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What Village? Opportunities and Supports for Parental Involvement Outside of the Family Context

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Abstract

Parental involvement research and practice has disproportionately focused on the characteristics of families that promote family-school partnerships. This study focuses instead on school and community characteristics that may elicit or support parental involvement for all families, but especially those from racial/ethnic minority groups. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort 2011 enhanced with data from the American Community Survey and the IRS, multilevel models reveal that educational organizations in the community are associated with higher levels of school-based parental involvement behaviors. This association varies across diverse racial/ethnic groups, such that the link between human service organizations and parental involvement is stronger for Latina/o families than for White and Black families.

1. Introduction

For nearly two decades, policies and practices within the U.S. educational institution have emphasized the role of parental involvement in children's education (U.S. Department of Education 2001). Supporting research and subsequent discussions surrounding parental involvement, however, often focus on the circumstances of families that are associated with more parental involvement, even though families represent only one ecological context of childhood and one "side" of family-school-community partnerships (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler 2007). Qualitative evidence, in contrast, points to the role of schools and communities in connecting families to schools, shifting attention away from what parents are or are not doing themselves (Epstein 2001; Hong 2011). Thus, closely investigating the potential for school and community characteristics to influence parental involvement is important for both theory and practice. Attention to race/ethnicity, in addition, is fundamental to understanding education within the U.S., which reflects a pervasive and often rigid stratification system in which families, schools, and communities are situated and that shapes the exchanges among them (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2014).

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This study, therefore, examines how both school practices and community characteristics may influence parental involvement behaviors above and beyond the individual circumstances of families across diverse racial/ethnic groups. With a data set integrating child-level and school-level data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort 2011 (ECLS-K: 2011) with community-level data from IRS administrative records and Census data, multilevel models predicted school- and community-based parental involvement behaviors at the beginning of elementary school for Latina/o, Black, and White students. The guiding hypotheses are that parental involvement—especially on the part of Latina/o parents—would be higher in the context of school-based opportunities for involvement and community characteristics that nourish strong relationships between families and schools.

The nature of parental involvement, the norms that guide parents' role in education, whether and why such involvement matters to children's outcomes, and the links between parenting and inequality are all highly contested (Robinson and Angel 2014). This study does not investigate the value of parental involvement itself but instead takes as a starting point that educational policy strongly emphasizes parental involvement and that children are often rewarded and receive investments based on parents' perceived behaviors (Lewis and Diamond 2015). In that climate, barriers that reduce parental involvement and that create or exacerbate disparities in parental involvement can have an impact on children, regardless of any arguments for or against the ideas, expectations, and practices of parental involvement more generally. So, efforts to identify potential remedies to such barriers are important (Epstein 2010). A deeper understanding of the school and community influences of parental involvement will therefore shed light onto plausible avenues for organizing schools and communities in ways that promote strong family-school partnerships. Additionally, attention to racial/ethnic variation in these effects will more fully situate the frequently obscure exchanges that take place between families and schools within the community and larger social contexts.

2. Situating Parental Involvement in Education

The U.S. has a long and often conflictual history of emphasizing the important role of parents in managing their children's journeys through a complex educational system and in supporting schools (Somers and Settle 2010). Parental involvement expectations have been high in the past, such as when colonial education was run mostly by parents who set the curriculum and hired and fired teachers. Expectations for parental involvement in education have also been low, such as after the industrial revolution, when universal schooling, bureaucratization, and the professionalization of teachers created a more formal institution separate from the community. The current upswing towards strong expectations for parental involvement can be traced back to the rise of parent-teacher associations in the 1940s, the battles over school desegregation in the 1960s that increased recognition of the need for parental advocacy for children in schools and community ownership of schools, and the more recent trend towards expanding private and nonprofit involvement in public enterprises (Brown 2016; Nelson and Gazley 2014). Backed by research that identifies links between educational success and parental involvement, fostering parental involvement in education has become a fundamental component in educational policy (Hiatt-Michael 2014; Massell

and Perrault 2014; Domina 2005). This study argues that such a reliance on parents, given certain cultural and historical contexts, plays a role in the reproduction of inequality.

