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Voices of Parents on Raising and Educating Their Children from Birth to College

# A Teaching Case Study



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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*Building a Birth-to-College Model: Professional Learning Communities (December 2012).*

# Introduction

Given rich developmental experiences and high-quality early education and K-12 schooling, children can enjoy learning and achievement from birth to college and beyond. Research indicates that children are wired to learn from birth.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge is emerging on how families positively influence their children's sociocultural development,<sup>2</sup> as well as oral language<sup>3</sup> and mathematical skills.<sup>4</sup> Further, evaluation studies indicate that schooling matters. Participation in high-quality early learning programs predicts subsequent learning, as well as life achievement, through young adulthood.<sup>5</sup> A causal relationship has been identified between participation in high-quality kindergarten and ensuing elementary school achievement, high school graduation, and college graduation.<sup>6</sup> And college completion brings measurable benefits to the graduates, their children, and their communities.<sup>7,8</sup>

City, state, and national leaders are leveraging research to forward bold policy proposals. In 2012, San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro secured

voter approval of a sales tax hike to fund full-day prekindergarten for four-year-old children<sup>9</sup> and two years earlier opened a one-stop city center where students can access guidance on college financial aid, test preparation, and admission.<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has forwarded a vision of universal access to early learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and greater financial aid for low-income college students.<sup>11</sup> President Barack Obama has enacted policies to make college more affordable and incentive states to bring about K-12 reforms and recently proposed to make prekindergarten accessible to all four-year-olds in poverty. The goal of these policies is to increase opportunities for children to engage in high-quality learning experiences, from birth to college, which will enhance their trajectories over a lifetime.

Largely missing from the discourse are the viewpoints of parents. Yet, a large body of literature attests to the powerful influence of families on their children's learning at home.<sup>12</sup> Research has further indicated

- 1 E.g. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- 2 E.g. American Psychological Association, Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (2008). *Resilience in African American Children and Adolescents: A Vision for Optimal Development*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/cyf/resilience.html>.
- 3 E.g. Zimmerman, F., Gilkerson, J., Richards, J., Christakis, D., Hu, D., Gray, S., & Yapanel, U. (2009). Teaching By Listening: The Importance of Adult-Child Conversations to Language Development. *Pediatrics*, 124, 342 – 349.
- 4 E.g. Pruden, S., Levine, S., & Huttenlocher, J. (2011). Children's spatial thinking: does talk about the spatial world matter? *Developmental Science*, 14, 1417 – 1430.
- 5 Reynolds, A., Magnuson, K., & Ou, S. (2010). Preschool-to-third grade programs and practices: A review of research." *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 1121-1131.
- 6 Chetty, R., Friedman, J., Hilger, N., Saez, E., Schanzenbach, D. & Yagan, D. (2011). How Does Your Kindergarten Class Affect Your Earnings? Evidence from Project STAR. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 126, 1593-1660.
- 7 Attewell, P., Lavin, D., Domina, T. & Levey, T. (2007). *Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 8 Bowen, W. & Bok, D. (2000). *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*.
- 9 *Huffington Post*, "Julian Castro: Pre-K 4 SA Passage Shows Belief In Education, Opportunity For Future Prosperity." Posted: 11/08/2012 2:27 pm EST Updated: 11/08/2012 2:42 pm EST, downloaded on May 20, 2013, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/08/julian-castro-pre-k-4-sa-\\_n\\_2094348.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/08/julian-castro-pre-k-4-sa-_n_2094348.html).
- 10 <http://www.cafecollege.org/home>.
- 11 Governor Deval Patrick's State of the Commonwealth Address, 2013.
- 12 E.g. Pruden, S., Levine, S., & Huttenlocher, J. (2011). Children's spatial thinking: does talk about the spatial world matter? *Developmental Science*, 14, 1417 – 1430.

that family engagement in early learning settings and K-12 schools<sup>13</sup> is associated with children making greater achievement gains<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, robust evidence suggests that family engagement is one of the essential elements for improving a K-12 school.<sup>15</sup>

However, instead of “acting with,” parents may view themselves as “acted upon” by school staff and policymakers who typically do not involve them in substantive discussions about educational change.<sup>16</sup> “Distance, tension, and antagonism” between schools and families, particularly in school districts serving low-income families of color, is often the norm.<sup>17</sup> Teachers, principals, and staff attempting to coordinate family initiatives in these contexts typically attribute low levels of family involvement to the indifference of families to their children’s education.<sup>18</sup> Parents, on the other hand, may view the very same initiatives as indifferent to their needs and wants.<sup>19</sup> The self-constructed narratives of parents with respect to their children’s development and education are likely to go unheard if their content falls outside conventional notions of how parents should think and act. This is especially the case when such narratives are voiced by parents living in households and communities with few socioeconomic resources.<sup>20</sup>

This case study helps to fill the gap between the valuable assets that parents bring to their children’s learning and the lack of attention given to parental voices in discourse about the current and future condition of public education for students from the earliest years through young adulthood. It presents the self-constructed narratives of twenty-one parents about how parents, themselves, think about and work towards the development, education, and future successes of their children.

Remarkably, every parent we interviewed expressed the belief that it takes a village to successfully raise and educate their children from birth to college and that this village begins at home through their own commitment of support. The parents see themselves as vital to the foundation of a village that radiates outward and includes not only those individuals charged with providing formal education and support, but also members of the broader community who take collective responsibility for the teaching and learning of all children. In highlighting the village that the parents envision—primarily in their own words—our intent is to provide critical information to parents, practitioners, and policymakers interested in fostering family-school relationships that will add value to children’s learning across the birth-to-college continuum.

13 Current literature generally defines family engagement in educational settings as meaningful interaction between families and schools for the purpose of supporting student learning and achievement. E.g., California Comprehensive Center at WestEd and the California Department of Education. (2011). *Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts*. Sacramento: California Department of Education.

14 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

15 Bryk, A., Bender Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. (2010). *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

16 Weiss, H., Lopez, M.E., & Rosenberg, H. (2011). *Bringing Families to the Table. Recommendations and Next Steps from the National Policy Forum for Family, School, and Community Engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, page 7.

17 Hong, S. (2011). *A Cord of Three Strands*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, page 13.

18 Lopez, G. (2001). The value of hard work: Lessons on parent involvement from an (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71, 416 – 438.

19 Mapp, K. & Hong, S. (2009). “Debunking the Myth of the Hard-to-Reach Parent.” In S. Christensen and A. Reschly (Eds.) *Handbook of School-Family Partnerships*. New York and London: Routledge.

20 Lopez, G. (2001). The value of hard work: Lessons on parent involvement from an (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71, 416 – 438.

## Background

### The Parents

We interviewed twenty-one predominately low-income African American parents on the South Side of Chicago for this case study in the spring of 2013. We additionally interviewed nine individuals who engage and support the families in their roles as community center staff, early learning center staff, or elementary school staff.

We invited the parents to participate in interviews for two reasons: 1) They are the parents of young children who participate either in a community-based, parent-infant-toddler playgroup or preschool at one of two early learning centers<sup>21</sup> and 2) Their children are headed to kindergarten at the University of Chicago Charter School.<sup>22</sup> Eighteen of the parents had incomes that fell within federal poverty guidelines. Nineteen were mothers.

### The Educational Settings

The parents and staff are affiliated with one of the following educational settings: (1) Educare Chicago (Educare), operated by the Ounce of Prevention Fund<sup>23</sup>; (2) the Effie O. Ellis Early Care and Youth Center (Effie Ellis), operated by Centers for New Horizons<sup>24</sup>; (3) IN/TO Play, the parent/infant/toddler playgroup offered by the Oakwood Shores Community Life Center, operated by The

Community Builders;<sup>25</sup> and (4) the Donoghue and North Kenwood/Oakland (NKO) campuses of the University of Chicago Charter School, operated by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute<sup>26</sup>.

Educare and Effie Ellis educate children from birth to age five. Donoghue and NKO serve children from prekindergarten through grade five. They are two of UCCS's four campuses that all together provide children with a prekindergarten-through-grade-12 pathway to college, beginning at age four.<sup>27</sup> The mission of the Oakwood Shores Community Life Center is to support the transformation of the neighborhood from public housing to mixed-income housing by providing children and families with education, arts, and recreational programs.<sup>28</sup>

### Birth-to-College Alignment of Goals, Standards, and Best Practices

Donoghue and NKO collaborate with Educare, Effie Ellis, and the Oakwood Shores Community Life Center to build coherent, seamless pathways to college that begin at birth. Donoghue and NKO are charter school campuses that must admit children by lottery under state law. Thus the collaboration includes charter school admissions policies and strategies that give priority to children from Educare, Effie Ellis, and the Oakwood Shores

21 Two of the twenty-one parents have children who are in kindergarten or first grade. They were invited to participate in interviews because they serve as mentors to the parents with children who are transitioning to kindergarten. Of the total of twenty-one parents, many have older children, in addition to children age five and under.

