children's educational development. Some school leaders have created environments where parent opinions, ideas, and questions are considered bothersome (Stelmach & Preston, 2008). Quite often, caregivers refer to the attitude or behavior of the school leader as the reason why they do not want to be involved. How then can school leaders support their staff and students' families to intentionally shift their mindsets, words, and actions so that families feel valued and respected as legitimate stakeholders in their child's education? There are several ways in which leaders can provide inclusive strategies to elevate and validate families through a shared vision and by advancing social justice and antiracist principles.

Shared Vision

School leaders can focus on building trusting relationships with families to counter negative perceptions and beliefs about how families in urban contexts engage with education stakeholders. It is imperative that school personnel work in collaboration with families since research has

long established that when caregivers are engaged with schools, children are more likely to: achieve at higher rates, avoid retention, attend school regularly, develop positive social skills, demonstrate leadership qualities, adapt well to school, graduate from high school, and attend postsecondary education (Epstein et al., 2018; Jung & Sheldon, 2020). A first step school leaders can take in fostering trusting relationships with families is to develop a schoolwide family engagement vision. The school leader can facilitate the collaborative process of developing the school vision to elevate the importance of family engagement. School leaders can also identify teachers who are eager to assist with translating the school vision into action. School leaders can support these teachers by cultivating a supportive environment for this translational work to occur and building trust amongst the school staff as they grapple with shifting family engagement opportunities to reflect the school community and families (McCauley et al., 2023).

As school leaders and teachers develop a shared vision, it is imperative to move beyond performative acts of involvement and planning. Leaders can support teachers' reflection of their biases and assumptions so that school leaders and teachers might authentically engage families to co-develop a shared vision (McCauley et al., 2023). As Admiraal and colleagues (2021) noted, "we can conclude that the more embedded an intervention is in the organization and culture of a school, the more sustainable impact it has, moving schools towards a culture of professional learning and collaboration" (p. 696). The school leader should expect school staff to partner with families, community members, and students to create this shared vision. Fullan (2000) reiterated this point by saying,

> Effective schools use their internal collaborative strength to seek out relationships with the community. They see parents more as part of the solution than as part of the problem. They pursue programs and activities that are based on two-way capacity building in order to mobilize the resources of both the community and the school in the service of learning. (p. 4)

Thus, collaborative family–school–community partnerships extend beyond the school walls in the hope of building a shared vision that promotes respective and collaborative relationships that are beneficial to the success of the school and its students (Epstein, 2011).

Leadership for Social Justice and Antiracist Principles

In creating a vision for family engagement, Jung and Sheldon (2020) found that school leaders who adhered to strong transformational leadership practices, on average, had "more teachers implementing active

family engagement practices" (pp. 23–24). Transformational leadership begins with engaging parents in positive conversations that seek to identify how the school supports and limits family engagement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Through these conversations, leaders might discover that families experience barriers to family engagement such as (1) lack of awareness or communication regarding opportunities, (2) minimal connections or relationships with the school, (3) time limitations, (4) work conflicts, (5) limited financial resources, and (6) childcare needs (Edwards, 2016).

Recognizing the barriers to family engagement is not sufficient towards adopting a socially just, antiracist leadership stance. As decades of research show, schools have implemented many strategies to advance educational opportunities and resources for children, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or social class. Yet millennial era school leaders in high poverty urban districts are still grappling with many of the same equity issues as their predecessors (Cook et al., 2020; Paige & Witty, 2010; Robertson, 2008). What many urban school leaders fail to recognize is the interrelationship between family engagement and the institutionalized, systematic effort to perpetuate educational inequities between people of color and dominant populations. Leaders must acknowledge how years of dehumanizing and abusive policies contribute to positioning specific "types" of families in ways that advance their individualized power and privilege while oppressing other "types" of families (Allen, 2008; Cross, 2007; Ferber, 2011).

Therefore, urban school leaders must reject deficit-based views of families and engage their staff in doing the same. According to Fiarman (2016),

> We must eliminate the stigma around talking about our bias. School leaders need to help their staff understand that unconscious bias is not deliberate; it doesn't reflect our goals and intentions. We can increase awareness and normalize talking about bias through direct teaching, modeling, and explicitly naming it. This allows teachers to discuss and examine their own biases more freely and productively. (p. 7)

The new normal must be built on antiracist and social justice principles. Educators must see, celebrate, and embrace families from all backgrounds (e.g., cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, socioeconomic) as equal partners and experts on their children and communities. The new normal requires a collaborative family–school–community partnership. Educators and families should work together to define their shared vision and potential challenges to implementing this vision.

