



Advancing Research to Improve Family–School Collaboration in School Mental Health

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Working together in collaboration, families and schools can provide consistent support to promote children’s social–emotional competencies, problem-solving skills, and positive relationships with others. The purpose of this chapter is to advance research to improve family–school collaboration in the context of integrated school mental health programs. We begin with an overview of key family–school terms and associated definitions. Next, we describe research support, and focus specifically on the need for research and implementation efforts that are specifically focused on promoting equity. Following the review of research support, we describe key research needs. In the context of existing research support for family–school collaboration, consonant with research needs, we describe specific research-supported strategies and primary next

steps. We conclude with a discussion of implications for policy.

Defining Features of Family–School Collaboration

For decades, researchers have sought to understand how educators and families can work together effectively to support the needs of students (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). Within the robust body of literature on family–school collaboration, a number of terms have emerged to describe work across home and school settings. Terms such as family involvement, family-centered services, family–school partnerships, and family engagement may sound similar, but there are considerable differences in how each is defined, which in turn reflect different approaches and perspectives for how schools and families should work together. Here we provide a brief overview of each of these terms.

Family Involvement describes the process by which parents and other caregivers support their children’s education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Research in this area focuses on discrete parenting activities that reinforce a child’s educational experience (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). Commonly cited forms of family involvement include embracing parenting practices that support children in their roles as students, communicating with school staff, volunteering for school-based

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activities, and helping students with homework (Epstein et al., 2018). *Family-Centered Services* emphasize the belief that all families should be treated with dignity and given the agency to participate meaningfully in matters related to their child. Furthermore, family-centered services target family functioning in order to promote positive outcomes for youth (Dunst, 2002). These services empower families by focusing on strengths, building child and caregiver capacity to solve problems, and facilitating resource mobilization (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008).

Family-School Partnerships describe an approach in which educators and families work together to promote positive academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes for children (Holmes et al., 2020). By engaging in cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, caregivers and educators are able to provide a comprehensive continuum of support for students that spans home and school settings (Sheridan et al., 2014). In partnership-oriented collaboration, parents and teachers work as equal partners in solution-focused problem-solving, decision-making, and planning for students (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). Family-school partnerships embrace many of the core assumptions of family-centered services including building on strengths, a belief in the dignity of all families, and practices that emphasize family agency (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). In a partnership, parents shift from being mostly passive supporters to active change agents with the power to shape school systems and practices (Ishimaru, 2020). Concurrently, school staff actively engage caregivers by (a) adopting school-wide practices that foster a welcoming climate for all families, (b) establishing positive feedback loops across home and school settings, (c) providing resources to support caregivers' use of evidence-based parenting practices in the home, (d) creating leadership opportunities for family members, and (e) engaging families in co-creating school policy (Garbacz et al., 2016). Therefore, *Family Engagement* is primarily a process whereby school personnel or other stakeholders aim to engage families in professional relationship to support their child. Family engagement focuses on understanding family expectations and culture, identifying and mitigating possible obstacles to engaging, and promoting

a process that centers on family goals (Winslow et al., 2016).

In order to sustain collaborative work between schools and families, partnership approaches strive to be responsive to family context and culture (Booster et al., 2020). Through collaborative problem-solving and embracing systems thinking, family-school partnerships contextualize children's challenges within family systems. This ensures that support planning aligns realistically with the child and family's personal needs, capabilities, and access to resources (Dunst, 2002). School-family partnerships are responsive to family culture in that they emphasize building on existing strengths and expertise rather than focusing on deficits. This encourages recognition of the multi-faceted ways that families from different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds support their children (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013).

In practice, however, engaging families as true partners can be challenging in the face of contextual and cultural factors (Stefanski et al., 2016). Within schools, deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs by staff about the deficiency of certain families can represent significant barriers to effective schooling (Ishimaru, 2020). Additionally, when families have a long history of negative interactions with school staff and the education system as a whole, it can be difficult to establish trusting relationships (Sheridan & Eastberg, 2020). Differing cultural expectations around the roles and responsibilities of caregivers and school staff can also present a challenge to establishing true partnerships. Finally, within the context of the broader community, a variety of complex social and political factors such as race, ethnicity, immigration, and socioeconomic status can have a significant influence on how schools and families interact (Miller, 2019). Family-school partnering efforts often fail to address such aspects of the historical and sociopolitical context, which maintains inequitable relationships between school staff and families (Ishimaru, 2020).

