Conceptualizing Parental Support in K-12 Online Education

Courtney N. Hanny
Brigham Young University

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Conceptualizing Parental Support in K-12 Online Education

Courtney N. Hanny

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

Charles R. Graham, Chair
Richard E. West
Jered Borup

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology
Brigham Young University

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External support, such as that provided by parents, plays an important role in helping students in K-12 online education engage in their education and obtain academic success. The Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework has been proposed as one way of conceptualizing the communities that support students, including the roles that parents and guardians play. Research studying parental support in online education could benefit from the structure offered from the ACE framework, but, due to the framework’s novelty, it has not been widely applied in research. The first article in this thesis sought to use the ACE framework to synthesize past research on the roles parents take when they become involved in their students’ online education. Results indicated that the framework has strong potential for understanding research on parental roles but that there are some roles discovered in the literature that do not fit cleanly in the framework. The second article further explored the ACE Framework’s application in studying parental roles by interviewing parents in another context to understand their reported roles in supporting their students. Findings for this study further validated the usefulness of the ACE framework, but also exposed patterns in the roles not covered by the ACE framework. These patterns suggest looking at the ACE framework through a systems approach rather than an egocentric model.

Keywords: learner engagement, distance education, electronic learning, virtual schools, secondary education, parent role
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my husband, who in helping me focus did more than his fair share of the dishes without a single complaint. You are the best. To our little peanut, who has indirectly created more than her fair share of dishes but has tried her best to make mom-to-be not have too many complaints. I can’t wait to meet you.

To the wonderful faculty at BYU and in my committee, whose instruction, advice, and friendship helped me get to this point. Especially for Charles Graham – who has seen me at some of my lowest points and has always helped me back up. You are all profound examples of disciple scholars.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE AND CONTENT</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 1: New Hats for Parents? Reviewing Parental Roles in K-12 Online and Blended Student Engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hats for Parents? Reviewing Parental Roles in K-12 Online and Blended Student Engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Problem Statement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Database Searches</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Expert Consultation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Reference Screening</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Total Articles</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Article Analysis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Results and Discussion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Learning Coach Roles</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting ..................................................................................................................................... 53
Data Collection ....................................................................................................................... 54
Data Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 54
Trustworthiness ....................................................................................................................... 56
Limitations .............................................................................................................................. 56
Findings and Discussion ............................................................................................................... 56
Supporting the Student Directly .............................................................................................. 57
Affective Support ..................................................................................................................... 57
Behavioral Support .................................................................................................................. 58
Cognitive Support .................................................................................................................... 59
Increasing the Parent’s Ability ................................................................................................. 59
Indirect Affective Roles ......................................................................................................... 60
Indirect Behavioral Roles ....................................................................................................... 61
Indirect Cognitive Roles ......................................................................................................... 62
Cultivating Student Ability ..................................................................................................... 62
Organizational Independence: Behavioral ............................................................................... 63
Emotional Resilience and Perspective: Affective ..................................................................... 64
Pursuing Course Community Support .................................................................................... 64
Selecting the Course Community .......................................................................................... 65
Connecting Student to School Resources ............................................................................. 66
Advocating ............................................................................................................................. 66
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 67
Implications for Research ....................................................................................................... 67
LIST OF TABLES

Article 1

Table 1  *ERIC (EBSCOhost) Search Terms and Results* ................................................................. 7
Table 2  *Search Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria* ........................................................................ 9
Table 3  *Parental Roles in Supporting Online Learners, as Identified in Literature* ............ 15
Table 4  *Possible Solutions to Role Confusion* ............................................................................ 25

Article 2

Table 1  *Demographics of Interview Participants Compared to Survey Respondents* .......... 52
LIST OF FIGURES

Article 1

Figure 1  PRISMA Flow Diagram .............................................................. 11

Article 2

Figure 1  Facilitators, Types, and Results of Engagement ......................... 48
Figure 2  Academic Communities of Engagement Framework .................... 49
Figure 3  Matrix Depicting Intersections Between Initial and Secondary Codes ................................................. 55
Figure 4  Parents Increasing Own Abilities: Effect on the Personal Community of Support ........................................ 60
Figure 5  Parents Cultivating Student Ability: Effect on Independent Engagement ............................................... 63
Figure 6  Parents Pursuing Course Community Support: Effect on Course Community of Support .......................................................... 65
DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This thesis contains two articles. The first is a literature review, which is entitled *New Hats for Parents? Reviewing Parental Roles in K-12 Online and Blended Student Engagement* and details the current state of research concerning parental roles. The second article, “*Someone in Their Corner*: Parental Support in Online Secondary Education,” adds new insight to the foundation established in the literature review.

Both articles in this thesis are written in an article-ready format, which means that they were written and designed to be submitted in an academic journal. While this formatting allows the thesis to be published more efficiently in a journal, it often bears with it the restriction of a word count. For example, the journal for which the second article, the thesis report, was designed requires articles to be less than about 7,000 words, all inclusive of tables and references. However, given the requirements of the university, some additional pages, appendices, and other artifacts have been included here as well.

Beyond these introductory pages and the literature review, the main additions to the journal-ready thesis report can be found in the appendices. Appendix A contains the Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval to Conduct Research. Appendix B and C include the survey and interview protocols, respectively.

Note that the references and citations used in the literature review and in the thesis report are found after each article, independent of each other.
ARTICLE 1

New Hats for Parents? Reviewing Parental Roles in K-12 Online and Blended Student Engagement

Courtney Hanny

Brigham Young University
Abstract

The fruits of this literature review include a synthesized list of parental roles in online and blended educational contexts as well as an analysis of two popular strategies for navigating parent and teacher role confusion in these contexts. These findings highlight the complex demands on parents of K-12 students in online and blended settings and reveal missing elements in existing parental involvement frameworks. In these settings the expected roles of parents and teachers are often confused, causing frustration and miscommunication on behalf of both parties. Some schools have tried to mitigate or resolve this confusion; research in these schools reveals the relative benefits and disadvantages of their chosen methods. By systematically collecting and analyzing existing research regarding parental roles in online and blended education, this review generates a repository of researched parental roles as a launching point for practitioners and for research studying parental role support.

Keywords: distance education and online learning, elementary education, learning communities, secondary education, cultural and social implications
New Hats for Parents? Reviewing Parental Roles in K-12 Online and Blended Student Engagement

Factors affecting student achievement are plentiful and have been researched in great depth; in one report, Bertolini et al. (2012) identified 15 core factors and 42 supporting elements from existing literature. One such factor, student engagement, has repeatedly been shown to lead to higher student outcomes (Hughes et al., 2008; Stout & Christenson, 2009), while its absence has been linked to student attrition (Henderson, 2018). However, just knowing that student achievement and engagement are linked is not sufficient; researchers and educators need to know how to raise student engagement in order to reap the benefits of this connection. This is especially relevant to K-12 student engagement, as students in this age group may need external support to reach the motivation necessary to excel in their courses (Borup et al., 2020).

Parents are one source of this support, as they have been shown to have an influence in K-12 student engagement in a variety of classroom settings (Black, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007) and can help students remain cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally engaged in their schooling (Borup et al., 2014). However, most of the research around parental involvement and its effect on K-12 student engagement has occurred within in-person classroom contexts. This research includes two commonly cited frameworks from Epstein (1987) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 2005), which define parental motivations, parental roles, student perception of parental roles, and the consequential effects on student achievement. Despite the widespread application of these frameworks in research examining parental involvement, both of these frameworks were developed exclusively in the context of an in-person environment.
While traditional, in-person learning remains viable, there is also growth in the number of students enrolled in online and blended classrooms as technology in classrooms increases exponentially (Gulosino & Miron, 2017; Watson et al., 2015). The attempt to generalize in-person frameworks to these contexts may be unwise; although the line between what is considered online or blended is still being disputed (Hrastinski, 2019), it is clear that both vary from their in-person counterpart (Pulham et al., 2018). Parental involvement research in both online and blended domains is in its infancy, therefore this article examines parental involvement in any model that has at least some of the instruction, not just homework, delivered asynchronously, usually through technological means. While this net is large, it captures the increased responsibility that parents have as more educational activities take place outside of a traditional classroom.

This transfer of responsibility makes parental involvement in online and blended contexts look different from that of traditional classrooms, as these contexts are inherently more asynchronous and home-based (Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). Blended and online instruction is also more dependent on student control and choice (Clayton Christensen Institute, n.d.), which increases the demand on student engagement and on the actors, such as parents, who support this engagement. Some researchers refer to parents in these contexts as learning coaches, in order to emphasize their importance and to be more inclusive to the variety of individuals who might play this role (Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). As parental involvement can impact student engagement, this interaction and influence needs to be understood in the unique online and blended context.
1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the importance of defining these roles, some studies point out the lack of research studying parental roles in online and blended student engagement (Borup, Chambers, & Srimson, 2019; Henderson, 2018). However, the problem is not that this research is missing; but rather, the research that does exist is scattered and usually contains only small samples and case studies. One purpose of this literature review is to gather these articles and synthesize their commonalities. Understanding the parental role in increasing student engagement is even more important given the projected increase in interest in online and blended education after the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020). The current lack of understanding about the role of learning coaches causes conflict and frustration on behalf of both parents and teachers (Borup, 2016), which practitioners have had varying levels of success at resolving (Franklin, Burdette, et al., 2015). To help clarify the learning coach role, I explore the following in this literature review:

1. How does existing research inform our understanding of parental roles within online and blended educational contexts?
2. What does existing research say about the relationship parental roles have with other support sources, such as teachers and students?
3. What techniques to navigate these relationships are explored in existing literature, and what are their respective strengths and weaknesses?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

While frameworks specifically depicting parental influence in K-12 online and blended contexts are lacking, research has provided general frameworks studying student engagement. The Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework describes the support students
require for successful affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (Borup et al., 2014; Borup et al., 2020). This framework argues that student intrinsic engagement is supported by two sources: (a) Course Community of Support and (b) Personal Community of Support. The Course Community of Support, reflecting support from actors within the course environment, such as teachers, administrators, and classmates, has been well researched. In fact, entire frameworks, such as Communities of Inquiry (Garrison et al., 1999) explore the idea of course community support in depth.