Three contemporary trends are particularly important for understanding the current weight placed on parental involvement in education against the backdrop of increasing inequality. First, the benefits to education are rising while competition for educational opportunities is at an all-time high. The returns to educational attainment—most clearly in the form of the earnings premium for a college degree—have increased for nearly three decades, so that progress in the educational system has become the dividing line between haves and have nots (Hout 2012; Chanda 2008). At the same time, access to educational opportunities has become more competitive, increasing the vulnerability of those at the disadvantaged end of the socioeconomic spectrum who have greater need for education to achieve social mobility but face more barriers to using the educational system this way (Bound, Hershbein, and Long 2009). Parents, therefore, are compelled to ensure their children are the “lucky ones” who are able to realize the historic returns to education. They must manage both opportunities and obstacles for their children, diverting more resources than ever towards the management of their children’s education (Schneider, Hastings, and LaBriola 2018). Of course, families who have a wider array of resources are better able to do so (Lunn and Kornrich 2018).

Second, these trends in educational investments are a part of a larger general trend towards intensive parenting (Schiffrin, Godfrey, Liss, and Erchull 2015). Reflecting the premise of intensive motherhood, where mothers are pressured to be not only nurturing but self-sacrificing and solely focused on their children’s well-being (Hays, 1997), educationally intensive parenting involves the marshalling of tremendous amounts of time and resources towards the educational development of children and the procurement of educational opportunities. Lareau (2011) terms this cultural idea “concerted cultivation” and, although it reflects the desires, fears, and values of affluent White families, it has come to dominate the U.S. educational system in such a way that it is imposed on all parents, regardless of means, who are judged by this standard (Crosnoe et al. 2015; Nelson 2010). Parents are pressured to conform to these standards and try to keep up with others who are doing so. If they do not, their children lose out; not only on potential educational opportunities but also because they might be judged by their teachers or other educators as unengaged or undeserving of academic investment (Lewis and Diamond 2015). Such a system is particularly hostile towards individuals with fewer resources, which disproportionately disadvantages racial/ethnic minority families who already face many barriers to creating strong family-school partnerships (Turney and Kao 2009).

Third, public schools are systemically underfunded. Along with scientific evidence that more resources in schools promote better educational outcomes, there is widespread public perception that investment into the educational system is insufficient (Jackson, Johnson, and Persico 2015). As recent teacher strikes across the nation highlight, current methods for investing in education, which largely rely on property taxes, have strained efforts to fund evidence-based educational policies such as small classroom sizes and well-trained teachers (Boyd et al. 2008). Teachers and staff are therefore forced to rely on the generosity of individuals and organizations in the surrounding community to provide services that range

from afterschool programming and tutoring, to in-class volunteers, to family support specialists (Eber, Nelson, and Miles 1997). When all is said and done, parents often must pick up the slack, and, again, some parents are better positioned to do so than others.

These three trends encouraged the push towards strong parental involvement norms and practices in the U.S. educational system. Historically, investigations into parental involvement in research and policies aimed at improving parental involvement have focused on parents themselves (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). Both conceptually and literally, this focus casts parental involvement as solely a parental behavior removed from the broader context outlined above. Such an approach puts too much emphasis on parents, gives too much credit to individual families when they are involved, and too much blame on them when they are not (Meyers and Jordan 2006). In short, it downplays non-random patterns of constraints and opportunities on parental involvement that may have nothing to do with the family itself. Taking a broader view recognizes that parental involvement becomes a behavior situated within a system of stratification and at the intersection of a web of overlapping ecological contexts that surround a child: family, school, and community.

