Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: An Underused Resource for Student Success

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Abstract

Parent engagement in education has been shown to have positive effects on students' academic and social/emotional success. However, much of the research has focused on younger students. Less attention has been given to parent engagement at the secondary level, especially with respect to how parents choose to engage and how adolescents perceive this engagement. This article reviews the literature on parent engagement at the secondary level, focusing on its importance to academic achievement, high school completion rates, and social–emotional functioning. Factors influencing parents' decisions to become engaged are discussed, including parental self-efficacy, role construction, and specific invitations from the child. Parent engagement remains important at the secondary level, though parent behaviors appear to change to match the developmental needs of students. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Key Words: parent engagement, families, middle, high schools, secondary level, parental self-efficacy, role construction, invitations

Analysis of the Literature on Engaging Families of Secondary Students

Parent engagement is a complex, multifaceted construct that encompasses the ways in which parents support their child's education at home and at

school. Parent engagement has been linked with positive student outcomes across the age range from elementary to high school. Although somewhat less attention has been given to high school students, the available literature reviewed below suggests that parent engagement is associated with higher academic achievement, better high school completion rates, and positive social/emotional outcomes (e.g., Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007).

Though there appear to be significant benefits associated with parent engagement throughout a child's education, in recent years, concerns have been expressed regarding whether some parents are too involved in their children's lives. These "helicopter" parents are believed to swoop down at a moment's notice whenever their children are in distress and may inadvertently interfere with children's ability to tackle challenges and solve their own problems. This phenomenon has been researched primarily at the college level, where some evidence suggests that students with overly engaged parents lack autonomy and fail to develop appropriate peer relationships (Van Ingen et al., 2015).

The notion that there are benefits and risks to parent engagement suggests some gaps in the literature. For example, most research directed toward understanding the mechanisms through which parents choose to become involved in education and the behaviors they enact has been conducted at the elementary level (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). However, schools are expected to engage families throughout high school, given federal legislative mandates for both general (Every Student Succeeds Act) and special education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and relatively little research has addressed this process. Questions remain regarding the role that the parent–child relationship may play in motivating parent engagement and whether there are developmental differences in the kinds of behaviors that adolescents prefer and will accept from their parents.

In this article, we review the existing literature on the parent engagement process at the secondary level and its effects on academic and social/emotional outcomes for students. We used primary search databases including Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and ERIC (EBSCOhost). The search included combinations of the following terms: parent involvement, parent engagement, parent participation, high school, secondary school, elementary school, academic/educational outcomes, high school completion, school dropout, and social/emotional outcomes. We first outline the outcomes associated with parent engagement, both academic and social/emotional. We then discuss what is known about parental decision-making and engagement behaviors. We conclude with implications for practice and future research.

Definitions

Researchers use a variety of terms to describe the ways in which families and schools interact to produce student outcomes. In older literature and conceptualizations, parent "involvement" or "participation" was used to focus on particular parental behaviors, valued by school personnel, that help students succeed. For example, some early research focused on parent involvement as communication with teachers regarding student progress (Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Bertrand, 1997; Epstein, 1991) and helping with homework (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Lawson (2003) described these kinds of conceptualizations of parent involvement as "school-centric," meaning that school professionals decide what is expected from parents. School-centric parent involvement includes those behaviors that are visible to school staff, such as attending parent–teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, and helping with homework. Lawson contrasts these kinds of involvement behaviors with "community-centric" activities that are less visible to teachers, such as keeping children safe in dangerous neighborhoods. When "involvement" is judged only from the perspective of the school, miscommunications can occur that negatively affect family–school relationships.

Parent engagement is a relatively newer term that has a broader conceptualization, encompassing any behavior that parents perform to support education. This notion has its roots in early research that recognized the importance of factors such as parental aspirations for student achievement and communication of those aspirations to students (Bloom, 1980, as cited in Fan, 2001). Engagement includes school-centric behaviors but also less visible behaviors such as conversations with the child about education-related topics. Parent engagement perspectives acknowledge that there is no singular way for parents to be engaged and that no matter how small the behavior may be (e.g., asking adolescents how their school day was), it may have a positive effect. Engagement includes any parental behavior that shows adolescents that parents have a vested interest in their education and future and encompasses behaviors at home (e.g., monitoring of behavior and homework), at school (e.g., interactions with teachers, attending school events), and parent–student interactions (e.g., educational planning; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014).