Urban school leaders should integrate family engagement into equity agendas. Schools and educational systems in urban settings will continue to

struggle to enact equity efforts if their staff are disconnected from the communities they serve. Urban school leaders should develop equity agendas that emphasize building trust and deepening relationships with families of different races and ethnicities in order to pave the way for educators to recognize how racialized power imbalances between home and school influence their work. As part of an equity agenda, urban school leaders must develop authentic family engagement policies and metrics. Leaders who truly want to elevate family engagement in urban settings will apply the same tools they use to advance their other priorities. That means creating policies that support a liberatory vision for family engagement and expose bias related to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Crafted policies should also articulate specific, measurable expectations for the system's improvement over time. There are several ways in which teachers can be supported to include shifting mindsets from deficit to asset ways of thinking, working together to map community assets, encouraging caregivers to share stories, focusing on bidirectional communication between home and school, and providing curriculum-based over event-based opportunities as described below.

Teachers

Oftentimes, teachers may view families as disengaged, challenging, having "language barriers," or "don't care" attitudes. Thus, teachers may benefit from examining the ways in which they view families whose backgrounds may differ from theirs. As Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) indicated,

> If we are to teach, we must first examine our own assumptions about families and children, and we must be alert to the negative images in the literature. Instead of responding to pathologies, we must recognize that what we see may actually be healthy adaptations to an uncertain and stressful world. As teachers, researchers, [school leaders], and policymakers, we need to think about the children themselves and try to imagine the contextual worlds of their day-to-day lives (p. 203).

Consequently, teachers may not be aware that their personal experiences as children and the communities in which they lived could have shaped their perspectives about how families should engage in schools. In addition, teachers may not be cognizant of the wealth of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and experiences that families bring to urban schools, especially that of race, ethnicity, culture, and language, as educators often regard these as barriers instead of rich resources. We describe several strategies teachers

might consider when reframing family engagement in ways that elevate family members' power, prestige, positioning, or access.

Shifting Mindsets

To assist teachers toward an asset view, discussions can begin early within teacher preparation programs where class activities can help preservice teachers to unravel the complexities of urban spaces that encompass geographical locations as well as socioeconomic, cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences. Designing conversations in ways that address assumptions can be particularly helpful. For instance, connecting preservice teachers with families so that they have opportunities to discover that "powerful learning is possible when people have the opportunity to hear stories and perspectives from a wider range of voices" (Damrow & Sweeney, 2019, p. 263). When connecting with families, preservice teachers could converse with caregivers from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to discover caregivers' range of expectations for ways in which schools should assist children's learning (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). These conversations can provide opportunities for preservice teachers to consider how families' current forms of power, prestige, positioning, and access inhibit or facilitate schools' integration of the family's expectations.

In-service teachers can examine their mindsets toward urban teaching practices through professional development. Examples of notable professional development related to race, culture, and critical examination of our mindsets include Singleton and Linton's (2006, 2021) *Courageous Conversations About Race* and Trumbull and Greenfield et al.'s (2001, 2020) Bridging Cultures Project. Through professional development opportunities such as these, administrators and teachers learn to critically reflect on their own experiences with race, ethnicity, and culture; interrogate their cultural competence related to their own race/ethnicity and that of their students; identify how cultural practices intersect with their instructional practices and interactions with families; and develop their critical consciousness. As teachers critically reflect about their own race, ethnicity, position, prestige, power, and access, they can also interrogate how socially constructed views of race/ethnicity intersect perceptions of intelligence and students' innate ability to learn. As Mesler and colleagues (2021) concluded, teachers' adoption of a growth mindset (i.e., belief that intelligence is not a fixed attribute, but rather is malleable) is positively associated with students' developing growth mindsets. When teachers adopt a stance that they along with their students can grow and develop, teachers may be more apt to turn to families and communities, bridging student learning across contexts.

Mapping Community Assets

Teachers can identify families' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) by intentionally recognizing the strengths and resources that the students and caregivers possess. Green (2017) developed the concept of a community-based equity audit, an instrument that supports teachers with mapping community assets. Green recommended starting by using Google Maps to locate where community institutions are and the ways in which they benefit the community members. Since many teachers are community-outsiders, it is the families who have the deep knowledge of the community assets—knowledge that transcends what is available on Google maps or gleaned from driving around the community. Thus, teachers can draw on the families' funds of knowledge and insights about community resources to develop a richer and more complete map of community assets. By including families in the process of developing the community asset map, families' positioning and prestige are elevated and valued.

