



## Family Engagement during the Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

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Research conducted as part of NYKids at UAlbany <https://ny-kids.org/>



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How has the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures affected family engagement?
- 2) What strategies and techniques have educators used to engage with families throughout the pandemic?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Family engagement:

- Influence on students' academic performance, engagement in school, and social-emotional wellbeing.
- Impacts school systems and empowers family members to become active participants in their children's schooling.

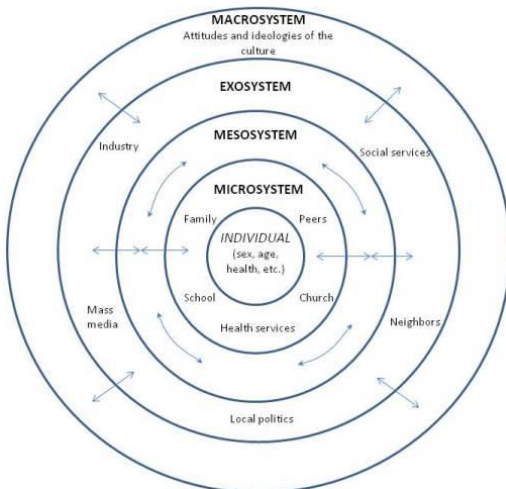
#### Engagement and inequality:

- Historically been defined in narrow terms; typical engagement strategies best-suited to the norms of White, middle-class families.
- Widening definition of engagement and development of approaches to engage diverse families.
- Address power imbalances that often exist in family-school relationships.

#### Engaging families during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Social distancing measures and school closures created physical barriers between families and schools, yet family members were asked to participate more directly in their children's remote learning.
- Strained school-community relationships were furthered fractured as pre-pandemic strategies and in-person events no longer viable.
- Inequalities in family engagement evident in emerging research; yet also opportunities for adaptation

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS



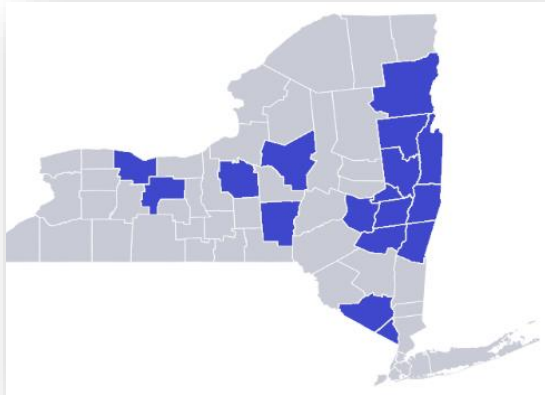
*Ecological theory of development*



*Social capital theory*



## METHODOLOGY



- ✓ Mixed-method design
- ✓ Validated survey, new, and open-ended questions around adaptation in crisis.
- ✓ 900+ Survey Responses across NYS
- ✓ Case studies in 6 schools with comparatively lower stress
- ✓ Interviews and focus groups with 88 educators

## FINDINGS & KEY QUOTES

### Challenges

- Educators feeling disconnected from families
- Difficulties maintaining boundaries
- Tensions between schools and communities

*"It was 24/7. I'd get calls from parents at 11:00 at night because they would work until 9:00 and then they would come home. That's when their questions would be, and that's when I had to answer them."* – Teacher, MS45

### Inequalities

- Differential access to high-speed internet and computers
- Working families struggled with supervising children's learning

*"Some kids might be able to log on at any point during the day, some kids maybe not until maybe 5:00 when their parents were home... depending on if they were essential [workers] or not."* – Teacher, ES46

### Adaptations

- Using a variety of tools to communicate
- Maintain accessibility and presence
- Address inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic
- Seek out mutual understanding and insights

*"[Families] have a deeper understanding of our approach, our resources, our expectations."* – School leader, ES6



## CONCLUSIONS

- Insights into the challenges faced by educators seeking to engage families during the pandemic and the inequalities in engagement which have emerged and/or been exacerbated.
- Validates the significance of the connections between families, communities, and schools on children's development and access to valuable resources.
- Findings illustrate adaptations and innovations of educators who found ways to engage with students and families in novel ways.
- Tensions between schools and communities across the U.S. raises questions about how to engage and share power with families who refuse to comply with safety mandates or insist on eliminating curricular elements focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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