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The Development and Sustainability of School-Based Parent Networks in Low-Income Latinx Communities: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

David E. Rangel
Brown University
Megan N. Shoji
Mathematica
Adam Gamoran
William T. Grant Foundation

Research suggests that school-based parent networks have significant benefits for children's education, yet scholars know very little about how such relationships form and develop over time. This study uses interview and survey data with elementary school parents in predominantly low-income Latinx communities to examine how parents meet one another; how deeper, more trusting relationships develop; and how the size and quality of parent networks change over time in the presence and absence of a family engagement program. Interview data suggest few and infrequent opportunities for parents to meet one another, which makes building relationships characterized by trust and shared expectations more difficult. The quantitative results show positive short-term effects of the program but differential effects over time.

Keywords: parent networks, mixed methods, Latinx, elementary school

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David E. Rangel is an assistant professor of education at Brown University, Box 1938, 164 Angell Street #265, Providence, RI 02912; e-mail: *david_rangel@brown.edu*. He uses sociological perspectives to understand educational inequality with a focus on Latinx parents and children in the United States.

Megan N. Shoji is a researcher at Mathematica, where she builds evidence to inform K–12 education, early childhood, and child welfare policy. Her research focuses on educational inequality, evaluation design, and technical assistance to help organizations develop and use evidence to advance their work.

Adam Gamoran is President of the William T. Grant Foundation, where he leads initiatives to support research to reduce inequality in youth outcomes, and to improve the use of research evidence in policies that affect young people. His own research focuses on educational inequality and school reform.

Strong school-based parent networks are linked to a host of positive educational outcomes, from higher test scores (McNeal, 1999) and better grades (Jeynes, 2007) to improved classroom behavior (Turley et al., 2017). School-based parent networks have undergone extensive examination regarding their links to children's achievement, yet the networks themselves have received little focus. For example, how these social ties form and develop over time is all but missing from the extant educational literature. Moreover, much of the previous work tended to focus on the size of parent networks but paid less attention to the quality or the level of exchange within a network. As a result, we know less about how parent networks can effectively support children's academic success because this requires a deep understanding of their development, quality, and sustainability.

Understanding the development, quality, and sustainability of school-based parent networks may be especially important because of the central role schools play in connecting parents (Bennett et al., 2012). At the same time, researchers point to a growing disconnect between schools and the low-income and Latinx communities they serve (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016), suggesting that the development of parent networks in these communities must not be taken for granted and may require specific intervention to promote their development (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011).

This mixed-methods study informs our understanding of elementary school parent networks in low-income, predominantly Latinx communities by examining how these networks develop and change over time in the early elementary school context. We pose two sets of questions. First, we ask how parents meet other parents in the school community, in general, and in the presence of a targeted intervention. We use structured interviews to investigate how parents describe meeting other parents in the school community, and we use quantitative data to test the impact of a targeted intervention on the size of parent networks as children transition from first through third grade. Second, we ask about conditions that evoke deeper, more trusting relationships among parents. As with our first question, we use parent interviews to ask what conditions they regard as critical for the development of such relationships, and we test the effects of the intervention on the quality of parent networks. In both cases, we bring the qualitative and quantitative findings into dialogue with each other in this article.

To address our research questions, we draw on longitudinal data with more than 3,000 participating families in a field experiment, as well as in-depth interviews with a subset of parents, to understand how networks develop and function without additional intervention *and* in the presence of a family engagement program designed to build and sustain parent networks. In response to the first set of questions, interviews reveal that in the absence of a targeted intervention, parents had limited opportunities to build deeper, more meaningful connections with other parents in the

school community. Moreover, although longitudinal growth curve analyses reveal immediate short-term impacts on the size of parent networks, in subsequent years, network size was comparable in both the presence and the absence of the targeted intervention. Concerning the second set of questions, parents pointed to three conditions that influenced their decisions to befriend other parents in the schooling context: determining trustworthiness, expressing care and respect, and reciprocal exchange. These findings proved illuminating in light of longitudinal growth curve models that revealed that short-term impacts of the intervention on network quality were maintained through third grade. As a whole, these mixed-methods findings offer theoretical and practical insights into the formation of school-based networks over time and detail how schools can support the formation and sustainability of parent relationships in communities with high proportions of low-income Latinx families.

Parent Networks and Children's Educational Outcomes

Why might parents' social networks matter for their children's educational outcomes? One answer is provided by James Coleman (1988, 1990), a prominent theorist of social relationships and their educational benefits. Coleman theorized that social connections among parents whose children are friends could facilitate a child's development and promote positive educational outcomes. Coleman further asserted that social ties create conditions that enable the enforcement of norms, shared values, and the flow of information and other resources. Researchers have studied this conjecture by examining the relation between parent network size and educational outcomes. Research in this vein has found a positive correlation between larger parent networks and improved math achievement (Carbonaro, 1998), improved classroom behavior (Turley et al., 2017), and reduced risk of dropout (Ream, 2005).

Yet network size says little about the exchange of resources embedded within social networks. Coleman (1988, 1990) articulated the salience of "obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness" or network *quality*, for the exchange of resources embedded within social relationships. Importantly, markers of relationship quality have also been linked to positive child outcomes, from reduced parenting anxiety and increased parent-child interaction, to higher test scores and better grades (Goddard, 2003; Green et al., 2007; Pong, 1998). These findings highlight the value of conceptualizing parent networks in terms of their size *and* quality.

Distinguishing conceptually between network size and quality also recognizes that different processes might be at play for understanding each. In other words, what it takes for parents to say they "know" the parents of their children's friends (size) may be qualitatively different from parents identifying their children's friends' parents as sources of social and material support

(quality). More to the point, parents "knowing each other," a common educational measure of network size, does not mean that parents share similar norms and values about their children's education or that they use their social ties for support in the ways Coleman theorized.

In addition to size and quality, Coleman also noted the importance of *stability* to the exchange of resources within a social network. Stability refers to whether social connections are maintained over time. Coleman (1988) argued that leaving an existing network, for example, by moving to a new community, fractures social relationships with detrimental consequences. There is general support for this claim, as researchers have found a strong negative association between residential and schooling mobility and student academic performance (Hagan et al., 1996; Pribesh & Downey, 1999).

Moreover, evidence suggests that network stability may be a particularly challenging issue in low-income and minority communities. Structural processes that concentrate disadvantage in these communities, such as crime, violence, and poverty, potentially shape how parents establish and maintain social networks in their local contexts (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Sampson et al., 2002; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). For example, Jones's (2004) ethnographic account of a violent Philadelphia neighborhood found that young women often exclude themselves from some social relationships to mitigate unforeseen potential conflicts. Similarly, Desmond (2012) found that severe resource constraints forced individuals to treat social ties as disposable, impinging on the longevity of their relationships. Specific to the Latinx context, nationally representative data have shown that Mexican American students experience higher rates of nonpromotional school mobility relative to their non-Latinx White peers (Ream, 2005). Importantly, recent research has found that more restrictive immigration policing suppressed Latinx elementary school enrollment, perhaps as a consequence of families leaving these communities, thereby affecting the stability of their relationships (Dee & Murphy, 2019).

Collectively, this work suggests that both individual and contextual factors may uniquely influence the stability of parent networks in the underresourced Latinx context of the current study. As such, it may be that intentional structures are necessary to build and sustain parent networks in this context. Additionally, existing research on network stability is mostly limited to the consequences of fractured relationships, rather than on understanding how networks change over time. Thus, our study contributes to the broader literature by addressing how relationships form and develop—we distinguish conceptually between size and quality, as the process governing each may differ, and our experimental longitudinal approach allows us to consider variations in network size and quality over time in the presence and absence of a universal family engagement program.