Additionally, more recent conceptualizations of the family–school connection recognize that limiting the focus to "parents" misses the broader contextual supports within families that are likely to have an effect on student outcomes. Therefore, many authors use the term "family engagement" to be inclusive of these influences. Family engagement perspectives also acknowledge the importance of community influences in building families' capacities to engage

in ways that support student success (see Dearing, Sibley, & Nguyen, 2015 for a review). Similarly, family engagement perspectives include the notion of partnership; there should be a bidirectional flow of information and shared responsibility for outcomes (Parent Teacher Association, 2010). Complicating matters further, some researchers use these various terms interchangeably, whereas others define their terms more specifically. The research reviewed here primarily is focused on that subset of the literature that directly examines the role of parents. This should not be construed to mean only birth parents but is inclusive of all adults who serve a parenting role in a family. We use the term parent engagement to emphasize the broader and more multifaceted forms of engagement, while maintaining a focus on those in a parenting role. We also maintain the terms used in the studies described (i.e., using "parent involvement" if that is the language of the original study).

Engagement and Academic Achievement

Positive relationships between parent engagement and student achievement are evident through high school, with the types of engagement behaviors varying from those traditionally found at the elementary level. At the elementary level parent engagement behaviors associated with academic achievement include volunteering in the class/school, attending school functions, helping with and checking homework, and engaging in reading activities with the child (e.g., Green et al., 2007; Senechal & Young, 2008; Walker et al., 2005). At the high school level, these behaviors may decrease in the degree of impact they have on academic achievement, and other engagement behaviors that are more developmentally appropriate for adolescents may more strongly influence achievement as described below (Jeynes, 2007; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Meta-analyses conducted with secondary school students (both middle and high school) have shown a significant relationship between measures of general parent engagement and academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007). In these studies, more subtle and indirect forms of engagement appeared important. Parent–student communication (regarding school and values), holding high educational expectations, and authoritative parenting style were the strongest predictors of academic achievement. In contrast, helping with their child's homework demonstrates a more mixed set of results with some studies showing a positive influence (Jeynes, 2007) and others a negative or nonsignificant influence on academic achievement, probably due to the greater influence of prior academic performance (Shumow & Miller, 2001; Strayhorn, 2010). That is, prior achievement confounds the influence of parent engagement on academic success. If an adolescent is not performing well

in school, parents may increase the amount of homework help they provide. If an adolescent is demonstrating academic success, parents may decrease the homework support provided (Hill & Tyson, 2009), but not necessarily be less engaged with the student's academic success. Some of the inconsistency also may be explained by the nature of the homework activities and the extent to which parents are supported in their efforts to help. Specific instructions to parents in how to engage with homework (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) and how to help students manage emotionality around homework (Xu, 2005) appear to be beneficial.

Parent attendance/participation in school events is considered important at the elementary level but demonstrates mixed results as students get older. Although Hill and Tyson (2009) found that parent attendance/participation in school events had a significant, positive relation with academic achievement among middle school students, Jeynes (2007) found that parental participation did not influence overall achievement among high school students. However, Jeynes found a relationship between parental attendance/participation and specific achievement subcategories, such as grades, teacher rating scales, and indices of academic behaviors and attitudes. A possible explanation for these results is the grade levels of focus. At the high school level, there may not be as many opportunities for parent attendance/participation and thus influence on academic achievement was not detected.

Parent engagement behaviors that are shown to significantly impact academic achievement among high school adolescents include communicating high educational aspirations (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Froiland & Davison, 2016; Wang & Benner, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014) and communication/discussions about school and the adolescent's future (Altschul, 2011; Dietrich, Kracke, & Nurmi, 2011; Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013; Fan, 2001; Gordon & Cui, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Autonomy support (Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Deslandes et al., 1997; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012), parental monitoring (Crosnoe, 2005; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Shumow & Miller, 2001), and the home environment (e.g., specific place to study; Altschul, 2011; Crosnoe, 2005; Fan, 2001; Keith et al., 1998; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014) are also influential.

Using data from a multiwave longitudinal study of adolescents during their tenth and eleventh grade years, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) compared three types of parent engagement and their association with academic achievement. Academic socialization was defined as communication-based behaviors from parents that convey the importance of education, their aspirations for the adolescent, and plans for the future. School-based engagement was defined as

school–home collaboration, volunteering, and attending school events, while home-based engagement included providing a structure for homework and leisure time and monitoring schoolwork. Academic achievement was measured as the end-of-year grade point averages of adolescents for both Grades 10 and 11. Of the three types of parent engagement examined, academic socialization had the strongest association with adolescents' achievement. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil also found that home-based parent engagement was positively, significantly associated with academic achievement, whereas school-based engagement was not associated with achievement.

