The Relationship Between College Students and Their Families

The relationship between college students and their families and, in turn, between families and institutions of higher education, is long-standing and complex. Much attention has been paid to the role of parents, in terms of how much they should be available and present for their college-going children, and how much information can and should be shared with parents by members of higher education institutions. The discourse on parents in higher education is heavily influenced by media depictions and stereotypes about intrusive parenting styles (Kiyama & Harper, 2015; Self, 2013; Taylor, 2006; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The results are images of parents and families as hovering, pushy, entitled, and necessary to manage (see Kiyama & Harper, 2015). Working within this paradigm limits the discussion to a narrow set of parents, and has unintended consequences for the parents and families who do not fit this generalization. This monograph imagines a different reality that more fully reflects the diversity of today’s college students and their families. Rather than focus on ways to limit or manage parents, we focus on ways to engage and involve families and other key actors in students’ lives. We also acknowledge the challenges that exist in determining what role parents and families should play in students’ college experiences, because theory and research might not fully capture their contributions and thus provide little guidance on best practices among families or among institutions and their role in contributing to these relationships.
The focus within higher education literature and practice is primarily on the role of parents (Wartman & Savage, 2008); therefore, this monograph will refer to parents to reflect the intentions of the authors we cite. Whenever possible, we expand the focus by using the more inclusive terminology of families which includes guardians, extended family members, siblings, caregivers, partners, and other support members.

Plan for Monograph

Many have contributed to the conversation on parents’ involvement and we want to particularly highlight the last ASHE monograph on Parental Involvement in Higher Education written by Wartman and Savage (2008). Wartman and Savage (2008) opened the conversation about the inclusion of parents in students’ higher education experience. Our intent with this monograph is to continue the conversation they started and to engage in areas they proposed, as well as a few new ones. We offer a thorough review of the literature on parents and families, with attention to differential experiences by race, class, first-generation college student status, and other salient characteristics. We also broaden our focus from just parents to families, and with a generous definition of family that extends beyond a biological or legal definition. Finally, building on the Wartman and Savage (2008) monograph, we offer an extended discussion of the ways in which research and practice on parent and family K–12 engagement shapes the discourse on engagement in higher education. If it is true that our theoretical understandings of the nature of parent and family involvement are largely based on the experiences of a subset of parents, mainly wealthier parents, we expect that an exploration of a wider range of parents and families by economic class as well as other important characteristics—such as race/ethnicity, educational history, and first-generation status—will lead us to propose alternative frameworks regarding how parents and families might be better integrated into the higher education landscape.

In order to facilitate a move to more inclusive and alternative frameworks, this first chapter addresses the need to expand our notions of parental involvement to familial engagement, largely to better meet the needs of an
increasingly diverse college student body. We continue to focus on parents, as they tend to be the emphasis in research and practice, and we do not want to lose sight of their unique contributions, but we also do not want to ignore the reality of many students’ lives that are also largely influenced by other extended family members. The benefit of looking beyond parents is that the scope of possibilities related to engaging diverse families widens and offers new methodological, theoretical, and practical approaches to this engagement. We believe that this conversation must include attention to the role of familial engagement across the K–20 spectrum.

The K–12 literature is ahead of higher education in its inclusion of diverse families, so we draw upon those findings to reveal possible points of intersection within the college context and opportunities to engage students and families before they get to college. Familial engagement within the K–12 context is also important to address because the educational experiences of parents in those early years shape their engagement in later years.

The transition to college is explored next and addresses the transitional gap between secondary and postsecondary education. This chapter emphasizes the college outreach and access literature and promising practices related to serving diverse families and communities. This discussion leads to an exploration of college orientation programs as an institutional strategy to engage families.

The next chapter is focused fully on the context of college and provides an exploration of the ways in which family engagement influences college students. Although research is somewhat limited, we offer a discussion of the multipart relationship between families, students, and institutions. Further, we review patterns of relationships and communication between families and their college-aged children and discuss the influence of those relationships on students’ experiences in college. Finally, we offer a discussion of the supportive roles families can play with institutions.