Formation of Parent Relationships

How school-based networks form and develop remain largely unexamined processes (Cook, 2005). One exception is Mario Small's (2009) work that explored the formation of parent social networks in daycare centers in New York City. Using the case of these daycare centers, he argued that parent networks formed as a result of embedded school processes that forced parents to meet and interact regularly. For example, the daycare centers in his study required high levels of parental involvement to complete their routine day-to-day organizational tasks, which necessitated a large parent volunteer staff. This large volunteer staff would show up regularly at the school, thereby creating opportunities for parents to meet and regularly interact, a necessary condition for the formation of social relationships (Fehr, 1996). Small surmised that these embedded processes (the center's need for volunteers and internalizing the need to volunteer) shaped not only when and how parents met but also parents' perceptions of other parents' volunteer efforts that made them more likely to form social ties with other volunteers. Thus, the daycare centers and the organizational processes that brought parents together played an outsized role in connecting parents to one another above and beyond personal dispositions, or the individual parents' own motivation toward meeting other parents. Although daycare centers may seem different from public schools because parents can choose to enroll or not, often daycare enrollment is less a matter of choice than a response to constraints (Meyers & Jordan, 2006), so Small's findings may have bearing on the formation of parent networks in schools despite the different settings.

Yet research on parent relationships with public schools shows high levels of disenfranchisement, particularly across racial and ethnic and social class lines. For example, previous studies have noted that schools with predominantly low-income and racial and ethnic minority populations tend to do a poor job engaging families and lack critical support services (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). Urban schools often struggle to effectively engage parents because of their reliance on traditional forms of engagement, such as parent-teacher organizations, school volunteer groups, and parent-teacher conferences. Such engagement efforts are ineffective in low-income Latinx contexts (Hill & Torres, 2010; Noguera, 2001; Valdés, 2017) because they fail to address the larger structural obstacles to parent participation such as language barriers (Carreón et al., 2005), lack of familiarity navigating complex institutions (Perreira et al., 2006), and material and economic constraints (Hill et al., 2017; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012). Despite these barriers, the prior research is clear—Latinx parents hold high educational aspirations for their children (Goldenberg et al., 2001; Langenkamp, 2019), and although parents may feel alienated rather than embraced by school "outreach" efforts (Kim, 2009; Valenzuela, 2010), they are highly involved in

home-based schooling practices like checking homework when possible, providing emotional support (Auerbach, 2007; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992), and developing their children's educational identities (Kiyama, 2010).

As a result, even if embedded organizational practices are present, as in Small's (2009) study, they may hold less sway in public schools compared to daycare centers (Noguera, 2001; Warren et al., 2009), particularly in predominantly low-income Latinx communities. Given the potential differences between schools and daycare centers, and the unique cultural context of predominantly Latinx communities, it is necessary to examine how parents describe opportunities to meet other parents, and how schools might already structure the formation of parent networks.

Deepening Relationships in Schools

How relationships become deeper and more trusting may differ from how social ties form. Research on friendship formation, albeit not in a schooling context, has examined a number of situational factors. These situational factors include how often we see someone, whether we are in search of friends, or whether we may be dependent upon someone for a particular resource (Fehr, 1996). Beyond these situational factors, researchers have noted that individuals make cognitive assessments of others to determine another's worthiness of becoming a friend, though these same cognitive assessments are not made when deciding to become an acquaintance. Research has shown that people are generally receptive to forming acquaintances but are far pickier when deciding to become friends with someone (Fehr, 1996). In the context of the present study, this means parents may very well indicate that they "know" another parent, but knowing another parent does not mean that they are friends or, more important, that they provide each other material, social, or emotional support. To more clearly understand this distinction, we examine factors that influence with whom parents develop relationships in the school-community context.

The development of deeper school-based parent relationships may be a function of the environment in which they are embedded. Research on parent networks in the schooling context has alluded to differences across social class and racial and ethnic lines. Focusing on White and African American families, Horvat et al. (2003) found that differences in the formation of parents' social networks were linked to social class. Middle-class families' networks were populated by working professionals such as lawyers and doctors, while working-class and poor families' networks were primarily kinship based. Along racial and ethnic lines, research has found that strong kin networks are a defining feature of Latinx families (Marin et al., 1987). This strong sense of family obligation, or familism, may negate the need for school-based social

ties because strong extended family connections provide sufficient social, emotional, and material support (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

Method

Our study draws on quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This approach allowed us to address a more diverse, complementary set of research questions, which include confirmatory and explanatory questions that require drawing causal inferences as well as documenting processes (Creswell et al., 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) and produce stronger evidence for conclusions than would be possible with only quantitative or qualitative data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). For the current article, we followed an integrated analytic procedure in which we concurrently analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data and where both held equal status in answering our research questions (Klassen et al., 2012; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

Our data came from the Children, Families, and Schools project, a multiyear cluster-randomized controlled trial of Families and Schools Together (FAST), an after-school program that engages whole families in group activities within and across family units. The study involved 26 public elementary schools across three school districts in Phoenix, Arizona, and another 26 schools from one school district in San Antonio, Texas. These cities were selected for their high proportions of low-income Latinx families and local service partners experienced in implementing FAST. The study staggered implementation across two successive cohorts of first graders (2008–2009 and 2009–2010) and three cycles within each school year (fall, winter, and spring).

Schools were first randomly assigned to a study cohort and then to receive the FAST program (intervention group) or conduct business as usual (comparison group). The research team recruited all first-grade families in the study schools to participate. Our primary mode of recruitment occurred at back-to-school nights. We leveraged our relationship with key school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, and administrative assistants) to send reminders about our recruitment events home with the children. In both intervention and comparison schools, we invited all first-grade families to attend back-to-school nights, where we provided a meal to the whole family, described the purpose of the larger study, and subsequently included consenting families to the study. In FAST schools, we first recruited to the larger study, and then to participate in FAST. We supplemented school-based recruitment events with home visits to ensure the fullest participation possible. Regarding compensation, we balanced concerns about possible coercion with the recognition that research participants from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities should be compensated fairly (Rangel & Valdez, 2017). Families were compensated $10 for completing the preprogram

survey. Postintervention, families were compensated $5 for each of the three follow-up surveys, which took about 15 minutes or less to complete. We also compensated interview participants $15 per hour of interview time.[1] About 60% of all first-grade families in the 52 study schools enrolled in the study (n = 3,084). Researchers followed these students and their families over 3 years to examine changes in parent social networks over time.

FAST Program

The FAST program engages families in activities designed to empower parents, enhance school and community engagement, and reduce family stress, social isolation, and conflict (McDonald et al., 2006). FAST consists of eight weekly multifamily group meetings (FAST Nights), followed by two years of monthly parent-led meetings. FAST Nights last about 2½ hours each and are held in the evening at the school, led by a trained team of local community members and at least one member of the school staff. Each FAST night incorporates 12 structured activities designed to facilitate within-family, between-family, and family-school relationships.[2] Previous quantitative and qualitative evaluations of FAST highlight its potential to strengthen parent networks in communities similar to those examined in our study (Gamoran et al., 2012; Guerra & Knox, 2008; McDonald et al., 2006; Shoji et al., 2014).

Data Sources

We analyzed qualitative data from in-depth interviews and quantitative data from surveys. We used parent interview data to understand how parent networks form and develop into deeper more trusting relationships. We used parent survey data to understand how FAST affects the size and quality of parent networks, and changes over time.

Qualitative Data Collection

Two of the authors interviewed parents from four comparison schools and four intervention schools that began the study in spring 2010 (2009–2010 first-grade cohort). We cold-called potential interviewees from lists of eligible study participants. Refusals were rare and usually due to scheduling conflicts; participants more commonly dropped out of the interview sample because we could not reach them by phone (unanswered calls or out-of-date phone numbers). In total, we interviewed 57 parents from 34 families across the eight schools.