22 Eighteen children are transitioning to UCCS kindergarten in the fall of 2013. Three children are infants or toddlers who will attend UCCS in the future if their parents so choose.

23 Since 1982, the Ounce of Prevention Fund has persistently pursued a single goal: that all American children—particularly those born into poverty—have quality early childhood experiences in the crucial first five years of life. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/>

24 Founded in 1971, Centers for New Horizons, Inc. (Centers) is a nonprofit organization that assists children, youth, and families to become self-reliant. Centers provides programs in seven locations throughout Chicago's South Side. <http://www.cnh.org>

25 The mission of The Community Builders is to “build and sustain strong communities where people of all incomes can achieve their full potential.” <http://www.tcbinc.org/>

26 The mission of the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) is to create knowledge to produce reliably excellent urban schooling. <http://uei.uchicago.edu/>

27 The other two UCCS campuses are Carter G. Woodson, which educates students from grades six to eight, and Woodlawn, which educates students from grade six to twelve.

28 The Community Builders (TCB) manages the community center.

neighborhood.<sup>29</sup> The building of an effective educational pathway from birth to college goes beyond the creation of a strategic admissions plan to involve the challenging work of aligning goals, standards, and best practices. Alignment efforts to ensure continuity of teaching and learning are crucial as the early learning and K-12 worlds have been historically divided in many ways including, but not limited to, policies, funding streams, teacher preparation and licensure, and organizational structures.<sup>30</sup> Children who have had the opportunity to participate in high-quality early learning may experience a “fade” by third grade of the significant benefits they have accrued if these fundamental disconnects are not systematically and comprehensively addressed.<sup>31</sup>

The birth-to-college alignment efforts of the partners give priority to the engagement and support of families.<sup>32</sup> The twenty-one parents we interviewed for this case study participated in the following alignment strategies intended to foster kindergarten readiness among young children and to ease the transition of children graduating from an early learning setting to a kindergarten classroom:

1) Parents and children who participated in In/To Play interacted with prekindergarten and primary grade teachers from Donoghue. Each teacher visited In/To Play to demonstrate parent-child read-alouds and other developmentally appropriate learning activities that involve both children and their parents.

The teachers additionally answered questions posed by the parents, and the parents shared with each other and the teachers the rituals and routines they use at home to support their children’s oral language development. The goals of the teacher-parent-child interactions were to: a) scaffold relationship-building between the parents and teachers that begins when the children are infants; and b) facilitate the sharing of parental and teacher knowledge and practices that foster child development and school readiness going forward from infancy.

2) Parents whose children attend preschool at Effie Ellis were given a tour of Donoghue that was customized to their interests and needs. In the company of their sons and daughters, as well as the Effie Ellis family partnership counselor, the parents participated in the tour, which was conducted by the Donoghue director of family and community engagement, in order to make informed decisions about whether or not to apply for admission.<sup>33</sup>

3) Parents of children enrolled in preschool at Educare accompanied their sons and daughters to a morning of “kindergarten shadowing” at Donoghue and another morning of “kindergarten shadowing” at NKO. The children visited a total of five kindergarten classes. They enjoyed a whole group community-building activity, participated in an interactive read-aloud, and engaged in learning centers—all in the company of kindergarten students. Their parents did observations and asked questions

29 See Supplemental Materials Appendix A for the admission policy and strategies.

30 Kauerz, K. & Thorman, A. (2011). QRIS and P-3: Creating Synergy Across Systems to Close Achievement Gaps and Improve Opportunities for Young Children. Boston: Build Initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/QRIS\\_P-3brief.pdf](http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/QRIS_P-3brief.pdf).

31 About the fade, see, for example, Kauerz, K. (2006). *Ladders of Learning: Fighting Fade-Out by Advancing PK-3 Alignment*. Issue Brief #2. New York & Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation Early Education Initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.newamerica.net/search/google?cx=001680077332311518415%3A6joxp0bogz8&cof=FORID%3A11&query=Kristie+Kauerz&op.x=0&op.y=0&form\\_build\\_id=form-3f6a6769fe711179d82e5bea9b049be5&form\\_id=google\\_cse\\_searchbox\\_form](http://www.newamerica.net/search/google?cx=001680077332311518415%3A6joxp0bogz8&cof=FORID%3A11&query=Kristie+Kauerz&op.x=0&op.y=0&form_build_id=form-3f6a6769fe711179d82e5bea9b049be5&form_id=google_cse_searchbox_form).

32 Teacher development is a second priority focus. UCCS trained Effie Ellis preschool teachers in STEP, the developmental literacy assessment used by UCCS to gauge the progress of students, prekindergarten through grade three. Together with Educare, UCCS engages birth-to-grade three teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) described in a case study entitled “Building a Birth-to-College Model: Professional Learning Communities, a Teaching Case Study.” The case study can be downloaded from <http://fcd-us.org/resources/building-birth-college-model-professional-learningcommunities?destination=resources%2Fsearch%3Ftopic%3D0%26authors%3DUrban%2520Education%2520Institute%26keywords%3D>

33 Subsequent to their parents participating in interviews for this case study, Effie Ellis students spent a morning at Donoghue engaged in “kindergarten shadowing,” as one part of systematic efforts to increase their readiness to learn when they enter elementary school. They visited three classrooms where they were joined small groups of kindergarteners in learning centers and toured the gymnasium, the lunchroom, the library, and the auditorium.

of UCCS teachers and staff. The parents participated in “kindergarten shadowing” in order to achieve two goals: a) to make informed decisions about which of the two UCCS campuses they want their children to attend, beginning fall 2013; and b) to acquaint their children and themselves with kindergarten—the teachers, the classroom settings, the curricular and instructional approaches, the classroom culture—so as to prepare their children and themselves for the transition to kindergarten with rich, firsthand information.

4) Parents of Educare graduates now attending kindergarten, first, second, and third grade at UCCS agreed to form a committee to advise Educare and UCCS. They were joined by parents of children enrolled in Educare infant/toddler and preschool programs who are headed towards UCCS in the coming years. The committee looks at the needs and interests of families whose children are about to transition from preschool to kindergarten, learns about the transition plans and strategies of Educare and UCCS, and makes recommendations on how to improve them.



## It Takes a ‘Village’ to Raise and Educate a Child

*It takes a whole village to raise a child.*~ Igbo & Yoruba (Nigeria) Proverb

Virtually every parent interviewed clearly and consistently articulated the belief that it takes a village to raise and educate their children from birth to college. Their words went far beyond simple recitation of the proverb. The parents articulated the primacy of their roles in the village, emphasizing that the village begins at home with their children. They described the village’s inclusion of those who educate and support their children, as well as their expectations of and interactions with these village members. The parents further spoke about developing relationships with other members of their community, especially other parents, so as to increase the social capital of the village. Importantly, the parents were thoughtful in explaining the benefits to their children of the multi-faceted village they envision.

Monique Moon conceives of a village that benefits her 6-month-old daughter with wrap-around care.

“My goal of just knowing that she has a loving and nurturing environment...(so) she’s around not only her family members, but also other educators and other adults, you know, that have kind of that same goal for her, too—wanting to make sure that she’s taken care of.”

Nastassia Jackson, the mother of 4-year-old twin sons, describes a village where she and her sons are both benefactors and beneficiaries.

“Knowing that I’m going to be in there (preschool) whenever I can to participate—not just with (my sons)—but, with the other children. I’m a firm believer in ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. So, something that their parent may not be doing, I can give to them and, something that I may not be doing, somebody else’s parent can give to my boys.”

Trecia Savery-Harrell, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, sees village members taking collective responsibility for her daughter as a key benefit.

“Let’s say she messes up, because she’s going down the wrong path. She’s not doing the right things. You have all these people that can step in and say ‘they know you just as well as I know you, because they’ve been around you’. So, you have that support. You have that foundation.”

Monique Moon, Nastassi Jackson, and Trecia Savery-Harrell reflect the collective views of the twenty-one parents about the village they believe is required to educate children from birth to college. The parents all together give reality to research on the value placed by African American parents on communalism in raising their children. African American parents seek social bonds with broad networks—consisting of siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as fictive kin, such as close friends and neighbors—that share responsibilities for the positive social development of children.<sup>34</sup> Further, in their references to the Nigerian proverb about the village that it takes, the parents evoke the underlying African concept of Ubuntu, roughly translated as “interconnectedness,” the fundamental idea that no individual can exist in isolation, that no one can experience humanity alone.

This case unfolds how parents conceptualize and realize the village they believe is needed to raise and educate their children well. First, we provide an overview of the parents’ views on the essential components of the village. Then we address how parents think about each essential component. After drawing out the implications of the parents’ concept of the village for parents, practitioners, and policymakers, we conclude the case.

