

Book Review of *Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family–School Partnerships and Implications for Practice*

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For decades, researchers have emphasized the impact that family, school, and community partnerships have on student success and well-being. Effective partnerships are tied to a variety of positive outcomes for the entire community, including improvements in student grades, test scores, graduation rates, attendance rates, levels of student engagement and teacher retention, and a decrease in suspensions and disciplinary issues (Mapp et al., 2022). While the evidence base for family–school partnerships has been steadily growing for half a century, the moment has never been more opportune for substantial change. The COVID-19 pandemic provided families with a window into the classroom and educators with a window into their students’ homes. Families and schools needed to collaborate in unprecedented ways. Now the question remains, how can schools leverage what they learned about families instead of returning to the status quo? The book *Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family–School Partnerships and Implications for Practice*—written by Karen L. Mapp, Anne T. Henderson, Stephany Cuevas, Martha C. Franco, and Suzanna Ewert—not only makes a compelling case for family–school partnerships, but also offers actionable recommendations for cultivating these partnerships.

Anyone who is part of a school community can benefit from reading this book. School and district leaders are best positioned to make use of the book’s recommendations for implementing systems change at a large level, whether adopting a Community Schools model or instituting parent–teacher home visits. However, educators will be most able to create change quickly at the classroom level by putting into practice the strategies to strengthen relationships

with families. Lastly, there are also helpful takeaways for parent and community leaders, particularly in understanding how community organizing can be a lever for change.

The book is divided into an introduction; four chapters that highlight the impact and benefits of family–school partnerships for different audiences—(1) students, (2) educators, (3) families, and (4) schools, districts, and communities; and a final chapter on the implications for practice. The chapters succinctly offer research summaries, real life examples, and recommendations through the use of vignettes, bulleted lists, charts, and other visuals.

The introduction depicts why now is the time to double down on family–school partnerships, highlighting the progress that has been made at the federal and state level, as well as investment from the philanthropic sector. Next, the section provides a brief and useful historical summary, referencing political wins and research milestones for family engagement beginning in the 1960s. The section also includes a glossary of terms and breaks down the definition of family engagement: “a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children’s learning and development, from birth through college and career” (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 16), describing the meanings of “full,” “equal,” and “equitable.” One of the most valuable components of the introduction is the outline of the book and what essential questions each chapter answers. The outline will help readers who want to prioritize the sections most relevant to their role or community context.

The first chapter focuses on the ways students benefit from strong family–school partnerships. Like each of the chapters that follow, the section opens with a short vignette illustrating a real-life example and proceeds to lay out research and best practices that illustrate big ideas. The chapter highlights Child–Parent Centers—which provide opportunities for caregivers to strengthen their connection to their children, the school, and the community—as a best practice in early childhood that supports children’s long term success. The resources offered at Child–Parent Centers vary, but include opportunities to connect with other families, volunteer in the classroom, receive parent education, or participate in GED classes. The first chapter also illustrates the impact of structured conversations to build trust between parents and teachers, particularly through parent–teacher home visits.

In addition to these holistic approaches, the chapter features short-term interventions that lead to academic success, including encouraging families to prioritize shared reading experiences and math games to build basic skills. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize that effective communication between home and school is the cornerstone of high-impact family–school partnerships; this chapter explores the power of text messages and personal

calls to strengthen relationships and to increase family engagement and student motivation. The chapter even delves into a topic that eludes many: partnering with families in middle and high school. The authors focus on the elements of a strong transition program to keep families engaged in high school and organize strategies in the chart, “Beating the Odds: Components of an Effective Program to Engage High School Families” (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 35). While the importance of creating more just and equitable school systems is embedded throughout the book, the end of Chapter 1 addresses the topic explicitly, calling for conflict-resolution practices that rely on “radical healing” strategies (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 36) and the removal of structural barriers to engagement through community organizing. The first chapter presents a thorough explanation of the ways students benefit from strong family–school partnerships, effectively synthesizing research on what impacts student success and articulating strategies for putting that research into practice.

