Promoting Home-to-School Connections in the Digital Age

Kelly M. Torres
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA

Shani Salifu
The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology has provided numerous opportunities for teachers and families to connect and to support student academic performance. The advent of the internet and educational apps has resulted in immediate and more accessible home-to-school communication options. Researchers have found significant benefits related to these connections resulting in higher academic performance and lower off-task classroom behaviors. However, families do not always have reliable access to technology, and teachers may lack training on how to establish these valuable partnerships. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of how to promote home-to-school connections and practical applications of how to overcome potential barriers that inhibit these impactful relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education across all levels and resulted in many students completing their academic studies remotely in their home settings. Many K-12 schools have also restructured their educational approaches to be more inclusive of technology (e.g., Google Chromebooks) to allow for swift campus closures and to close the digital divides found across their districts. Although an increased number of children were completing their learning digitally in the 2020-2021 academic school year, homeschooling is not a novel phenomenon. Pre-pandemic there were approximately three percent of children who were homeschooled (Shaw, 2020). However, as a result of the impact and health concerns associated with COVID-19, the number of children completing their education via homeschooling or remotely has skyrocketed and substantially increased (Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Prothero & Samuels, 2020; Shaw, 2020; Wamsley, 2021; Weiss & García, 2020). The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)

defined digital learning as "any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen a student's learning experience and encompasses a wide spectrum of tools and practices " (p. 1969). As conveyed by the Every Student Succeeds Act, digital instruction includes:

(a) interactive learning resources, digital learning content (which may include openly licensed content), software, or simulations, that engage students in academic content; (b) access to online databases and other primary source documents; (c) the use of data and information to personalize learning and provide targeted supplementary instruction; (d) online and computer-based assessments; (e) learning environments that allow for rich collaboration and communication, which may include student collaboration with content experts and peers; (f) hybrid or blended learning, which occurs under direct instructor supervision at a school or other location away from home and, at least in part, through online delivery of instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace; and (g) access to online course opportunities for students in rural or remote areas. (p. 1969)

Children who are completing their education digitally or remotely during global pandemics still need to feel connected to their schools. Furthermore, families with students enrolled in brick and mortar schools want opportunities to communicate with their child's teachers. Particularly, home and school connections are considered a key attribute to students' academic success. Although these connections are essential and vital to students' educational growth, researchers have found that family engagement and connections to teachers are a major challenge (Cucchiara, 2018; Daniel et al., 2016; Hutchison et al., 2020; Jacques & Villegas, 2018; Kuusimäki et al., 2019). As a result, schools should aim to develop strong relationships with families in order to improve communication channels and to determine how to implement effective practices for supporting students' learning. Strengthening support between schools and families is vital for the development of positive attitudes for remote learning and the development of dispositions that maximize academic growth (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvery, 2018; Kaufman, n.d.; OECP, 2020). Essentially, schools and caregivers can effectively use technological tools that provide varied levels of support for student progress and knowledge acquisition (Bergman & Chan, 2017; Gauvreau & Sandall, 2017; Gillen & Kucirkova, 2018; Minero, 2017; Office of Educational Technology, n.d.; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). These technological tools bolster cooperation between teachers and families with remote and brick and mortar students.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Family to School Connections

Home to school collaborations result in many educational benefits including increased student achievement and students possessing positive attitudes toward their schooling. Particularly, school engagement has been found to be a significant predicator of achievement (Bosacki et al., 2019; Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Duchesne et al., 2017; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Hutchison et al., 2020; Raynham & Jinks, 2021; Wang & Hofkens, 2020). Indeed, researchers have found that family to school connections promote academic gains and demonstrate a commitment to developing a mutual responsibility to a child accomplishing educational success (Bayly & LeBron, n.d.; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein, 2018; Jeynes, 2016; Jeynes, 2021; Park & Holloway, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Further, Comer and Haynes (1997) stated