3. Situating Parental Involvement within the Social Ecology

Ecological perspectives on child development theorize that children exist and grow within concentric ecological contexts that span from the individual out to the global (Bronfenbrenner 1994). These ecological considerations have been adapted to education primarily by situating educational processes within exchanges among family, school, and community contexts (Epstein 2001). These three contexts create a dynamic environment where parental involvement is an active or passive response to several potentially competing forces (Meyers and Jordan 2006). Situating parental involvement within a broader ecology suggests that there must be an underlying infrastructure that “allows” involvement practices in the first place. Such an infrastructure informs and supports parents in their decisions to be involved at school by reducing barriers and creating clear pathways for action (Hong 2011). As such, parental involvement can occur regardless of a family’s circumstances because actors within the school and community contexts generate the necessary opportunities for all parents to engage. Removing the narrow focus on the family context of involvement, therefore, acknowledges that the same family might engage in no parental involvement in one family-school-community ecology but much more in another. Here, I explore two ecological forces that theory predicts should be associated with strong family-school partnerships.

The first ecological force, *educational opportunity*, represents the quantity and quality of educational services (Coleman 1968; Carter, Welner, and Ladson-Billings 2013). For parental involvement, opportunity encompasses a school’s policies and practices that equitably facilitate rewarded parental involvement behaviors (Galindo and Sheldon 2012). A focus on school behaviors and activities is logical, as they represent small, inexpensive, and often easy to implement changes, rather than, for example, changing parental education or income. Schools have a lot of flexibility in their approaches to parents, so some provide more opportunities for parents to become involved than others, and some are better than others at identifying and overcoming barriers to involvement through being sensitive to

parent's needs (Alexander et al. 2014; De Gaetano 2007). Overall, schools that have high levels of involvement are those that maintain regular contact with parents, provide many opportunities for building relationships, and promote healthy exchanges between families, teachers, and staff (Zarate 2007).

The second ecological force, *community support*, encompasses the community-level resources that facilitate educational outcomes (Epstein 2001). Abundant evidence suggests that community programs that address family needs can help improve the relationship between families and schools (Hong 2011; Nelson and Gazley 2014; Osterling and Garza 2004). Within an educational context that highly prioritizes parental involvement, after school arts programs, tutoring or counseling services, or scholastic clubs are just a few examples of organizations that could provide opportunities for parents to practice parental involvement behaviors, visit the school, or interact with school staff. Such positive interactions form the building blocks of strong associational connections between institutions in a community including families and schools (Paxton and Ressler 2018). Indeed, some evidence suggests that community support sets the stage for involvement behaviors to take place by helping parents feel more comfortable navigating institutions, and often, the strength of community programs lies in their ability to engage parents where they are and respectfully incorporate their perspectives into school-wide norms and practices (Nelson and Gazley 2014; Small 2009; Zarate 2007). More broadly, community supports can help to create a stronger sense of community, where families feel safer and more comfortable allowing their children to participate in activities, more willing to travel to the school to participate in school events, and more likely to communicate with teachers (Kraft and Rogers 2015).

Educational opportunity and community support represent two kinds of community resources that should be associated with the strength of school-family partnerships, or the level of parental involvement experienced by diverse groups. The guiding hypothesis here is that as levels of opportunity and community support increase, levels of parental involvement increases.

4. Situating Social Ecology within Racial/Ethnic Stratification

Mirroring the focus of much ecological theory on proximate contexts and interpersonal dynamics, the ecological contexts of family, school, and community—and exchanges among them—exist within a broader social system that is unequal and stratified (DuBois 2001 [1963]). One stratification system, race/ethnicity, clearly shapes parental involvement, both in terms of frequency of action and how schools receive and value it (Adair 2012; Turney and Kao 2009). Racial/ethnic stratification has proven to be a key organizer of the interplay of family, school, and community in children's lives and when linking family circumstances with less engagement in parental involvement behavior, considering the intersections of social ecology and stratification allows the exploration of scenarios that might reduce educational inequalities between families. Race/ethnicity is a large and complex social force within family, community, and educational contexts and operates differently according to any individuals' particular racial/ethnic history and identity (Irizarry 2015). As such, it is

appropriate to dedicate theoretical and practical attention to specific racial/ethnic groups and develop theories that reflect their unique circumstances.