Discovering Caregiver Stories

In their work with parent literacy, Edwards et al. (1999) indicated that parents' stories can help teachers access knowledge that will assist with parent–teacher relationships. Stories can provide a window into the children's and their families' lives that can help with creating lessons as well as assisting with challenges that parents face. Teachers can learn about a parent's stories through thoughtful dialogue that demonstrates honor, respect, and equitable discourses. For instance, a teacher may inquire, "Can you describe 'something' about your home learning environment that you would like the school to build upon because you feel that this 'something' would enhance your child's learning potential at school?" (Edwards et al., 1999, p. 40). A collection of caregiver stories can serve as a space for teachers to practice cognitive flexibility—(re)shaping their knowledge, beliefs, and discourses about how to connect each student's individualized and unique home language practices and family literacy experiences with formal, school-valued literacy practices.

Checking for Consistent Bidirectional Communication

As in all professions, communication is key. However, bidirectional communication between parents and teachers is instrumental to address students' growth. Common examples of bidirectional communication include phone calls, home visits, family–teacher conferences, and virtual meetings (Graham-Clay, 2024). When engaging in these forms of bidirectional communication, teachers need to consider how commonly held assumptions and biases may impact their enactment of these strategies.

For instance, D'Haem and Griswold (2017) found that preservice teachers held common stereotypes about parents from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and "candidates were focused on giving information to parents and not on creating reciprocal relationships" (p. 82). Further, Benner and Quirk (2020) indicated that parent engagement consumes much time, and some teachers do not see parent communication as an important part of their work. Feelings such as these could contribute to decreased bidirectional communication, perpetuating limited access, prestige, positioning, and power for families.

Bidirectional communication has the potential to create space for families to share important perspectives pertaining to teachers' assessments regarding the highlights and challenges of their children's school experiences. According to Leenders et al. (2019), building strong trusting relationships with parents "before there is anything substantial to talk about" (p. 11) is imperative, since parents don't always feel supported. Leenders et al. suggested the following strategies to encourage bidirectional communication:

- Involve parents in the decision-making process.
- Maintain boundaries with the best interest of the child in mind.
- Show a proactive and flexible attitude.
- Do not be timid about discussions related to difficult subjects.

Additionally, identifying and addressing barriers to family engagement with bidirectional communication is important. Graham-Clay (2024) noted potential barriers involve transportation, language, access to technology, finances, and the ability to read communications. There is no one-size-fits all form of bidirectional communication. Rather, this form of communication should be collaboratively developed with caregivers. As caregivers experience elevated forms of power and positioning as they collaborate to design communication approaches, teachers are also building trust and deepening their own knowledge of the families' backgrounds and preferences.

Offering Curriculum-Based v. Event-Based Opportunities

Schools often provide special event-based opportunities such as *Donuts with Dad* and *Spaghetti Dinners*. These are common activities that take place at schools throughout the U.S. as parents gather together. The missing element is a focused discussion on academics and curriculum that might best help parents learn ways in which to assist their children with schools' expectations. According to Edwards et al. (2019), there are several options for providing curriculum-based opportunities:

- Provide ideas on how best to help with specific assignments.
- Survey students about their likes and dislikes and create a list of books

that parents can help obtain through the library, online, or by additional means.

- Compile a classroom fact notebook to help parents with terminology, study resources, and ancillary materials.
- Create a phone or online hotline where parents can find out about forgotten or missing assignments.
- Start a blog to share what's going on in the classroom, and keep parents updated on assignments, field trips, and study strategies.
- Record videos for parents for quick updates.

These activities take teachers' time and effort; however, so does planning major events where parents may come together but not necessarily around academics and without the specialized teacher knowledge that can help students find success. When teachers engage families in curriculum-based opportunities, they send the message that families are integral members to the child's learning team and that teachers need the families' collaboration so that they know how to best support each child's growth and development. Community members also have much to offer within school–home communications as leaders can help with connecting resources and community knowledge as well as assist with building varied forms of capital to assist families.

Community Members

Oftentimes, schools may only look within their school contexts for individuals to draw into family engagement opportunities. Research has demonstrated that tremendous value lies in creating opportunities for community members and leaders to have a role in supporting the development and enactment of effective family engagement opportunities (Zygmunt et al., 2016). For this article, we define community members as individuals who have a vested interest in the community (e.g., people who live in the community, people who were raised in the community but have moved away, staff of businesses that serve community members). While there are many inclusive strategies that involve community members, we highlight three interconnected strategies that together amplify the community's impact on (re)framing family engagement.

Learning From Community Leaders

There is a growing body of research that examines how preservice teachers and practicing teachers can develop more inclusive family engagement strategies through the involvement of community members (e.g., Murrell, 2001; Zeichner et al., 2018; Zygmunt et al., 2016). This body of research indicates that an initial strategy is to identify community leaders and elders

who have deep knowledge of the community and its families. Community leaders and elders are able to offer a counternarrative to the often deficit-oriented perspectives that accompany urban contexts and families (Zygmunt et al., 2016).