Similarly, Wang, Hill, and Hofkens (2014) examined these three types of parent engagement on the academic achievement of students longitudinally from seventh grade through eleventh grade. Academic achievement was measured as students' grade point average at the end of Grades 7, 9, and 11. Academic socialization was defined as scaffolding independence for adolescents and linking education to future success. School-based parent engagement included the amount of communication between the parent and teachers as well as the quality of the communication. Home-based parent engagement included the amount of structure parents provided in the home for adolescents completing work. School-based parent engagement decreased over the course of middle and high school, while home-based and academic socialization increased. In contrast to Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), though school-based engagement decreased over time, it still had a positive association with academic achievement. Both studies showed a positive association between home-based and academic socialization engagement behaviors and academic achievement.

In sum, evidence indicates that parent engagement exerts a positive influence on academic achievement among high school students. School-based engagement may lessen in importance, while academic socialization appears to increase in importance. The latter is less visible to teachers, which may account for the perception of a decline in engagement from elementary to secondary school.

High School Completion Rates

Parent engagement also has a positive influence on high school completion rates for adolescents (Anguiano, 2004; Barnard, 2004; Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008). When parents are engaged to a greater extent, the percentage of students that drop out of high school decreases. Using the NELS (1988) national dataset to examine the effects of parent involvement on high school completion, Anguiano (2004) found that "parents' participation did make a difference in whether an adolescent completes high school" (p. 77). Both traditional parent involvement and parental advocacy involvement were examined as predictors of high school completion. Traditional parent involvement was

defined as mostly school-based involvement including communication with the school, attendance at school events, and asking about or helping with homework. Parental advocacy involvement was also school-based and measured the extent to which parents were involved with the school's policies and the parent–teacher organization. Anguiano found a significant, positive relationship between both forms of involvement and completion of high school.

Similarly, parent engagement predicted high school completion and dropout in a longitudinal study of individuals from kindergarten through 20 years of age (Barnard, 2004). Parents were asked to report on their engagement at home and at school when their child was in second, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Parent engagement at home was described as the frequency with which parents performed various activities with their child, including reading to them, cooking with them, discussing school progress, and taking them to educational environments such as a museum or library. Parent engagement at school was described as the frequency of which parents volunteered in the classroom, spoke with their child's teacher(s), and participated in school activities. Teachers were also asked to report on the frequency in which parents engaged in school activities from first through sixth grades. Results indicated that parent reports of their own engagement, both at school and at home, were not predictive of high school completion or dropout by age 20. However, teachers' ratings of parent engagement had a significant relationship with both dropout and high school completion rates. As the number of years a teacher rated a parent's engagement as average or better increased, the lower the rates of high school dropouts and the higher the rates of high school completion. These results have two important implications for parent engagement research. First, parent engagement behaviors that are visible to teachers may influence teachers' perceptions in ways that have beneficial effects on students' academic success. Second, study outcomes vary depending on whose perceptions are measured. These results are intriguing given the evidence that less visible parent behaviors have an important influence on overall achievement.

Social/Emotional Outcomes

Parent engagement is linked with adolescent social/emotional well-being, including lower levels of depression and aggressive or violent behaviors as well as higher levels of adolescent sense of competence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009; Dodge, Greenberg, & Malone, 2008; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Gibson & Jefferson, 2006). In a longitudinal study of adolescents from tenth through eleventh grade, negative relationships between parent engagement and depression were demonstrated (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In other words, as parent engagement

increased, adolescents' reports of depression decreased. Of the three forms of parent engagement examined, academic socialization had the strongest negative relationship with depression, while home-based parent engagement had an indirect negative relationship with depression through behavioral engagement (or behaviors that demonstrate an individuals' engagement in school, such as completing assignments and attending class). School-based parent engagement also had a significant negative relationship with depression. One possible explanation for this finding is that the quality of communication between the parent and teacher influences their interactions with the adolescent. Adolescents may feel more connected to their parents and teachers through a positive parent–teacher relationship, and thus their reports of depression decrease.