<sup>34</sup> American Psychological Association, Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (2008). *Resilience in African American Children and Adolescents: A Vision for Optimal Development*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/cyf/resilience.html>.

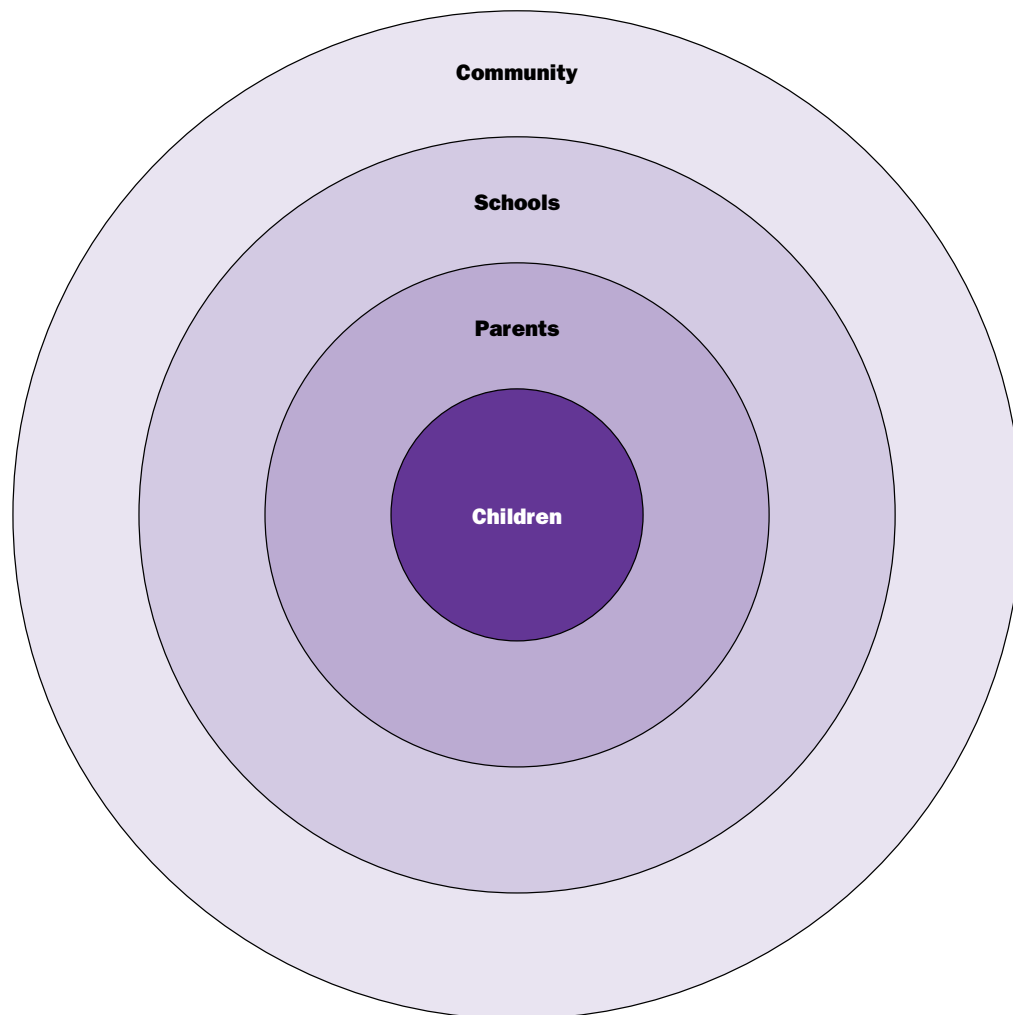


## Overview of the Essential Components of the ‘Village’

Parents expressed coherent thoughts about the village that it takes to educate their children well. Imagine a series of concentric circles radiating outward from a common core. This image can be used to illustrate how parents envision the ‘village.’ Children are at the very core of the ‘village,’ with children represented by the innermost circle. Parents are located in a larger circle around this core, representing their belief that the village begins at home, with parents taking the primary role in educating their children. A third circle envelops these smaller circles and represents the extension of the village to include schools where parents and educators collaborate to teach the

children at the core, as well as to support each other in this endeavor. The largest circle is comprised of the broader community where parents seek to develop social networks of collective responsibility with other parents, friends, and neighbors in order to envelope their children—indeed, all the children in the community—with care, development, and education.

We next describe the roles and relationships of the individuals residing in the circles surrounding the children at the core: 1) parents; 2) parents and educators; and 3) parents and social networks. We give prominence to the parents’ own words.



**Essential Components of the “Village”**

## Parents: The Village Begins at Home

Parents stated that the village begins at home. That is, they see themselves playing the most crucial role in ensuring the development and education of their children. In this role, parents articulated explicit hopes and dreams for their children's future successes and how their children will attain them. They described in detail the ways in which they serve as their children's first teachers and as transmitters of family culture.

### Hopes and Dreams for a Brighter Future

Parents indicated they want the very best outcomes for their children. Moreover, they hope and dream that their children will have better lives than their own. They described the advice they give their children for developing the strength of character that will enable them to lead independent and capable lives filled with possibilities. The parents further named education from birth to college as an important journey they want their children to take.

On wanting the best for her daughter, Passion Overstreet, the mother of a son (age 14-months) and a daughter (age 4), explains,

"I grew up in Chicago and it was rough...but my mama always instilled in me that education is very important...I want the best for my child...the best education, the best clothing, the best anything ...you have to work hard to get it. I've been through a lot and so I know how important these things are. So I'm trying to instill in her—as much as I can—that education is very important."

Stephen McNabb, a father of two daughters (ages 4 and 7) and a son (age 7), describes his desire for his children to struggle less in their lives than he has in his.

"I just want their life (to be) better than mine—or easier than mine."

With a better life in mind, many parents hope that their children will be strong in the content of their character in order to lead independent and capable lives filled with possibilities. Cassandra Montgomery, the mother of two daughters (ages 3 and 16) and a son (age 5), explains.

"The experience that I would like for them to cherish for the rest of their lives is that they're their own person and that they are the outcome... Anything that they want to achieve or they're resisting—it lies within them. So, I think that would sustain (them) through anything."

Some parents emphasized they want their children to be good thinkers, able to be strategic decision makers. As explained by Felicia Franklin, the mother of a 4-year old daughter,

"I really expect for her to be on her own—standing on her own two feet—able to just know how to survive. Able to move through life in a strategic manner, (using) her decision making (skills)."

Similarly, Nastassia Jackson, the mother of two sons (age 4) and a daughter (age 8), explains how she talks to her children about future successes—that they can be achieved over time by planning and making the right choices.

"Make that right choice and then that right choice will lead you into something great."

Parents extend this notion and hope that the efforts put into expanding their child's character and increasing their capacity to make astute decisions will lead to acceptance to and completion of a college degree. As Carol Young, the mother of a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 5), states,

"Hopefully, both of my kids will be graduating out of high school at the top of their class with a very high ACT score, where they have the opportunity to pick any college that they want to go to (with) full scholarships—academic or sports."

Khari Humphries, director of community life at Oakwood Shores, captures the unique power of parents' hopes and dreams to shape their children's lives.

"I think the biggest asset that parents bring is that they believe in their child...their idea of their child's full potential is so much higher than the rest of the world. So, that's a huge asset that they bring—that love and that belief will help the young people develop."

### **Parents Are the First Teachers**

Some parents described the experiences that led them to understand they are their children's first teachers. They realized their children learn from their example, an awareness that has impacted their parenting. Other parents articulated the philosophy of education they are intentionally teaching their children—a philosophy of love and passion for learning.

Lanetta Griffin, the mother of a 3-year-old son, details how she learned she is her child's first teacher.

"[My son] is basically mimicking what I'm doing. They watch everything. They're just like a sponge. I've always heard that they pick up everything and—it's just—I learn something new everyday with him. I learn that he's just like me...I'm like, 'Oh my god, like, that's me!' You always have to watch out."

On realizing that her children learn from her example, Passion Overstreet, the mother of a son (age 14-months) and a daughter (age 4) explains,

"You know, with everything, you have to lead by setting an example...One time, I caught my daughter on the treadmill running...I know she got that from me, because she sees that I work out and I'm trying to exercise."

Omnee Readus, the mother of a 5-year-old son, tells a similar story about how her son is learning the value of hard work and responsibility by observing his parents getting ready for work everyday.

"(The) most (important) part, for me, is that he sees me and his father go to work everyday. So, I think he would pretty much be cool, because...he'll imitate his father and he'll put on his boots and his stuff and he's like, 'Ok. Bye-Bye, Ma. I'm going to work!'... I think he'll be fine, because he sees it's like an everyday thing."