However, Personal Communities of Support are less well defined, as they contain many supportive actors whose involvement extends outside the time and space limitations of the course. These actors include parents, guardians, siblings, extended family members, neighbors, friends, and other external supports. Parents and guardians, or learning coaches, are primary and universal actors within a student’s Personal Community of Support, especially because they often connect K-12 students to tutors and other supports. Despite the importance of the learning coach, research has yet to agree on what that role encompasses and how it should be defined.

2. Methodology

In order to analyze parental influence on student engagement in online and blended education, I implemented the following search techniques.

2.1 Database Searches

I found articles by searching two databases: ERIC (EBSCOhost) and Google Scholar. ERIC key terms were each searched by topic, then these results were combined to generate searches for “parent elementary” and “parent secondary” as seen in Table 1. I narrowed the search to include peer-reviewed results from 2000-2021. Due to the quickly expanding and changing technological landscape, this time frame was generous enough to encapsulate relevant
research regarding blended and online practices. I included conference proceedings marked as peer-reviewed within the search. The articles from these narrowed, combined searches were screened according to the criteria outlined in section 2.4.

I then searched Google Scholar in two phases, each time screening the first 50 results by title. The first search included terms “parental involvement" AND "student" AND ("blended" OR "online" OR "distance") and yielded 5 new articles. The second included ("parental engagement" OR "parent involvement") AND "student" AND ("blended learning" OR "online learning" OR "distance learning") and added 18 articles.

Table 1

**ERIC (EBSCOhost) Search Terms and Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Shorthand</th>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Parents” (Unfiltered for date or peer-review)</td>
<td>DE &quot;Family Involvement&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent Participation&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent School Relationship&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent Child Relationship&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent Influence&quot; OR DE &quot;Parents as Teachers&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent Student Relationship&quot; OR DE &quot;Parent Teacher Cooperation&quot; OR DE &quot;Family Relationship&quot; OR DE &quot;Family School Relationship&quot;</td>
<td>68,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Elementary” (Unfiltered)</td>
<td>DE &quot;Elementary Education&quot; OR DE &quot;Elementary Secondary Education&quot; OR DE &quot;Primary Education&quot; OR DE &quot;Elementary Schools&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 1&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 2&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 3&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 4&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 5&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 6&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 7&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 8&quot; OR DE &quot;Intermediate Grades&quot; OR DE &quot;Kindergarten&quot;</td>
<td>421,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Secondary” (Unfiltered)</td>
<td>DE &quot;Secondary Education&quot; OR DE &quot;Elementary Secondary Education&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 10&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 11&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 12&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 7&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 8&quot; OR DE &quot;Grade 9&quot; OR DE &quot;High Schools&quot; OR DE &quot;Junior High Schools&quot; OR DE &quot;Secondary Schools&quot; OR DE &quot;Adolescent&quot; OR DE &quot;High School Students&quot;</td>
<td>454,666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 Expert Consultation

I also contacted the first author of the ACE Framework for recommendations concerning this research topic (Borup, personal communication, February 8, 2021). He identified articles and researchers’ CVs he thought would be beneficial. His referrals led to the addition of 17 more articles; 3 of which were included in the introduction due to their lack of blended or online
emphasis, 2 were subsequently screened out, and 12 were added as new articles for analysis in the review.

2.3 Reference Screening

After isolating articles using the above methods, I identified the top three most relevant articles based on their related research questions (Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018). I analyzed the reference lists of these articles to identify additional studies not gathered through my other methodologies—this increased the article count by nine.

2.4 Total Articles

After conducting each search, I analyzed abstracts for relevance according to the criteria in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Search Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sample included parents, students, or teachers in K-12 contexts</td>
<td>• Sample included only early childhood or higher education contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom model involved distance or blended education</td>
<td>• Classroom model only consisted of technology integration within a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Study drew conclusions or made observations regarding parental role as</td>
<td>traditional face-to-face model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well as student affective, behavioral, or cognitive engagement</td>
<td>• Study had no conclusions or observations regarding parental role, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Written in English</td>
<td>student academic, behavioral, or affective engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Written in a language other than English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then deleted repeats using Zotero’s duplication search, resulting in a total of 6 articles for “parent elementary,” 26 for “parent secondary,” and 18 for “parent general K-12.” Due to some online schools’ lack of division between elementary and secondary grade levels, the third category became relevant. Of note is the diversity in settings for the collected research, as
included studies were completed in eight different countries, with the United States, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Australia being the most prominent.

Figure 1 shows this process within a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram, which is the current standard for systematic and thorough reviews (Page et al., 2021).
Figure 1

**PRISMA Flow Diagram**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Records identified through database searching</th>
<th>Additional records identified through other sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric (EBSCOhost; n=78)</td>
<td>Expert Consultation (n=17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar (n=18)</td>
<td>References (n=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=97)</td>
<td>Total (n=26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↓ ↓

Records before duplicates removed

(n=123)

↓

Records screened

(n=118)

→ Records excluded

(n=4)

4 not full-text article

↓

Full-text articles, abstracts assessed for eligibility

(n=114)

→ Articles excluded, with reasons

(n=64)

5 not related to technology

5 statistical reports

24 not online/blended technology integration

30 not parental influence over student

↓

Studies included in qualitative synthesis

(n=50)
2.5 Article Analysis

After filtering based on abstract relevance, I analyzed each article with the goal of answering the research questions. I isolated each parental role mentioned by the researchers and sorted them into the type of engagement that they support according to the ACE Framework. Especially of note were roles not already included within the framework and roles that were frequent sources of role confusion between teachers and parents, such as interpreting and enforcing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). To understand the relationship parental roles have with other support sources, I reviewed articles addressing confusion between teachers’ and learning coaches’ roles as well as any contradictory findings about ideal parental roles. Finally, I identified possible solutions to role confusion within the studies and compiled the benefits and disadvantages voiced by the researchers.

3. Results and Discussion

In my analysis of learning coach roles, I also discovered the diversity of the learning coaches’ situations. Demographics from each study varied widely. Studies showed that many learning coaches are female, with mothers taking the role more often than fathers (Beck et al., 2016; Black, 2009; Novianti & Garzia, 2020). Some studies found that respondents were white and educated (Black, 2009) while other studies’ respondents primarily had low socioeconomic status (Curtis & Werth, 2015) or attended schools with greater-than-average minority or special needs populations (Beck et al., 2014).

Learning coaches also differ in why they choose to enroll their students in online and blended programs. A substantial number transfer from homeschooling environments (Borup, 2016), which is a curious statistic as homeschooling populations typically have higher success rates than average students (Hasler Waters, 2012), while online schools seem to have lower
(Henderson, 2018). However, ex-homeschooling populations often decide to transition when parents no longer have time to homeschool or, in the higher grades, when students need a path to receive a diploma or when curriculum becomes more difficult (Borup & Stevens, 2016).

However, not all learning coaches come from a homeschooling background. Motivation for transferring students to an online setting from a traditional school may differ based on the student’s age. Younger students are often switched for greater flexibility in curriculum or because of special academic needs, while older students are more likely to switch to avoid conflict, bullying, and other behavioral issues (Erb, 2004; Henderson, 2018). Beyond these differences, learning coaches may be motivated by a desire for individualized curriculum, for higher quality education, or by other behavioral or structural needs (Beck et al., 2016; Borup & Stevens, 2016; Borup, Walters, & Call-Cummings, 2019; Curtis & Werth, 2015).

In summary, online learning coaches typically choose online school deliberately, either to gain something their children could not get through traditional- or homeschooling, or to avoid something they, the parents or the students, disliked about a previous method. In choosing these routes, most parents consider the needs of their students rather than the role that they are capable of or desire to have in their children’s education.

### 3.1 Learning Coach Roles

The roles of a learning coach are different than the traditional- or homeschool parent. The original ACE framework outlined some roles that learning coaches have and distinguished them by the type of engagement that they support in students (see bolded and underlined roles in Table 3). In-person frameworks also discuss some parental roles, although uncertainty about the transferability of these roles to the unique online context creates a need for cautious interpretation. For example, the Epstein Framework (1987) presented four parental roles:
providing for basic needs, communicating with the school, contributing at home, and
volunteering at school. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Framework (2005) proposed that
student perception of parental role is more important than the role parents actually have. Students
are most successful when they perceive their parents as being encouraging and motivating, or
when parents monitor, model, inspire self-regulation, reinforce principles students are learning,
offer additional instruction, and help students connect with their teachers (Hoover-Dempsey &
Sandler, 2005).