In “Shifting the Paradigm” we offer a practitioner perspective. Written by two established professionals in the field of parent and family relations, this chapter encourages readers to shift the paradigm of parent and family involvement. The authors offer a discussion of standards, models, and best practices when engaging with parents and families, particularly in the emerging
area of parent and family services. They also review emerging challenges and opportunities when working with families.

The concluding chapter offers recommendations for the ways in which our research and practice can better investigate and address the diversity of families described throughout the monograph. The review of promising practices addressed in “Shifting the Paradigm” was particularly salient to the formation of the implications for practice suggested in this chapter. Further research is also suggested, including families’ experiences of students’ transition to college and the role of orientation programs in supporting and including families.

To set the context for the content of this monograph, in the following sections we first clarify our terminology regarding the distinctions between parents and families, followed by the differences between involvement and engagement, as these theoretical distinctions reveal important implications for research and practice.

The Progression From Parents to Families
The role that parents and families play in higher education and their relationships with postsecondary institutions will be discussed in greater detail throughout the remainder of this monograph; however, it is important to offer a brief overview of the ways in which parents and families have been positioned within higher education contexts over time. The 1960s and 1970s saw a shift in how college students were viewed as a result of the student affairs profession utilizing student development theory to inform their understanding of students as young, independent adults; during this period the role of parents and families was left unaddressed (Cohen, 1985; Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008). Literature from the 1980s describes parents as tangential or irrelevant to the work of college practitioners (Cohen, 1985; Taub, 2008). Wartman and Savage (2008), focusing on traditionally aged college students enrolling directly from high school and millennial students (defined as those born after 1982), noted that these perspectives about college students immediately transitioning from childhood to adulthood might not be the best reflection of
The closeness that the millennial generation has with their parents and families is noteworthy in comparison to previous generations (Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Over the last 10 years, students and parents have reported increased levels of communication and involvement with each other (Sax & Weintraub, 2014; Wartman & Savage, 2008; Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). This increase in communication has been shown to contribute to a greater sense of well-being for students (Sax & Weintraub, 2014). Enhanced technology has been cited as one avenue that facilitates communication between students and parents (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Other forms of parental involvement at the college level include offering financial support, and assisting with concerns such as mental health issues, student safety, and roommate issues (Carney-Hall, 2008; Kiyama & Harper, 2015; Sax & Weintraub, 2014).

These glimpses of positive forms of involvement are often overshadowed by the negative ways in which parents are described. These negative descriptors include characterizations of parents as bulldozers, hovering helicopter parents, and kamikaze parents (see BBC News, 2008; Self, 2013; Taylor, 2006, for specific examples), resulting in a false expectation that institutions must manage parents’ involvement (Kiyama & Harper, 2015; Sax & Wartman, 2010; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Unfortunately, these negative perceptions raise questions about the potential for adverse effects on students’ development in college when, in fact, involvement by parents can be supportive of students’ academic success and development (Taub, 2008). Research on the role of parental involvement in college has been largely framed through the lens of traditional student development theories. For example, Taub (2008) and Sax and Wartman (2010) trace how the role of parents has been framed through psychosocial theories like Chickering’s vectors, Schlossberg’s transition theory, attachment theories, and identity theories. Yet, these models are limited in understanding the varied ways in which families can be engaged and in the role that institutions must play in connecting with students’ families.

Although the importance of parents in college students’ lives is now acknowledged more frequently among higher education audiences
(Carney-Hall, 2008; Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012; Sax & Wartman, 2010; Self, 2013), research on the role of families in the lives of their college-aged children overwhelmingly uses parent or mother and father terminology; does not explore the diverse contributions of families of color, first-generation, or low-income families; and does not include varied ways to measure the full engagement of families. Thus, within the remainder of this monograph we offer a discussion of some of the many ways in which families can be and are engaged in the lives of their college-aged children. We also encourage educators to consider the role that institutions must play in engaging families in culturally relevant and inclusive ways. Finally, we must begin to grapple with institutional strategies for becoming more inclusive of independent students whose parents and families are not present or involved.