Other parents described articulating their love, passion, and support for education as the main "lesson" they wanted to teach their children.

Cassandra Montgomery, the mother of two daughters (ages 3 & 16) and a son (age 5), explains, "My primary role is to be enthusiastic about school and about learning."

Trecia Savery-Harrell, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, extends the underlying logic of this notion.

"If I didn't think education was important, then she wouldn't think that education is important."

The importance of parents imparting a love and passion for education to their children is recognized by educators such as Todd Barnett, director of family & community engagement at Donoghue.

"Parents are that motivation and that support system and I think they help instill a passion and an excitement for education that—without parents—we (educators) just couldn't do this work in the same way."

### **Parents Transmit Culture and Historical Legacies**

Parents explained the value they place on the transmission of culture and history across generations. LaShante Hamblin, the mother of two sons (ages 1 and 4), selected an early learning center because it provides the cultural context she wants for her children.

"I liked the fact that they didn't have more than one culture inside the center and they don't celebrate holidays, but they do black history month, like all the time. Black history month (is in) February, but at (my son's center) it happens all the time."

Further, Ms. Hamblin expressed pride in her 4-year-old son displaying his knowledge of the civil rights legacy of Rosa Parks and the 1955 boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama. As Ms. Hamblin recalls,

“[His] favorite person [to read about] was Rosa Parks. We were on the bus a while ago and I said, ‘Blue, don’t go far to the back of the bus, because we’re getting off in a minute.’ He turned back and said, ‘I can sit where I want to sit, because Rosa Parks said we could sit where we want to sit.’ I couldn’t come back with my mouth. I mean the whole bus just laughed like, ‘Oh my god!’ Then, they did a presentation on it for school—like an assembly—and he was a boycott. It was so funny... He was like, ‘Man, we won’t go!’”

Other parents described their desire to educate their children about cultural diversity in order to convey that differences can unite, not divide, in Chicago, one of the nation’s most segregated cities.<sup>35</sup> For example, Kenya Conley, the mother of three sons (ages 6, 9, and 12) and a daughter (age 9), explains,

“I was able to move to Michigan when I was in high school and I hated it at first because it wasn’t what I was used to. But, it was the difference in the cultures. So, once I graduated from high school, I was so happy, like, ‘I’m glad my mom sent me out of Chicago—out of the ‘hood’—and took me to the suburbs in a whole other state’. I met all these different people that, you know, I probably would have been judging [otherwise].”

In a similar vein, Ms. Conley describes how she tries to continue where her own mother left off. She describes how she encourages her children to play in sports leagues outside their neighborhood so that they can develop friendships with children of different races. Ms. Conley explains,

“Since we’re in the ‘hood’, I try to take them outside the ‘hood’ to see...like, basketball. They’re on the school basketball teams and football and baseball, but they’re also in the league. The league is, probably, 30 percent black and the rest are either whites or mixed or whatever. So, I try to let them know that it’s not just us. There [are] other people, so they have friends that [are] not black... So, they go to their houses and everything...We’re all the same—like everyone is the same—but we’re different. It’s a good different, you know? It’s a good thing.”

### Summary

This section has focused on parents’ views on the primary roles they play in the village that it takes to educate their children.<sup>36</sup> The parents believe that the village begins at home. This perspective agrees with the views of their children’s educators. As Jill Thompson, an educational consultant at Educare, explains,

“Parents—we often say that they are their child’s first teacher. When we (the preschool) receive children, they already have learned something and it does come from being a part of a family and having your parents take care of you and nurture you.”

More specifically, parents described themselves as the ones who ‘dream big’ for their children. They hope their children will have better lives than they have had. They foresee the importance of their children learning to think and make decisions strategically in order to lead independent lives with possibilities. All of the parents we interviewed expressed that they want their children to gain acceptance to and graduate from college. The parents also articulated their belief that education is the key to life success.

35 Baird-Remba, R. & Lubin, G. (2013, April). 21 Maps of Highly Segregated Cities in America. Business Insider. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-segregated-cities-census-maps-2013-4?op=1>.

36 See Supplemental Materials Appendix B for a profile of a parent’s thinking about the village that begins at home.

The parents' views are in accord with research findings about parents involved in their children's learning at home and also engaged in their children's learning in educational settings.<sup>37,38,39,40,41</sup> Parents additionally described how they see themselves as their children's first teachers, a role recognized by parent advocacy groups.<sup>42</sup> One of the

ways in which they fulfill this role is through modeling behavior they want their children to learn. Another way is through parenting strategies designed to instill cultural values and appreciation of historical legacies—central elements in the research literature on the “funds of knowledge” that families transmit to their children.<sup>43</sup>



37 Chavkin, N. & Williams, D. (1993). *Minority parents and the elementary school: Attitudes and practices*. In N. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

38 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

39 Hidalgo, N., Siu, S., Bright, J., Swap, S., & Epstein, J. (1995). *Research on families, schools, and communities: A multicultural perspective*. In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: Macmillan.

40 Rich, D. (1985). *The forgotten factor in school success: The family. A policymaker's guide*. Washington, DC: The Home and School Institute.

41 Ritter, P., Mont-Reynaud, R., & Dornbush, S. (1993). *Minority parents and their youth: Concern, encouragement, and support for school achievement*. In N. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

42 Parents as Teachers National Center (2007). *The Parents as Teachers program: its impact on school readiness and later school achievement*. St. Louis: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.parentsasteachers.org/images/stories/documents/Executive20Summary\\_of\\_K\\_Readiness.pdf](http://www.parentsasteachers.org/images/stories/documents/Executive20Summary_of_K_Readiness.pdf).

43 Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). *Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms*. *Theory into Practice*, 31, 132 – 141.

## Parents and Educators: The Village Extends to Schools

Parents talked about their relationships with early learning centers and schools, describing how and why they extend the village from home to include their children's educators. The parents see their relationships with centers and schools in multiple ways. First, they place high value on early learning centers and elementary schools that have family cultures. Second, parents want to self-define the roles they play in centers and schools. Third, parents choose educational settings for their children based on evidence that their family values and goals are reflected in the values and goals of the centers and schools. Fourth, parents seek relationships with teachers that are not only supportive of their children but also mutually supportive of the complementary roles they believe that parents and teachers should play in educating children.

### Learning Environments as Extensions of the Family

Many parents expressed the importance of their children's early learning centers and elementary schools truly welcoming them and functioning like 'family'. Specifically, parents seek learning environments for their children that honor and respect them as assets to their children's educations. They want to engage with educators as equals to establish a strong correspondence between what occurs in the home and what occurs in schools and early learning centers.

On feeling welcomed during her first experience at her son's preschool, Omnee Readus, the mother of a 5-year old son, recalls,

"We went in (and) we felt like we belonged here... We felt welcome."

On feeling honored and valued by the educators at her children's preschool, Gia Long, the mother of a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 4), explains,

"Just like they get to know your child, they get to know you. So, I guess it becomes, like, that family atmosphere."

Importantly, Nastassia Jackson, the mother of two sons (age 4) and a daughter (age 8), underscores why a school with a family culture is a significant element of the village it takes to educate her children. She notes that she and her son's teacher are...

"...on one accord. What he's seeing at school, he's also seeing at home. Then, (I share) what I do at home with the teachers. So, what he's seeing at home with Mommy, the teacher's also doing similar things (at school). So, back to that village thing again."

### Self-Defined Parent Engagement

Parents talked about the many ways in which they are engaged in their children's educations. Some parents described themselves as fully immersed in their children's schools through volunteering. Others described themselves as actively engaging through advocacy efforts. Still, others described the power of simply being present—being in the classroom to provide their children with moral support. In all, the parents indicated they have self-defined their engagement with their children's schools.

On being fully engaged in the life of her children's schools, Marquia Fields, the mother of two daughters (ages 5 and 14) and a son (age 7),

"I volunteer for everything...I just like to be involved. I like to be in the 'know'. I like to make a difference, you know? You do get the newsletters and stuff like that, but when you come to the meetings...you can see what's going on."

Nastassia Jackson, the mother of two sons (age 4) and a daughter (age 8), talks about her engagement as focused on communicating with responsive teachers.

"I can speak with a teacher and...they really listen. They take into account what I say and they try to apply it to the classroom or my child's individual need."

On advocating for a child with special needs, Shanita Washington, the mother of two daughters (ages 7 & 15), recalls her past experiences selecting her daughter's future elementary school.

“Because of (my early learning center), I expected more of (the elementary school)... They have to step up. They have to be on top of their game or I'm going to take her out, because I've gotten accustomed to this way of teaching—you know, having these resources, having this support system... They're going to have to offer me this. Period.”

Ms. Washington has invested much time and energy in securing the appropriate resources for her daughter. She discusses how she attempts to ‘pay it forward’—by sharing her experiences with other parents, particularly those with special needs children.