These frameworks, as conceptualization of theory, strove for parsimony; however,
research in online and blended schools show a number of additional roles not presented in these
frameworks. As a result, teachers and parents struggle to understand and define their roles due to
poor communication and unfamiliarity with the new modality (Borup et al., 2015).
Understanding and defining these roles is important in communicating what learning coaches can
expect as their children transition into online schooling.
Table 3

Parental Roles in Supporting Online Learners, as Identified in Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective Roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love/Nurture</strong></td>
<td>Supporting students with physical and emotional needs; forming personal relationships with students.</td>
<td>Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup &amp; Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Cheng &amp; Weng, 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivate</strong></td>
<td>Choosing motivation strategies based on knowledge of students, including incentives, rewards, and punishments.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup &amp; Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014; Keaton &amp; Gilbert, 2020; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Sorensen, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer</strong></td>
<td>Assisting with online school to demonstrate commitment to student’s success and education.</td>
<td>Borup et al., 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instill Perspective</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Hasler Waters, 2012; Keaton &amp; Gilbert, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encourage</strong></td>
<td>Reflecting positivity and praise about student performance and education in general.</td>
<td>Bird, 2015; Black, 2009; Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Keaton &amp; Gilbert, 2020; Liu et al., 2010; Oviatt et al., 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set Expectations</strong></td>
<td>Setting high expectations about work quality and purpose.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Cheng &amp; Weng, 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Role</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Citations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide Access</strong></td>
<td>Securing technology, tools, and internet access necessary for learning as well as providing a designated learning space and technology support.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Oviatt et al., 2018; Sorensen, 2012; Strom et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor</strong></td>
<td>Supervising and tracking seat time and attendance, internet use, grades in Learning Management System (LMS), progress compared to pacing guide provided by teachers, performance, and assignment completion. Keeping students on task and honest in their work. Discussing progress with the student.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup &amp; Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Cheng &amp; Weng, 2017; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Keaton &amp; Gilbert, 2020; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Oviatt et al., 2018; Stahl et al., 2017; Strom et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organize</strong></td>
<td>Helping students: • Create and keep daily, weekly, or monthly schedule • Create ideal physical learning space • Strategize own improvement • Structure activities to fit needs and dispositions</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup &amp; Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014; Keaton &amp; Gilbert, 2020; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Oviatt et al., 2018; Stahl et al., 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
<td>Showing good behavior in close proximity, with the idea that the student will copy it.</td>
<td>Bird, 2015; Black, 2009; Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2015; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Liu et al., 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Role</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Citations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage</td>
<td>Accompanying the student while working to ensure student work is completed on time. Keeping a strict watch on student progression.</td>
<td>Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014; Oviatt et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2019; Sorensen, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurture Relationships</td>
<td>Instigating student-teacher and student-student interactions.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters &amp; Leong, 2014; Oviatt et al., 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advise Enrollments</td>
<td>Helping students decide which classes to take and in which form.</td>
<td>Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup et al., 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cognitive Roles**

| **Instruct**          | Conducting lessons, teaching or tutoring. Also suggesting additional topics to study as enrichment. | Bird, 2015; Black, 2009; Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, & Srimson, 2019; Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Clark et al., 2005; Curtis & Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020; Liu et al., 2010; Oviatt et al., 2018 |
| Assist with Assignments | Guiding students, assisting with research, and being available for questions as a first access point. | Curtis & Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014; Oviatt et al., 2018; Strom et al., 2009 |
## REVIEWING PARENTAL ROLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>Pushing for special education needs or additional support.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Franklin, Rice, et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Development</td>
<td>Aiding in the development of study skills, integrity, reading habits, persistence, and critical thinking</td>
<td>Bird, 2015; Black, 2009; Borup et al., 2017; Borup &amp; Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015; Cheng &amp; Weng, 2017; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2010; Oviatt et al., 2018; Sorensen, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Self</td>
<td>Learning content and software before teaching students. Attending class with students to learn. Adjusting own expectations.</td>
<td>Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Rice et al., 2019; Sorensen, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage Resources</td>
<td>Finding materials for extension, differentiation, and student needs. Recruiting additional help.</td>
<td>Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Rice et al., 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Lessons</td>
<td>Preparing content and planning future instruction.</td>
<td>Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020; Stahl et al., 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with Teacher</td>
<td>Communicating with the online school and teachers. Asking teachers about appropriate developmental levels for students.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup, Chambers, &amp; Srimson, 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Curtis &amp; Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters et al., 2018; Oviatt et al., 2018; Sorensen, 2012; Stahl et al., 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze Student Needs</td>
<td>Determining online readiness, student academic level, and student needs.</td>
<td>Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012; Novianti &amp; Garzia, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Bolded and underlined roles were also identified in ACE (Borup et al., 2014; Borup et al., 2020)
3.1.1 Summary of Learning Coach Roles

Based on prevalence in the literature, the most widespread learning coach roles include motivating, monitoring, organizing, and instructing, all of which were included in the ACE Framework (see Table 3). However, some roles need to be added to the framework in order to capture the full gamut of learning coach responsibilities. These include encouraging, managing, aiding personal development, preparing lessons, reinforcing and assessing, and communicating with the teacher (Table 3). Some examples of parents fulfilling these roles were found by Hasler Waters (2012). In a case study in a Hawai’i cyber charter school, she studied the experiences of five learning coaches through semi-structured interviews, an online survey, online focus groups, diary logs, and materials given to learning coaches at this school. Learning coaches helped their children manage their content by reviewing their assignments and submitting them to a learning management system. When the students were downcast that their sibling was performing better in a subject than they were, learning coaches aided their personal development by teaching that every individual is different and has unique strengths. Learning coaches’ unique knowledge about the understanding of their children sometimes motivated them to have the student redo a lesson, even if the student had already passed an online test, because the students “did not grasp the concept or . . . had skimmed through the lesson and [the learning coach] would ask them follow up questions that would reveal what they had missed” (pp. 170-171). Learning coaches also commented that their awareness of exactly what their students were learning allowed them to reinforce their students’ schoolwork with real life examples, such as applying fractions to baking or using scientific knowledge to classify sea cucumbers on the beach.

Other learning coach roles are less prevalent in the research, such as advocating, analyzing student needs, and attending training. This lack of emphasis could suggest a lack of
importance or a role where the actor is fluid, indicating potential for miscommunication or role confusion.

### 3.1.2 Analysis of Learning Coach Roles

Many articles emphasized that learning coach roles changed as students mature and develop. While not exclusively based on age, researchers found that students in elementary school required more monitoring, instructing, and overall time from their learning coaches than those in secondary (Henderson, 2018; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Stahl et al., 2017). Differences were also noted for students with special needs; studies found comparatively large demands on parents of special education students to analyze student needs, prepare lessons, and differentiate materials (Franklin, Burdette, et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2017).

Even without the increased demand from these situations, learning coaches often found that the load was more taxing or isolating than they originally predicted or felt qualified for (Downes, 2013). This is especially true as learning coaches tried to juggle a dual role of both parent and learning coach and found that attempts to fulfill their educational responsibilities often strained their family relationships (Borup, Walters, & Call-Cummings, 2019; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). However, despite this load increase, parents were often grateful for their new roles as learning coaches, as it allowed them to feel more involved in and aware of their child’s academic journey and growth (Bubb & Jones, 2020; Novianti & Garzia, 2020).

A rare exception in the literature were schools that allowed students to enroll in online classes without parental approval or involvement. In these cases, parents were often unaware of their child's enrollment in an online course (Borup, Chambers, & Srimson, 2019; Borup et al., 2017).
3.2 An Interplay of Roles

As previous researchers described and categorized learning coach roles, they also identified the roles of other actors in students’ ACE framework communities. This indicates that the sources of support within the ACE Framework do not operate independently of each other; rather, they each affect how much support the others can and need to give.

3.2.1 Student Roles

Students’ intrinsic motivation to engage affects the necessary involvement from the learning coach. While this is most likely true of students’ academic and affective engagement as well, evidence in the research best supports that student behavioral engagement and their ability to self-regulate affects the behavioral support that learning coaches must provide (Borup et al., 2013; Curtis & Werth, 2015). This is significant because some online enrollments are motivated by behavioral problems in traditional schools. Parents may feel that defiant or disruptive behavior will improve in online education, but research indicates that the transition to online schooling may make these issues worse (Borup, Walters, Call-Cummings, 2019), especially for students with special needs (Rice et al., 2019) and for learning coaches who struggle with discipline (Hasler Waters, 2012).

3.2.2 Teacher Roles

The roles of online teachers are also diverse and complicated, but for the sake of scope, this review will only address those that directly involve working with the learning coach. However, other roles of online teachers are significant in that they may overlap with those of the learning coach and cause role confusion, miscommunication, and other conflicts (Borup et al., 2015; Downes, 2013; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020; Oviatt et al., 2018). Therefore, the most important teacher role to discuss here is communicating with the learning coach (Graziano & Feher, 2016;
Te Kiri, 2018). Having an open, two-sided conversation is key in learning coach and online teacher cooperation. Oviatt et al. (2018) illustrates this point in his analysis of 1,055 surveys of students enrolled in online high school classes and nine follow-up interviews with parents and students. He found that parents and students became increasingly frustrated when the structure and expectations of the course were not made clear. For example, a parent-student combination realized halfway through a course that the student was not progressing at an appropriate pace. In this case, the teacher was expecting the parent and student to organize a pacing guide, but the parent was unaware of this role nor felt like she had the necessary information to fulfill it. As a contrary example, teachers in Borup et al. (2017) actively combated the tendency of students to enroll in online classes without informing their parents by requiring students to receive signed permission. These forms asked parents to confirm that they had talked to their child about taking an online class and understood the implications thereof.

Secondary teacher roles include supporting the learning coach and focusing on the content and cognitive support that is unique to the online teacher, and for which the learning coach may be unqualified (Hasler Waters, 2012).

3.2.3 Role Overlap and Confusion

This intermingling of the influences of each support community is the most obvious in regard to teacher and parent roles. In some situations, parents are entirely ignorant of their roles, either from not understanding that online classes are real classes or not knowing their student is in an online class (Borup et al., 2017). These researchers found that parents are also sometimes unaware that online courses have teachers whom the parents can contact should they need help. In other cases, the parents may know there is a teacher, but find that it is faster to use the Internet to help the students themselves (Cwetna, 2016; Hasler Waters, 2012). In each of these cases, the
important collaboration between the two communities of support does not exist and the weight of supporting the child is unbalanced. This is especially dangerous for children who have IEPs or other special needs. In a forum with administrators representing seven of the United States and the District of Columbia, these leaders admitted that the differentiation of parent and teacher roles still needs to be clarified in regard to IEPs in their states (Franklin, Rice, et al., 2015; see also Basham et al., 2016). They mentioned the especially problematic situation of parents not recognizing that it is often their responsibility to notify the school that their student has an IEP, resulting in these students not getting the help they need.