Within these considerations in mind, Latina/o families warrant special attention (Cheadle 2008; Lareau and Horvat 1999). They often experience the U.S. educational system through racialized immigrant histories, which create barriers to parental involvement in addition to those shared with other families (Adair and Tobin 2008). Although similar to other racial/ethnic minorities in some ways, Latina/o families have historically demonstrated lower levels of parental involvement in education according to the conventional measures in the literature (Turney and Kao 2009). Often research investigating this phenomenon focuses on unique family-centered explanations, such as linguistic or cultural differences between Latina/o families, especially immigrants, and the U.S. educational system (De Gaetano 2007; Reese et al. 1995). There are also structural explanations that point out racial/ethnic minority families face additional barriers to parental involvement such as hidden curriculums, and outright hostility (Adair and Tobin 2008). Latina/o parents may be even less visible at school because of their unfavorable economic conditions coupled with a lack of familiarity with the educational system, which is all confounded by rising racial and immigrant tensions (Adair 2012).

In such an educational ecology, groups that encounter more systemic barriers may receive outsized benefits from opportunities and community resources when they are present (Winsler et al. 2008). The Latina/o case, positioned comparatively to other racial/ethnic groups, can serve as a barometer for the strength of the ecological context in the formation of family-school partnerships. This study therefore explores whether opportunities for involvement and community resources might matter more to the parental involvement of Latina/o families, a necessary condition for the reduction of inequality (Ceci and Papierno 2005).

Through the lens of educational opportunity, invitations and demonstrations of inclusion could help to assuage any confusion, skepticism, or hesitation a family might have about engaging with schools (Lareau and Horvat 1999). Teachers that listen to the views of Latina/o families on what involvement entails, such as support for the family, and then communicate parental involvement expectations and invitations that are responsive to those views, may be more successful in overcoming language and cultural barriers (Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha 2001). Although a crude measure of such activities, simple communications between teachers and families are necessary to set the groundwork for strong family-school partnerships (Galindo and Sheldon 2012).

Turning to community supports, Latina/o families tend to not only experience isolation from the educational system but are also often physically or geographically isolated from other resources (Reckhow and Weir 2010). The community supports that do exist, therefore, may be particularly valuable. Not only might these organizations help directly by providing educational or tutoring services to individual families, they can also provide the kinds of opportunities families need to make connections to other community members (Small 2009). Given a Latina/o family's potential lack of familiarity with educational norms, for example, community supports might help them gain experience and knowledge about working with

schools. Moreover, supports that help parents interact with educational institutions in a welcoming light could lead to parents feeling more comfortable visiting the school, transforming the relationship between families and schools towards a sense of partnership (Zarate 2007). Community supports may even be a necessary component of strong family/school partnerships for Latina/o families because the barriers to parental involvement are so great that these families are unable to overcome them on their own.

5. Study Aims and Hypotheses

Following contemporary ecological theory, this study has two aims with corresponding hypotheses. The first aim is to incorporate the ecological context into considerations of parental involvement by testing the hypothesis that communications with the school and the presence of community support organizations will be associated with higher levels of parental involvement. The second aim is to place the social ecological context of parental involvement within a system of racial/ethnic stratification by testing the hypothesis that associations between opportunities and supports on one hand on parental involvement on the other will be greatest for Latina/o, then Black, then White families.

6. Data and Methods

Focusing empirical attention on the school and community contexts requires a data set that contains information on the child, their family, their school, and their community. This study combines several sources to construct such a data set. The base data set, the ECLS-K 2011, is an ideal data set from which to start, as it contains recent information on children, their families, teachers, schools, and care providers collected by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES). Data collection on more than 18,000 children began in the fall and spring of 2010–2011 and continued through the spring of fifth grade in 2016 (Tourangeau et al. 2015).