“I like to share my story to help people, especially with special needs kids—to be an advocate—to let them know, ‘Ok, you're not the only one. There are resources out there. There are things that you can do to help them.’ Like I said, (my child's early learning center) helped me so much and I would not know how to be an advocate for her without them. So, I like to share my experience with other parents.”

Omnee Readus, the mother of a 5-year-old son, suggests that she provides him with socio-emotional support by simply being present in his school.

“It's about me just being there...I want to be there with him every step of the way.”

Trecia Savery-Harrell, the mother of a 4-year old-daughter, similarly describes how her presence is supportive of her child.

“I come and sit in the classroom...She is part of it and so I want to be part of it too. I know what she's learning.”

### **Parent Choice**

Parents talked about choosing educational settings for their children based on evidence that their family values and goals are reflected in the values and goals of the early learning centers and elementary schools.

They described the importance of gathering data through visits to the centers and schools, even if they had to take time off from work. Additionally, parents noted their appreciation for early learning centers and elementary schools with instructional approaches and classroom cultures that are aligned so that their children experience continuity of teaching and learning.

Felicia Franklin, remembers how she chose her 4-year-old daughter's preschool.

“I came here with interview questions. I liked the way they spoke to the questions, answered the questions. I did a tour. So I gave them a chance and I enjoyed their educational system and how they run their school.”

Trecia Savery-Harrell, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, describes her research and decision making processes.

“We went to some daycares and I had looked around and didn't like it. I didn't want her in a crib. I didn't want her at someone's house... That wasn't the alternative – for her to be babysat... So we came here and her first classroom...set it all up... Oh, we're going to teach them this and they had a lesson plan and there was an activity. I could see it. I could look at the lesson plan and I could see how everything ties into it... This is the best thing I've ever seen for kids her age... Her teachers get excited and then I get excited and then she gets excited.”

Cassandra Montgomery, mother of three children ages 3, 5, and 16, similarly researched preschool prior to selecting one for her children. She remembers,

“I came and I saw the facility. I talked with one of the advisors there. My decision was based on that I did like the resources that they had there. I did like the interaction I saw with the children and the teacher. I did like the ratio. I mean, they had at least two teachers in each classroom. So it was those things that made me go ahead and say, ‘I want to try (this preschool).’”

When it came time to deciding upon an elementary school for her 5-year-old, Ms. Montgomery states that she used a research process similar to the one

she used in selecting preschool. She also wanted to ensure a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten for her child. Ms. Montgomery explains,

“I do hear really good things about (the elementary school). I came to the tour. I did enjoy the resources. I did enjoy the ratio. I did enjoy the person who did my tour. He really answered my questions. One of the things that stood out the most is the fact that they continuously monitor the kids’ development... if they start out with a level one, they monitor them maybe three or four months later to see if they need to go up or whatever placement they need to be... It was most exciting to know they do things somewhat the same as (my child’s preschool)...I was most excited that he (my son) would do a smooth transition—that it wouldn’t be such a big transition to kindergarten because he’s used to the environment.”

Passion Overstreet recounts that she sought an elementary school where her 4-year-old daughter would be “able to excel at her best at this age.” Nastassia Jackson, the mother of two sons (age 4) and a daughter (age 8), describes how she identified a school where her twins would excel.

“...the teacher was actually giving instruction to a small group of kids and they each had the same book. They were doing, like, a ripple reading the book. I was just, like, so amazed. Like, I know my daughter has done this, but still it seemed like these kids were just flying through this book. I was like, ‘Ok. Yeah. If they’re going to go to a school, they’re going to go (here)—that’s my choice.’”

### **Successful Partnerships Between Parents and Schools**

Within the context of carefully chosen educational settings with welcoming and respectful family cultures where parents can self-determine their engagement, parents reported seeking close collaborations with their children’s teachers.

Shanita Washington, the mother of two daughters (ages 7 and 15), notes the dimensions and value of the close relationship she has forged with her younger daughter’s teachers. She explains,

“I have relationships with her teacher. Like I said, she (the teacher) emails me all the time or she talks to me or she calls me and it makes me feel really good, because it feels like we are both working as a team to help her (my daughter).”

LaTonya Maxwell, family support coordinator at Donoghue, shares her perspective on the benefits to children of parents and teachers working together. As Ms. Maxwell describes,

“It can’t be ‘because I’m mom or dad, I know more’ or ‘because I’m the teacher, I know more.’ We both come with different assets and, collectively, they help our children grow.”

Parents identified two factors that they think are most pertinent in establishing successful partnerships with teachers: (1) honest, two-way communication about their children’s education, and (2) teacher-parent relationships that include attention to the personal.

Omnee Readus, the mother of a 5-year-old son, explains what honest communication means to her.

“(Just) communicating with us, as parents, you know? Not just tell(ing) us what you think we want to hear or don’t. Let us know exactly what’s going on.”

Monique Moon, the mother of a 6-month-old daughter, emphasizes she wants exchanges to be bi-directional. As Ms. Moon explains,

“Also—for the teachers—there always being open communication—so, not only from them, but definitely from me.”

Parents recognize they need to build trust in order for communication to be open and honest. Their strategy is to engage in interpersonal talk with teachers, in addition to talk about their children’s education. As stated by Carol Young, the mother of a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 5),

“I talk to the teacher (and) ask them how their day was. You know, (not just) ‘How (are) my kids doing?’ You know, to get to know the teachers themselves, besides just working with the kids. Just to sit down and have a conversation with them and say, ‘Well, how was your day?’”



Melinda Berry, senior early head start family support supervisor at Educare, notes that gaining the trust of parents is a goal of family support teams.

“If they (parents) don’t trust you, then they’re not going to leave their child with you, probably, and they’re not going to listen to you. They’re not going to take a few extra minutes to sit down with you and talk to you.”

When trust is the basis of a relationship, it allows parents and educators to work synergistically with one another, rather than in parallel. As LaShante Hamblin, the mother of two sons (ages 1 and 4), states,

“(My son’s teachers say) well, he’s good in this. So, they try to help with the weaknesses and...balance the weaknesses and the strengths...I say, let’s get together so we can have nothing but strong. That’s what I want.”

### Summary

This section has focused on parents’ perspectives about how they extend the village from home to include educators at school.<sup>44</sup> Their views accord with findings in the research literature.

Parents communicated the importance of their children’s early learning centers welcoming them and feeling like ‘family’.<sup>45,46</sup> Moreover, parents expressed their desire to be valued as equals, as well as honored for their contributions in ways that they self-define.<sup>47,48,49,50,51,52,53,54,55</sup> Furthermore, parents described how their choices of educational settings for their children are based on evidence—garnered through personal research—and that their family values and goals are reflected in the values and goals of the early learning centers and elementary schools that they select.<sup>56</sup>

Parents reported forming collaborative relationships with their children’s educators to support their children’s learning and academic and life successes.<sup>57,58</sup> Parents and educators, alike, contend that these relationships are based on the trust that is built when people step outside of themselves and their own worlds to take on the perspectives of others and interpersonally connect, known within the literature as ‘personal regard’.<sup>59</sup>

44 See Supplemental Materials Appendix C for a profile of a parent who advocates for her children at school.

45 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

46 Mapp, K. (2002). Having Their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They are Engaged in Their Children’s Learning. *School Community Journal*, 13, 35 – 64.

47 Cediell, A. (2002). Parent involvement in district-wide reform. Unpublished manuscript (Qualifying Paper), Harvard Graduate School of Education. Cediell, A. (2004). *With An Army: Mobilizing Parents For School Improvement* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

49 Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

50 Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

51 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

52 Mapp, K. (2002). Having Their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They are Engaged in Their Children’s Learning. *School Community Journal*, 13, 35 – 64.

53 Sheldon, S. (2003). Linking school-family-community partnerships in urban elementary schools to student achievement on state tests. *Urban Review*, 35, 149-165.

54 Weiss, H., Lopez, M., & Rosenberg, H. (2010). *Beyond Random Acts: Family, School, & Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

55 Weiss, H., Lopez, M., & Rosenberg, H. (2011). *Bringing Families to the Table: Recommendations and Next Steps from the National Policy Forum for Family, School, and Community Engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

56 Kauerz, K. & Thorman, A. (2011). QRIS and P-3: Creating Synergy Across Systems to Close Achievement Gaps and Improve Opportunities for Young Children. Boston: Build Initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/QRIS\\_P-3brief.pdf](http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/QRIS_P-3brief.pdf).

57 Comer, J., Haynes, N., Joyner, E., & Ben-Avie, M. (1996). *Rallying the whole village: The Comer process for reforming education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

58 Kruse, S., Louis, K., & Bryk, A. (1994). *Building professional community in schools*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring Schools.