Other times students are getting support from parents and teachers, but the two support systems are trying to fulfill the same role. For example, Cwetna (2016) found that, while parents saw identifying student needs and providing assistance as roles that teachers held, they also identified these roles as two of their primary roles as well. Cwetna attributes this to “an underlying desire for teachers and parents to work together;” however, the results from her study indicate that more frequently parents try to review concepts themselves to teach their children and wait to contact the teacher until both student and parent are lost (pp. 118). This coincides with other researchers' findings that parents often turn to outside resources and the Internet before reaching out to teachers (Hasler Waters, 2012). Students often find that it is easier to ask a parent their questions, as the fastest source of support, than to email a teacher (Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). Oviatt (Oviatt et al., 2018) found that students enter online learning already thinking that the majority of their support will come from their parents, and throughout the online class receive instructional help from their parents more than twice as often as they do their teachers. Parents taking on the role of instructing can be problematic because without the “knowledge and
skills to do so” their efforts could “just confuse [the student] more” (Borup, 2016, pp. 77; see also Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012).

Beyond academics, ex-homeschooling parents may be surprised by the structure or inflexibility imposed by online teachers, while parents coming from both homeschool and brick and mortar schools may be unprepared to step up and assume all the new roles that may be expected of them (Borup, Walters, & Call-Cummings, 2019). For example, Borup, Walters, and Call-Cummings (2019) tell of a mother who, tired of the work involved in homeschooling, decided to enroll her last child in an online school. She found the experience “grueling” because she still had to “sit side by side with him for the first 4-6 weeks” but was no longer able to enjoy spontaneous educational trips or deep conversations about interests because he now had school-imposed deadlines (pp. 101). A teacher expressed frustration at ex-homeschooling parents who wanted to “unilaterally extend assignment due dates” since they were accustomed to that level of control (Borup, 2016, p. 73).

3.3 Possible Solutions to Role Confusion

Online schools and practitioners are not oblivious to frustrations caused when learning coaches and teachers do not agree about their respective roles. In answer to these conflicts and more, two trends have emerged as solutions to role confusion: parent training and adopting a facilitator model.

3.3.1 Parent Training

One of the most commonly suggested implications for research, and a common practice within online school communities, is the idea of training parents. This can take the form of providing materials at the beginning of the semester, often with an orientation video, or by providing continuous opportunities for learning coach training. Major strengths of this model
include increased involvement and engagement on behalf of both learning coach and student
(Ball & Skrzypek, 2019; Bond, 2019; Borup, 2016; Ramma et al., 2018; Zaka, 2013). However,
the results differ broadly depending on execution and individual circumstance, and can result in
any combination of student, parent, and teacher needs not being met (see Table 4; Borup &

Table 4

Possible Solutions to Role Confusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
<th>Train Parents</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
<th>Train Facilitators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible Advantages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased student buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lighten parental load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased parent buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organizing</td>
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<td>• Managing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Aiding development</td>
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<td>• Mentoring</td>
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<td>• Facilitating</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic disciplining</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Enforcing IEP</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Online facilitator: cost-savings since no building needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible Disadvantages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student Needs Not Met</strong></td>
<td>• May led to parent-regulated, instead of self-regulated, adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>School Needs Not Met</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent helping may turn into cheating</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Online facilitator: cannot take all the parental roles listed under advantages, such as managing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Special Education needs may not be met</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Parents Needs Not Met</strong></td>
<td>• Training takes time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents have limited qualifications; training would not be enough to make them teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Training requires a lot of parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Family Needs Not Met</strong></td>
<td>• Current trainings not well-used</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Current trainings not working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In-person facilitator: reduces desired flexibility</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Factor | Possible Solutions
--- | ---
Train Parents | Train Facilitators

**Teachers Needs Not Met**
- Difficult to monitor parents

**Requirements**
- Communication expectations and role definition clearly defined
- Realistic time commitment clearly defined (especially for Special Education)
- Done proactively, not after student failing
- Work with parents’ needs
  - Learning Management System/Dashboard/Parent Portal
  - Consider needs other than access
  - Training on effective academic disciplining within parent role
  - Culture

- Communication expectations and role definition clearly defined
- Still takes time
- Still takes training
  - Even if already an in-person teacher

As researchers have analyzed parent needs within existing training programs, they have found requirements necessary for training programs to be effective. The first and most frequent requirement is communication between the learning coach, the teacher, and the school. Without expectations for communication, role distribution, and expected time commitment detailed and understood by all involved parties, many of the advantages of this solution turn into frustrations (Borup, 2016; Borup et al., 2017; Cottingham, 2020; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). Additionally, these training programs must be done upfront, before students have already become disengaged (Borup, 2016). Learning coaches need to be empowered to perform their roles by having access to Learning Management Systems or Parent Dashboards (Borup et al., 2017; Borup, Chambers, & Stimson, 2019; Davidovitch & Yavich, 2015; Stahl et al., 2017), culturally relevant training (Stahl et al., 2017; Te Kiri, 2018), and help understanding how to discipline within a school context (Borup, Walters, & Call-Cummings, 2019; Hasler Waters,
2012). Orientation videos and packets may not be enough (Borup et al., 2017); parents may need guides (Oviatt et al., 2018), mentors (Franklin, Burdette, et al., 2015), or professional trainers (Novianti & Garzia, 2020; Stahl et al., 2017). Schools planning to implement teacher training should consider how to promote their training programs so they do not become unused (Hasler Waters, 2012) or ineffective (Borup, Chambers, & Stimson, 2019). These training sessions also need to be efficient, as one of the main obstacles for learning coaches is the time it takes to fill their roles (Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012).

### 3.3.2 Facilitators

The second prominent solution with the literature was recruiting or hiring a facilitator for the student’s online school. Facilitators can do their work remotely, using technology, or in-person. They can be a full-time facilitator or a teacher who has been assigned to facilitate a separate group of online students. Depending on these characteristics, a facilitator can take many of the behavioral, cognitive, and affective roles of a learning coach (Table 4; Borup et al., 2017; Freidhoff et al., 2015). However, these characteristics also determine how many of the advantages of online learning are preserved, as some facilitator programs resemble computer lab instruction and eliminate the flexibility of online learning and the economic advantages of not needing a physical space to meet (Freidhoff et al., 2015).

The requirements of facilitator instruction closely mirror those of the parent training solution. Facilitators still need extensive training to fulfill their role, even if they are already in-person teachers (Borup et al., 2017; Freidhoff et al., 2015). Expectations about communication and role division still need to be clear (Borup et al., 2017) as there are now three individuals who need to communicate, but among whom the burden can be shared. In-person facilitators also
require a physical location with technology in which the student can work, whereas online facilitators do not, and cannot, support students’ behavioral engagement to the same extent.

4. Conclusion

The existing literature on parental roles in K-12 student engagement has emphasized traditional, in-person schooling. As such, there are few frameworks and conceptualizations of parental roles in online and blended education. Previous research has confirmed their importance in these contexts, even giving them the title of learning coach to emphasize their increased role (Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). The sole online and blended framework that acknowledges and defines parental roles, the Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework (Borup et al., 2020), proposes a broad perspective of students’ Communities of Support. This overview situates parents as one actor within a larger category of the Personal Community of Support and studies their roles through a simplified, parsimonious approach. While important for theory building, these simplistic definitions are insufficient for informing the practical and real experiences of learning coaches and for facilitating communication about the full breadth of roles that they are often expected to fill. This review has searched the literature for a more complete picture of the roles of a learning coach as well as how practitioners have negotiated the need for increased coordination with parents.

4.1 Implications for Research

Past literature has revealed many of the roles that actors in the Personal Community of Support are expected, or have taken upon themselves, to fulfill. Some of these roles are captured in the ACE framework, while many are not specifically stated within the framework. Interestingly, some of the roles left out of the ACE framework were captured by the in-person Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler framework (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005), which shows
that some roles may be universal to the Personal Community of Support. Future research could compare the way these roles are manifested in online and in-person contexts to see if there are nuanced differences in how parents fulfill these responsibilities.

Research could also analyze in which school environments the various roles identified in this literature occur and what their respective effects are on student engagement. The sparse research in each variety of blended and online contexts required this review to take a more aggregate perspective on the roles parents play. However, future work could take the general categories of parental engagement found in the literature to then narrow down which types of involvement are most prevalent in online, blended, facilitator-led, etc. classrooms. This research looked at the roles parents are filling in these contexts, but it was beyond the scope to identify the relative influence of each role on student engagement. Prevalence in parental actions does not necessarily translate into importance; future research may track which roles lead to the most impact on student engagement. Further research could also investigate the roles that are mentioned less often in the research and discover whether their lack of attention is caused by oversight, lack of importance, or fluidity in which actor fulfills those roles.

Finally, while this research categorized parental roles, I found no literature on why parents fulfill their roles in online and blended contexts. It seems that researchers primarily rely on the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005) to explain the motivations behind parental involvement. However, just as the roles of parents differ from the traditional educational context to an online and blended one, it is reasonable to assume that their motivations for doing so might also change. Especially in terms of policy and practice, researchers should explore the reasons why learning coaches choose to engage in these unique contexts to better inform the training and recruitment of their support.
4.2 Implications for Practice

This literature review explored the two most common methods in the literature for providing a learning coach role: training parents and hiring facilitators. As shown in Table 4, each of these methods have costs and benefits that need to be considered. However, they both have the mutual requirements of time, training, and communication in order to be run effectively.