One male and one female researcher (the first and second author) conducted the interviews between March 2011 and May 2012, when most target children were in second or third grade. Interviews typically occurred in person at the family's place of residence on a weekday evening and lasted 60 to 150 minutes. Except on one occasion when the interview was conducted by phone, we took a takeout meal to share with the whole family before the

interview. Families selected the meal when we called to schedule the interview. After the meal, we interviewed parents in English or Spanish according to their preference. Of all interviews, 37 were conducted in English, and 20 were conducted in Spanish. When more than one parent was present, we conducted separate but simultaneous interviews where the male researcher interviewed the male parent or guardian while the female researcher interviewed the female parent or guardian.[3] We used a semistructured protocol to elicit parents' narratives, feelings, and explanations about their family, school, and community relationships. This article focuses on parent reports of their relationships with other parents in the school community. Interviews were audio-recorded and later orthographically transcribed and, if necessary, translated into English.

Quantitative Data Collection

We administered written surveys to parents four times throughout the study: baseline (at recruitment, when all students were in first grade), first follow-up (in Year 1, following the completion of the eight weekly FAST meetings in intervention schools), second follow-up (during the spring of the second year of the study, when most children were in the second grade), and third follow-up (during the spring of the third year of the study, when most children were in third grade). All surveys asked parents about their relationships with their children, school staff, and other parents with a focus on parent reports of their relationships with other parents in the school community.

Parents completed the baseline survey in person at a study recruitment event or home visit, and nearly all parents who enrolled in the study also completed the baseline survey (n = 3,077). The university's Survey Center mailed follow-up surveys to all study parents in the spring of the first, second, and third years of the study. As Table 1 shows, response rates were lower for the follow-up surveys than the baseline survey, at 66% for the first follow-up and 41% and 45% for the second and third follow-ups, respectively. Response rates on follow-up surveys were 5 to 10 percentage points higher in comparison schools than in intervention schools, differences that were statistically significant at each point. We discuss the potential implications of these differences in the Results section. Although there were no statistically significant baseline differences between FAST and comparison schools on student demographic characteristics (student gender, federal school lunch program eligibility, race and ethnicity, English language learner, special education), there were significant differences on some measures of relationships with children, school staff, and other parents, as reported below.

Table 1
Parent Response Rates by Survey, Wave, Overall, and by Study Condition

	Comparison	FAST	Total
Enrolled in study			
Total *N*	1,493	1,591	3,084
Baseline survey (Year 1)			
%	99.9	99.7	99.8
n	1,491	1,586	3,077
First follow-up survey (Year 1)			
%	71.0	61.7	66.2
n	1,060	982	2,042
Second follow-up survey (Year 2)			
%	45.6	36.2	40.8
n	681	576	1,257
Third follow-up survey (Year 3)			
%	47.4	42.5	44.8
n	707	676	1,383

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of parent survey responses at four time points. Response rates calculated overall across all study schools.

Survey Measures

Dependent Variables

We used two dependent variables to assess parents' relationships with other parents in their children's schools: (a) the size of parent networks and (b) their quality of relationships. We measured network size using a single survey item: "How many parents of your child's friends at this school do you know?" with possible responses ranging from 0 to 6 or more. This item was adapted from measures in national surveys (Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988) used in previous research (e.g., Carbonaro, 1998; Morgan & Sorensen, 1999; Morgan & Todd, 2009), to fit the target survey length and appropriate reading level of parents in the study population.[4] We measured the quality of parent relationships with a composite measure based on seven survey questions asking about parents' relationships with other parents in the school (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$), designed to measure obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness in parent networks (Coleman, 1988). The scale includes three types of questions. First, we asked parents the extent to which other parents do things for them: "How much do other parents at the school (a) help you with babysitting, shopping, and so on; (b) listen to you about your problems; and (c) invite you to social activities such as meals and parties?" Second, we asked parents the extent to which they do things for other parents: "How much do

you (a) help other parents at this school with babysitting, shopping, and so on; (b) listen to other parents at this school about their problems; and (c) invite other parents at this school to social activities such as meals and parties?" These questions were designed to measure reciprocal exchanges of tangible and emotional support theorized to build obligations and trustworthiness in social networks. Third, to measure shared expectations, parents were asked the extent to which other parents at the school share their expectations for their child. All seven items had four-category ordered response options ranging from "not at all" to "a lot."

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables of interest were time and whether a school participated in the FAST program. We measured intervention status (*FAST*) as a characteristic of schools because randomization occurred at the school level. We measured time using two piecewise terms (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) that differentiate periods of intensive intervention (weekly sessions) and sustainability booster (monthly sessions) to reflect the design of the FAST intervention (McDonald, 2008). The first growth period (*Year 1*) captured linear change over the first year of the study, from baseline to the first follow-up survey, after implementation of the eight weekly FAST meetings in intervention schools. The second growth period (*Years 2–3*) captured linear change over the second and third years of the study, from the first follow-up survey to the third follow-up survey, when intervention schools held monthly parent-led FAST meetings.

Control Variables

At the student level, we controlled for family background characteristics; these included indicators for student gender, eligibility for the federal school lunch program, and family racial and ethnic background. We distinguished four categories of family racial and ethnic background using a combination of student race and ethnicity and parental language dominance: Latinx students with a Spanish-dominant parent, Latinx students with an English-dominant parent, non-Latinx students of color (Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Black), and non-Latinx White students (omitted category). We measured parental language dominance by the survey language the parent chose during study recruitment. We also controlled for design effects at the school level, where randomization occurred. These included indicators for study cohort (2008–2009 vs. 2009–2010 [omitted]) and randomization block (Block 1, Block 2, Block 3, or Block 4 vs. Block 5 [omitted]; these blocks referenced the four different school districts within the two cities, and within San Antonio, schools were blocked by student poverty level prior to randomization).

Analysis

Interview Data

We conducted an iterative analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings of debriefing sessions held after each interview.[5] In this article, we focus on the themes that emerged from the data concerning parents' relationships with other parents in the school and the role of schools in facilitating parent interactions. We reviewed field notes for context and then open-coded each interview transcript for themes about how parents build relationships with other parents and barriers to building parent networks in the school community. Two of the authors then discussed how the themes in a given interview fit into larger themes across all interviews. We also listened to audio-recorded debriefings and discussed the relationship between these and our conclusions from coding the transcripts.

Survey Data

We constructed two analysis samples from the survey data, one for each outcome measure: size and the quality of networks. Each sample included all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure. The network size sample included 7,497 time point observations across the 3 years (up to four per family) for 2,973 student participants nested within the 52 study schools. The network quality sample included 7,343 time point observations for 2,960 students across the 52 study schools. In Table 2, we present descriptive statistics for each sample.

The nested structure of the data makes multilevel modeling an appropriate analytic approach for the quantitative component of this study (Hox & Kreft, 1994; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In addition, because the intervention served schools, it was important to estimate the effect of the intervention at the level at which it occurred. We used HLM 6.0 software to estimate three-level hierarchical linear models in which time points (Level 1) are nested within students (Level 2) and schools (Level 3). For each outcome measure, we estimated piecewise growth curve models with two growth periods, representing change over Year 1 (baseline to first follow-up) and change over the next 2 years (from Year 1 follow-up to Year 3 follow-up). By focusing on differences in trajectories over time, our models account for baseline differences between FAST and comparison schools in the outcome variables. Our approach also uses all available information for a given case, but those who responded to more survey waves contributed more to the results than those who responded to fewer waves.[6] We estimated the effects of each growth period at Level 1 with random slopes, allowing their effects to vary across students and schools. We included student- and school-level control variables at Levels 2 and 3, using grand-mean centering. Equation

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Analytic Samples by Relationship Outcome