A second inclusive strategy is that teachers and school leaders can learn from the identified community leaders and elders. In particular, teachers and school leaders can learn how to develop the mindsets and abilities necessary for adopting the stance of a *community teacher.* Murrell (2001) defined community teachers as "possess[ing] contextualized knowledge of the culture, community, and identity of the children and families he or she serves and draw[ing] on this knowledge to create the core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in diverse settings" (p. 52). Community leaders and elders can share the histories, cultures, languages, and ethnicities of the children and families who reside in the community. For example, Zeichner and his colleagues (2018) engaged preservice teachers in a series of panel presentations and discussions hosted by community members. These panel presentations and discussions served as spaces where preservice teachers could connect their course-based learning with the "real-world" histories and experiences of families and community members. Community leaders helped to support preservice teachers' sense-making of their "disrupted" views of families and children who experience marginalization. In their work with preservice teachers, Seidl and Friend (2002), provided opportunities for preservice teachers to participate in a community partnership with a local Black church in order to build an "equal status" partnership. These are a few examples in which community connections might allow for development of cross-cultural competencies.

Murrell (2001) cautioned that teachers "have to avoid the fatal assumption that they know all they need to know about the culture, values, traditions, and heritages of the people they purportedly serve" (p. 31). Thus, community members can serve as critical listening partners who support and encourage teachers to relate their personal identities back to the identities of their students, families, and community members. As a critical listening partner, community members and teachers can together explicate how institutional systems perpetuate racism, discrimination, and power imbalances and identify ways to rectify educational conditions that limit the power, prestige, positioning, and access children and families have (Murrell, 2001; Zygmunt et al., 2016).

Identifying Community Capital

The final inclusive family engagement strategy is to form a family–school–community partnership that works towards the goal of mobilizing

and engaging the broader community in the education of its children. The task of mobilizing the broader community is a sizable one—a task that needs to be approached with thought and intention. We suggest that members of the family–school–community partnership can begin by identifying the types of *community capital* (Yosso, 2005) that the community possesses. Yosso (2005) defined the six types of community capital as follows:

1. Aspirational capital: "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77).
2. Linguistic capital: "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78).
3. Familial capital: "those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79).
4. Social capital: "networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79).
5. Navigational capital: "skills maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80).
6. Resistant capital: "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80).

When the partnership knows what forms of capital exist in the community, they can set about designing family engagement opportunities that elevate and build upon this capital.

Throughout their research, Scaife and colleagues describe multiple efforts to incorporate community capital into family engagement (e.g., Scaife et al., 2023; Zygmunt & Cipollone, 2018; Zygmunt et al., 2018). One such effort involves using community leaders to teach preservice candidates about the community's resistance, navigational, and aspirational capitals (Scaife & Zygmunt, 2024; Zygmunt & Scaife, 2024). As part of their coursework, preservice candidates meet with community leaders at Shaffer Chapel, a historic site at the center of the community. Community leaders share the oral histories of the chapel and the community's recent work to restore the chapel and to create a community museum in the chapel's basement. The preservice teachers hear how these stories represent the community's forms of capital and what they should expect when engaging with the community's children at the local elementary school. Preservice teacher candidates are then supported to craft their teaching and interactions around these forms of community capital during their fieldwork experiences at the elementary school located in the community. It is expe-

riences such as these that position a community's forms of capital as assets that family–school–community partnerships can draw upon as they work to enhance educational experiences.

Conclusion

Family engagement has been recognized as the missing link in many urban educational contexts (Wood et al., 2014). In this article, we have built the case for how urban school leaders, teachers, and community members should (re)frame their thoughts about family engagement within urban school contexts in their quest to create validating and inclusive school communities. As Epstein (2011) noted, "Just about all families care about their children and want them to succeed and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education" (p. 393). When school leaders and teachers (re)frame how they envision family engagement, there is the potential to elevate and validate families' knowledge, literacies, and experiences.

We have outlined suggestions and strategies that hold the potential to work with the contextual circumstances pertinent to urban schools and communities. Implementation of these strategies is best done collaboratively since the efforts of practicing teachers and school leaders are not sufficient to promote effective system change. We advocate for the intentional inclusion of families and community members when (re)framing of family engagement. As research has shown, family–school–community partnerships with a vision to elevate and validate all members' contributions and roles can positively impact students' learning and academic success (e.g., Zeichner et al., 2018; Zygmunt et al., 2016). In summary, the children in urban contexts reap the educational benefits when all members of their families, schools, and communities work together towards a shared vision of educating future generations in ways that reflect asset-views, respect, and validation.

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