Chapter 14


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ABSTRACT

To improve academic outcomes for students of color, educators must find new ways to implement change. It is essential that innovative strategies include parental engagement in the arsenal to improve academic outcomes for youth of color. The authors share insights gleaned from an examination of parental engagement, the social capital in families of color, the conditions necessary for social capital exchange, and how to create a climate that encourages G-STEM (growing students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) parental capital exchange. Lessons learned from the work of the authors with the parents and parent components of the program and strategies implemented by G-STEM leading to success are shared.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How might school/parental partnership actions and programs change if educators assumed that all parents care about the educational outcomes of their children?
- How might school/parental partnership actions and programs change if educators assumed that all families have capital of value to the academic success of young people?

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• How might school/parental partnership efforts change if schools assumed they were partnering with parents, rather than assuming that parents were partnering with schools?
• What are some strategies that educators can use to identify the social capital and cultural assets within their families?

The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.  
-Coretta Scott King

INTRODUCTION

Denise is 51, Black, female, married, and the mother of two teen-aged daughters. Denise scheduled a meeting with the school guidance counselor for herself and her high school daughter, Johnetta, well before course schedules for the upcoming year were to be finalized. The three agreed on a schedule that included AP History, which was important to Denise. But the final schedule Denise saw didn’t include the course. When she pursued this with her daughter, she learned that the counselor had called Johnetta into the office after the meeting and told Johnetta she was “doing well” and she had enough credits. She told Johnetta that she did not need the AP History course and removed it from her schedule. Denise was upset. “She needs to be prepared for college,” she said of her daughter, “and she can take more AP classes. Don’t just let her slide by on her schedule.”

The following year, as Denise met with a counselor in preparation for Johnetta’s senior year, the counselor suggested that Johnetta go to school just half a day. Denise thought this was a bad idea. “I was really irritated. … she only will have to go a portion of the day …. Well, what will you be doing the rest of the day? That could be filled with education and knowledge. I mean, I know that sounds funny, and I’m not trying to be mean, but it’s like, wait a minute here.” (Rollins, 2013)

Unfortunately, Denise’s experience is all too common in our education system. But, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.” To improve academic outcomes for youth of color (primarily Black, Latino/a and American Indian for this discussion) and change the culture that created this scenario, caring educators must continue to push for change and consider new strategies and new ways to implement that change (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Yosso, 2005). If we as educators are committed to socially-just outcomes for all students, then it is critical to consider the role of parental engagement as we develop these new strategies. The work of the authors with the parent component of G-STEM (Growing students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), an informal, precollege academic development program that prepares youth of color to pursue college degrees in technical fields, offers some insights.

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on parental engagement and the methods we will use to explore this topic, social capital theory; introduces G-STEM, including its parental engagement philosophy; and shares the outcomes of several program studies as they relate to parental engagement and G-STEM. The social and cultural capital of our families, the potential for social capital exchange, and an assessment of the effectiveness of G-STEM’s strategy, are shared as well. Lessons learned can provide important insights for school administrators to consider who are seeking to improve the social capital exchange between their educational institutions and the parents of the students they serve. However, it is important to interrogate notions of parental engagement and social capital theory as we begin.
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