Variable	Parent Network Size (No. of Parents Known)					Parent Relationship Quality (Degree of Trust, Reciprocity, Shared Expectations)				
	n	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Level 1: Time										
Relationship measure (network size or quality)	7,497	3.22	2.13	0	6	7,343	1.94	0.82	1	4
Year 1 (first growth period)[a]	7,497	0.61	0.49	0	1	7,343	0.61	0.49	0	1
Years 2–3 (second growth period)[b]	7,497	0.52	0.78	0	2	7,343	0.53	0.78	0	2
Level 2: Family										
Female (child)	2,973	0.51	0.50	0	1	2,960	0.51	0.50	0	1
Federal school lunch program eligible	2,973	0.79	0.40	0	1	2,960	0.79	0.40	0	1
Latinx/Spanish-dominant	2,973	0.26	0.44	0	1	2,960	0.27	0.45	0	1
Latinx/English-dominant	2,973	0.48	0.50	0	1	2,960	0.48	0.50	0	1
Non-Latinx, non-White	2,973	0.11	0.31	0	1	2,960	0.11	0.31	0	1
Level 3: School										
FAST	52	0.50	0.50	0	1	52	0.50	0.50	0	1
Cohort 1 (2008–2009)	52	0.54	0.50	0	1	52	0.54	0.50	0	1
Randomization Block 1	52	0.12	0.32	0	1	52	0.12	0.32	0	1
Randomization Block 2	52	0.15	0.36	0	1	52	0.15	0.36	0	1
Randomization Block 3	52	0.23	0.43	0	1	52	0.23	0.43	0	1
Randomization Block 4	52	0.23	0.43	0	1	52	0.23	0.43	0	1
Randomization Block 5	52	0.27	0.45	0	1	52	0.27	0.45	0	1

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure.
[a]First growth period spans from baseline to first follow-up (spring of first-grade year). [b]Second growth period spans from first to third follow-up (spring of third-grade year).

1 shows the full model estimated for each outcome, Y, at time, t, for student, i, in school, j.

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{tij} = {} & \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001} * (\text{FAST}_j) + \Gamma_{002-006} * (\text{Design}_j) + \Gamma_{010-050} * (\text{Family Background}_{ij}) \\ & + \gamma_{100} * (Y1_{tij}) + \gamma_{101} * (Y1_{tij} * \text{FAST}_j) + r_{1ij} * (Y1_{tij}) + u_{10j} * (Y1_{tij}) \\ & + \gamma_{200} * (Y23_{tij}) + \gamma_{201} * (Y23_{tij} * \text{FAST}_j) + r_{2ij} * (Y23_{tij}) + u_{20j} * (Y23_{tij}) \\ & + r_{0ij} + u_{00j} + e_{tij}. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

Because all control variables are grand-mean centered, the grand intercept, $\gamma_{000,}$ represents the baseline score for an average child in an average school. The slope γ_{001} represents baseline differences between FAST and comparison schools. Design_j is a vector of the five school-level control variables, and $\Gamma_{002-006}$ is a vector of corresponding coefficients capturing baseline differences among schools by study cohort (Cohort 1_j and randomization block (Block 1_j, Block 2_j, Block 3_j, and Block 4_j). $\text{Family Background}_{ij}$ is a vector of the five student-level control variables, and $\Gamma_{010-050}$ is a vector of corresponding coefficients capturing baseline differences among students based on student gender (Female_{ij}), eligibility for the federal school lunch program ($\text{Free/Reduced Lunch}_{ij}$), and family racial and ethnic background ($\text{Non}-\text{Latinx/Non}-\text{White}_{ij}$, $\text{Latinx/Spanish}_{ij}$, and $\text{Latinx/English}_{ij}$). The coefficients, e_{tij}, r_{0ij} and u_{00j}, capture the amount of variation around the grand mean across time points, students, and schools, respectively.

The slopes γ_{100} and γ_{200} respectively indicate the average change in the outcome over the first and second growth periods (*Year 1*, from baseline to the first follow-up survey, and *Years 2–3*, from the first to third follow-up surveys) across all students in comparison schools. The coefficients u_{10j} and u_{20j} capture the amount of variation across schools in average growth over the first and second periods, respectively. The coefficients r_{1ij} and r_{2ij} capture the amount of within-school variation across students in average growth over the two growth periods. The effects of interest are represented by the slopes γ_{101} and γ_{201}, which denote the effect of FAST on the change in the outcome variable during the first and second growth periods, respectively.

Results

In this section, we integrate results from the survey and interview analyses. First, we describe how parents reported making the acquaintance of other parents in the school community. Then, we outline trends in the size of parent networks in first grade and as children transition from first to third grade when schools conducted business as usual and when they offered FAST. Subsequently, because meeting another parent does not necessarily translate into a close relationship, we describe what parents reported as necessary to build deeper relationships with other parents. In describing

how relationships deepen, we examine the quality of parental relationships and trends over time at schools where FAST was and was not offered.

Meeting Other Parents in the Schooling Context: How Relationships Form

Our interviews revealed that the process of meeting other parents involved fairly superficial interactions that occurred when parents were together in a common area or close physical proximity to one another. In the passage below, a mother from Phoenix explained how parents meet each other during pickup and drop-off times and describe how this plays out at the beginning of the year, when parents may not know each other yet:

> Well, at first when you meet other parents . . .one arrives and, "Good morning," and, "Good morning." That's how one starts, "Good morning, how are you doing?" "Yeah, I'm fine." And that's the way friendship starts, by asking, "How are you doing?" "Yeah, I'm good." "What grade is your daughter in?" "Oh, well in that grade." "Oh, is it your first time coming here to [the school]?" And some say, "Yes," and others, "Nooo . . ." That's how we start: by greeting each other good morning. (Translated from Spanish)

Children appeared to play a prominent role in connecting parents. A mother with a precocious and affable daughter remarked that on the way to school, her daughter would often introduce her to her friends' parents. Other commonly mentioned opportunities to meet parents were children's birthday parties, children playing with friends outside of school, families living in the same apartment complex or neighborhood, and parents attending school events such as classroom parties, children's performances, or fundraisers.

Although parents mentioned the many ways they met other parents, schools were mostly absent from these discussions. When asked how much of a role the school plays in connecting parents, one father stated, "I can't really say that they want parents to be involved. I guess it's something that just happens [parents meeting other parents]." A few parents did mention that their schools provided a "resource room" where they could congregate after dropping off their children in the morning. These rooms proved helpful to some parents as they allowed them to meet and interact with others. Another way schools attempted to engage parents across all schools was through parent-teacher associations or organizations (PTAs/PTOs). Of the 57 parents we interviewed, 30 mentioned the PTA/PTO in some way, but only a few expressed continued and active engagement; other parents seemed dismissive or failed to see the benefit of PTA/PTO participation. One father summed up a common perception among our respondents: "I want to know what's going on with mine, I want to know [about] the teacher and the kid. I'm more focused on, 'How is my kid doing?' like, right here in the classroom." PTA was not viewed as beneficial because the focus was on schooling operations that appeared disconnected, for

many parents, from their child's success. Thus, while schools might view PTA/PTO as an engagement strategy, it was rarely mentioned as a means to meet other parents. Apart from these instances, schools seemed to do very little to connect parents or facilitate social ties.

When parents did find opportunities to meet other parents, these connections were often surface level. As one mother suggested, short interactions, "Just, 'Hi.' 'Bye,'" were insufficient for developing deep relationships with other parents. As a result, although parents often reported knowing the parents of their children's friends, seeing them in school settings, and greeting one another, this did not lead to parents really "know[ing] the other parents." One father explained the distinction by saying, "We've met them, we even know where they live, but do we have daily or regular communication? No. But when we see them, we do say hi, and they do say hi to us." Other parents explained that they know other parents in the school but do not "hang out" as friends. This distinction is important as it suggests the process through which parents come to meet each other is not, in and of itself, sufficient for parents to develop connections characterized by the exchange of information and social support.

Our interviews also revealed that parents, in general, were not focused on building deep relationships with other parents in the school community. Instead, parents talked extensively about spending time with extended family members or maintaining friendships established previously. One father who did not have strong relationships with his neighbors or his children's friends summed up these sentiments in responding to a question about with whom he socializes. He stated, "Usually anybody that comes over is a relative or someone that we grew up with, you know, friends like that. Like all our friends are, like, (*makes a "whew" noise)* plus ten years, you know? Something like that." Another parent noted the effect of living in a neighborhood with high rates of mobility: They once knew all of their neighbors when they first moved in, but they now know none of them, and their house had recently been broken into for the first time, making them even more leery of their neighbors.