59 Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform. *Creating Caring Schools*, 60, 40 – 45.

## Parents and Social Networks: The Village Scales Up

Parents voiced strong opinions about the importance of networking with other parents and community members in solidarity—to scale the ‘village’ from home to school to community in order to educate all children well. Parents seek to actively utilize community resources and develop a sense of collective responsibility among community members on behalf of children. Specifically, they discussed three factors that are key to expanding the ‘village’ to the broader community: (1) establishing friendships, (2) sharing resources, and (3) taking collective responsibility.

### Establishing Friendships

The parents wish to connect meaningfully with others, especially other parents. For example, Monique Moon, the mother of a 6-month-old daughter, reminisces about the close-knit community where she grew up.

“I really feel like it is important to just be a part of your community and to get to know everyone...that was one of the things I loved to do growing up. You know, your street was your community—like, you knew everyone, everyone went over to everyone’s house and played together—where that is not necessarily, maybe, the case to do now. So, if I can go to playgroups like this, [then] that will hopefully foster and we can all kind of just grow with each other. Hopefully, that will give that same effect.”

Lanetta Griffin, the mother of a 3-year-old son, voices a similar sentiment when she explains her motivation for attending community gatherings of children and parents.

“I really just wanted to, basically, come and see what it was about. Basically, meet other parents and see what they are teaching their children. You know, just meeting people, making friends.”

Shanita Washington, the mother of two daughters (ages 7 and 15) extends this idea by discussing the benefits of volunteering at her daughters’ schools; namely, that being active has allowed her to make valuable connections with other parents.

“I’ve gotten to meet different parents. Like, usually, I’m picking up or dropping off, so...I don’t always get to kind of mingle. So, I get to know other parents... It’s a great way to share talk...maybe I’m venting about my 15-year-old, what she’s doing, and another parent can say, ‘Oh. My child’s doing this and you can try that.’”

Khari Humphries, director of community life at Oakwood Shores, summarizes the parents’ view about wanting social connections with other parents when he says,

“What parents tell me they care most about is the opportunity to meet other parents with children the same age as theirs. They want to share their parenting experiences and stories about their children growing up. They value overcoming the notion that they and their children are alone in their experiences by learning what they and their children have in common with other parents and children. They seek community with each other. It’s only after this community is built that the parents want professional experts to participate as well.”

## Sharing Resources

In addition to establishing friendships with other parents, parents value social connections with others as a means of sharing information and resources pertinent to enhancing their children's development and learning. Karen Ratliffe, the mother of a 9-month-old daughter, describes this goal.

"...just to have experts come in to share different ideas and different ways that we can ensure that our kids are growing healthy and successful in life."

Echoes Trecia Savery-Harrell, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter,

"I think that you can ask questions and people are going to help you find the right answers. That there are so many resources out here that you just can know about."

Todd Barnett, director of community and family engagement at Donoghue, takes a slightly different tack by describing the role that schools can potentially play in brokering two-way connections between families and the broader community in service of student well-being and achievement. As he explains,

"The primary role is to engage families and the broader community surrounding the campus with the intent of supporting student achievement and to also support student wellness—so, forming external partnerships, finding ways for families to not just benefit from supports, but also be the supports."

## Taking Collective Responsibility

Parents described a desire for social bonds with the broader community. Specifically, many parents indicated that such bonds would constitute the ultimate version of the village that it takes to educate all children: Everyone would take collective responsibility for ensuring the children's future. As described by Trecia Savery-Harrell, mother of a 4-year-old daughter,

"I think that's what she is learning—that 'I can seek out these people and they (can) become my support system when I don't have it'."

Continues Ms. Savery-Harrell,

"She can bond to these people because she learned that there are other people out there besides just me."

Bernice Norvell, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, articulates the connection between support and success outcomes.

"Knowing that that child knows that they have support and somebody's watching them—I think they tend to do better."

Meanwhile, Carol Young, the mother of a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 5), extends this idea to encompass the ways in which families and communities can be mutually supportive to one another. As she explains,

"I think that we (parents and children) need support everywhere—from your neighbor, you know, just 'Hey, I'm not having the best time right now'. You know, 'Is there anything that I can do?' If you have

a church nearby, go to the church and see if they can help. You know, ‘I’m doing really good in school, can I go here and see if there is something I can do for the kids that’s not doing so good?’ What do we have in place? We should be able to have (supports) in place everywhere—in our communities, schools, homes—(where) a child should feel good about anything that’s going on. They know that —no matter what—that they’re going to have help from someone, somewhere.”

### Summary

The goal of this section was to demonstrate that parents envision the ‘village’ as encompassing social

bonds with other parents, friends, and community members with expertise in child development and education.<sup>60</sup> To this end, parents described how they seek out relationships through networking opportunities with other parents. Their goals are to establish relationships that have the potential to blossom into strong connections that afford opportunities to share and access resources and develop a sense of collective responsibility in the community for the well-being of children, families and all its residents. The perspectives of the parents accord with the literature on the child-focused collaborations among families, schools, and communities that have a positive influence on children’s learning and achievement.<sup>61,62,63,64,65,66,67</sup>

60 See Supplemental Materials Appendix D for profiles of parents involved in community building that focuses on children.

61 Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

62 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

63 Mapp, K. (2002). Having Their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They are Engaged in Their Children’s Learning. *School Community Journal*, 13, 35 – 64.

64 Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31, 132 – 141.

65 Small, M. (2009). *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

66 Weiss, H., Lopez, M., & Rosenberg, H. (2010). *Beyond Random Acts: Family, School, & Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

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## Implications

Parents not only provide rich developmental and learning experiences for their children, but they also seek high-quality educational settings for their sons and daughters—whether they are parent-infant-toddler playgroups, early learning centers, and/or elementary schools. To this end, parents place high value on learning settings with family cultures and on relationships with each other, educators, and members of the community that all together constitute the ‘village’ that it takes to educate all children well. Therefore, this case study has implications for policies, structures, and practices that foster and sustain family cultures within educational contexts, as well as those that encourage ‘village’ relationships between and among parents, educators, and other members of a community to support the development and learning of all its children.

Specifically, the parents in this project suggest that early learning centers, community centers, and elementary schools adopt policies, structures, and practices that include the following:

- 1) Goals and metrics for family engagement, family education, and family leadership that are baked into organizational visions, missions, and strategic plans.
- 2) Staff who specialize in family engagement and support.
- 3) Capacity building for teachers and school leaders to develop the knowledge and skills to build collaborative relationships of respect and trust with parents.
- 4) Structures and resources for parents to share their knowledge and skills with other parents on:
  - a) parents as their children’s first teachers;
  - b) the criteria and process of selecting early learning/elementary schools;
  - c) self-defining parental

engagement with schools; d) relationship-building with teachers to build trust and collaboration; and e) networking with other parents and community members to build social capital in support of children’s education.

- 5) Refinement of curriculum and instruction to build upon the assets that children and parents bring from home.
- 6) “Community school” approaches that foster social bonds and collective responsibility among parents, educators, neighbors, and community leaders for the development, education, and well-being of all the children in the community.
- 7) Expansion of access to early learning opportunities to strengthen the village parents believe is needed to educate their children.
- 8) Preparation of children for college in developmentally appropriate ways, beginning at birth, to accord with their parents’ hopes and dreams.
- 9) Collaborations to align and implement standards and best practices across the birth-to-college spectrum so that parents can be assured of continuity and coherence in their children’s development and learning.
- 10) Annual surveys, focus groups, and forums to systematically learn from and document:
  - a) the hopes and dreams of parents for their children;
  - b) how parents define and enact their roles in supporting their children’s development and education;
  - c) what more parents think should be done to extend the ‘village’ that begins at home to encompass early learning, elementary school, and community settings; and
  - d) how parents assess the progress of the village in developing and educating all children.

## Conclusion

Parents believe wholeheartedly that a ‘village’ mindset—one that embraces a focus on collective responsibility and collective action to support children’s development and education from birth to college—will ensure the best outcomes for their children and all children. Parents conceptualize their ‘village’ as a series of concentric circles that radiate outward from a common core. Children are at the very core and form the basis of the ‘village.’ Parents form the circle that envelops this core, taking primary responsibility for supporting their children’s development and learning. In an effort to supplement and complement their efforts, parents seek to partner with their children’s educators in meaningful, interpersonal ways. Finally, parents seek to extend the ‘village’ to encompass members of a broader social community; namely, other parents, friends, and neighbors with social bonds and shared social responsibility for the development, education, and well being of all the children in the community from birth to college.

The notion of the ‘village’ derives from the African concept of ‘Ubuntu’ or ‘interconnectedness.’ As Nelson Mandela explains,

“One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu—the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can’t exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can’t be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality—Ubuntu—you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”

With respect to Ubuntu and the ‘village’ described by the parents, the core premise is that raising and educating children well involves collective responsibility for the common good. The ‘village’ can be said to represent the American ideal of education where “the whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people” to create and sustain public schools for the common good.