This cross-sectional study combines the kindergarten wave of the ECLS-K: 2011 data with several additional sources of data matched to the child's school zip code. Data for organizational supports came from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), which archives IRS data on all registered nonprofit organizations several times a year as far back as 1989 (available at www.nccs.org). Data from the American Community Survey (ACS), which the Census collects annually on a sample of millions of households, allowed the measurement of community-level control variables. To translate census tract-level data to the zip code level, I used data provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development tract to zip code crosswalk including population-based weights. A final source of data on all U.S. schools, the Common Core of Data (CCD), contributed information regarding the number of charter schools in a zip code. Multiple imputations processed all other missing data with 10 imputations with predictive mean matching to the 5 nearest neighbors, and analysis included child-level weights (Morris, White, and Royston 2014). All available respondents were included in the analysis for a sample of 18,170 children.

7. Variables

Parental involvement.

A series of questions in the ECLS-K asked respondents to indicate if they were involved in each of 11 different involvement activities within the past school year. *School involvement* summed just the 5 activities that require interacting directly with the school (attending an open house, attending a PTA/PTO meeting, attending a parent/teacher conference, attending a school or class event, and volunteering at the school). *Community involvement*, in contrast, summed the 6 activities that involve going out into the community (attending an athletic event, club, music lessons, drama classes, and organized performing arts programs).

Opportunities.

The ECLS-K also captures two dimensions of opportunities for involvement in school and the community: invitations to parents by the school and contacts with parents by teachers. Invitations counts the total frequency of invitations from the school for parents to engage in their child's education. School administrators report the frequency of 6 events, from parent-teacher conferences, to sending report cards home, to performances at school parents, on a 5-point scale from "never" to "7 or more times" per year. The categorical variable is converted to continuous by taking the mid-point of each category, and the final scale sums the total number of activities from 0 to 42. Similarly, contacts sums five teacher-reported items that ask the frequency of teacher contacts to parents within the past year from "never" to "15 or more times" resulting in a continuous measure ranging from 0 to 75. These items include sending home newsletters, portfolios of children's work, using e-mail communications, and talking to parents on the phone.

Community support.

The total number of education nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations per capita measures the presence of civically-minded educational spaces and services in 2009. Nonprofits are divided according to their major National Taxonomy for Exempt Entities code (ED for education). This count excluded institutions of higher education and private or religious institutions. Limited to community-based organizations, the number of nonprofit education organizations registered within a school's zip code is measured per 10,000 residents. Additional cleaning corrects for organizations that had their nonprofit status revoked within two years of the survey wave and to account for co-located and federated organizations. Those respondents with a valid zip code but no observed nonprofits receive a value of zero. Similar measures counting the number of arts, health, and human services nonprofits demonstrate comparable associations to those presented here for education nonprofits.

Family covariates.

Several variables measure family circumstances. Three indicators flag at least one parent with a college education, if the parents are married, and if at least one parent is employed. Family income is a categorical variable from 1 to 15 and treated as continuous.

Community covariates.

From the ACS, demographic variables measure the percentage of those 16 and over who are unemployed and the percentage of high school graduates. Additional community covariates such as median household income or the percentage of those in poverty over-identify the level-2 model so are not included.

Charter schools.

Similarly to the nonprofit measure, this variable counts the total number of registered charter schools in a zip code per 10,000 residents.

Race/ethnicity.

From the composite variable the NCES supplies, three dichotomous race variables group children into Latina/o, Black, and White, with “Other” as the reference.