Moreover, we heard from a number of parents concerned about sexual predators. These experiences collectively highlight why parents may be less open to the idea of connecting with others in the school community. As a result, parents may be more focused on maintaining previous relationships or spending time with extended family. As Fehr (1996) noted, *availability*, or whether or not an individual has the time to commit to new relationships, is a necessary condition for friendship development. As such, strong extended kin relationships and strong prior relationships may limit parents' availability to developing new relationships.

In all, parents' experiences indicated that meeting other parents and forming social ties was a relatively mundane process. Parents formed ties in school settings in ways expected by the previous literature, mostly by

occupying the same physical space or by children connecting parents (Horvat et al., 2003; Small, 2009). Also, we found few embedded organizational practices that exerted an influence on the formation of parent networks in schools. As such, our finding that parents meet each other dropping off their children or when in close physical proximity is not altogether surprising. However, what is surprising is that, despite the considerable emphasis schools place on parental involvement and parent engagement (Desimone, 1999; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Jeynes, 2003), most social ties formed as a result of parent efforts and not the school facilitating these connections. Furthermore, in the typical day-to-day operation of schools, opportunities to meet other parents tend to be relatively infrequent, spread across the school year, and brief. As a result, even in cases where parents did meet each other, parents often distinguished and acknowledged other parents as "acquaintances" but not people they would turn to for material or social support.

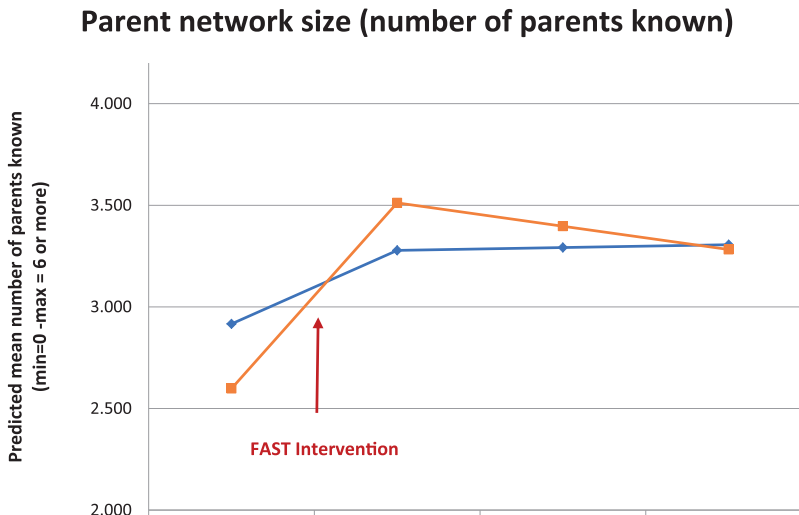
Meeting Other Parents: Changes in the Size of Parent Networks

Our qualitative results revealed that, in both the presence and absence of FAST, parents described opportunities to meet other parents. Our survey findings confirm that parents make the acquaintance of other parents in school settings even in the absence of targeted family engagement efforts; however, in the presence of FAST, parent networks grew more quickly.

Based on the results of our growth curve model, Figure 1 shows the predicted size of parent networks for FAST and comparison schools at each time point for otherwise average students in otherwise average schools (i.e., for students with sample mean scores on all control variables included in the model). The trends suggest that relative to second and third grade, parent networks grow most in the first-grade year at both FAST and comparison schools. However, the growth in FAST schools is more immediate, suggesting that point-in-time interventions can speed up what appears to be a typically unfolding process. Figure 1 also illustrates that FAST augments the size of parent networks in the year when the program is offered, but those relationships may not last over the subsequent 2 years.

On average, parents at comparison schools reported knowing about three other parents of their children's school friends early in the first-grade year (Table 3, $\gamma_{000} = 2.916$; also see Appendix A for full model results).

Throughout the school year, their parent networks grew by about one third of a parent, or less than one fifth of a standard deviation, on average ($\gamma_{100} = 0.362$). Over children's first-grade school year, parent networks tended to grow more in FAST schools than in comparison schools, by approximately one quarter of a standard deviation, or another half a parent ($\gamma_{101} = 0.552$). While parent network size did not change significantly in comparison or FAST schools over the next 2 years (.05 level), it is unclear whether the boost in parent network size is maintained 2 years after FAST,



	Time 0	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Comparison	2.916	3.278	3.292	3.306
FAST	2.598	3.512	3.397	3.282

Figure 1. **Predicted growth in parent network size over 3 years for FAST and comparison schools.**

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure. All family-level demographic controls and school-level design controls are set at the sample mean.

as evidence suggests a slow decline over the following years ($\gamma_{201} = -0.129$, $p = .066$). In any event, despite the initial boost afforded by FAST participation, predicted mean network sizes were identical in the third-year follow-up. Hence, our quantitative data highlight that first-grade parents know about three other parents in their children's school and the size of their networks change very little over subsequent years, both in the absence and presence of a targeted family engagement program.

The Quality of Parent Networks: Building Deeper Relationships With Other Parents

While the process of meeting other parents requires only minimal interaction, our interview data suggest that the process of strengthening those relationships is far more complex.

In this section, we present results on how the quality of school-based parent relationships changes over time and how parents describe the type of interactions that can foster deeper relationships among parents. We find

Table 3
Estimates of Growth in Network Size and Effects of FAST Over the First Year and the Next 2 Years

Parent Network Size (No. of Parents Known)	Coefficient	*SE*	*p*
Baseline			
Intercept (γ_{000})	2.916	0.057	<.001
FAST (γ_{001})	−0.318	0.116	.009
First growth period [a]			
Year 1 (γ_{100})	0.362	0.050	<.001
Year 1 * FAST (γ_{101})	0.552	0.099	<.001
Second growth period [b]			
Years 2–3 (γ_{200})	0.014	0.034	.688
Years 2–3 * FAST (γ_{201})	−0.129	0.069	.066

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure. Robust standard errors are reported. Results for design effects (cohort and randomization block) and family demographics (child gender, federal school lunch program eligibility, and family race/ethnicity) are omitted. See Appendix A for full model results.
[a]First growth period spans from baseline to first follow-up (spring of first-grade year).
[b]Second growth period spans from first to third follow-up (spring of third-grade year).

that deepened relationships emerge through three critical processes: determining trustworthiness, expressing care and respect, and reciprocity.

Determining Trustworthiness

Before trust can emerge in a relationship, a necessary (but not always sufficient) condition is that each person must deem the other person trustworthy (Cook, 2004). Parents described the process of determining trustworthiness as an initial step toward deepening relationships with other parents. Parents regularly described their assessment of other parents' trustworthiness as a "gut feeling." When pressed, parents explained that gut feelings followed from their observations or experiences with other parents. For example, parents stated that they mentally vet other parents by watching how they treat their children. In addition, parents recalled "red flags" that told them another parent was *not* trustworthy. One mother explained, "I've seen the dad kind of lose it in front of me and I'm think[ing], 'Okay, if that's what he does in front of me, can you imagine what he does when we're not around?'"

Another mother explained a similar scenario when her second-grade daughter was invited to a neighbor's slumber party. The mother explained that on one occasion the neighbor left her front door open, and the whole apartment complex could hear this mother berate and curse at her daughter for losing her shoes. The yelling lasted long enough to leave an indelible

impression on the mother such that she did not permit the sleepover for fear of a similar outburst. Parents also reported paying attention to others' physical appearance as indicators of their trustworthiness. One parent observed, "I hate to say I'm judgmental, but I mean, if a parent comes and they're full of tattoos and earrings it's like, nuh-uh, it's not going to happen [being around my kids]."