Critiques and Needs

After several decades of research on family-school connections, there are several key cri-

tiques. Most notably, there is a lack of consensus about how to define and operationalize collaborative work between schools and families (Stefanski et al., 2016). In research, this is apparent in highly theoretical frameworks with inconsistent definitions and use of terminology across studies, a lack of consistent methodology to directly examine the mechanisms of family–school collaborations, and a lack of specific examples of how to implement core components in a school setting (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). These factors may make it challenging for schools to effectively translate partnership and engagement models into practice.

The lack of consensus on how to define family–school work is evident in the variety of terms that are used. Although family involvement, family centeredness, family engagement, and family–school partnerships have distinct meanings with differing implications for work with families, they are often used interchangeably in both research and educational policy (Stefanski et al., 2016). Most notably, the field is moving from an emphasis on promoting family involvement to more collaborative processes (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). Despite this shift in research, models of family involvement continue to persist in practice, as educators value school-based parenting activities and de-emphasize the value of parents as equal partners (Ishimaru, 2020; Stefanski et al., 2016). The family involvement construct places responsibility on families to become involved (on the school’s terms) rather than on schools to create systems and practices that engage families as collaborators (Garbacz et al., 2017a, b). A troubling implication of this dynamic is that when family involvement is low, parents/caregivers (rather than school systems) are characterized as deficient (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013).

Advancing Family–School Collaboration as an Inclusive Approach

We suggest that terms used in the family–school literature do not capture an inclusive approach to the work that families and schools share in their

support of youth mental health. We argue that the field should move toward an approach that creates non-hierarchical dynamics among families and educators that emphasize authentic collaboration among families, schools, and mental health systems. Family–school collaboration positions families and educators as co-equals in planning and problem-solving. The collaborative approach should be flexible and dynamic, integrating families’ culture and identities. These collaborative, non-hierarchical, flexible strategies should be clarified with families and educators in school and district documentation and used by researchers during study conceptualization and methodology. Such an approach centers on family voice, integrates family voice with educator perspectives in a collaborative manner, and allows these stakeholders to be empowered in taking ownership over the care for their child.

Research Support for Family–School Collaboration

Family–school collaboration is an empirically supported approach for supporting positive youth mental health outcomes (Sheridan et al., 2019a, b). Observational studies show that family–school collaboration is associated with improved emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning in youth (Castro et al., 2015; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2019). Across developmental periods, engagement between families and schools predicts increased positive behaviors, including prosocial skills, and decreased negative behaviors, such as concentration problems and disruptive behaviors (Smith et al., 2019). In children, parent educational involvement is associated with improved social skills (Powell et al., 2010). Among adolescents, parent involvement has been shown to predict growth in positive peer affiliations (Garbacz et al., 2018). In addition, studies show that academic achievement is higher among students whose parents are more involved in their education (Castro et al., 2015). Multiple dimensions of parent involvement, including home-based and school-based involvement, have been linked to more adaptive behaviors in youth (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Garbacz et al., 2018).

Research shows that collaborative parent–teacher relationships strengthen children’s emotional and behavior functioning. Minke et al. (2014) found that teacher report of children’s social skills and externalizing behaviors were more positive when teachers and parents shared positive perceptions of the parent–teacher relationship, compared to when their perceptions of the relationship differed. Furthermore, parents’ perceptions of teacher responsiveness were associated with better child social adjustment (Powell et al., 2010). In sum, when parents and teachers form positive, reciprocal relationships, they can reinforce child competencies and ameliorate concerns, in order to improve youth mental health.

There is strong research support for the efficacy of family–school interventions for youth mental health. Notably, Smith et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of family–school partnership interventions on academic and social–emotional functioning. Family–school partnership interventions focus on joint family–school efforts to support children by strengthening connections across home and school. Results of the meta-analysis by Smith et al. show that family–school partnership interventions have positive effects on child mental health ($\delta = 0.34$), social behavioral competence ($\delta = 0.32$), and academic achievement ($\delta = 0.25$) and behaviors ($\delta = 0.25$). School-to-home communication and collaboration contributed to multiple positive intervention effects, and bidirectional communication was associated with intervention effects on child social–behavioral competence specifically (Smith et al., 2020). A separate meta-analysis by Sheridan and colleagues (2019a, b), which examined both family–school partnership interventions and parent-involvement interventions, also identified positive intervention outcomes for child social–behavioral competence and mental health.