The Importance of Shifting Away From Parent Terminology

Literature focusing on parents, rather than families, presents theoretical and methodological constraints, because identifying parents as a primary unit of analysis limits the full range of responses to questions about educational support (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). Additionally, focusing exclusively on parents neglects the wide range of familial and cultural support available to students in the college transition process, particularly with respect to extended family members, students of color, families from differing socioeconomic status, dual-language families, undocumented families, students from multiple-family backgrounds, same-sex families, single-parent households, or independent students (Kiyama & Harper, 2015; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011; Sil, 2007; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). Additionally, such terminology sends a message about who should be involved in students’ educational processes, wrongly assuming that students are supported, and solely, by their parents (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012).

Limited definitions of family also perpetuate a heteronormative, White ideal within educational settings (Kiyama & Harper, 2015). This heteronormative ideal is often seen as never divorced, with two opposite-sex parents (Heilman, 2008). This ideal then perpetuates the tailoring of research
and programming to intact, two-parent households with economic means (Kiyama & Harper, 2015), creating hegemonies of families and negative judgments about family units that differ from the long-established norm (Heilman, 2008). Early analysis from a study conducted on institutional communication during parent and family orientation programs suggests these normative ideals can be limiting, harmful, and discriminatory to diverse types of family units (Kiyama, Harper, Ramos, Aguayo, & Page, 2015).

Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) have urged both researchers and practitioners to think more broadly about how to incorporate different household configurations into studies and programs that include families. This is particularly important when considering the different constructions of households and families for different cultural groups (Kiyama & Harper, 2015). Households and families may be inclusive of both biological and nonbiological members. Therefore, we urge educators to consider issues of culture, language, and subjectivity in varying definitions of households and families (Heilman, 2008). Families may also be led by guardians or grandparents (Keller, 2001); thus we must turn our attention to creating more inclusive terminology for capturing the diversity of family structures. This may include cluster households representing families that are linked beyond the traditionally defined nuclear family (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Kiyama, 2008; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) or fictive kinship, a cultural symbol of collective identity between persons not related by blood or marriage (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

**Changing Demographic Trends**

Higher education has seen a growth in the diversity of its student body by various personal and demographic characteristics. The categories and descriptors described in this section reflect the terms used by the data sources or authors we cite. The enrollment growth of students of at least 25 years of age has been greater than traditionally aged students, although the younger students (age 24 and under) still comprise the majority of 4-year enrollments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Growth is also evident when examining college enrollment rates by race. The proportion of college students who
identify as a person of color has increased from 16% in 1976 to 40% in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), although the growth rate has been greater for Black and Hispanic students than for Asian/Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaska Native students (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In recent decades, the proportion of women pursuing higher education has increased at a faster rate than men, and women comprise a greater proportion of the undergraduate enrollment overall (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Half of students in K–12 years are now at or below the poverty line (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). An increasing proportion of low-income students report having college aspirations, although their enrollment rates remain quite low, particularly in comparison to high-income students (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Approximately 25% of today’s college students are low-income and first generation, where first generation is defined as having parents without an undergraduate degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Another important population to consider is foster-care youth. It is estimated that approximately 32,000 youth exit the foster care system each year and of those qualified to attend college only about 20% enroll in postsecondary education (Unrau, 2011).

These changing demographics are important to note because efforts to better serve the needs of college students should reflect today’s students and their growing diversity, which even extends beyond the categories briefly mentioned previously.

Our attention should be attuned to students of color, first-generation, and low-income students, because the families of these students are underrepresented in research (Wartman, 2009) and are particularly vulnerable to feeling excluded by the education system, starting in elementary school (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Kiyama, 2010). The concern in college relates to the vast disparity in average college degree completion among these groups. Students of color comprise 16% of the college-enrolled population whose parents are college educated, and 36% of the first-generation population (Chen, 2005). Among first-generation college students, only 24% earn a bachelor degree, in comparison to 68% of students whose parents have a college degree (Chen, 2005; Snyder &
Dillow, 2012). With regard to degree attainment, 7% of low-income and approximately 25% of middle-income students earn college degrees within 6 years (in comparison to 52% of high-income students; Snyder & Dillow, 2012).

As higher education seeks to address these inequities, we must consider the wealth of support and beneficial outcomes that parents and families can offer. In particular, research has shown that although parents of first-generation college students may not have the specific knowledge required to navigate college settings, they do offer their students encouragement and emotional support, and help the student to develop college aspirations and an expectation of college attendance (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Kiyama, 2010). What this suggests is the strengths offered by first-generation families may “counteract the academic risk factors students face” (Dennis et al., 2005, p. 224).