Time and training cannot be ignored for either facilitators or parents. Some may assume that hiring full-time or part-time traditional teachers will mitigate these challenges and omit the need for additional training; however, as this research shows, the roles that facilitators play in order to replace a learning coach are vast. Even teachers who are highly qualified in traditional teaching will require training to adjust to the new role (Borup et al., 2017; Freidhoff et al., 2015). Parents might likewise be assumed to understand their roles as learning coaches since they are their children’s guardians. However, Downes (2013) compared learning coaches to new teachers, who have new responsibilities and tasks, yet, as Downes pointed out, learning coaches do not have the luxury of preservice education. Especially when working with children with special needs, parents may be unprepared for the task of helping their children while simultaneously learning their new roles. Rice et al. (2019) perfectly illustrated these concerns with their case study describing a foster mother and her son for whom the traditional school environment was too dangerous because of his disabilities:

Basically, we’re doing the role of a teacher because you should be reading up on the courses beforehand so that you can help the child with their classwork. That’s highly impossible. Especially if you have other children. And in my case, I have two other kids who have issues and they’re expecting me to get all this done in five hours. Well, that’s
unrealistic for me. So, it’s a lot on a learning coach and this is free. So, I guess they would say “well this is your child and you should have an interest in what your child is doing,” well yes, that’s true but at the same time most of us are not educated. (pp. 157)

Not only was the lack of training and time a barrier for this mother, but so was the lack of upfront transparency in what she would be expected to do. Acknowledging the full range of learning coach responsibilities will facilitate communication between learning coaches and online teachers and schools. This communication is vital. To minimize frustration, burnout, and negligence, it is necessary for students, teachers, administrators, and learning coaches to understand the roles they are expected to fulfill and those that others are expected to hold. This is especially evident in the roles of parents studied in this literature review. Parents often become overwhelmed or feel unqualified as they take on new responsibilities; having to learn those roles on the job rather than before enrolling their students would help them prepare and understand the commitment they are accepting. Failing to do so can lead to poor outcomes for the student, parent, and the school. To conclude the story of the foster mom:

I wouldn’t do this again. My eyes were really open. And I wouldn’t recommend this type of setting for children with special needs unless [the school] really included in their catalog a separate category for special needs and they say exactly what they have to offer. (Rice et al., 2019, pp. 162)

Some parental stress is mitigated by current workarounds, such as training learning coaches or introducing a facilitator model, but each contains advantages and disadvantages that need to be considered. It is also important to note that the roles of the learning coaches, teachers, and students often intersect and affect one another. Thus, intrinsic support, the Personal Community of Support, and the Course Community of Support cannot be studied in isolation,
nor can they be effectively approached in the field without the proper lines of communication
and mutual understanding in place. By understanding what these roles are, we are one step closer
to helping learning coaches and practitioners work together to develop more engaging learning
environments for students.
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ARTICLE 2

“Someone in Their Corner”: Parental Support in Online Secondary Education

Courtney N. Hanny¹
Jered Borup²
Charles R. Graham¹
Richard E. West¹

¹Brigham Young University
²George Mason University
Abstract

Despite increased interest in K-12 online education, student engagement deficits and the resulting student attrition remains a wide-spread issue. The Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework theorizes that two groups support online student engagement: the Personal Community and Course Community of Support. However, more evidence is needed to understand how members of these communities, especially parents, support students in various contexts. Using insights gleaned from 14 semi-structured interviews of parents with students enrolled in online secondary school, this study adds validity to the roles identified in the ACE framework by presenting real examples of parents supporting their online students’ affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Findings also confirm patterns found in previous research that are not explained using the ACE framework, such as parental advocacy, communication with teachers, and self-teaching. We discuss how a systems approach to conceptualizing the ACE communities allows the framework to capture more accurately the lived experiences of parents within the Personal Community of Support. We also discuss implications for both practitioners and members of students’ support structures.

**Keywords:** learner engagement, distance education, electronic learning, virtual schools, secondary education, parent role
“Someone in Their Corner”: Parental Support in Online Secondary Education

Enrollment in online learning continues to increase in K-12 education, but attrition in these schools and programs remains much higher than that of in-person classes (Freidhoff, 2021). One explanation for high student attrition in online programs is a lack of student engagement, as engagement has been shown to have a powerful effect on student academic success in traditional, in-person schooling (Hughes et al., 2008; Stout & Christenson, 2009). Student engagement, defined as a student’s ability and drive to apply themselves cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally to their coursework, may be more difficult for students to develop in online settings than in-person due to fewer opportunities to interact and increased learner isolation (Martin & Bollinger, 2018).

In their Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) framework, Borup et al. (2020) proposed that student engagement in online courses increases when students are supported by two external communities: the Course Community, which includes teachers, classmates, and other supports inherent within the course, and the Personal Community, which exists independently of students’ enrollment in a course. K-12 students’ parents or guardians are primary actors within their Personal Community of Support, a conclusion supported by research that shows parental influence is important to student achievement in traditional, in-person classes as well as online courses (Black, 2009; Jeynes, 2007).

The ACE framework also highlights the general types of support students could receive from their personal communities to increase their affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, such as academic mentoring, behavior monitoring, and encouragement (Borup et al., 2020). However, we have limited understanding of specific parental roles within the Personal Community of Support, how those roles appear in various contexts, and how they support
student engagement. This lack of understanding may stem from a deficit in published case studies, examples, and experiences around these themes. Without such evidence, researchers lack a foundation to build upon and explore the implications of the framework. Additionally, practitioners, parents, and other supportive actors in students’ education may struggle to apply implications built on theoretical underpinnings instead of relatable case studies.

This paper sought to more deeply understand the roles parents play in their online secondary student's education through the lens of the ACE framework. Parental roles in the Personal Community of Support are particularly important in online school settings, as parents or guardians are often the physically present adults when students are engaging in remote education. Understanding the parental role is therefore an important step in knowing how to assist both students and their support structures in these settings. In exploring this problem, we analyzed parents’ support from their perspectives to understand how they perceive their supportive roles and to capture the lived experiences of parents in this role.

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this review is to (a) briefly introduce the extensive research base studying student engagement, (b) explain what the ACE framework adds to our understanding of student engagement, and (c) review current research regarding parental roles in supporting online student engagement.

**The Construct of Student Engagement**

Student engagement has been described as the “holy grail of learning” (Sinatra et al., 2015, p. 1)—an appropriate phrase as it emphasizes both the importance and elusiveness of the construct. Its importance has been reaffirmed by research linking engagement to student achievement, academic persistence, better mental health, and fewer delinquent behaviors (Wang
& Degel, 2014) as well as higher critical thinking skills and grades (Carini et al., 2006). However, research has also confirmed the construct’s elusiveness, as many can agree on its multidimensional nature but not on the specific dimensions that compose it (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). These disagreements relate to what types of engagement are considered in defining student engagement and what grain, or scale, should be considered as affecting student engagement (Sinatra et al., 2015).

This study will use a definition of student engagement that is narrowed on both of these accounts based on previous literature. For types of engagement, we base our definition on constructs originally identified by Fredricks et al. (2004) and highlighted in a literature review completed by Borup et al. (2020). Borup et al. found the most prevalent definitions of student engagement in the literature included three facets: affective (“emotional energy associated with involvement”; p. 813), behavioral (“physical behaviors (energy) required to complete course learning activities”; p. 813), and cognitive (“mental energy exerted towards productive involvement”; p. 813). For scale, we consider the individual student, as opposed to a school or class, but we attempt to do so holistically. While engagement is a state, not a static trait, the student’s ability to engage in learning activities is influenced by the learner’s characteristics and background, as well as the learner’s personal and learner environments (Borup et al., 2020; Figure 1). With engagement, as Reschly and Christenson (2012) summarized, “both the individual and context matter” (p. vi).
The Academic Communities of Engagement Framework

The ACE framework is founded on the theory that others can encourage, and even increase, students’ academic engagement. This theory has ideological roots in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, which postulated that the level of achievement students can accomplish is greater with the help of others (Vygotsky, 1978). The ACE framework groups these support actors into two communities: the Personal Community of Support (the actors that support a student before, during, and after a specific course) and the Course Community of Support (the actors associated with the student because of and for the duration of a particular course; see Figure 2). Given online students’ lack of physical contact with the Course
Community, the Personal Community—especially the parent/guardian—is of particular importance in online school settings.

**Figure 2**

*Academic Communities of Engagement Framework*

![Academic Communities of Engagement Framework](image)

*Note.* Depiction of the ACE Framework as shown in Borup et al. (2020). The personal and course communities can help bridge the gap between what the student is capable of doing alone (black triangle) and what they need for academic success (outer triangle).

**The Roles of Parents**

This section will expound on what previous research has found to be typical of parents’ roles, or what is typically expected of parents in online settings, to support students in the three types of engagement. While some roles may serve multiple types of engagement, most can be categorized into the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. A thorough examination of
previously identified parental roles in the literature and how they fit into the three dimensions of engagement is included in the first article of this thesis report, but some highlights are given here.

Previous studies have shown a number of ways in which parents help their online students emotionally invest in their learning. For example, parents help students have a positive experience in school by encouraging and nurturing them (Borup et al., 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Hasler Waters, 2012). They also help students stay invested in their education by motivating them and helping them set goals (Borup, 2016; Curtis & Werth, 2015; Hasler Waters, 2012; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020).

Parents can also inspire behavioral engagement by supporting and enabling student participation in school-based activities. These can be one-time roles, such as providing space to complete schoolwork (Downes, 2013; Novianti & Garzia, 2020), or occasional roles, such as monitoring student work (Borup et al., 2015; Oviatt et al., 2018) and helping with weekly schedules (Hasler Waters, 2012; Oviatt et al., 2018). However, behavioral support can also be a constant role, such as when parents need to manage student work (Borup et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2019) or provide daily organizational support (Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014; Curtis & Werth, 2015).

Parents of online students also help students cognitively engage in their work. This primarily occurs as tutoring or even teaching students the required content (Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). However, a few studies also observed parents providing cognitive support by assessing student knowledge (Downes, 2013; Cwetna, 2016) and otherwise reinforcing content learned (Hasler Waters, 2012).
Additional roles exist in the literature that do not fit cleanly in the ACE framework. These roles include leveraging external resources (Cwetna, 2016; Rice et al., 2019), communicating with the teacher or school (Borup et al., 2019), analyzing student needs (Downes, 2013; Hasler Waters, 2012), self-teaching content (Curtis & Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016), aiding student development (Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012), and advocating to the school on behalf of the student (Franklin et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2019). These roles are important aspects of what parents do within the Personal Community of Support, but the ACE framework in its current version does not have a place for them.