Family–school interventions have improved outcomes for youth from diverse backgrounds and across developmental periods (Sheridan et al., 2019a, b; Smith et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2020) found that family–school partnership intervention effects were not moderated by child race and ethnicity, while Sheridan et al. showed

that family–school intervention effects on mental health were largest for African American children. These results support the use of a collaborative approach to working with parents from diverse backgrounds, who may have differing values and expectations regarding their involvement at school and their child’s behavior (Smith et al., 2020). In addition, Smith et al. (2020) showed that family–school partnership interventions were effective across age groups and that certain relational intervention components may be uniquely impactful when intervening with parents of older children. Sheridan et al. (2019a, b) found that family–school intervention effects on mental health were greater for children from non-urban and rural settings, as compared to urban settings. Family–school interventions may be particularly beneficial in augmenting existing resources in the context of rural communities that have less access to services (Sheridan et al., 2019a, b).

Family–school interventions leverage a collaborative approach to problem-solving that strengthens and supports parent–teacher relationships (Sheridan et al., 2012). Sheridan et al. (2012) examined parent–teacher relationships as a mechanism of change for intervention effects in Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC), an evidence-based, family–school partnership approach for child emotional and behavior concerns. Results showed that enhanced parent–teacher relationships mediate the effects of CBC on positive changes in child behavior (Sheridan et al., 2012). In addition, the Family–School Success intervention for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been shown to improve the quality of family–school relationships (Power et al., 2012). CBC has been shown to lead to greater gains in teacher report of children’s social skills when parents’ and teachers’ communication with one another has low congruence, compared to when their communication has high congruence (Garbacz et al., 2015). These results suggest that CBC’s collaborative, relational approach is particularly beneficial for parents and teachers to begin the CBC process with divergent views about their communication with one another.

The Family Check-Up (FCU) is another evidence-based approach for family–school collaboration. The FCU is a brief, family-centered intervention that is tailored to the individual strengths and needs of families. The FCU utilizes a motivational approach to facilitate the uptake of evidence-based parenting practices in schools and other service settings, including parenting practices that promote home-to-school connections (Stormshak et al., 2010). Research supports the efficacy of the FCU for family–school engagement at home (Garbacz et al., 2019). Critically, the FCU has been shown to prevent declines in family–school engagement at home across the transition from kindergarten to elementary school (Garbacz et al., 2019). The FCU also enhances key child competencies and reduces mental health concerns. Among children and adolescents, the FCU has been shown to have positive effects on self-regulation and effective parenting strategies that, in turn, are associated with decreased emotional and behavior problems (Chang et al., 2014; Stormshak et al., 2010, 2020).

Family–school interventions have demonstrated social validity. Social validity refers to the extent to which individuals are satisfied with an experience or intervention, such as CBC (Wolf, 1978). Relative to teacher-only consultation and parent-only consultation, teachers and parents have indicated a preference for CBC for resolving student concerns and have rated CBC as more acceptable (Freer & Watson, 1999). Parents and teachers have reported perceiving CBC as effective and acceptable, as well as being satisfied with consultants (Sheridan et al., 2001). In addition, a partnership-oriented approach has been shown to predict teacher acceptability and satisfaction with the CBC process (Garbacz et al., 2008). Together, these studies highlight the utility of a collaborative family–school approach for increasing the social validity of interventions designed to support youth mental health.

Family–school interventions have been evaluated using a range of research designs, including randomized controlled trials, group quasi-experimental designs, and single case methods (Sheridan et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2020). Of

note, Sheridan et al. (2012) conducted a four-cohort, large-scale cluster randomized trial, wherein small groups of students within classrooms were assigned to either a CBC or business as usual control condition. Randomized controlled trials of CBC have assessed intervention outcomes at immediate post-test (Sheridan et al., 2012), as well as three-month (Power et al., 2012) and one-year follow-up (Sheridan et al., 2019a, b). In another study, Sheridan et al. (2001) examined effects from a variety of single-case design studies. CBC has also been examined through multiple baseline, multi-treatment, and reversal designs to evaluate CBC effects (Sheridan et al., 1990). Findings from single-case design studies have found benefits for children in a range of social, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Garbacz et al., 2016; Schemm, 2007; Sheridan et al., 1990).