In another study of sixth grade students, Duchesne and Ratelle (2010) similarly found that parent engagement had a significant negative relationship with adolescents' rates of anxiety. Parent engagement was defined as the extent to which parents "invest in and participate in their daily lives" as perceived by the adolescent (p. 500). As parent engagement increased, adolescents' rates of anxiety decreased.

These studies demonstrate that parent engagement is a complex, multifaceted construct that plays an important role in the educational and social/emotional well-being of adolescents. From positively influencing academic outcomes to decreasing rates of high school dropouts to lowering rates of anxiety and depression, parent engagement is associated with many benefits. However, there is some evidence that parent engagement can be problematic when it is overly intrusive and interferes with students' developing autonomy and problem-solving skills.

Parental Over-Engagement

The value of parent engagement in education typically is considered an obvious good or "like apple pie" (Ramirez, 2001, p. 1). Although some have noted the potential for conflict (e.g., Lareau & Muñoz, 2012), most research has focused on ways to increase engagement from pre-K through high school graduation. In recent years, however, there has been some attention to parental behaviors that are detrimental to students' developing autonomy and overall adjustment, particularly in college. Excessively controlling behaviors have been associated with a host of negative outcomes in college students, such as lower self-efficacy (Bradley-Geist & Olsen-Buchanan, 2014; Van Ingen et al., 2015), less secure peer attachment and lower peer trust (Van Ingen et al., 2015), more test anxiety (Shadach & Ganor-Miller, 2013), and increased depression and anxiety (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Efforts to exert psychological control in the absence of parental warmth and in the presence of excessive criticism

appear most likely to lead to negative effects (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Nielson, 2015; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

The available research has been conducted primarily with college students, and there are few studies in this area at the secondary level. However, there is evidence of negative effects on achievement when parents engage in too much regulation of homework (Wang, 2015) and indicating that adolescents want to maintain control when help is provided (Moroni, Dumont, Trautwein, Niggli, & Baeriswyl, 2015; Xu, 2002). Given that parent engagement is associated with a variety of positive outcomes for adolescents, as well as the indications that there may be some risks, it is important to understand the mechanisms that support effective parent engagement at the secondary level.

Parents' Decisions to Become Engaged

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised theoretical model of the parent involvement process provides a framework for understanding parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education and how that involvement influences student outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2005). The first two levels of the model hypothesize the mechanisms whereby parents decide whether and how they will engage in their children's education.

Parents' motivation to become involved in education is captured by two variables: parental role construction and parental self-efficacy. Parental role construction refers to parents' beliefs about what their responsibilities are towards their child's education. Role construction can be active (parents believing that their child's education is their responsibility or is a shared responsibility with schools) or passive (parents believing that their child's education is the responsibility of the school alone; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2005). Parental self-efficacy refers to parents' beliefs about whether their actions and abilities have a positive influence on their child's educational outcomes. These variables have been associated with children's academic, social, and behavioral functioning (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999; Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, & Koziol, 2013) and parental behaviors. For example, among parents of seventh through ninth grade students, parental role construction and self-efficacy were significant predictors of home- and school-based engagement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Park & Holloway, 2013).

Although multiple researchers have noted the importance of parental role construction and self-efficacy in predicting parents' engagement behaviors, these motivational factors do not always function the same way across studies. Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) found that role construction and self-efficacy both predicted home-based engagement, while

self-efficacy was a negative predictor of school engagement. In contrast, in a study of 203 parents of elementary students, Anderson and Minke (2007) found that role construction did not have a direct effect on parental behavior once the influence of specific invitations from the student was included in the model. Similarly, they found that self-efficacy predicted parent engagement behaviors at home but not at school. Some of the conflicting evidence may be a result of not including measures of academic socialization in these studies. That is, parents' academic self-efficacy may positively influence their academic aspirations for their child and their child's academic self-efficacy, which, in turn, influences their child's academic achievement (Bandura et al., 1996). Importantly, these variables may also function differently across race, ethnicity, and class. For example, self-efficacy predicted involvement behaviors most strongly for economically disadvantaged parents (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Importantly, parents are more likely to be engaged in their child's schooling when they perceive that their engagement is welcomed and desired (Green et al., 2007; Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, & Meza, 2010; Park & Holloway, 2013; Walker et al., 2005). Invitations to participate appear important in communicating this message, particularly when they come from the student (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Green et al., 2007).