Connecting Students, Families, and Institutions

Previous research highlights the beneficial role that parents play in college students’ lives (Harper et al., 2012; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), although institutions might be missing these contributions, particularly among racially diverse, first-generation, and low-income families (Wartman, 2009). Conversely, when institutions do recognize these contributions, a space can be created for the range of concerns and varied types or forms of engagement that parents offer.

*What is the Distinction Between Involvement and Engagement?*

There has been a shift in describing the role of parents and families from a lens of involvement to that of engagement. This lens of engagement offers a broader and more culturally inclusive way to understand the role that families play and understand how families’ orientations of the world frame their engagement (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Carreón, Drake, and Calabrese Barton (2005) offer a compelling explanation of the important distinctions between engagement and involvement,
recommending that we as educators focus on engagement. They note that “‘involvement’ has been used to describe the specific things parents do, while ‘engagement’ also includes parents’ orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do” (Carreón et al., 2005, p. 469).

A dominant paradigm of parental involvement has been consistently reinforced over the last 30 years (Kiyama, 2008; Kiyama & Harper, 2015). Educators’ perceptions guide what is accepted as PK–12 parental involvement (Lareau, 1987; López, Scribner, & Mahirivanichcha, 2001; Zarate, 2007), often packaged as traditional behaviors or activities, such as participating in school sanctioned events, belonging to a parent/teacher association, monitoring school attendance, buying educational materials for the home, helping with homework, and seeking tutoring for their children (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Daniel-White, 2002; Kiyama & Harper, 2015; López et al., 2001; Zarate, 2007). These examples are categorized dichotomously as either external involvement (e.g., attendance at school meetings) or internal involvement (e.g., family responsibilities such as ensuring the children arrive to school on time; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Researchers have critiqued parent-involvement literature for its deficit framing, lack of cohesion, and overall lack of inclusion of diverse forms of involvement (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Kiyama, 2010; Kiyama & Harper, 2015; López et al., 2001). These deficit perspectives position parents as powerless, easy to manipulate, without proper resources, and lacking in dominant forms of capital (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Equally problematic is the treatment by educators that position parents and families as bystanders rather than partners, thereby ignoring their strengths and contributions (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).

Lareau (1987) summarized previous studies that examined parental involvement in elementary education. These studies conceptualized parental involvement in the following ways: lower-class and working-class families do not value education as highly as their middle-class counterparts, educational institutions discriminate against lower-class families and welcome middle-class families, and/or that institutional differentiation (e.g. the role that teachers play) is a key determinant in parental involvement (Lareau, 1987).
Further, research demonstrates that teachers and schools involved parents of high-achieving children more than parents of other students (Zarate, 2007). For example, Zarate (2007) reported that one teacher requested parent volunteers based on parents’ occupations; those with higher-status occupations were asked to serve on the school’s governing board while others were asked to provide food for school events. The kind of involvement experienced by middle-class families represents a systematic, deficit-oriented relationship between the parents and schools (Tierney, 2002). There are, however, more culturally responsive ways of partnering with families.

There are multiple ways in which parents and families are and can be engaged in their children’s educational journeys. For example, many parents and families incorporate college-going practices and discussions into everyday household interactions and involve multiple family members in garnering college information and resources (Kiyama, 2010, 2011). At both PK–12 and higher education levels, families can create a family contract (Hallet & Griffen, 2015) to help foster conversations during everyday household activities such as dinner (Auerbach, 2004; Berzin, 2010; Choi, Tekleselassie, & Mallery, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, sharing of educational resources is not limited to the family unit. Families capitalize on strong social networks to collaborate and share relevant college information within the community (Kiyama, 2011). Finally, formal policies in place at both the K–12 and post-secondary levels engage families in shared decision making, programming efforts, and community outreach (Sil, 2007). Thus, engagement is an overarching set of cultural attitudes and beliefs that belie and inform parental participation and parents’ perceptions about education rather than simply a quantitative behavioral assessment of specific actions that might be better captured by involvement. Aware of sociocultural resources that many families bring to school relationships, scholars have recognized and begun to capitalize on these cultural assets of families and communities (Galindo & Medina, 2009).