Equity and Minoritized Populations

Additional work is needed that centers family–school research on equity and prioritizes minoritized populations, or individuals who have faced stigma and prejudices. Several needs exist in how family–school work is conceptualized and measured. The family involvement construct reflects a white, middle-class standard for parenting, which marginalizes families from non-dominant backgrounds who do not adhere to these norms (Yull et al., 2014). When schools maintain involvement-oriented approaches, they perpetuate attitudes that children and families from non-dominant backgrounds are inherently flawed and need to be fixed through didactic (rather than collaborative) interactions with school staff (Ishimaru, 2020). Family involvement approaches also emphasize school-centered parenting activities where parents are expected to passively support the policies and demands of school staff with little opportunity to actively engage in agenda-setting or decision-making (Ishimaru, 2020). Failing to provide meaningful opportunities for all families to engage in active decision-making results in school policies and practices that reflect educator priorities rather than the needs and val-

ues of the surrounding community (Stefanski et al., 2016). These cultural and contextual issues are reflected in the significant challenges that schools report in their attempts to engage families, especially those from minoritized backgrounds (Kim, 2009).

In order to engage families from all backgrounds in equitable partnerships, family-engagement and partnership frameworks must address the importance of context and culture (Ishimaru, 2020). In practice, efforts to promote equal partnerships within school contexts often place the burden of responsibility on parents to engage rather than on modifying school systems that are inaccessible (Ishimaru, 2020). In a qualitative study examining the implementation of three different school initiatives to engage families, Ishimaru (2019) found that despite a goal of establishing partnerships, schools still defaulted to unidirectional strategies that focused on increasing parents' school-based involvement, rather than promoting systems-level change. These frameworks often fail to address the power dynamics that do not provide opportunities for non-dominant families and the feelings of distrust that discourage them from meaningfully engaging in school contexts (Miller, 2019). Additionally, partnership-oriented frameworks do not directly address how issues of intersectionality impact the educational experiences of children and their families (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013). To effectively collaborate with families, school policies and practices address the intersection of identities and additive effects of multiple marginalized identities (Proctor et al., 2017).

Inconsistent definitions in existing research are confounded by limited diversity within research samples among existing studies further impeding the translation of family-school collaboration research to practice particularly with historically marginalized and excluded families. The majority of existing family-school collaboration research provides empirical support for school-centric approaches that lack family and youth voice in school decisions, noticeably reinforcing the preferences, power, and authority of educators over families (Booker & Goldman,

2016) and until recently, a limited focus on closing achievement or discipline gaps (Sondergeld et al., 2020). Typical approaches to family-school collaboration require families to fit into school-preferred approaches for partnering with educators and supporting their children's learning (e.g., attending school events during typical business hours), rather than further investigating ways to facilitate implementation of promising family-school collaboration practices across all socioeconomic and racial groups (i.e., subtle forms of engagement including what families discuss and the various ways families support children at home; Jeynes, 2010; Sheridan et al., 2019a, b).

Traditional school-centric approaches often have a negative impact on the family-school collaboration relationship with historically marginalized and excluded families (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Huguley et al., 2020; Weininger & Lareau, 2003). Traditional approaches further marginalize families within educational processes and communicate the value of dominant-culture perspectives (Harry, 2008). Interpersonal relationships are likely affected by ineffective strategies employed as educators report feeling ill-equipped to effectively reach out to minoritized families (Eberly et al., 2007). Research and implementation efforts focused on family-school collaboration should address improving the relationships between schools and historically marginalized families will need to consider confounding influences of (a) educator and families' negative prior family-school collaboration experiences, (b) cultural, developmental, and skill-level differences at play within individual relationships between families and schools, (c) as well as aggregate, school-level effects of these considerations within studies. Additionally, attention is needed for the role of immigrant and refugee status and length of time in host country, availability of language support within studies to better understand factors affecting family-school collaboration for immigrant families (Antony-Newman, 2019).

Social capital is an important topic to consider in family-school collaboration. Social capital refers to the degree to which families have connections and relationships with others (Goddard,

2003; Sheldon, 2002). Creating opportunities for families to learn about family engagement behaviors from one another can normalize the challenges of parenting and supporting student success and well-being and may reinforce the importance of these behaviors. Increasing equitable parental ties with other families of children enrolled at the school offers a potential strategy to increase family–school collaboration (Goddard, 2003; Sheldon, 2002).