Parents understand this ideal and embrace it.

On her understanding of Ubuntu and collective responsibility for public education, Felicia Franklin, the mother of a 4-year-old daughter, explains,

“The more support and investment that she has the greater (the) person she can become.”

Moreover, Ms. Franklin emphasizes that,

“If everyone does their part, she should grow up to be a phenomenal woman.”

Lastly, Carol Young, the mother of a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 5), describes her vision for the future—a village that is generative of its own future, one that is perpetuated by the successes and investments of successive generations, like her own children—a continuation of collective responsibility. As she explains,

“I hope that they’ll be very productive citizens. That they can give back to the communities—help people that need help. You know, have really good families. Just really focus on how could they better themselves and their communities going forward—what could they do or what could they give back that...was given to them.”

**Voices of Parents on Raising and Educating Their Children from Birth to College  
A Teaching Case Study**

# Teaching Notes

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**Overview**

This teaching case study is the third in a series that, together, provide an analytic narrative of the building of a Birth-to-College (BTC) Approach to Education launched by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) in 2009. The goal is to close the achievement gap that plagues public education.

The first case study focused on the cultural work undertaken by the Ounce and UEI in 2009-10 to cross the structural divides between early learning and elementary-secondary education. With the help of an expert facilitator, UEI and the Ounce worked to form a partnership built upon trust, a shared vision and mission, and common values.

The second case study described UEI and the Ounce’s subsequent work to raise resources, build an infrastructure, and launch Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that engaged in the alignment of mindset, standards, and practices from birth-to-college with an initial emphasis on birth to grade three. The PLCs consisted of teachers and family support staff from the Ounce’s Educare School for children from birth to age five and teachers—pre-K to grade three—from the North Kenwood/Oakland and Donoghue campuses of UEI’s University of Chicago Charter School.

The present case study features the perspectives of parents on the development and education of their children from birth to college. The parents enrolled their children in an infant-toddler-parent play group sponsored by the Oakwood Shores Community Life Center or in prekindergarten at the Effie O. Ellis Early Care and Youth Center or the Ounce’s Educare School. All the children are headed to the University of Chicago Charter School for kindergarten in the near or long term.

This teaching case study consists of four unique, but complementary, components. These components are a case study, a video, teaching notes, and supplemental materials. The components are intended to be used together, not to stand alone. The case study and video provide analytical narratives in text and visual forms. The supplemental materials consist of key information—referenced in the footnotes of the case study—pertaining to the University of Chicago Charter School admissions policy and profiles of four parents. The teaching notes provide suggestions for weaving the case study, video, and supplemental materials together to structure a multi-part discussion on parents’ thoughts and actions meant to foster the learning of their young children from birth to college.

## Discussion Guide

Discussion facilitators should read the case study, watch the video, survey the supplemental materials, and study the discussion prompts provided below in preparation for leading the case discussion. Discussion participants should read the case study. For background information, it is recommended, although not essential, that the discussion facilitators and participants review the first and second case studies and videos in the series on the BTC model.

### Prompts for Discussion: Part One

To begin the discussion, the facilitator should use the discussion prompts pertaining to the case study sections entitled “Introduction,” “Background,” “It takes a Village to Raise and Educate a Child,” and “Essential Components of the Village.”

1. What are the salient characteristics of the parents interviewed for the case study and the educational settings in which they enrolled their children? How do the parent demographics and their children’s learning environments compare to those generally found across the country? How do they compare to the population of parents of young children of interest to you?
2. The parents elaborated upon a belief in the need for a village to successfully develop and educate their children. Do their beliefs constitute a viable theory of action? What are the factors contributing to viability or constraining viability?



### Prompts for Discussion: Part Two

These prompts correspond to the case study sections named “Parents: The Village Begins at Home,” and “Parents and Educators: The Village Extends to Schools.” Prior to beginning the discussion, show the video. The nine-minute-long video features parents’ thoughts on some of the roles they play with respect to their children’s development and education.

1. How and why would the parents with whom you work react to the viewpoints and actions of the parents in the case study vis-à-vis their roles at home? How and why would the teachers with whom you work react?
2. How and why would the parents with whom you work react to the viewpoints and actions of the parents in the case study vis-à-vis their roles with respect to early learning/elementary schools and teachers? How and why would the teachers with whom you work react? What are the implications for your work of the parents’ ideas about, as well as their interactions with, early learning/elementary schools and teachers?

### Prompts for Discussion: Part Three

These prompts correspond to the case study sections entitled “Parents and Social Networks: The Village Scales Up,” “Implications,” and “Conclusion.”

1. How and why does family social capital matter to the education of children whom you serve? What is the role of early learning/elementary schools in fostering the social capital of families and their communities?
2. What are research-based, early learning, K-12, or community-based counternarratives to the parents’ beliefs in the value to their children’s development and education of a village that begins at home, extends to schools, and encompasses friends and others in the larger community?

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# Supplemental Materials

**T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S**

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## Appendix A: University of Chicago Charter School Admissions Policy and Strategies

Illinois state law requires charter schools to admit students by lottery if there are more applications than available seats. The University of Chicago Charter School (UCCS) adheres to this law. Parents in Chicago are accustomed to applying for schools they want their children to attend. This is the case because the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) offers a variety of school options, including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, small schools, career academies, military academies, contract schools, and selective enrollment high schools, in addition to charter schools. CPS conducts lotteries to determine admission.

Beginning each fall, UCCS invites applications and aggressively recruits families to apply. A prekindergarten-to-grade 12 charter school, UCCS generally has spaces available at prekindergarten, kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. The prekindergarten and kindergarten seats are available at the Donoghue and North Kenwood/Oakland (NKO) campuses, the sixth grade seats at the Carter G. Woodson and Woodlawn campuses, and the ninth grade seats at the Woodlawn campus. UCCS conducts a public lottery in the spring.

UCCS gives admissions priority to applicants who are attendance zone residents and siblings of children already enrolled at a UCCS campus. The Donoghue, NKO, and Carter G. Woodson campuses share an attendance zone. This attendance zone generally shares the same boundaries of the neighborhood recently renamed Oakwood Shores. Oakwood Shores encompasses all or parts of the Chicago neighborhoods historically called North Kenwood, Oakland, Douglas, and Grand Boulevard. The Woodlawn campus has its own attendance zone. It encompasses most of the Chicago neighborhood called Woodlawn.

For parents of two-year-olds, UCCS coordinates its admissions policy with the admissions policy of Educare Chicago. Parents may apply to the three-year-old program at Educare Chicago for fall entry and, simultaneously, to kindergarten at UCCS, three years in advance. Educare Chicago follows Head Start policy to admit families. Families must document that their incomes fall within federal poverty guidelines. Families admitted to Educare Chicago's three-year-old program are given priority in the UCCS lottery for admission to kindergarten three years later. Families admitted to UCCS kindergarten may choose to enroll their children either at the Donoghue campus or the NKO campus.

It is generally the case that children with an admissions priority win the lottery. This is the case whether the priority is given due to attendance zone residence, status as the sibling of a child already enrolled, or status as a student admitted to Educare Chicago's three-year-old program.

The children of six of the twenty-one families interviewed for the case study took advantage of the coordinated UCCS-Educare Chicago admissions policy. They were admitted to Educare Chicago's three-year-old program for entry in 2010, received priority in the UCCS lottery conducted that year, and were subsequently admitted to UCCS kindergarten for entry in the fall of 2013. The case study describes the six families' experiences and thoughts during the spring of 2013 as they prepared their children to graduate from Educare Chicago and start UCCS kindergarten in the fall.

The children of twelve of the twenty-one families interviewed for the case study attended Effie Ellis for prekindergarten and won the spring 2013 UCCS lottery for admission to kindergarten in the fall. All these families received admissions priority because they were residents of the attendance zone shared by Donoghue and NKO.

The children of three of the twenty-one families interviewed for the case study were infants or toddlers participating in IN/TO play, the parent/infant/toddler play group sponsored by the Oakwood Shores Community Life Center. They reside in the attendance zone shared by Donoghue and NKO. If their parents decide to apply to UCCS prekindergarten or kindergarten, when their children are age-eligible, then the children would receive attendance zone priority in admissions.

## Appendix B:

### Parent Profile: Supporting a Firm Foundation

Carol Young is the single mother of two young children: a son (age 3) and a daughter (age 5). Ms. Young's daughter is about to transition from her preschool to a UCCS kindergarten classroom in the fall. We chose to profile Ms. Young because her words resonate with many of the major points in the case study. For example, Ms. Young was quite vocal in the importance she places on education from birth to college as an important journey that she wants each of her children to take. As Ms. Young explains,

“I definitely want to make sure that college is in reach...for...my kids.”