8. Plan of Analyses

The analytic tool for this analysis is Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM). In ecological theory and in the data, children are “nested” in communities, which means that responses within community groups are dependent, so un-nested models would suffer from problems of aggregation bias and misestimated precision (Stephen and Anthony 2002). Not only mathematically appropriate, multi-level models are also conceptually appropriate for explicitly testing theories that rely on cross level, individual-to-community interactions (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). The study hypothesizes that community and school contexts matter for parental involvement in education, and HLM provides an integrated strategy for hypothesis testing of community and school effects (Mo, Singh, and Chang 2013). Students, therefore, are clustered in communities associated with their school zip code, with both school and community variables on the second level. An alternative strategy could place community characteristics on a third level above schools like the county, but this study tests the potential for *nearby* community-level influence on family-school partnerships by placing community variables within geographically smaller zip codes. Using Stata to process the data and perform multiple imputation resulted in 10 fully imputed data sets for analysis in HLM 7 (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

Modeling for the two aims proceeds in the following step-wise fashion. For the first aim of investigating the entire ecological context of parental involvement, separate models predict school and community involvement with the family, school, and community variables. For the second aim of uncovering racial/ethnic differences in the influence of school and community contexts on parental involvement, full models are fitted with interactions between school opportunities and community supports and each race/ethnicity group.

9. Results

Table 1 displays sample means by racial/ethnic group for the multiply imputed data. These descriptive statistics indicate that White families report higher involvement in both the school and the community in the spring of the kindergarten year. Although Latina/o and

Black families report similar school involvement, Latina/o families have the lowest levels of community involvement overall.

For opportunities, school administrators for all racial/ethnic groups report similar numbers of invitations, but teachers of Latina/o families report nearly 6 fewer than average contacts. The same is true for community supports, with Latina/o families attending schools in zip codes with lower than average nonprofit education organizations. These families also display more disadvantaged socioeconomic family and community circumstances, but above-average numbers of charter schools in their communities.

Turning to the multivariate HLM results, Table 2 presents the analysis that corresponds with the first aim. To begin, neither invitations nor contacts significantly explain variation in school or community involvement. The coefficient for educational nonprofit supports, however, indicates that increasing numbers of supports is positively associated with parental involvement in kindergarten in school and in the community. In practical terms, an additional 500 educational nonprofit organizations per 10,000 residents would be associated with an increase in parental involvement in both the school and the community by, on average, one activity.

Both race/ethnicity and family covariates significantly explain variation in parental involvement. White families report slightly higher levels of school involvement than Black, Latina/o, and Other families. In contrast, Latina/o families on average report less community involvement than other families. Having a college educated parent, married parents, and higher family income are positively associated with school and community involvement. In general, other community covariates are not associated with parental involvement, with the number of high school graduates in a community significantly but weakly predicting increases in parental involvement.

To accomplish the second aim, the next analytical step includes interactions between each racial/ethnic category and each opportunity and support in the models presented in Table 2. One significant interaction emerges, for Latina/o families with educational nonprofit supports predicting school involvement ($b = .005$, $p < .05$). To ease interpretation, this interaction is graphed in Figure 1 (full models available by request).

With the predicted value on the six point parental involvement scale in school along the y-axis, this graph demonstrates a small increase in school involvement for Latina/o families, about a fifth of a single involvement item, associated with living in communities where the number of educational nonprofits is 44 per 10,000 compared to Latina/o families in communities with 1 educational nonprofit per 10,000. The significance of the interaction term rests on the fact that although the same gradient is present for Black, and White, the strength of the association between community support and parental involvement is greater for Latina/o families in comparison to Other families.

10. Discussion and Conclusion

Research on parental involvement and many other educational topics often centers on the family characteristics that promote or hinder academic success. Such a focus, however,

ignores the ecological contexts that surround families. Doing so continues to burden parents to independently provide for the educational success of their children within an unfair educational system that prioritizes some types of families over others. In a stratified and unequal society, such an approach allows inequality to persist. I argue that the other ecological contexts of childhood outside of families, both school opportunities and community supports, may also be influential factors in creating strong family-school partnerships that promote the educational success of all children. Shifting the focus to these broader contexts allows for a more nuanced discussion on the causes of parental involvement, situates parental involvement within larger social systems, and points the way towards alternative educational policies that rely less on the parenting norms of affluent White families.