In examining motivators of engagement for parents of middle school students, Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) asked 770 parents to report on the frequency of specific invitations for involvement from both the teacher and adolescent. Results demonstrated that parents' perceptions of specific invitations from the adolescent were the strongest predictors of home-based parent engagement for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade parents. For school-based parent engagement, specific invitations from the adolescent were significant predictors for seventh and eighth grade parents but not ninth grade parents. Specific invitations from teachers were a significant predictor for school-based, but not home-based, engagement for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade parents.

The ways in which parents engage in education also are influenced by their perceived life contexts, that is, the time and energy parents have to devote to educational engagement and their beliefs about whether they have the skills to be engaged successfully (Green et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2005). Examined as a single construct, self-perceived time and energy was found to be a significant predictor of home- and school-based parent engagement among parents of first through sixth grade students (Green et al., 2007). In contrast, Anderson and Minke (2007) did not find parents' perceived time and energy to be a significant predictor of parent engagement. More recently, in a sample of Mexican American adolescents, financial difficulties and major life events in the family predicted less involvement at school and at home, respectively

(Camacho-Thompson, Gillen-O'Neel, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). As with the investigations of efficacy and role construction, including a measure of academic socialization may provide greater clarity in how these variables predict engagement. For example, recent evidence suggests that academic socialization operates as a stronger predictor of success among students from more advantaged life contexts (Benner et al., 2016).

Parent–Adolescent Relationship Quality

Parent–adolescent relationship quality has been linked with adolescent outcomes, including academic achievement and social/emotional variables. Adolescents reporting better relationship quality with their parents tend to demonstrate higher academic achievement (Chan et al., 2013; Deslandes et al., 1999; Gordon & Cui, 2012), higher rates of high school completion (Englund et al., 2008), higher ratings of self-efficacy (Gecas, 1971), higher self-esteem (Chan et al., 2013; Deković, 1999; Doyle & Markiewicz, 2005; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986), and lower rates of depression (Fanti, Henrich, Brookmeyer, & Kuperminc, 2008; Wang, Brinkworth, & Eccles, 2013) and other internalizing problems (Morin, Bradshaw, & Berg, 2015).

Changes in the amount and types of parent–adolescent communication through the adolescent developmental period have been demonstrated (Keijsers & Poulin, 2013). When examining parental knowledge, parental solicitation, parental control, adolescent disclosure, and adolescent secrecy, Keijsers and Poulin (2013) found a decrease during early adolescence in willingness to disclose information to parents as well as a decrease in parental solicitation. Further, they found that parental knowledge of the adolescent's whereabouts, friends, and activities gradually decreased throughout adolescence. These communication changes appear to be driven by the adolescents. In their pursuit of increased privacy and autonomy, they regulate the amount of information they provide their parents. Parents respond to this desire for increased privacy and autonomy by decreasing their solicitation of information.

In addition to changes in parent–adolescent communication, perceived parent–adolescent relationship quality changes as well (McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005). Adolescents reported a decrease in perceived relationship quality with their parents over a three-year time period (i.e., from the age of 11 to 14). The amount of conflict increased, parent engagement decreased, adolescents had less positive regard for their parents, and adolescents perceived that their parents had less positive regard for them. Further, McGue et al. (2005) reported that for each of these four aspects of the parent–adolescent relationship, approximately 20–30% of adolescents' perceived marked deterioration over this three-year time period. These changes in communication and relationship

quality during adolescence may have an impact on the amount and types of invitations adolescents provide to parents, thus influencing the amount of parent engagement. That is, in the presence of a more positive relationship, the adolescent may be more likely to extend an invitation, whereas if the relationship is negative, the adolescent may not extend an invitation. However, no studies on the influence of relationship quality on invitations were found.

Differences in Parent Engagement Behaviors Across Years of Schooling

Although there is ample evidence that parental engagement serves as a positive influence on adolescents' developmental outcomes, parental engagement at home and school appears to decrease over the course of a student's education from elementary to middle to high school (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; Crosnoe, 2005; Green et al., 2007; Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). This decline is commonly attributed to parents' perceptions that adolescents desire greater autonomy. Adolescents in western cultures are expected to begin establishing their own identity and take on greater responsibility. They typically begin to desire separation from their parents and greater autonomy in order to complete tasks on their own.