While parents most often mentioned negative signs that they perceived as red flags, they also reported processing positive cues that signal trustworthiness. For example, when we asked a parent to explain what would make them feel comfortable around another parent, they reflected, "I guess a parent who's inquisitive like I am. They have to be asking questions too." Another parent had similar thoughts, suggesting, "If they keep talking and they keep inquiring about you or inquiring about what you do or things about your kids, in a good way, and then you inquire back and then that's when you build that comfort level." The previous mother who did not let her daughter spend the night at her neighbor's contrasted her perception of the "bad mother" with another mother in the apartment complex of whom she had a favorable opinion. When asked how she came to this positive view, she stated,

> Just observing her with her children, you know? My daughter goes out the door, [but] I don't sit out there and watch her. I stay inside. 'Cause I know she's out there safe, playing, but it's, you know, it's never that safe. But she [the other mother] sits out there the whole time. It doesn't matter if it's hot or cold. She'll sit outside the whole time watching her kids play out there. And, you know, I've never seen her yell at her kids. She's always gentle with her kids. I see her hugging her kids, kissing her kids, talking to them gently. I've never seen her put a hand on her kids. I've never seen her raise her voice to her kids. It's like, "Okay. I like her." Even the father is like that: very nice.

Expressing Care and Respect

In addition to determining trustworthiness, parents reported strengthened relationships emerged by expressing care and respect for one another. This can occur in various ways but was described by parents most prominently when they felt others had their children's best interest at heart. One father experienced this when his daughter made a critical error in a sports match, which caused the team to lose. He recounted,

> I noticed when [the other parents] approached my kid . . . and they started hugging her and saying, "That's okay." . . . And that's what amazed me. I was like, "Wow." . . . When she made the mistake, the first thing I thought, "They're going to kill her, or the other parents are going to say something mean." . . . [But] it made me

> feel really great when the other kids approached, 'cause I know that [the parents] did talk to their kids [and told them] not to get upset with [my daughter].

For this father, the parents' responses demonstrated that the parents cared deeply about and had a high level of respect for his family, which made him feel closer to the team and resulted in a stronger and "more open" relationship afterward.

Similarly, a different father described expressions of care and respect to explain how his relationship with another parent developed. The two fathers met for the first time when he dropped off his son at the other house for a play date. In his own words, he recounted the following experience:

> So we drop him off, and everything's cool: dad's cool, mom's cool. And [I] came back home, and then like two hours later they call us and they say, "Hey, I just want to let you know, can I ask your permission? I want to take [your son] and my son to the movies if it's okay with you, no problem, or if you guys want to come." And that was cool, you know, so he asked our opinion if we want it or not, and he's like, "Well, my wife wanted to go, and I think it's almost the last days of the movie being in the theater. What do you think? We're just asking you if you'd let [your son] go. And then as soon as the movie's done we'll drop him off at your house, if you don't mind, or if you want to pick him up here, [but just because] that way you don't have to drive all the way up here." It's, like, wow, cool.

In a follow-up question, this father explained that asking for permission signaled to him that the other family had their son's best interest at heart and showed "that they were not just thinking about themselves but that they are thinking about us." He further reported that since this first meeting, the families had gone on numerous outings together, and they regularly visit each other's homes.

Reciprocity

Parents also identified reciprocal exchange, or the act of doing things for each other, as an essential aspect of strengthening relationships. One parent recounted the following story of how a close relationship began while walking her daughter to school in the rain past the house of a woman she knew in passing but with whom she had never spoken:

> She greeted me and said, "You are going to get wet. I'll give you a ride in my car." I told her, "No, no. I'm fine, don't worry." She was taking her daughter to school as well. "Well, alright," [I agreed,] and my daughter and I got in her car with her, and she took us to the school. Then on the way back she also took me and dropped me off at my house. And that's how our friendship started . . . And then she was always waiting so we could go to school together, and our

> friendship grew like that. Later, she started to invite me to have breakfast, or I would invite her to my house to have breakfast . . . And when I had one of my girls' birthdays or she had one of hers, we invited each other and that's how our friendship grew. We invited each other to some party . . . she came to my house with me or I went to hers, and so on and so forth. (Translated from Spanish)

In some cases, reciprocity appeared to be foundational to the establishment of strong ties because it conveyed that a person could be counted on when the need arose, thus engendering trust between individuals.

Reciprocity may be more critical or more likely to emerge when individuals have few supportive connections. For example, one parent described becoming "great friends, BFFs [best friends forever]" with a single mother in her apartment complex by spending time together and being "there for her" because "she didn't have anybody to help her—give her rides, picking up her son, picking up her kids, doing this, doing that—I was there for her." Another mother explained how her relationship first blossomed with a neighbor, who was a single mother, when she began offering to babysit the neighbor's children. She described how the babysitting led to the neighbor becoming a more frequent visitor and subsequent requests for more babysitting help. The neighbor also began reciprocating by calling to see if she could pick something up for the mother when she was going to the grocery store. These exchanges of favors paved the way for the mothers to interact more frequently and discover shared interests, which lay the foundation for deepening relationships (Verbrugge, 1983). According to the mother, their relationship cemented to where they are now close "like sisters" after she agreed to watch the neighbor's son when the neighbor "was in a bad situation" because "[one of her children] was in the hospital and then she has three more kids." When asked why she offered to help in this time of need, she explained, "Well, because if I was in the same situation, I'd appreciate for somebody to offer to take care of my kids."

While parents noted the importance of trustworthiness, expressions of care and respect, and reciprocity in forging stronger relationships, most of these opportunities emerged with neighbors, in extracurricular organizations, or when children were playing with their friends outside the home. These experiences suggest that in typical daily operations, schools in these contexts are not providing opportunities for parents to meet and interact in ways that yield supportive networks

Changes in the Quality of Relationships Over Time

Our qualitative results highlighted limited opportunities for parents to build deep relationships in schools. Our quantitative results similarly reflect these limited opportunities. Parent perceptions of network quality were never higher than 2.0, a score that indicates that parents of average children

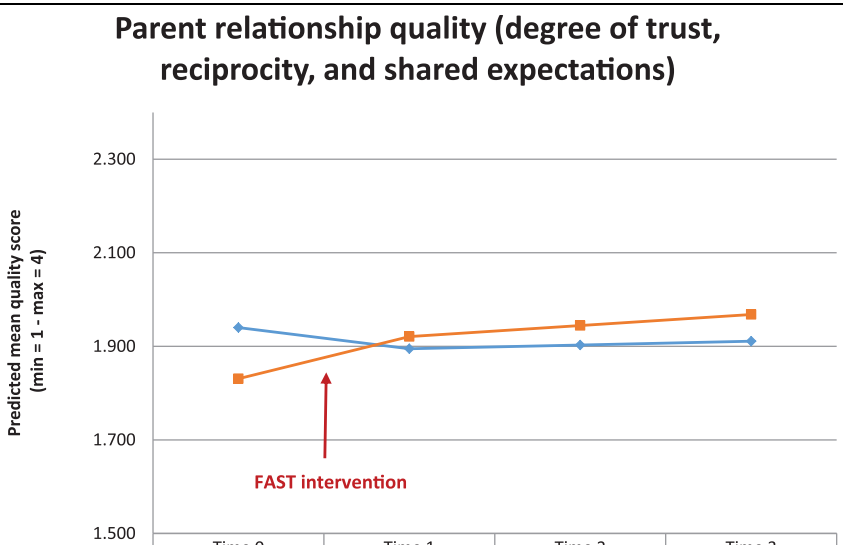


Figure 2. **Predicted growth in parent network quality over 3 years for FAST and comparison schools.**

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure. All family-level demographic controls and school-level design controls are set at the sample mean.

felt other parents shared their expectations for their child and engaged in reciprocal behaviors with them "a little."