Modeling this shift in focus, I analyzed the parental involvement of a diverse and nationally representative cohort of kindergartners and their families with special attention to the school and community contexts that might promote strong family-school partnerships for Latina/o families. Using multi-level models, results indicate that community supports may present an avenue through which to improve family-school partnerships, a theory developed in smaller qualitative studies (Hong 2011; Nelson 2017). In addition, the analysis presented here offers some indication that these services may be particularly beneficial to those most marginalized by the educational system. These results contribute to our understanding of the ecological contexts of education in two ways.

First, community supports do appear to matter, potentially even more than school invitations or contacts. The association between educational organizations and parental involvement in school indicates that investments into the community may have spillover effects that help to connect families to schools, and potentially other institutions. Because results indicate that similar families in different community contexts report different levels of parental involvement, interventions at the community level may help all families to build better relationships with schools, regardless of their individual circumstances. Such a link may help to explain the success of the Harlem Children's Zone (Dobbie, Fryer, and Fryer 2011). This link suggests further that comprehensive community-level interventions may be more practical and beneficial to all families than school-based ones. These findings also suggest that research into such interventions should pay particular attention to the mechanisms underlying how community supports can promote strong school/family partnerships. While simply attending a program within a school's zip code might not at first appear to foster strong connections between parents and school staff, when parents interact in such educational environments they may develop the kinds of behaviors and parental involvement practices that are rewarded by schools more broadly. Continued qualitative and quantitative data collection could unpack these potential pathways.

The lack of findings for the invitations and contacts evident in these models also demonstrate a possible limitation of the study. Social desirability bias leading to overreporting or bad reporting on these measures could explain the inability of these measures to reach statistical significance. Teachers may be pressured to overreport their contacts with parents or may not even remember all of the contacts that they do make. Either way, research that focuses on the mechanisms linking school invitations and contacts to

parental involvement might be better positioned to answer why the connections between the two are not apparent here.

Worth noting, however, is the fact that although these models take into consideration the nested structure of the data, the school and community contexts are treated at the same level. Disaggregating the two levels, potentially through meaningful urban boundaries that contain several schools, may help to scale our understanding of how community processes effect the relationship between families and schools. Alternative models that address the limitations of the cross-sectional models presented through exploiting the longitudinal nature of the data in fixed effects, but which do not account for its nested nature, return similar results. Similar future research could also extend the window of observation, and further situate the practical nature of the findings vis-à-vis other potential community supports or policy interventions.

Second, the significant interaction between educational organizations and Latina/o status indicates that these services may matter even more for some of the most marginalized families within the U.S. educational system. For this group, which is shown to mask substantial levels of internal variability, future research could explore internal variation meaningful distinctions, such as nativity or by acculturation or assimilation (Irizarry 2015). The real-world distribution of community supports is also likely to be stratified, so future investigations may benefit from incorporating additional geographical considerations such as average travel times to services. Finally, investigations into other racial/ethnic groups, and other divisions of the Latina/o community, are also clearly warranted. The complexity of race/ethnicity means that each group likely has its own unique experience with the educational system, so hypothesized mechanisms connecting educational opportunities and community supports to parental involvement may operate differently for different groups and therefore, much like the Latina/o families here, they each warrant unique attention.

Despite the potential for community-level investments to improve the educational opportunities for all children, current educational policy and practice is subsumed by parental investments into their own children. When different parents have different resources, and the allocation of those resources is based on an unequal and stratified system, such an approach to education will only allow for schools to reproduce inequality like a functionalist black box (Karabel and Halsey 1977). Taking the current scenario of intensive parental involvement as the backdrop on which to test the association between community resources and family-school partnerships, this study begins to push future discussion on education beyond the child, and beyond the family, and forces the institution of education to grapple with how it acknowledges and responds to all types of communities. Nonprofit human service organizations may hold clues to how such comprehensive educational and social service provision may, one day, contribute to the elimination of inequality.