Research Needs

Family–school research has progressed considerably over the last 50 years (see Garbacz et al., 2017a, b for a review). Research has increasingly emphasized experimental investigations and sought to understand how family–school interventions promote positive outcomes for families, educators, and children. In addition, conceptualizations of family–school constructs have moved from emphasizing one-directional, involvement-oriented approaches to more dynamic, flexible, and collaborative approaches. Despite these improvements, significant needs remain to advance family–school collaboration toward improved equity and authentic collaboration among all families. Research is needed that addresses (a) increased connection to practice and (b) centering on family voice and experience. With those points in mind, we position qualitative research, research to specifically better understand family–school interventions with minoritized populations, community-based participatory research, research–practice partnerships, research that uncovers mechanisms within family–school interventions responsible for positive outcomes, and hybrid designs as essential needs to propel research on family–school collaboration and enhance outcomes for children, youth, families, and schools.

Qualitative Research

One of the core elements of family–school collaboration is the recognition of the value of

family voice in educational contexts (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Within this approach, the assumption is that caregivers have important ideas about their children and that it is critical for educators to be receptive to this information (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Despite the centering of family perspectives in family–school frameworks, caregiver and youth perspectives are often left out during the development of educational theory, policy, and practices (Ishimaru, 2020). Through the use of qualitative research methodology in education, children and families are positioned as valuable sources of data that can be used to guide program design, evaluate effectiveness, and inform school-based practices (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

A qualitative approach is also critical for understanding how stakeholders from various groups make sense of and experience school practices and family–school interventions (Dotson-Blake et al., 2009). Although qualitative research encompasses a broad variety of research methodologies, qualitative strategies that may be used to capture child and caregiver perspectives include focus groups, interviews, and story-telling (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Furthermore, qualitative research methods are particularly powerful for addressing equity in family–school collaboration efforts. By allowing participants to express their lived experiences in their own words, qualitative work gives voice to groups who have been historically marginalized or otherwise excluded from educational research (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Qualitative work lends nuance to our understanding of the complex experiences of marginalized groups within the education system and enriches the quality of data interpretation (Yull et al., 2014). Moving forward, research on family–school collaboration should focus more on qualitative methods in order to focus on family ideas, perspectives, and experiences. Such qualitative research may uncover problems that have led to failed scale-up efforts of family–school interventions and perpetuated a lack of research-supported practices used in schools (Dishion et al., 2020).

Family–School Research with Minoritized Populations

Research is needed to investigate the role of family–school collaboration, particularly with historically marginalized families, to better understand the possibilities for improving racial inequities among students. Recently, efforts to prioritize equity within all facets of research have provided general recommendations to the field including ensuring researchers are aware, intentional, and committed to examining their own biases, digging deeper into the data, engaging communities as partners, guarding against using White as the normative comparison, and ensuring their research has a positive impact on communities (Andrews et al., 2019). Within the space of family–school collaboration for historically marginalized and excluded families, emphasis on increased family and youth voice to inform school practices and processes is essential.

The emerging studies in the space of family–school collaboration with historically marginalized and excluded groups often utilize case studies or small samples as the primary methodological approach (Ishimaru et al., 2016). However, these approaches lack replicability and limit the support and utilization of approaches in the field as evidence-based practices. Future studies should consider methodological rigor and replicability to increase implementation of practices in the field (Ishimaru et al., 2019). Community-based participatory design research shows promise as a methodological approach that fundamentally reshapes the connections between families and schools by centering family and youth voice within the research process (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). In the section that follows, we expand on how a participatory approach can advance family–school collaboration.

Community-Based Participatory Research

In the development of sustainable family–school partnership programs, it is critical to consider the

broader context and culture of the community as well as the processes that shape interactions between families and school staff (Booster et al., 2020). Therefore, research on family–school collaboration moving forward should seek to include experiences of families from their perspective and work with families in a research process that starts with understanding needs and opportunities, which can lead to identifying research questions that are relevant to families. Such approaches will allow researchers, practitioners, and families to integrate family and youth voice within policy and practice (Huguley et al., 2020). Critical participatory action research (Brooks et al., 2020), participatory design research (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016), and design-based research (Ishimaru et al., 2019) center the voice of families and students in the design of the study allowing for a truly family-driven, contextually responsive research-based strategy.