**Understanding Parents’ Roles Through Parents’ Voices**

While the studies cited above provide a view of parental roles in various capacities and environments, additional case studies in varied contexts are needed to develop the transferability of the ACE Framework to additional settings. Just as important as the situations in which the ACE framework explains parental roles, are those it cannot explain. These negative cases may reveal a pattern yielding additional insight. Finally, it is important to understand these roles from a variety of sources; analyzing self-report data from parents of online students is vital in understanding their role.

**Method**

In this study, we sought to further understand the role of parents in the Personal Support Community as well as the interconnections between parental support, students’ abilities to independently engage, and the support of Course Communities. In this section we will delineate the method for recruiting participants and describe the school setting from which the participants were recruited. Then we will describe our methods for data collection and data analysis as well as possible limitations and ethical considerations in our research design.
Participants

Participants for this study were parents of children enrolled full-time in a public online secondary school in the Intermountain West of the United States. We selected participants from a recruitment survey based primarily on their students’ grade level and the parents’ self-reported involvement levels but considered other demographic information in an attempt to recruit diverse experiences and voices. Aggregated demographic data for the 14 participants and the survey respondents is captured in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Interview Participants Compared to Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Demographics</th>
<th>Participant N(%)</th>
<th>Survey Respondent N(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level of Student a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>1 (.05)</td>
<td>3 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>3 (.14)</td>
<td>7 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>3 (.14)</td>
<td>6 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth</td>
<td>6 (.29)</td>
<td>16 (.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh</td>
<td>5 (.24)</td>
<td>9 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth</td>
<td>3 (.14)</td>
<td>10 (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Affective Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
<td>1 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>5 (.36)</td>
<td>11 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>6 (.43)</td>
<td>18 (.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly</td>
<td>3 (.21)</td>
<td>11 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Behavioral Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>4 (.29)</td>
<td>5 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>6 (.43)</td>
<td>16 (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>3 (.21)</td>
<td>13 (.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly</td>
<td>1 (.07)</td>
<td>7 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Cognitive Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
<td>1 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>4 (.29)</td>
<td>8 (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>7 (.50)</td>
<td>17 (.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>2 (.14)</td>
<td>9 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly</td>
<td>1 (.07)</td>
<td>6 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Demographics</td>
<td>Participant N(%)</td>
<td>Survey Respondent N(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School History a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only online</td>
<td>2 (.10)</td>
<td>3 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick and mortar</td>
<td>10 (.50)</td>
<td>36 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>5 (.25)</td>
<td>11 (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (.15)</td>
<td>5 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Adult Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>8 (.57)</td>
<td>25 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>1 (.07)</td>
<td>5 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older sibling</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
<td>0 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (.07)</td>
<td>1 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4 (.29)</td>
<td>10 (.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>3 (.21)</td>
<td>9 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time from home</td>
<td>2 (.14)</td>
<td>6 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time not from home</td>
<td>2 (.14)</td>
<td>5 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time from home</td>
<td>4 (.29)</td>
<td>8 (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time not from home</td>
<td>3 (.21)</td>
<td>12 (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Special Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, disability</td>
<td>7 (.50)</td>
<td>19 (.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, gifted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/unreported</td>
<td>7 (.50)</td>
<td>17 (.43)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a Participant numbers add up to more than 14 due to some parents having multiple children enrolled in the school and/or history in multiple types of schools.

Limitations of this sampling method include limited transferability of the experiences of these parents, since we recruited from a single school. There was also the potential for self-selection bias, as parents who are willing to fill out the recruitment survey and commit to an interview are likely more engaged in their student’s education. We did not collect demographics such as sex and socioeconomic characteristics, so the interviewed parents likely do not reflect a representative distribution across these and other demographics.

Setting

The school was a fully online school founded less than 20 years ago at the time of this research, serving students in grades 7-12. Each grade level housed 200-300 students, all living within the state boundaries. The school website had a parent information page encouraging...
parents to participate in their child’s education but reassuring them that involvement was not required due to low teacher/student ratios at the school. The website also advertised an optional parent/teacher social media connection and regular parent-focused meetings. While the school’s unique characteristics and approach to the parent-school partnership may be considered limitations for the transferability of results garnered in this research, it also provided an environment in which parents were not required nor pressured to participate.

**Data Collection**

Fourteen individuals were recruited for web-based interviews following a semi-structured protocol lasting 30-45 minutes. The purpose of each interview was to reveal the roles and involvement of parents in their children’s online education. Initial questions inquired about parents’ typical roles, parents’ levels of involvement, and how parental roles interacted with other elements of the student’s education. However, the semi-structured format allowed for the natural exploration of themes within parents’ responses.

**Data Analysis**

We analyzed the screening survey demographics descriptively, as the main purpose of these demographics was to recruit for interviews.

We analyzed the interview data in two phases. The first followed open coding based on Creswell and Poth’s (2018) approach to grounded theory. Open coding was the most appropriate coding approach for this study due to its exploratory and case study nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three of us researchers formed the data analysis team. We each read through one to two interviews, looking for roles parents described having in their student’s online education. We then met to discuss the codes we found before coding two to four more interviews each. At the
next meeting, we started combining codes into common categories (axial codes) that were beginning to emerge. We coded the remaining interviews according to these axial codes.

After completing this initial coding, the three researchers met again to discuss the axial codes. While this first set of axial codes were influenced by prior research we had completed regarding the Academic Communities of Engagement Framework, we also noticed another underlying coding structure that ran across these axial codes. While not true “selective” codes as defined by Creswell and Poth (2018), these other categories acted as another axis, by which the codes could be arranged in a matrix (Figure 3). The initial axial codes related to how the parents were supporting their students (affectively, behaviorally, or cognitively), but the secondary axial codes reflected patterns in how the parents delivered this support, whether directly to the students or by influencing one of the other communities of support.

**Figure 3**

*Matrix Depicting Intersections Between Initial and Secondary Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary Axial Codes</th>
<th>Initial Axial Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Students Directly</td>
<td>Behavioral Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the Parent’s Ability</td>
<td>Cognitive Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating Student Ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing Course Community Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intrigued by this second set of codes, we read through the interviews looking specifically for case study examples that fit within each box of the matrix. Codes were indexed based on
which interview they came from, a subjective rating on the strength of the example as a case study, and a rough description or quote indicative of the example. The primary author then organized the strongest and most prevalent examples into a summary of results that was confirmed with the research team and the original interview participants.

**Trustworthiness**

We sought to strengthen the trustworthiness of our findings through member checks on the themes and findings, a diverse selection of authors for this research, and rich, thick description in the form of extensive quotations within the results of the article to allow the participant’s voices to share their own emic thoughts and motivations. The trustworthiness of our results is further strengthened by stratifying our research participants. Each individual’s responses act as a form of source triangulation to ensure the findings are not isolated occurrences in one person’s life.

**Limitations**

Limitations for this study include the usual transferability concerns of convenience sampling. However, the participants within the school were purposively chosen in order to collect diverse opinions and experiences. Further limitations include non-response bias created by lack of survey responses or availability for interviews. Observational and additional case study research may be required to further include experiences of parents who are less likely to participate in a study like this one.

**Findings and Discussion**

As foreshadowed by Figure 3, this study provided additional evidence for the ACE framework’s Personal Community of Support, including case studies for parental affective, behavioral, and cognitive support mechanisms. However, the data also revealed a phenomenon
new to the ACE framework: outside of the ACE roles, parents also support students indirectly by influencing the support the student, parents, and the Course Community can each provide. Our results first present the direct support offered by parents, then the indirect support they provided. Each section is subdivided by how parents’ actions benefited student engagement.

**Supporting the Student Directly**

Parents in this study performed many of the same roles that have been found in previous research and that correspond to the roles of the Personal Community of Support as defined in the ACE framework (Borup et al., 2020; see Figure 2)

**Affective Support**

In this study, the most represented affective roles parents played were increasing student interest and motivation and creating an emotionally secure environment. Motivating the student when internal motivation failed echoed findings from previous research (Hasler Waters, 2012; Oviatt et al., 2018), but parents also emphasized looking for and encouraging students to pursue topics the students found engaging. Parents talked about the importance of being a “cheerleader” and “being present” so their children could feel like home was a healthy environment where “school is just a positive thing.” Previous research mentioned parents needing to love and nurture school-aged children (Borup et al., 2019; Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Borup et al., 2015), but more research could be done on how parents create emotionally healthy environments in their homes when children are enrolled in online school. Research in higher education suggests emotional support may have a greater impact on student outcomes than financial support (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019), underscoring the need for researchers and practitioners to understand the impact and practice of providing emotional support in secondary education.
Behavioral Support

Results of this study emphasized three ways parents behaviorally support their students: organizing, monitoring, and managing student work. All three categories confirm roles found in previous research, yet this study revealed important nuances not previously identified.

For example, while many researchers have noted that parents help their online students with organization (Borup, 2016; Downes, 2013), parents in this study commented on two categories of organizing: organizing time—such as scheduling and setting routines—and organizing space, by ensuring students have the necessary materials to participate.

While previous research described both monitoring (Borup et al., 2015; Curtis & Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016; Oviatt et al., 2018) and managing roles (Borup et al., 2017; Hasler Waters, 2012), this study illuminated an important differentiation between the two. Monitoring was an almost universal role; even the least involved parents expressed thoughts such as, “my involvement was zero except for checking his grades.” It involved checking on the student, sometimes interfering to shut down distractions, and keeping a pulse on student progression. However, parents noted “depending on how [their students are] doing in school, if [they are] not doing well, it is harder, because we do have to be a little bit more strict with how we're approaching [them].” This parental inclination sometimes compelled those more comfortable in a monitoring role to assimilate a managing role, even metaphorically “holding [the student’s] hand” as they work. Other managing roles included waking up students, keeping them on a schedule, and “making sure that they get food throughout the day, meals, and making sure they also get outside.” While former research has noted that monitoring activities “varied greatly across parents” (Borup et al., 2017, p.7) and flex based on the self-regulation shown by the student (Borup et al., 2015), this study adds that the spectrum is not simply about the time
parents dedicate to their student’s academics; it also includes ownership, as management of students’ schooling shifts from student to parental control.