Figure 2 depicts trends over time in the quality of parent networks by study condition. Based on our growth curve model results, which control for design effects and student-level demographics (gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity), the plot shows the predicted quality of parent networks for FAST and comparison schools at each time point for otherwise average students in otherwise average schools (or students with mean scores on all control variables in the model, similar to Figure 1). The trends show that FAST increased the quality of relationships among parents over the first-grade year, and this effect was sustained through to the third grade. At baseline, parents in comparison schools perceived higher network quality than those in intervention schools, on average (Table 4; γ_{000} = 1.940, the predicted mean in comparison schools and $\gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}$ [1.940 + −0.110] = 1.83, the predicted mean in FAST schools).

Baseline differences in relationship quality between intervention and comparison schools were about 0.013 standard deviations. Even though

Table 4
Estimates of Growth in Relationship Quality and Effects of FAST Over the First Year and Next 2 Years

Parent Relationship Quality (Degree of Trust, Reciprocity, and Shared Expectations)	Coefficient	*SE*	*p*
Baseline			
Intercept (γ_{000})	1.940	0.021	<.001
FAST (γ_{001})	−0.110	0.043	.014
First growth period[a]			
Year 1 (γ_{100})	−0.045	0.019	.019
Year 1 * FAST (γ_{101})	0.136	0.038	<.001
Second growth period[b]			
Years 2–3 (γ_{200})	0.008	0.010	.432
Years 2–3 * FAST (γ_{201})	0.015	0.020	.449

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure. Robust standard errors are reported. Results for design effects (cohort and randomization block) and family demographics (child gender, federal school lunch program eligibility, and family race/ethnicity) are omitted. See Appendix B for full model results.
[a]First growth period spans from baseline to first follow-up (spring of first-grade year).
[b]Second growth period spans from first to third follow-up (spring of third-grade year).

comparison schools started with an advantage in perceived network quality, by the third grade, the predicted mean relationship quality score was 0.057 points higher for intervention schools.

The challenges in building deep relationships characterized by material and social support found in the qualitative data are highlighted here by the low levels of exchange and shared expectations in parents' school-based networks. Moreover, in the absence of targeted interventions, our results suggest that network quality is not likely to change substantially. Notably, FAST had a direct and immediate impact on network quality over the first-grade year when the eight weekly FAST Nights were delivered. Yet this level of growth was not maintained once the intervention transitioned from weekly meetings to monthly parent-led meetings; however, in comparison schools, there was little growth in network quality in any year. The slower growth after substantial intervention and the little growth in nonintervention schools likely reflect not only the challenge of cultivating these relationships but also the high level of intervention necessary to maintain deep connections once established.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we first focused on how school-based parent networks developed. This focus revealed that parents most often met each other when they were in close physical proximity, such as during pickup and drop-off times or while walking children to and from school. Interacting briefly during these occasions was often sufficient for parents to declare that they "knew" another parent. We also found that without a school-specific focus on building relationships, opportunities to meet other parents were often brief, infrequent, and spread out across the year; however, offering a sustained family engagement program helped parents meet other parents more quickly than when schools conducted business as usual.

Second, we examined how acquaintanceships transitioned to deeper, more meaningful relationships. This focus on deeper relationships was rooted in Coleman's (1988, 1990) theory that the tangible benefits of school-based relationships derive primarily through network quality or the levels of exchange occurring within a network. Our analysis revealed that deeper relationships were forged through sufficiently intensive interactions in which parents could determine trustworthiness, express care and respect for one another, and engage in reciprocal exchange. However, these types of opportunities were rare in the schooling contexts we examined.

Boosting network quality was difficult even when schools offered a sustained and intensive family engagement program. This difficulty may stem from parents' lack of openness to new friendships, a central aspect of friendship development (Fehr, 1996). The parents we interviewed frequently cited strong extended family relationships and existing long-term friendships as reasons for not developing relationships with other parents in the school community. Parents also reported structural factors such as school or residential mobility and crime that limited their openness to developing new relationships. This suggests that in predominantly low-income Latinx communities, both strong cultural values around family and concerns about the broader community context reduce parents' openness to expanding their social networks. Future research should consider how structural factors shape network formation in other contexts. For example, in communities with low crime rates and mobility rates, are Latinx parents more likely to cultivate school-based connections than in the contexts we observed? Alternatively, do these families' strong kin networks similarly reduce parents' motivation to expand their parent networks?

In addition, our finding that parents easily acknowledged "knowing" another parent but found it more difficult to build deeper, more trusting relationships with other parents might explain why the previous literature has produced inconclusive evidence linking social closure and educational outcomes (Carbonaro, 1998; Fasang et al., 2014; Morgan & Todd, 2009). If the tangible benefits of social networks primarily accrue through relationship

quality, then we would expect a weak association between network size and educational outcomes. Instead, to fully consider the effects of parent networks on children's educational outcomes, future research should include measures of quality as well (Carbonaro, 1998; Goddard, 2003).

Finally, we advanced a longitudinal experimental approach to the study of school-based parent networks. Coleman (1988, 1990) theorized that the sustainability of relationships affects access to resources. We examined parent network size and quality over time and in the presence and absence of a targeted intervention to illuminate how a targeted family engagement effort affects parent networks immediately following the end of the program, and 2 years later. We found immediate positive short-term impacts on parent network quality and size but mixed results for longer term impacts. Two years after the intervention, the quality of parent networks remained stronger in intervention schools, but comparison schools had caught up to intervention schools in terms of network size. Our results suggest that targeted interventions can create otherwise-lacking opportunities for parents to build deep relationships with other parents in the school, and they can help parents meet other parents more quickly than they otherwise would. This advantage may be small, as the intervention boosted parent network quality by about 0.18 standard deviations in the long term and, on average, helped parents meet another half a parent in the first year than they would have met otherwise. Still, even a small improvement in network quality may provide important resources for parents otherwise lacking school-based relationships, and meeting parents sooner may be beneficial in low-income Latinx communities where educational inequalities surface early and grow over time (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017; DiPrete & Eirich, 2006).

FAST's impact on the quality and size of parent networks raises important questions about how this occurs. Previous research describes two ways that FAST helps structure interactions so that parents meet and deepen relationships with other parents (Shoji et al., 2014). First, specific program processes generate the kinds of interactions necessary for building relationships characterized by trust, shared values, and mutual expectations. Second, FAST creates a collective experience in the school setting that builds solidarity among parents, around the shared identity of being "FAST parents," and helps them see themselves as part of a larger collective. While FAST is not the only avenue for deepening parent relationships in school settings, our findings show that the establishment of deep relationships may be inhibited in the absence of formal school structures that facilitate parent interaction.

Limitations

Although we implemented our study in two cities and multiple schools, the sample mainly represents low-income, predominantly Latinx elementary school contexts. It is unclear whether these findings would extend to other

underresourced communities with different racial and ethnic compositions or even to other Latinx communities. At the same time, the study populations were diverse in that Phoenix has a more recent Mexican immigrant population, while San Antonio is home to earlier generation Mexican Americans. Furthermore, San Antonio is a minority-majority city in a minority-majority state (Texas), and thus might be a less hostile context for the Mexican-origin community than Arizona, particularly in light of the upsurge in anti-immigration policies in Arizona. Future research should explore whether school-based relationship-building processes look similar in other types of community contexts.

Finally, while the study provides a unique opportunity to examine the formation and effects of both the size and quality of parent networks, the data represent the specific context of our study locations from 2008 to 2013. Nationally, much has changed in the intervening years around anti-immigration rhetoric and policies that uniquely affect Latinx communities. At the same time, much of what we see happening today, with threats to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and increased anti-immigrant policies, was already present in Arizona throughout our study. For example, during our visits to Phoenix, we observed countless billboards and radio advertisements asking residents to call the "illegal alien" hotline to report undocumented individuals to authorities. This type of hostile anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx sentiment continues today and has spread and heightened since the 2016 presidential election (Ee & Gándara, 2019).