Despite existing support limited to small sample sizes (Ishimaru et al.'s 2019), principles from cultural-historical activity theory used in participatory design research studies offer suggestions for future family–school research. Cultural-historical activity theory offers a framework to better understand the relationship between what individuals think and feel, how they behave, and their relationship with each other (Engestrom, 2011). Suggestions that emanate from this framework include examining family–school collaboration as an outcome, focusing on experiences from historically marginalized and excluded families, better understanding the tensions among historically marginalized families and school staff, and allowing the goals of family–school collaboration to be defined by a local school-based team (Engestrom, 2011; Ishimaru et al., 2019).

These frameworks integrate collective learning from youth and families allowing for improved beliefs and skills among educators to better partner with historically marginalized and excluded families (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Brooks et al., 2020; Lac & Mansfield, 2018). Continuing to investigate design frameworks that center local voices and contextual fit within the design and research process show promise for

improving family–school relations, particularly for historically marginalized families (Ishimaru et al., 2019).

Community-based, participatory approaches allow for examining community context and aligning prevention and intervention efforts to community needs and priorities (Blitz et al., 2013). These frameworks align with context through soliciting key stakeholders’ (e.g., parents, teachers, school administrators, community members) perspectives to guide program development, implementation, data collection, interpretation, evaluation, and revision (Booster et al., 2020). Community-based, participatory approaches are distinct from investigator-driven models in that the beneficiaries of the research are active collaborators throughout the process. During the active collaboration process, community members take ownership over their goals and develop plans to address those goals. This results in culturally relevant prevention and intervention efforts that empower community by building the capacity of stakeholders to solve their identified challenges (Garcia, 2019). Consistently engaging families, community members, and educators throughout the research process also increase the likelihood that programs will be feasible and acceptable to those stakeholders that are likely to lead to improved implementation fidelity and better alignment with the resources and capabilities of a given context (Booster et al., 2020).

A vast majority of family–school research has centered around the assumption that caregivers interact with schools in the same way, without recognizing that minoritized families have unique experiences with the school system (Yull et al., 2018). Through including qualitative methods such as focus groups and an emphasis on stakeholder input, community-based, participatory approaches can serve as a powerful way to elevate the voices of minoritized students and families and to tailor recommendations to their unique experiences (Yull et al., 2014). This has proven to be a useful study design in medical research, another area where minoritized groups have been historically disenfranchised and where quality partnerships with families are important to effective practice (Moreno et al., 2009). Moving for-

ward, research on family–school collaboration needs to embrace a community-based participatory approach to design programming that is responsive to a variety groups, geographic contexts, and communities (Blitz et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2020; Yull et al., 2018).

Mechanism of Family–School Interventions

Family–school research is needed that uncovers mechanism and longitudinal implications of family–school interventions. There is a lack of studies examining whether the mechanisms of change by which family–school collaboration improves child mental health outcomes differ across families from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. As families from diverse backgrounds may have varying expectations and perceptions of their role in their child’s education (Smith et al., 2020), it is important to examine how this variability may shape change processes when families collaborate with school staff. Second, there is a need for further longitudinal intervention research on family–school partnership interventions, in order to determine if intervention effects on the parent–teacher relationship and child mental health are maintained over time. Third, additional research is needed to identify if specific family–school intervention components have differential effects on various child mental health outcomes, in order to understand which components are empirically supported for which domains of mental health.

Hybrid Designs

Hybrid designs combine elements of qualitative research and experimental design. In hybrid designs, there is a concomitant focus on examining the impacts of the intervention on family, school, and student outcomes, as well as a careful study of the implementation process, including focus groups and interviews with stakeholders who were involved in the delivery of the intervention and families and students who received the intervention (Curran et al., 2012). In a hybrid

design, researchers specify a set of impact research questions, such as the impact of a family–school partnership intervention on improving social skills for children at risk for emotional and behavior concerns. In the next set of research questions, researchers specify a set of implementation-oriented questions. These implementation questions focus on understanding the implementation process and how stakeholders experienced the intervention.

Hybrid designs have been applied in a majority of cases to scale up efforts, to better understand the process of moving an intervention from efficacy to effectiveness through dissemination research (Curran et al., 2012). However, any stage of the intervention development process would benefit from using a hybrid design. Indeed, findings consistently support the need to better understand how individuals participating in interventions make sense of the intervention and its implementation in their daily life (Castillo, 2020). Including hybrid designs at earlier stages of the intervention development process allows for a more proactive orientation to the design of interventions, grounding them in family, student, and educator voice from exploration, through iterative refinement, into efficacy testing, to effectiveness, and scale-up. In fact, such proactive approaches to integrating hybrid designs may help prevent a scenario where a family–school intervention shows evidence of efficacy, only to experience implementation problems during scale-up (Dishion et al., 2020).