She also acknowledges that the emphasis she, herself, places on education will potentially pay dividends in the future by making the possibility of college a reality rather than a dream.

“If I continue to do what I'm doing now, which is to push education, then maybe we can get a full scholarship where we don't have to pay so much for school...Just pick whichever school you want to go to. All of them want you—just pick one.”

However, Ms. Young recognizes that making a successful journey from birth to college involves more than just emphasizing the importance of education. The journeys that are successful become so because children have individuals in their lives that are thinking about not only the next step on the educational journey, but also the supports that will be needed to get there. For example, Ms. Young articulates an awareness of the importance of alignment across educational settings through her description of the positive educational and social experiences her children have had at their current preschool.

“I think—just continuing from the education they already have learned from being at home and the YMCA—just focusing on their cognitive learning and building relationships have been really good for them here.”

Moreover, the notion of alignment remains at the forefront of Ms. Young's thinking about the next steps in her children's education—how to continually build upon the foundations that have been previously laid at home, as well as at preschool. On planning for the interactions that will occur with her children's teachers in the fall, Ms. Young states

“One of the questions I just might have is for my [daughter's] kindergarten teacher—well, for [the teachers of] both of my kids—‘What is their lesson plan for the year?’ I think that – if we want to have higher test grades and scores...if they want to be able to compete against the top schools in Illinois, [then] like, what type of academic plan are you going to have in place for the kids?”

She continues,

“I just want to know what they're plan is going to be. How they are going to teach what they think is necessary for a pre-K kid to learn versus kindergarten. I definitely want to know their lesson plan.”

In addition to having a birth-to-college mindset, as well as actively thinking about and planning for the future, Ms. Young exemplifies additional qualities that illustrate the ways in which parents must be considered as the first ‘port of call’ or level of support within a village framework. For example, on serving as her children's first teacher

“Instead of telling them, ‘This is how you do...’ [or] ‘You do what I tell you to do,’ I want them to see what I do, so that they can understand the best ways and the best things to do to be good people. If I continue to show my kids, ‘This is how you act. This is how you treat other people,’ [then] they’ll be the same way.”

On helping her children develop the strength of character necessary to realize their hopes and dreams, she says,

“I want [to help] them to set their goals...just really focus on what they can do, once again, to be the best person [that they can be], their best selves: What can they do? How can they do it? If they were to fall off track, how could they get back on track? If they set a five-year goal—research it, do whatever they have to do to be successful with that goal. If anything doesn’t work out in between, not to get discouraged, but just try to find a different way to still complete that goal within a certain amount of time.”

On providing a love and passion for education through unwavering support, Ms. Young contends,

“I want them to describe me as a very supportive parent...a parent that they can always come to for anything and know that they’ll be supported in any type of way—no matter what—through their failures and their success.”

Ms. Young continues,

“I just want to be able to be there. As a single parent, it’s hard to be able to come to a lot of things and participate. I just want to make sure I have enough time where I know what’s going on, what she’s doing, what she’s lacking, and what she needs to do better in—what she’s doing great in. I want to be there for everything. I want to make sure that I know what’s going on at all times and if I do miss out on something, [then] I get to pick it up. I just want to be supportive to her and let her know that—no matter what—her mom is going to be there. Even if she don’t do good, I’ll be there clapping and with a smile for her—that’s what I want to do.”

## Appendix C:

### Parent Profile: Cultivating Advocacy

Shanita Washington is the single mother of two daughters, ages 7 and 15. One of Ms. Washington's daughters has special needs that are supported by accommodations within her classroom.

Ms. Washington worked diligently to make sure these accommodations were put into place prior to her daughter's transition to kindergarten from preschool two years ago. Ms. Washington's experiences illustrate many of the major points of the case study on parents partnering with educators to extend to schools the village that begins at home.

Ms. Washington relocated to Chicago from the southwest as a newly single parent with two daughters, one of whom has special needs. She re-lives the profound effect that family support staff at the early learning center where she enrolled one of her daughters has had on her family.

“For me, I feel like (the early learning center)...not only did it help my daughter, like, it helped me. When I came here [to Chicago], you know, I was in the middle of a divorce and it was just awful. They [the staff] were so supportive. You know, they had family support, so they helped me find a lot of resources. These resources helped me find my own housing and it was just, like, a god-send. It was everything I needed for my daughter—like I said, we were going through a divorce.”

Ms. Washington's daughter was, at the time, coping with multiple challenges. She has special needs, was coping with loss in the form of her parents' divorce, was relocating to a new city half way across the country, and was just starting preschool. Ms. Washington explains how one preschool staff member stepped up to provide support, structure, and stability.

“The classroom she went into—there was a guy in there, which is really rare in early childcare. He was, like, so wonderful, because he was like an opener. So, every morning, here was this positive male role model that my child did not have at home—that I could not give her, no matter how much I tried. He was there every morning greeting her—‘Good morning’—with the same routine and he was there and she responded to him. I was really grateful, as a parent, for that.”

Lastly, Ms. Washington describes how the teachers, as well as the family support staff, at her daughter's preschool helped her develop the tools that she would need, as a parent of a child with special needs, to deal with the challenges of implementing an individualized education plan that would adequately address the challenges her daughter might face upon transition to a classroom within a K-12 environment. Ms. Washington recalls the support she received from the teachers and family support specialists who remained by her side every step of the way, ensuring that her daughter would receive the best possible education with all the necessary supports in place. Ms. Washington recalls,

“I felt that they made me become a better parent for her, you know? I think it helped to prepare her for school. Also, my child has an IEP, so she’s a special needs child and they were just so supportive. Like, they told me about tons of services. They had services there [at the early learning center]. Her teachers were there—they went with me to, like, every meeting at CPS [Chicago Public Schools]. They were right there and it gave me the strength to become a better advocate for her, because I was sitting in a room with all these therapists—I didn’t know the language there. I felt alone, because—here I am—a single parent with all of these therapists. I’m like, ‘Oh my god! I don’t know what I’m supposed to say! What am I supposed to do? They’re telling me all this stuff about my child.’ I was really nervous. I was scared. But, (the school) was there for me every step of the way. Like I said, her teacher was there. The coordinator was there. I mean, whatever I wasn’t sure of, they were there. They could step in. They knew the language. Her teacher was there, so she could answer questions like, ‘This is what I’m seeing from [her] in the classroom.’ So, I mean, they were really a great support system.”



## Appendix D: Parent Profiles: Building a Community

The views of two parents, in particular, represent the essence of what it means to create a community-wide village that educates all its children. Monique Moon, mother of a six-month-old daughter, discusses her experiences helping to lead a child-focused community group of parents.

“[It’s] definitely [been] positive and it’s just so exciting to see that, every time I go, it grows more. That just goes to show you that there’s people that are interested in the same thing and, you know, really want to get involved as well. We all get together and get to know each other and talk and the older babies get to play with each other. It’s a really positive experience. Like, I really didn’t know that there were so many kids in her age group—you know, I say age group meaning 0 to 3—and I know there’s a lot more. I mean, it was just really nice to see that—that I know that I don’t necessarily have to always travel to the North Side or maybe travel to another neighborhood to have [her around] children around her [own] age.”

Continues Karen Ratliffe, mother of a nine-month-old daughter,

“I look forward to the playgroups every month. So far, my experiences have been great, because, every time I leave the playgroup, there is something new that I did not know, which is the main reason why I wanted to join the playgroup. So, I would say that I’m definitely receiving great insight every month that I attend the playgroup.”

When asked what drew her to the playgroup initially, Ms. Ratliffe explains,

“Just to be around other parents—so I can gain experiences, so I can ask questions, so I can compare and contrast to see what’s working and what’s not working. Obviously, I want the very best for my daughter and there are a lot of experts who can teach me. And so, one main reason for joining the mom’s group was to gain insight and ask the experts what’s best...that was the main reason.”

Lastly, both were asked about their hopes and dreams for the future of the playgroup.

Ms. Moon contends,

“I would love for it to just, kind of, grow into, not really an organization, but kind of like that where we constantly have specialized activities going on—whether that’s a speaker coming in or where we do just a playgroup going to the park or we form a babysitting co-op. I think just being able to branch out and really just kind of spread it to be like our own community and, you know, just kind of offer different services and different activities for children to do.”

Seconds Ms. Ratliffe,

“I would love to see it expand. I e-mailed some ideas in regards to different guest speakers coming in. So, I know we have the literacy expert coming in and I emailed to see if we can have a sign language specialist come in, even a lactation consultant come in. So, I would really like to see more parents and kids involved and the main reason is because it’s been official. Also, just to have experts come in to share different ideas and different ways that we can ensure that our kids are growing healthy and successful in life.”

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