Implications for Practice

Our results suggest that a targeted family engagement program can increase the size and quality of parent networks, but such targeted efforts may not be cost-effective and may be infeasible for some schools. However, schools can promote the development of strong parent networks by strategically embedding facilitative opportunities for relationship building within their organizational processes (Small, 2009). In light of our findings, we offer two recommendations for how schools can facilitate the formation of parent networks, even in the absence of a targeted intervention.

First, schools should provide more frequent opportunities for parents to meet and interact throughout the year. Parents in our study commonly cited PTA/PTO meetings and children's school performances as rare occasions when schools intentionally brought parents together. However, as mentioned previously, parents frequently reported little interest in PTA/PTO, which they saw as a bureaucratic organization with little relevance for their children's educational success. Many parents reported that they attended school performances alongside other parents, yet most of them did not interact with other parents while there, and for those who did, it tended to be brief and just the one time. While children's performances successfully

gather parents at the school, they do not provide sufficiently regular opportunities for parents to interact. Thus, an important first step is for schools to offer events throughout the school year that bring parents together regularly and allow for repeated and sustained interaction.

Second, schools should intentionally design events that gather parents in ways that encourage interaction among them. Many parents we interviewed noted that children's school performances did not actively encourage or make it easier for parents to engage with one another. Instead, the focus of these performances was on watching children perform rather than interacting with other parents, and chairs set up in rows made it easy for parents to keep to themselves. While performances effectively gathered parents in the same room, parents were left to initiate conversations on their own, which many did not feel comfortable doing. Schools might encourage parent interaction at events by setting up chairs at round tables instead of in rows, providing food or other focal points (e.g., children's artwork displays) around which parents can gather, or including facilitated get-to-know-you activities for parents. For example, schools could start children's performances by asking parents to turn to their neighbors, introduce themselves, and respond to a discussion prompt or question. This would remove the burden of initiating conversation from parents and encourage interactions that promote relationship development (Fehr, 1996; Shoji et al., 2014). Schools can also consider network-building opportunities as a factor when making decisions about day-to-day processes that involve parents. For example, school policies that require parents to stay in their cars during pickup and drop-off times likely limit parent connections more than if schools were to provide a designated area for parents to wait for their children. This pickup and drop-off example highlights how parent network formation can be shaped by schools' organizational policies, even if seemingly unrelated. Schools interested in supporting parent engagement can review existing policies to consider how they may facilitate or impede parents' ability to meet and interact with one another.

In total, our work demonstrates the intentional efforts required by schools not only to establish parent networks but also to foster deeper, trusting relationships. In the absence of intentional efforts, strong school-based relationships may be limited to the most outgoing parents. Providing opportunities to interact and facilitating interactions in these settings may allow parents to more fully recognize their shared interests and develop relationships that support their children's educational success.

Appendix A

Full Final Model Results for Parent Network Size

Parent Network Size (No. of Parents Known)	Coefficient	*SE*	*t* Statistic	*df*	*p*
Baseline					
Intercept (γ_{000})	2.916	0.057452	50.760	45	<.001
FAST (γ_{001})	−0.318	0.115817	−2.749	45	.009
Cohort (γ_{002})	−0.144	0.104930	−1.371	45	.177
Randomization Block 1 (γ_{003})	−0.020	0.127712	−0.158	45	.875
Randomization Block 2 (γ_{004})	−0.098	0.174988	−0.562	45	.576
Randomization Block 3 (γ_{005})	−0.375	0.147990	−2.535	45	.015
Randomization Block 4 (γ_{006})	−0.066	0.145723	−0.456	45	.650
Female child (γ_{010})	0.085	0.064998	1.307	2967	.192
Federal school lunch program eligible (γ_{020})	−0.374	0.097325	−3.845	2967	<.001
Latinx/English-dominant (γ_{030})	0.075	0.127061	0.587	2967	.557
Latinx/Spanish-dominant (γ_{040})	1.009	0.161223	6.255	2967	<.001
Non-Latinx, non-White (γ_{050})	−0.119	0.201483	−0.590	2967	.555
First growth period [a]					
Year 1 (γ_{100})	0.362	0.049583	7.301	50	<.001
Year 1 * FAST (γ_{101})	0.552	0.098761	5.590	50	<.001
Second growth period [b]					
Years 2–3 (γ_{200})	0.014	0.034147	0.404	50	.688
Years 23 * FAST (γ_{201})	−0.129	0.068702	−1.873	50	.066

Note. FAST = Families and Schools Together program. Number of families = 2,973, number of time points = 7,497. From authors' analysis of available parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure.

[a]First growth period spans from baseline to first follow-up (spring of first-grade year). [b]Second growth period spans from first through third grade follow-up (spring of third-grade year).

Appendix B

Full Final Model Results for Parent Relationship Quality

Parent Relationship Quality (Degree of Trust, Reciprocity, and Shared Expectations)	Coefficient	*SE*	*t* Statistic	*df*	*p*
Baseline					
Intercept (γ_{000})	1.940658	0.021296	91.128	45	<.001
FAST (γ_{001})	−0.11149	0.042896	−2.599	45	.013
Cohort (γ_{002})	−0.02885	0.03267	−0.883	45	.382
Randomization Block 1 (γ_{003})	−0.03447	0.050351	−0.685	45	.497
Randomization Block 2 (γ_{004})	−0.06547	0.066007	−0.992	45	.327
Randomization Block 3 (γ_{005})	−0.10454	0.04021	−2.600	45	.013
Randomization Block 4 (γ_{006})	−0.04579	0.037527	−1.220	45	.229
Female child (γ_{010})	0.019063	0.02835	0.672	2903	.501
Federal school lunch program eligible (γ_{020})	−0.12095	0.036835	−3.284	2903	.001
Latinx/English-dominant (γ_{030})	−0.10082	0.040814	−2.470	2903	.014
Latinx/Spanish-dominant (γ_{040})	0.471549	0.056153	8.398	2903	<.001
Non-Latinx, non-White (γ_{050})	−0.15181	0.060097	−2.526	2903	.012
First growth period [a]					
Year 1 (γ_{100})	−0.04404	0.018675	−2.358	50	.022
Year 1 * FAST (γ_{101})	0.13726	0.037541	3.656	50	.001
Second growth period [b]					
Years 2–3 (γ_{200})	0.004726	0.010207	0.463	50	.645
Years 2–3 * FAST (γ_{201})	0.012794	0.020393	0.627	50	.533

Note. Families and Schools Together program. Number of families = 2,960, number of time points = 7,343. From authors' analysis of available case parent survey data for all families with at least one observation for the outcome measure.

[a]First growth period spans from baseline to first follow-up (spring of first-grade year).

[b]Second growth period spans from first to third follow-up (spring of third-grade year).

ORCID iD

David E. Rangel https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1512-544X

Notes

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[1]See Rangel and Valdez (2017) for more details about the study's design and the culturally sensitive approach that guided the logic of the study.

[2]Activities include participatory music, a family meal, family games, one-on-one parent-child playtime, one-on-one discussions between parents, and a parent support group.

[3]No families included two parents or guardians of the same gender.

[4]We developed our surveys in consultation with national experts in education research who were familiar with the target population. We also shared our surveys with the local service agencies that had prior experience working with the target population in the study communities. These local partners provided valuable feedback to ensure surveys were jargon-free and appropriate for families. Moreover, they were particularly

helpful in ensuring the Spanish translation of surveys were suitable for the regional Spanish in each city.

[5]Debriefing sessions lasted 30 to 120 minutes. We discussed the main themes that emerged in each interview (because interviews with mothers and fathers were conducted separately and simultaneously), how those themes fit into our emerging theories about relationship development, and the questions that remained or were raised by the content of the interview. We also identified any new or particularly important topics or questions to explore further and discussed how to incorporate them into the question protocol for the next interview.

[6]We also ran models with the sample restricted to participants with data for all four time points for each outcome; the results were similar to those from the models with the full sample (results available upon request).

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