High-Impact Approaches to Promote Family–School Collaboration

In this section, we highlight a few strategies that show promise across studies and contexts as high-impact family–school approaches that center on equity and prioritize collaboration. We focus specifically on school proactive outreach to families, dual capacity building, effective two-way communication, and dynamic and authentic collaboration. Although much more research is needed, and there are limitations with existing research, these approaches could be considered

as both an implementation priority and as a foundation for future research.

To promote family engagement, schools might consider reaching out to families proactively before concerns arise. Indeed, such an approach holds promise for promoting positive student behavior and family–school collaboration (Garbacz et al., 2020). With proactive outreach, schools are using multiple modalities to reach families about collaboration, such as sharing how family voice can be amplified in school decision-making. Proactive outreach can also be focused on positive contacts about positive student behavior (Fefer et al., 2020). Proactive strategies allow schools to establish a connection with families that is grounded in a positive interaction. These positive interactions may help serve as a foundation for follow-up contacts if concerns arise. Fefer et al. (2020) showed support for a positive outreach strategy within classrooms by identifying students who may benefit from additional support but were demonstrating targeted or individual support needs and defining teacher-initiated positive communication with parents about their child’s positive behavior. Additional research is needed on these methods of positive outreach at the school and classroom level.

Families and teachers do not have a roadmap for collaborating with one another (Weist et al., 2017). When families and educators do interact, findings suggest that it is about problems, which can strain relationships and erode trust (Santiago et al., 2016). A dual capacity-building framework acknowledges that families and schools may benefit from additional support in collaborating with each other and positions those supports as important for establishing and sustaining collaborative relationships (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). Additional research is needed that examines approaches to supporting families and educators as they enter and sustain shared, partnership-centered work.

Research supports that effective communication strategies are key to promoting family–school collaboration. Home–school communication is a primary method of building trusting family–school relationships (Adams & Christenson, 2000). In addition, bidirectional communication between families and schools

promotes children’s social–behavioral competencies (Smith et al., 2020). When families and schools engage in two-way communication, behavior supports for children can be aligned across home and school, in order to reinforce and strengthen effective behavior management techniques (Sheridan et al., 2012). Family–school problem-solving teams that address shared concerns about children can be used to enhance communication between families and schools (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Research also suggests that working toward common goals, exchanging positive feedback, and establishing consistent behavioral expectations across home and school can facilitate effective communication between parents and teachers when supporting positive child behavior (Strickland-Cohen & Kyzar, 2019).

Empowering family members to actively participate in school decision-making is instrumental to family–school collaboration (Jones & Hazuka, 2013; Minke & Anderson, 2003). Family–school conferences that are centered around family strengths and explicitly value family members’ input on their child are one approach to increase family empowerment (Minke & Anderson, 2003). Culturally responsive practices are also critical to forming collaborative family–school relationships (Jones & Hazuka, 2013). By affirming the experiences and values of families from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as acknowledging the cultural values embedded within the school itself, schools can help form the basis of meaningful partnerships with families (Jones & Hazuka, 2013). In addition, by connecting with community partners who have knowledge of families’ cultural values, schools can create school environments in which children and families feel a sense of belonging (Jones & Hazuka, 2013).

Implications for Policy

Several implications for policy emanate from research needs to advance family–school collaboration. First, federal education policy often suggests that families and educators should

collaborate to support students, yet the policies lack clear guidance for how collaboration should happen (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Future education policy would be better served through clearer definitions, role and position clarifications, and scoped and sequenced recommendations for how schools and families should ground their collaborative work. Second, dedicated funds are needed to allow educators and families to collaborate in schoolwide decision-making and to support individual students. Public education can convey to families their value by acknowledging their time with dedicated funds. Finally, grant application calls often perpetuate a focus on classical rigorous quantitative methodology. Such approaches are not always well aligned with family–school research. For example, all families may not have the time to complete a lengthy psychometrically sound measure. In addition, quantitative methods often leave out an in-depth understanding of family voice and experience. Grant application calls should be restructured to prioritize pragmatic methodologies and allow for timelines that are conducive to research–practice partnerships, and community-based, participatory approaches where stakeholders and context are prioritized. Such approaches may have the best chance of creating translational change in schools and communities.

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