One area in which adolescents can begin to increase their autonomy is through their academic performance. Parental engagement behaviors that are typically performed during elementary school (e.g., volunteering in the classroom, checking/helping with homework, communicating with the teacher) do not align with adolescents' desire for increased autonomy. Parents may decrease these specific behaviors and engage in other, more developmentally appropriate behaviors, such as parent–adolescent discussions and communicating expectations, which may not decline during high school years (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang et al., 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Using the parent surveys from the base year (1988) and second follow-up (1992) of the National Education Longitudinal Study (1988), Catsambis and Garland (1997) examined the differences in parent engagement from eighth grade to senior year of high school. They found that some aspects of parent engagement were maintained across this timespan while others were not. Parents continued to maintain rules for students' keeping their grade point averages (GPAs) up, while rules regarding completing homework and discussing school activities declined. They also reported that some components increase, such as educational expectations for the child. Communication between schools and parents appeared to change over time with schools decreasing the amount of contact they initiated with parents regarding academic performance and behavior, while increasing the amount of communication regarding the child's academic programs and volunteer work.

Shumow and her colleagues also have shown differences in parent engagement across the high school years. Parents of freshmen appear more engaged at home and less engaged at school than parents of returning high school students (Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011). Home engagement for ninth graders was associated with better grades, whereas the opposite pattern was seen in older students (i.e., greater home engagement was associated with lower grades; Shumow & Schmidt, 2014). It appears that both parents and students need a period of adjustment to the high school setting and that this affects engagement behaviors.

Other potential reasons for changes in parent engagement include the increased difficulty of school work and the structure of the secondary school environment (Harris & Goodall, 2008). As the level of academic difficulty increases, parents may no longer feel they can help their adolescent, leading to a decrease in self-efficacy and a decrease in engagement. Parents also may not feel as comfortable with the secondary school due to its different structure from elementary school (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Harris & Goodall, 2008). First, unlike elementary school where parents typically only have to interact with one teacher, in secondary school students have a different teacher for each subject. Parents may not be able to establish a relationship with each of the teachers, leading to a decrease in engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Second, there are not as many opportunities for school-based engagement behaviors in secondary schools. Parents are typically not encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or on field trips as they are in elementary school.

Furthermore, relatively little is known about adolescents' preferences regarding their parents' engagement behaviors. As adolescents progress through secondary school, engagement behaviors at school (e.g., volunteering in the school, attending back to school night) may not be as acceptable to the adolescent as other behaviors, such as communicating beliefs and expectations that convey a vested interest in their achievement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Connors & Epstein, 1994; Halsey, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009). Middle school students report that they want their parents involved in their education, but they prefer indirect help (e.g., responding to requests for help, demonstrating that parents believe in them) over more overt helping that may be perceived as intrusive (Moroni et al., 2015; Xu, 2002).

In summary, there appear to be similarities and important differences in the manner and effects of parent engagement among secondary school students compared to elementary students. At the secondary level, home-based and school-based engagement behaviors continue to influence achievement and social/emotional outcomes, but academic socialization and expectations take on an increasingly important role. Cultural, socioeconomic, developmental,

and relationship variables interact in the context of changing school outreach practices, more advanced academic work, and larger, more complex school environments, making it challenging for schools to respond effectively. Still, some suggestions can be made on the basis of current evidence.

Implications for Practice

There appears to be considerable value in encouraging ongoing parent engagement with education throughout secondary school. The optimal pathways for accomplishing this are less clear. For example, there is evidence that larger schools are characterized by less safety and respect, which in turn limits communication and opportunities for families to engage (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013). Although advocating for smaller schools is a worthy goal (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007), it is a long-term, arduous journey toward change that may be discouraging to teachers and administrators seeking ways to improve engagement within existing structures. Other, smaller scale efforts can be undertaken to ensure that educators are provided with appropriate training and supports to develop effective family–school engagement activities.

Communication and Outreach to Families

Most critically, schools should attend to their communication practices with both parents and adolescents (Hill, 2015). All parents and students need information on high school admission procedures, discipline and related policies, course selection, and other routine matters in order to engage effectively with schooling. This kind of explicit knowledge is relatively easy to identify and share. Far more difficult, and yet more important, is the identification and communication of implicit or tacit knowledge about how the school works, how to obtain opportunities, how to smooth the transition to college, and other topics that are typically better understood by more advantaged families (Hill, 2015).