**Cognitive Support**

Like previous research, most cognitive support roles parents reported involved tutoring their children (Borup, 2016; Borup & Kennedy, 2017; Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). Parents described this role in a wide spectrum, from editing papers to answering questions to “basically, be[coming] a teacher, you know for seven or whatever hours of the day, because [my child] needed me to be.” Some parents had the academic and experiential background necessary for these roles (“my degree is in accounting and finance [and] I have a strong science background, too”), but others needed help from external sources (“for the most part we've been able to Google stuff and find videos to help [our students] . . . If you [want to] figure something out, you can find it on the Internet”). The varied sources parents report for their tutoring information give merit to Stevens’ and Borup’s (2015) concern that parents should be careful in offering cognitive support, as their lack of subject matter expertise may disadvantage their students (see also Borup, 2016).

**Increasing the Parent’s Ability**

Parents realize they cannot always support their students as much as desired, or enough to guide the student to academic success. The second major finding of this study was that parental support was not limited to directly helping students with their academic needs, as presented in the ACE framework. One indirect category of support is when parents seek to increase their capacity to further support students. Instead of acting as the Personal Community, parents seek to increase the support the Personal Community can give in the future (see Figure 4). Like the
direct support roles parents play, indirect roles in this category can be grouped into affective, behavioral, and cognitive roles.

**Figure 4**

*Parents Increasing Own Abilities: Effect on the Personal Community of Support*

**Note.** To help students reach the engagement necessary for academic success, parents increased the support the Personal Community of Support could provide.

**Indirect Affective Roles**

Parents reported many indirect affective roles, but the most prevalent related to increasing parental ability to motivate students and changing parental perspectives of success. For example, one parent said she had not yet mastered motivating her son but she was learning by “just do[ing] things by trial and error.” Another mom echoed her sentiments by saying, “I'm learning how to motivate my kids, you know, what works best” and then explained she had
learned to let her son work mostly independently, but her daughter needed to have someone present to motivate her. Parents often struggled to motivate their children at first because “some things that worked in the past, maybe, on [another] day doesn't really work because [the student is] just not in the mood.” It took time to learn which techniques best motivated their children and to increase their ability to offer affective support.

Additionally, parents related that initially supporting their children emotionally was difficult because their expectations clashed with the desires or capabilities of their students. Previous research has mentioned the parental role of setting expectations (Borup et al., 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014), but parents also have the prerequisite task of learning what those expectations should be. A parent in a study by Curtis and Werth (2015) also described this role, calling it a “painful process” (p. 182). In our study, a mother expounded with the following:

I've had to learn that not everyone was like me. . . Her talents and interests are so different from mine. . . and so just learning to appreciate that her school experience is going to be different from mine and that's okay and her grades are going to be different from mine and that's okay.

Working to understand and change her perspective helped this mother situate herself to better motivate and encourage her daughter in the future.

**Indirect Behavioral Roles**

The most prevalent way parents built their capacity to offer behavioral support was rearranging their schedules to be present while their child worked. Research has shown parents view physical presence as a supportive role (Curtis & Werth, 2015; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). Some parents found it sufficient, and had the flexibility, to change the hours they worked
professionally. For example, one parent said “[I] ended up starting my day super early so that I could get a big chunk of work done before he was up and going, and then I would be available” (see Hasler Waters, 2012 for another example). Other parents quit professional work to increase their availability. One such mom was working and attending evening classes at a local college when she moved her children to online school. She recounted, “when we made the decision to go online, that kind of made the decision for me to stay at home.” She left her job so she could be home to help her students during the day and still do her own schooling at night.

**Indirect Cognitive Roles**

Parents’ indirect cognitive engagement support roles frequently centered around a need for direct cognitive roles. Two frequent scenarios were (a) a need for tutoring, for which parents would need to either refresh their memory on a particular subject or teach themselves with the course resources, or (b) a solicitation for help with an assignment, for which parents would need to learn the course software, such as a learning management system. One parent commented that online school facilitates parents’ ability to learn content for tutoring their children, because “if I need to help them . . . I can watch and do the materials. As opposed to a brick and mortar school where . . . they bring homework and I was like, ‘sorry can't help you, you don't have a textbook.’” Other studies have noted that parents often watch their students’ class sessions before tutoring their students (Curtis & Werth, 2015; Cwetna, 2016).

**Cultivating Student Ability**

In addition to parents increasing their ability to support, they also indirectly supported students by increasing students’ capability to help themselves (see Figure 5). By teaching students to be more independent in the future, parents often found their role in the student’s Personal Community of Support could decrease.
Note. To help students reach the engagement necessary for academic success, parents increased students’ ability to independently engage.

**Organizational Independence: Behavioral**

As a counterpart to monitoring and managing, some parents found success in teaching students to create schedules and manage assignment expectations on their own. This usually involved more upfront work—parents walked students through processes, gave them organizational tools, and consistently set expectations that they needed to check up on themselves. While this support did not directly impact a student’s immediate success in a specific class, it gradually allowed parents to reduce direct behavioral roles without compromising academic success. Interestingly, parents did not always attribute this role to
supporting academic success; instead, they were helping students “be prepared to be out on their own.” Previous research supports this finding as parents feel it is their job to teach students “how to learn” (Hasler Waters, 2012; see also Borup et al., 2015; Hasler Waters et al., 2018).

**Emotional Resilience and Perspective: Affective**

Parents increased the long-term affective independent engagement of their children by helping students become emotionally resilient in their schoolwork. One parent discussed repeatedly teaching the mantra “I just haven't learned this yet” to help her son overcome his frequent frustration in both sports and education. Another parent described helping her daughter develop the perspective that her effort in school will affect her ability to attend her aspired college program. One mother allowed her child to gain this perspective by experience, saying, "you have to let kids fail so they can learn.” This mother deliberately watched her daughter’s progress from afar, allowing her to work through obstacles and only intervening occasionally. Unlike the role of establishing high expectations (Borup et al., 2019; Borup et al., 2015; Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014), giving perspective allows students to develop intrinsic motivation that increases their ability to independently engage in the future.

**Pursuing Course Community Support**

A final indirect role discovered in this research was the support parents offered students by engaging with and helping to expand the influence of the student’s Course Community (see Figure 6).
Note. To help students reach the engagement necessary for academic success, parents increased the support the Course Community of Support was providing.

**Selecting the Course Community**

This study is not unique in noting that parents in online schools actively choose to switch their students from a traditional to an online school environment (Borup & Stevens, 2016; Curtis & Werth, 2015). Usual reasons for this choice confirmed those noted in previous research (Borup & Stevens, 2016): a perceived deficit in the local traditional school, a family need, or, in the case of previously homeschooling parents, a perceived deficit in their own support. However, previous research has not mentioned that changing the Course Community of Support entirely is a role parents play in trying to help their child receive the amount of support necessary for
academic success. Many parents spent extensive amounts of time researching school environments, experimenting with school systems, and asking for references from friends and family in trying to fulfill this role.

**Connecting Student to School Resources**

Parents also reported playing a role in connecting students to the resources and support offered by the school. Especially because students were not physically proximate to their teachers, parents often had to redirect questions or concerns from the student, asking if they had contacted the teacher for support or reminding them to email the teacher during office hours. Parents also reported the importance of reading communication from the school, so both they and their student could be informed of school programs and other available resources. Cwetna (2016) noted that parents will “make sure their child gets help, whether it be from the parent, teacher, or another resource” (p. 94). When schools make resources easy for parents and students to find, parents support student engagement by helping students to access them.

**Advocating**

In addition to ensuring student awareness of school resources, parents also occasionally needed to advocate with the school to increase awareness of students’ needs. This was especially true for parents of students with disabilities and those with children who struggled with specific subjects. Researchers studying these populations often identify advocacy as an important role (Franklin et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2019). However, this study adds that advocacy is also important when students are enrolled in online and traditional schools simultaneously, as some physical schools were unaccustomed to the policies involved in dual enrollment, necessitating parental involvement to ensure the student was not penalized for their online school enrollment.
Conclusion

This study provided additional evidence validating the ACE framework and identified patterns in past literature’s roles that did not neatly fit into the ACE framework, such as advocating and aiding student personal development. With this expanded view of the Personal Community of Support’s functions comes important implications for research and practice.

Implications for Research

The ideological background of the framework, now known as the Ecological Systems Theory, was the idea that social interactions cannot be studied only as individual pieces; they should also be studied within the systems in which they occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Applying this ideology to the present study, student engagement cannot only be studied as a student, a teacher, and a parent, but needs to be analyzed in terms of the interactions among the three.

The ACE framework currently depicts interactions, but only those between the individual community actors and the student, or, more precisely, the individual actors and their interactions with the student’s engagement (referred to as an ego-centric approach in social network analysis, see Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). This study, supported by roles in previous research that are not captured in the ACE framework, suggests the ACE framework could, and should if it is to capture the full gamut of the student support network, be used more broadly to analyze the interactions between the various actors and how those interactions enhance or deter online student engagement. These results suggest parental roles move beyond direct interactions with a student’s engagement in a specific course. Further research could study whether the student, Course Community, or other actors within the Personal Community also have indirect roles in supporting student engagement. Additional research could also triangulate these self-reported
results with evidence from teachers and students and analyze the respective effects of indirect and direct roles on student engagement.

Another aspect of studying student engagement as a system is understanding that students are not the only actors contributing context. Parents, as the target of this research, also have individual backgrounds impacting the amount and type of support they can provide. Parents make different decisions and hold different roles based on these contexts. Additional research could study the motivations and contexts of parents to better understand parents’ desires and obstacles in providing both indirect and direct support. In this study, parents interacted not just with teachers, but with the school itself. This indicates the Course Community also brings the context of existing within a larger school community. Interactions between this community and the individual Course Communities, as well as the Personal Community, may also shed light on the support students can receive from various support actors.