The second chapter focuses on the ways that educators benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The authors demonstrate how connecting with families in meaningful ways can challenge teachers’ preconceived notions and disrupt implicit bias. The chapter shares a firsthand perspective from a teacher whose parent–teacher home visit fostered an appreciation for the child’s family and culture. Given the current climate of teacher shortages and low morale, one of the biggest takeaways from this chapter was the description of the Alensworth et al. study (2009) that found that teachers are more likely to stay in schools when they have trusting relationships with families. The chapter also illustrates how the outdated idea of family involvement which “tells parents how they can contribute” and in which teachers’ goals are to “serve clients” may not benefit educators; however, family engagement which asks teachers to build relationships by “listen[ing] to parents and what they think, dream, and worry about” will help to retain educators (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 48). While the chapter primarily discusses how educators can shift their own mindsets and practices to create change, the final section acknowledges that the issue cannot be resolved one teacher at a time, at least not without resources, leadership, and infrastructure. Buy-in from educators is an essential component of any effort to improve family–school partnerships. The chapter illustrates how taking the time to build relationships with families can pay dividends in the long run, but would be stronger if it included shorter term benefits to family engagement, as well.

The third chapter focuses on the ways that families benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The chapter revisits the practice of parent–teacher home visits, this time from the perspective of the parent. The vignette that opens the chapter illustrates that parent–teacher home visits can empower

families and make them feel valued. Beyond parent–teacher relationships, the chapter highlights how effective family–school partnerships provide opportunities for families to connect with each other, not just as acquaintances but in ways that allow them to develop meaningful networks that can provide support. The chapter emphasizes the importance of cultivating leadership skills among families. When parents and caregivers see themselves as leaders, they feel empowered, their family becomes better connected to the community, and the school reaps the benefits of the leaders’ dedication to the community.

Chapter 3 also digs into the wide variety of barriers that families face when engaging with the school and cautions against making assumptions about families. In addition to urging schools to think about childcare, transportation, work conflicts, and other common barriers, the authors prompt readers to consider how the families’ past experiences, cultures, or identities might affect the way they engage. Lastly, the chapter highlights ideal communication practices, describing that communication should be “clear, open, and ongoing” and should focus on painting an accurate picture of student performance (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 77). While it’s unsurprising that family–school partnerships benefit families in general, the chapter articulates how stronger family–school partnerships more effectively engage marginalized or underrepresented families.

The fourth chapter focuses on the ways that schools, districts, and entire communities benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The chapter describes how families can play a key role in school improvement, using community organizing to create lasting reform. The authors highlight the Mediratta et al. (2009) study that outlines how Austin Interfaith organized its community to achieve major wins. By mobilizing families and engaging district officials, the group elevated the needs of Black and Latinx students and successfully advocated for grant funding that resulted in additional staff and other resources, including bilingual teachers, special education teachers, a parent support specialist, and an ESL class. In turn, school climate and student performance improved in Austin.

The chapter also highlights other replicable reform efforts, including the districtwide implementation of Community Schools in Oakland, California and several individuals who utilized a co-design model to invite families to the table. The chapter notes that in areas that are low in social capital, establishing and maintaining systems for strong family–school partnerships can be particularly challenging, and addressing the root causes of inequities is often a crucial first step. If a major purpose of education is to graduate informed citizens who can contribute to society, there is an inherent connection between family–school partnerships and the wider community. The chapter effectively outlines how entire systems can be transformed by family–school partnerships and how community members can play a role.

The final chapter, like the introduction, offers a helpful recapitulation of the book, including summaries of the major findings across all four previous chapters. For the action-oriented reader, Chapter 5 also succinctly identifies six recommended practices:

1. Intentionally cultivate relationships of trust and respect.
2. Start family engagement early.
3. Communicate clearly and continuously.
4. Focus on equity.
5. Prepare educators at all levels to work with families.
6. Extend networks and partnerships. (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 105)

The book also includes summaries of all of the studies mentioned for readers who would like to dig deeper into the research.

Overall, this book offers a thorough overview of the latest research and practices in family–school partnerships, and it does an impressive job communicating research in terms that will resonate with practitioners at all levels. However, the second chapter focuses very heavily on how family–school partnerships can enhance teachers’ practice without emphasizing how it can improve their day to day life. In our current teaching climate, educators care about their long-term professional development, but also want to know how family–school partnerships can help them get through the day. To more effectively make the case to teachers, researchers need to shine a light on the ways caregivers can lighten teachers’ loads by helping in classrooms, supporting with administrative tasks, and reinforcing learning at home. The book makes the strongest case for the impact family engagement has on families, school leaders, and school systems, but also has useful content for educators, administrators, and youth program leaders at all stages of their career.

References

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