Schools and teachers may improve parent engagement by increasing parents' knowledge on how to encourage high academic expectations and to provide help in developmentally appropriate ways. This could involve providing parent training in the skills necessary to engage their adolescent in conversations on their current education, future educational goals, and career goals, along with communicating their confidence in their adolescents as learners. It is important that events designed to communicate this information are accessible to all families and target those families most in need. As one example, the Miami–Dade County schools provide "Parent Academies" that seek to communicate how schools work and how parents can adjust their strategies to changing adolescent

needs (Hanover Research, 2014, as cited in Mac Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca, 2015). Similarly, the Futures and Families Project (see Kreider et al., 2007; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015) provided support to Latino families through bimonthly meetings focused on developing a pathway to college for students; participating families reported less isolation and improved advocacy skills.

Teachers typically receive limited training in how to engage families effectively (see Bergman, 2013 for a review). Useful strategies include communication skills training (e.g., reflective listening, empathic responding, conflict management; see Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012), regular and positive correspondence through multiple media, and interactive homework with explicit instructions for family participation. Further, schools should help teachers take a strength-based approach to their interactions with families that acknowledges the supports that parents are providing that are not visible to them as teachers (Vega et al., 2015). This could be done through in-service presentations to the staff on barriers that families face (e.g., transportation, inflexible jobs, language barriers) and the many ways in which parents engage at home that may be invisible at school but that yield substantial benefits for student outcomes. These efforts must also remain mindful of the developmental needs of adolescents in preparing for postsecondary education or the workforce.

Utilize Transitions Effectively

Particular attention should be given to transitions both into and out of high school. Schools that provide higher quality transition activities between middle and high school report fewer ninth graders struggling academically (Mac Iver et al., 2015). Similarly, Shumow and Schmidt (2014) highlighted the ninth grade transition as a potentially fruitful arena for engaging families. Many families are aware of the potential pitfalls in this transition and make efforts to help at home and at school. Programs that provide information on how best to support student success, delivered through multiple media and opportunities with a focus on behaviors that are within the capacity of the parents (e.g., encouragement, monitoring, seeking assistance for homework), may be most beneficial.

Just as parent behaviors transition between middle and secondary schools, we should consider how their behavior will be expected to be different when the child transitions to college and provide support for these new behaviors. Such supports may be particularly important for first generation and culturally diverse college students, whose parents may have limited experience with high school course selection, financial support pathways, and application processes (Schwartz, 2009; Vega et al., 2015). Programming that informs adolescents and their parents about preparation for college applications, finding financial support, and navigating the transition may be especially important for first

generation college students. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program (AVID, 2012; Bernhardt, 2013) provides one example of effective ways to provide this support. Schools also should consider partnering with nearby two- and four-year institutions to educate parents on the expectations for students and the ways in which they can best support their children's success. As just one example, at the high school level, it is considered appropriate for a parent to contact a teacher or administrator directly to try to resolve issues; at the college level, similar behavior is considered problematic. School counselors could be utilized to organize and facilitate such partnerships, given that part of their role already includes college planning.

Employ Family–School Liaisons

Teachers and parents may need assistance to engage successfully. A parent engagement facilitator or family–school liaison, who works explicitly toward linking families with schools through problem solving around individual student needs, may be an important resource (Ferrara, 2015). Liaisons are particularly important at the secondary level because these schools are so much larger, more complex, and more difficult to navigate (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Liaisons typically share a language and cultural background with the families served. They communicate with families and provide diverse opportunities to participate (Vega et al., 2015). The Boston Arts Academy has been highly successful in engaging the majority of families by using a full-time family coordinator to link parents to resources and information (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2006). Parents in the school reported valuing communication with teachers that is open, friendly, and includes adolescents in a developmentally appropriate way. Liaisons have also reported that building relationships with families, particularly of at-risk students, is challenging and involves a high degree of persistence, empathy, and respectfulness; peer support among the liaisons can be helpful (Ferrara, 2015).

Support Developing Student Autonomy

There is no inherent conflict in a focus on parent engagement in secondary schools and a focus on fostering competence and self-reliance among adolescents. To the limited extent that their views have been sought, students express a preference for parental behaviors that support autonomy (Xu, 2002). However, parents likely need information regarding adolescent development and ways to balance autonomy and support.