Conceptually, family engagement encompasses an ongoing, strengths-based, reciprocal relationship between educational institutions and families (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009). Halgunseth et al. (2009) offer a synthesis of the literature on PK–12 family engagement (for more see Parent and Family Engagement in Higher Education 11
Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006), which includes:

1. Family participation that is validated in education related decisions
2. Consistent, two-way communication facilitated through multiple forms and in the linguistic preference of the family
3. Knowledge exchanges that are collaborative and build upon families’ unique knowledge and skills with educational agents seeking out information about students’ lives, families, and communities, and integrating the information into their curriculum and practices
4. Learning activities at home and in the communities are emphasized
5. Families and schools collaborate on establishing educational goals for their children
6. Schools have the resources needed to fully support and engage families

Family engagement should be systemic, integrated, and sustained within educational institutions (Weiss et al., 2010).

Current discourses on parents and families refer to involvement and engagement almost interchangeably and with inconsistent definitions and uses of these terms across research studies. In this monograph, just as we hope to expand the conversation from parents to families, we refer to engagement instead of involvement when possible in order to capture this broader orientation to familial contributions to students’ lives (Carreón et al., 2005). We do, however, utilize involvement when necessary in order to remain consistent with the research we cite and to refer to specific involvement actions or activities (Carreón et al., 2005).

**Engagement as a Framework**

The broader understanding of engagement shifts the focus from exploring what parents do to how and why they engage with their children, the schools, and within the broader family context. The term engagement is used “to expand our understanding of involvement to also include parents’ orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do…and [implies] that parental involvement goes beyond an individual and his or her participation in an event” (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004,
Therefore, by drawing upon engagement rather than involvement, researchers and practitioners are able to understand the role of parents and families as both “authors and agents in schools,” in which family members draw upon “multiple experiences and resources” in dynamic and interactive ways when constructing school interactions (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). The authors offer a model of engagement called Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE).

The EPE model is informed conceptually by broader sociocultural theories like cultural-historical activity theory and by critical race theory. The model includes a connection to families’ environments and whole systems, understood through their ecologies, and highlights networks, space, and capital (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004). These spaces are understood by the roles, rules, norms, and power that guide participation in the space, the forms of capital brought to the space, and the value assigned to such participation (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004). The authors offer three conjectures highlighting the EPE framework:

1. **Parental engagement is the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings.**
2. **Engagement as mediation must be understood as both an action and an orientation to action.**
3. **The differences in parental engagement across different kinds of spaces in urban schools are both a micro and macro phenomenon.** (pp. 6, 8, and 10)

These conjectures and the model itself expose how families “activate nontraditional resources and leverage relationships with teachers, other parents, and community members in order to author a place of their own in schools” (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004, p. 11). Families then are authoring these places and spaces through activation of forms of capital. Families also position themselves within these spaces by drawing upon their capital to facilitate doing so. Ultimately, this shifts the understanding about families in important ways. The participation of families is understood as having agency with engagement rather than what previous literature framed as deficit and limited notions of
involvement. This reframing is especially important when considering the culturally constructed and collectivist orientations from which families of color and first-generation families may originate.

Collectivism is defined as “a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives ... and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives” (Triandis, 1995, p. 2). Students and families from collectivist orientations value emotional attachment to families, aspirations of the group and network versus the individual, and interdependence (Fox, Lowe, & McClellan, 2005; Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). When considering the role of families from a collectivist approach, we understand that they can serve as one of students’ most important assets, offering cultural connections, emotional support, and expectations to facilitate students’ success (Guiffrida, Kiyama, Waterman, & Museus, 2012; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2011; Waterman, 2004). The idea of collectivism then pushes us to think of support for students in broader terms.

**Benefit of Taking an Asset-Based Approach to Familial Engagement**

Scholarship acknowledging the importance of moving away from deficit-thinking and toward asset-based approaches of family engagement reframes the conversation about parents and families (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; De Gaetano, 2007). Asset-based practices consider the abilities and values that individuals bring to any situation, such as the value that family engagement brings to students’ educational success (Grant & Ray, 2010).