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Fig. 1.
Predicted Parental Involvement in School with Human Service Nonprofits per 10,000 People
by Race/Ethnicity * Indicates a statistically significant interaction ($p < .05$)

Table 1.

Multiply Imputed Means for Full Sample and by Race/Ethnicity

	Multiply Imputed Means <i>SE</i>			
	Full Sample	Latina/o	Black	White
Outcomes				
School involvement	3.409 <i>0.011</i>	3.178 <i>0.025</i>	3.172 <i>0.032</i>	3.607 <i>0.014</i>
Community involvement	0.955 <i>0.010</i>	0.664 <i>0.017</i>	0.851 <i>0.025</i>	1.132 <i>0.012</i>
Opportunities				
Invitations	20.516 <i>0.069</i>	19.628 <i>0.149</i>	20.629 <i>0.210</i>	21.307 <i>0.090</i>
Contacts	44.570 <i>0.159</i>	38.182 <i>0.320</i>	43.391 <i>0.447</i>	49.240 <i>0.212</i>
Community Supports				
Education	22.358 <i>0.162</i>	20.759 <i>0.264</i>	26.626 <i>0.530</i>	19.736 <i>0.225</i>
Family Covariates				
College-educated parent	0.382 <i>0.004</i>	0.196 <i>0.007</i>	0.222 <i>0.010</i>	0.488 <i>0.006</i>
Currently married	0.689 <i>0.004</i>	0.612 <i>0.009</i>	0.416 <i>0.012</i>	0.780 <i>0.005</i>
Family income	10.164 <i>0.049</i>	7.772 <i>0.088</i>	7.500 <i>0.129</i>	11.937 <i>0.065</i>
Employed parent	0.569 <i>0.004</i>	0.488 <i>0.009</i>	0.588 <i>0.012</i>	0.613 <i>0.006</i>
Community Covariates				
Unemployment (%)	8.755 <i>0.027</i>	10.008 <i>0.053</i>	11.477 <i>0.095</i>	7.469 <i>0.031</i>
High school graduates (%)	84.371 <i>0.081</i>	76.867 <i>0.212</i>	81.736 <i>0.190</i>	88.447 <i>0.077</i>
Median household income	58375.430 <i>166.513</i>	52542.720 <i>275.111</i>	47581.810 <i>408.850</i>	61924.550 <i>244.342</i>
Charter schools per 10,000	1.486 <i>0.026</i>	2.297 <i>0.063</i>	2.079 <i>0.093</i>	0.895 <i>0.030</i>
<i>n</i>	18,170	4,590	2,400	8,490

Table 2.

Baseline Hierarchical Linear Regressions Explaining Variation in School and Community Involvement

	School Baseline		Community Baseline	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Community Level				
Intercept	2.317 ^{***}	0.213	−0.197	0.127
Opportunities				
Invitations	0.004	0.002	0.000	0.001
Contacts	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Supports				
Education	0.002 ^{**}	0.001	0.002 [*]	0.001
Race/Ethnicity				
White	0.227 ^{***}	0.038	0.106 ^{***}	0.033
Black	0.121 [*]	0.060	0.111 ^{**}	0.041
Latina/o	0.111 [*]	0.035	−0.070	0.037
Family Covariates				
College educated parent	0.370 ^{***}	0.027	0.388 ^{***}	0.024
Married parents	0.129 ^{***}	0.028	0.030	0.022
Family income	0.034 ^{***}	0.003	0.031 ^{***}	0.003
Parental employment	−0.036	0.025	0.016	0.021
Community Covariates				
Unemployment	−0.005	0.006	0.005	0.004
High school graduates	0.005 [*]	0.002	0.006 ^{***}	0.001
Median household income	0.000 [*]	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total charter schools per 10,000	0.004	0.006	0.000	0.003
Percentage of Variance Explained				
Within communities	0.139		0.043	
Between communities	1.191		0.849	

^{***}
 $p < 0.001$,

^{**}
 $p < 0.01$,

^{*}
 $p < 0.05$,

⁺
 $p < 0.1$