Secondary schools generally are not structured in ways that promote the development of autonomy skills (Barghava & Witherspoon, 2015). Indeed, approaches to discipline that prize compliance/obedience over self-regulation

(see Bear, 2015 for a review) may exacerbate the "helicopter" phenomenon and limit student growth. We recently saw a Facebook post from a college freshman that highlighted this problem succinctly: "In college they want me to make life-altering decisions. Two months ago, I had to ask permission to go to the bathroom." Secondary school staff should consider the ways in which students are provided opportunities to face developmentally appropriate challenges and make consequential decisions, in the context of supportive family–school relationships. According to Hill and Wang (2015), students should practice decision-making in situations that are not emotionally charged and that do not require giving up an immediate powerful reward for a long-term goal, with affirmation from admired adults. Teachers and parents might work together to develop these kinds of decision-making activities in areas such as selecting electives, choosing among an array of afterschool activities, or deciding how to manage the balance of a summer job with preferred activities. There would have to be a shared understanding and agreement that the adults can live with the youth's choices and allow the youth to experience the consequences of those choices. Similarly, youth can be more actively involved in meetings focused on their academic success. When adolescents are specifically taught how to lead their own Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, they develop increased knowledge of transition concepts and improved self-efficacy (Woods, Sylvester, & Martin, 2010).

Plan Interventions Collaboratively

Whatever methods or programs are considered to improve family engagement at the secondary level, they should be developed with a deep understanding of what families and youth report they need, not just what educators believe that they need. When schools develop interventions without this understanding, there can be miscommunication and a mismatch between program goals and family preferences that leave both sides frustrated (Lawson, 2003). Not surprisingly, similar problems can occur when parents attempt to develop interventions without fully understanding the needs and preferences of teachers. Wallace (2013) provides a case study of a group of dedicated parents who developed an ambitious, comprehensive program of engagement with a high school, including creating an enrichment center, volunteering in classrooms to help with student engagement, and providing speakers to enhance self-esteem among African American youth. However, teachers did not completely embrace the efforts, citing concerns about missed class time, wanting to continue their own afterschool efforts, and worrying that the parents would expect too much. Because teachers were not involved in the development of the program, parents inadvertently overlooked teachers' preferences and concerns. It appears

that a unidirectional approach is problematic no matter which side—family or school—initiates the activities. Careful, systematic needs assessment, with particular attention to student voice, may be an important initial step in understanding what supports are most needed.

Implications for Future Research

As noted earlier, far less research has been conducted at the secondary level compared to the elementary level. Indeed, all of the areas cited above as having implications for practice are important topics for ongoing research. Future research should attend particularly to the voice of students. For example, multiple studies have noted a decline in parent engagement from elementary to high school. However, adolescents typically have not been asked whether they would like their parents engaged and, if so, which engagement behaviors they would accept. This omission is significant because discrepancies are found on adolescent outcomes when comparing parents' ratings of their own engagement to adolescents' perceptions of parent engagement (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009; Ohannesian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 2000; Wang & Benner, 2014). Significantly, adolescents' perceptions of engagement are more influential on outcomes than parents' perceptions of their own engagement (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009). Research more thoroughly addressing youth preferences could lead to the development of more effective interventions.

Similarly, it appears that engagement behaviors vary as a function of contextual factors, such as overall academic success, school climate, and family resources and culture. (e.g., Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015). Research must be explicit in examining the effects of race/ethnicity, mother's education, and household income, as these exert differing effects on engagement (Hill & Wang 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013).

Finally, our understanding of parent engagement at the secondary level may be enhanced by careful integration of constructs across the educational, developmental, and sociological literatures. As is seen in the studies reviewed here, parent, adolescent, and teacher characteristics interact with school and community variables differentially across the developmental period to produce academic and behavioral outcomes. Longitudinal studies are needed that systematically examine the transactions among substantive subsets of these individual level variables within specific community contexts.

Conclusions

Parent engagement is an important factor influencing academic achievement, social/emotional outcomes, and high school completion rates. While

there are negative outcomes for too little parent engagement, there also can be negative effects for parent engagement behaviors that do not support adolescents' developing autonomy. It is important for schools to reach out to parents and support them in ways that are developmentally appropriate for their students. This should be accomplished through multiple vehicles so that all parents can access the information, especially those who traditionally have had difficulty navigating school systems. Teachers should receive in-service training that promotes more positive attitudes about families and engagement efforts and teaches communication strategies that support the development of positive family–school connections. There are still many questions related to factors influencing parent engagement at the secondary level. As we develop our understanding of adolescents' perceptions of and preferences for parent engagement and the roles that variables such as parent–adolescent relationship quality, adolescents' invitations for engagement, and family resources play in predicting parent engagement, we will be better positioned to produce positive outcomes for all students.

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