It is critical to recognize the various ways in which all families are engaged in their students’ education (Edwards, 2009). The involvement and engagement approaches may be visible or “invisible strategies” that may be reflected through emotional, psychological, or even community-based actions (e.g., telling children they are capable of doing school work, parents translating documents from English to Spanish for non-English-speaking parents, establishing social networks through community involvement; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013, p. 170). Parents and families may not be involved in at-school activities, but their engagement provides impetus for students’ educational
motivation and success. These families’ engagement provides support for students even as they transition into postsecondary education.

If educators fail to recognize the contribution that parents of all income levels and racial and ethnic backgrounds offer, and do not provide space for the range of concerns and varied types or forms of engagement that parents offer, there is the potential that some parents’ engagement will be ignored or missed. When teachers and administrators celebrate parental contributions and ways of knowing (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004), parental involvement and engagement can be fostered within classroom-, school-, and district-wide contexts (Carreón et al., 2005; De Gaetano, 2007). These same contributions can be fostered within postsecondary levels as well. Many underserved families are fighting stereotypes (e.g., uninvolved, careless, undocumented) that have circulated across society and, unfortunately, have been ingrained in educators’ thinking (Carreón et al., 2005). Along with navigating a foreign or unwelcoming educational system, many families must reclaim and reauthorize their own identity as individuals and cultural beings (Carreón et al., 2005). In this manner, parents find themselves warding off stereotypical notions that school systems, administrators, and teachers have of low-income/ethnic-minority children and their parents.

As a prominent and critical educator, Lareau (1987, 2002, 2003) invites scholars and practitioners to become mindful of the contextual circumstances of many low-income families when recommending assistance. A lack of traditional forms of involvement in the educational process is not apathy nor negligence on behalf of the families, but could be misinformation about educational processes, limited access, fewer financial resources, and limited experience navigating the educational system (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Weidner & Herrington, 2006; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). Additionally, a significant body of research has documented the history of involvement that diverse families have with their children, yet these forms of involvement do not receive the same validation, attention, or recognition from educational systems (Kiyama, 2010; López, 2001; McDonough, 1998; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002). Diverse forms of involvement can include raising bilingual children, being active in neighborhood and
community groups, teaching educational lessons through *consejos* (advice-giving narratives), or tapping into informal social networks to learn about educational opportunity (Kiyama, 2010; López, 2001; McDonough, 1998; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Ultimately, education systems must recognize that parents and families have and will continue to advocate for the rights of their children as students at classroom, school, community, or state levels. At times, increased support and guidance navigating the system (school and/or district level) leads to more responsive conversations with school personnel, advocating for district- and policy-level change, developing self-efficacy, and organizing community efforts (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Simultaneously, we must acknowledge the systemic and structural barriers that lead to inequitable outcomes for students, such as racial segregation (DeBlassie & DeBlassie, 1996), underresourced schools (Hill & Torres, 2010), and racism and discriminatory practices (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Hill & Torres, 2010).

Operating under the notion that parents and families have the best interest of their children in mind, we open the discussion to the emotional investment that families make. Reay (2000) found that parents universally valued educational success, regardless of income, race, or ethnicity, but that limitations in access to resources did create challenges. Specifically, Reay found that mothers from poor social class backgrounds were inhibited by “poverty, insufficient educational knowledge, and lack of confidence,” and that these inhibitions limited their ability to provide certain physical resources but did not prevent them from offering sustained empathetic support and encouragement to their students (p. 575). This emotional support is crucial in fostering a sense of psychological well-being among children and adolescents (Reay, 2000).

Interestingly, higher-income parents used their resources to provide high levels of activities, which overwhelmed, exhausted, and stressed the children (Reay, 2000). When families from low-income backgrounds are provided opportunities and resources to support their children’s development, the well-being of the child and of the family increases (Sheely & Bratton, 2010).
Although there is a nuanced relationship between children's structured and unstructured activities and their well-being, it is important to keep sight of the positive influence that conscientious and caring families with fewer resources can offer to their children. This is where communities and educators can work collaboratively to facilitate involvement and engagement in students’ educational success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Redding et al., 2011).