Implications for ACE Community Members

While implications for the various community actors are vast and nuanced by context—practitioners, parents, and students can all benefit from research surrounding student engagement and academic success.

Parents are important members of the Personal Community of Support. This importance is expanded when they become the supervising adult over their student’s education, as was made increasingly evident during the emergency remote teaching of the COVID pandemic (Novianti & Garzia, 2020). This research revealed that, while parents almost universally accepted and filled many roles, some stumbled upon roles they did not anticipate. For example, multiple parents were surprised when they realized they could move their students out of brick-and-mortar school. Parents also found that if they invested time in understanding the students’ needs, preparing
themselves to support the students, and delegating responsibility to the student, they had fewer
direct supportive roles. Borup et al. (2013) found the amount of time parents are involved in
supporting student schoolwork is not directly correlated with student academic success. They
attributed this lack of relationship to parents becoming more involved after students fall short.
Our findings agree that, in these situations, monitoring often changes to managing. However, this
change does not only involve an increase in parents’ time, but also an increase in parental control
of students’ academic progress, which decreases student ownership over their own work and may
affect student long-term academic engagement.

While parents in this study strove to improve their own abilities, it is important to
remember that most parents of secondary students have never attended an online school due to
its recent entry into mainstream options. Similar to families of first-generation college students
that struggle knowing how to offer support (Irlbeck et al., 2014), parents who never attended
online school may need help understanding how to best support their children.

Practitioners might benefit from knowing that, even in a school that emphasized student
independence, almost all parents held an active role. While the Course Community supports
students directly, practitioners could develop indirect support systems to help parents in their
efforts to support students. Many parents noted the importance of open, regular communication
with the school and teachers in helping them provide behavioral support, but it may be helpful to
provide resources for parents giving affective and cognitive support as well. This can be as
simple as making course learning materials available for parents, so they do not need to rely on
YouTube and other external sources for tutoring support. It could also be organizing parent help
groups, in which parents can trade advice on strategies that have worked in helping their own
online students. Practitioners could lighten their supportive load in the same way as parents do,
by increasing student ability. For example, online schools could provide student training and templates for organization, making them available to parents who may also be helping students with self-development.

The importance of practitioner support may depend on the household. For example, parents in this study often increased the indirect support of the Personal Community by rearranging or reducing their professional work schedules. However, some parents may lack the flexibility and financial means to use these support strategies. Parents sometimes struggled to navigate school software, an even more difficult role for parents asked to do so in a second language. Parents with multiple children attuned to their students’ needs to prioritize their involvement for the most dependent child, but this strategy may leave other children unsupported. Practitioners should seek awareness of students’ and parents’ greater contexts so they can provide increased support, whether directly for the student or indirectly by mentoring parents about the demands of online school, the needs of their students, and the resources available for support.

In conclusion, the ACE framework is a valuable depiction of student engagement support structures, with many of the roles currently held by parents nicely fitting within its umbrella. However, by using the framework as a tool to analyze the networks and interactions between the communities of support, we have a more complete view of how student support plays out in real contexts. What we lose in parsimony, we gain in validity and ability to use the framework to capture the experiences of those supporting student engagement, and therefore to understand and influence student academic success.
References


Martin, F., & Bolliger, D. U. (2018). Engagement matters: Student perceptions on the importance of engagement strategies in the online learning environment. *Online Learning, 22*(1), 205-222. [https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1092](https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1092)


APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Memorandum

To: Charles Graham
Department: BYU - EDUC - Instructional Psychology & Technology
From: Sandee Aina, MPA, HRPP Associate Director
       Wayne Larsen, MAcc, IRB Administrator
Date: June 21, 2021
IRB#: IRB2021-199
Title: Finding Their Why: Parental Motivation for Involvement in K-12 Online Education

Brigham Young University’s IRB has approved the research study referenced in the subject heading as exempt level, categories 1 and 2. This study does not require an annual continuing review. Each year near the anniversary of the approval date, you will receive an email reminding you of your obligations as a researcher and to check on the status of the study. You will receive this email each year until you close the study.

The study is approved as of 06/21/2021. Please reference your assigned IRB identification number in any correspondence with the IRB.

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. A copy of the approved informed consent statement can be found in IRIS. No other consent statement should be used. Each research subject must be provided with a copy or a way to access the consent statement.
2. Any modifications to the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before modifications are incorporated in the study.
3. All recruiting tools must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to use.
4. Instructions to access approved documents, submit modifications, report adverse events, can be found on the IRB website, IRIS guide: https://irb.byu.edu/iris-training-resources
5. All non-serious unanticipated problems should be reported to the IRB within 2 weeks of the first awareness of the problem by the PI. Prompt reporting is important, as unanticipated problems often require some modification of study procedures, protocols, and/or informed consent processes. Such modifications require the review and approval of the IRB. Please refer to the IRB website for more information.
APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument Administered via Qualtrics

Hello and welcome! My name is Courtney Hanny. I am a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Charles Graham at Brigham Young University. My team and I are trying to understand what motivates parents/guardians to become more/less involved in their child(ren)’s online education. Understanding your experience will help online schools communicate with parents/guardians like you and support students like your children. This survey will take less than 5 minutes of your time and will ask you to volunteer for a 30-45 minute interview about your roles and motivation to be involved in your child’s online education. Please consider volunteering to be interviewed regardless of your level of daily involvement in your child’s schooling; your insights are valuable to this topic. There is minimal risk for you by being involved: No information will be shared that others could use to know who you are and we won't ask you highly sensitive questions. All results will be deidentified before being used in the research study.

Questions? Please contact Courtney Hanny at courtney.n.hanny@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can call the BYU Institutional Review Board at 801-422-1461 or irb@byu.edu

IRB ID#: IRB2021-199

Thank you for your time! Please click the next button to start the survey.

Thank you! Now we just need some basic information to make sure we get representation from different groups in our interviews:
What grade level is(are) your student(s) enrolled in [name of school]? (If you have more than one student enrolled, choose all that apply)

- 7th Grade
- 8th Grade
- 9th Grade
- 10th Grade
- 11th Grade
- 12th Grade

Have you had students enrolled in a school type other than online? (Choose all that apply)

- No, I have only ever had children enrolled in online school
- Yes, traditional brick and mortar school
- Yes, home school
- Yes, other

Is there another adult, not from the school, who is regularly involved in your child(ren)'s schooling?

- No, not regularly
- Yes, another parent/guardian
- Yes, grandparent
- Yes, older sibling
- Yes, other

What is your employment status?

- Not currently employed
- Employed, Part-time, Not from home
• Employed, Full-time, Not from home
• Employed, Part-time, From home
• Employed, Full-time, From home
• Prefer not to say

Does your child have any special educational needs? Choose all that apply.
• Yes, disability (IEP)
• Yes, disability (504)
• Yes, disability (non documentoled)
• Yes, gifted/accelerated
• Not sure
• Prefer not to say

For the following questions, please read the aspect of parental involvement and respond with how frequently that aspect describes your role in the education of your student(s).

I help my child with their participation needs related to school (organizing, managing time, troubleshooting etc.).

• Never
• Rarely
• Sometimes
• Frequently
• Constantly

I help my child with their emotional needs related to school (encouraging, motivating, etc.).

• Never
• Rarely
I help my child with their cognitive needs related to school (providing tutoring, teaching, etc.).

We would like to conduct brief interviews (30-45 mins) asking parents/guardians with students in online schools about their motivations for becoming (or not becoming) involved in their student's schooling. As much as we would like to interview everyone who is willing, we cannot guarantee that everyone who volunteers will be contacted for an interview. While providing contact information means your answers will no longer be anonymous (your name will be connected to your answers), your answers and your contact information will be kept completely confidential (only the researchers themselves will have access to your data and will not share it with anyone).

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview?

- Yes
- No

What is your name?

What is your email?

What is your phone number? (In case you prefer texting to email)
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Instructions:

- Keep it to 30-45 minutes.
- Ask follow-up questions, especially when strong emotion is present (sub-bullets are examples).
- Go in an order that feels natural but try to cover all of the general topics.
- Help the interviewee feel comfortable whenever possible.
- Before starting the interview, look up the interviewee’s demographic information to know the interviewee’s child’s grade level, the amount of time the parent has been involved in online school, and other pertinent information.

Reminders (To be talked about at the beginning) (2 minutes)

- Thank you for your time and willingness. We are expected to go 30-45 minutes. Will that be alright?
- Is it okay if I record this interview? Only myself and my fellow researchers will see it.
- Nothing you say here will be traceable to you. We aren’t working for the school, nor will we give them your information. The only exception would be if you discuss something related to child abuse, at which point we are legally obligated to report it.
- If at any point you would like to stop or skip a question, please let me know. We want to make sure you are comfortable and will honor your request without question.
- Feel free to say “I don’t know” to any questions you may not know the answer to.
- Any questions for me?
Background (3-4 minutes) (Running Total: 5-6)

- I have your survey response here (thanks for filling it out). It says you have experience with ____ type of school in addition to online school.
  - Why did you choose online school?
  - Overall, how has online school gone with you and your student(s)?

Role in Education (12-18 minutes) (17-24)

- When you first enrolled your student(s) in online school, what did you imagine your role would be?
  - How was your actual role different than you expected?
- When you first enrolled your student in online school, what did you imagine the role of the teachers would be?
  - How was their role different than you expected?
  - How does their role interact with your own?
- Has your experience in schooling as a child affected the way you interact with your student as a parent in online school?
  - If yes, what has been that effect?
- Think of a typical week when your child is doing online school. What specifically do you need to do to make your child’s education run smoothly in a typical week?
  - You mentioned you do ______. What does that look like?
  - You mentioned you do ______. What motivates you to do that?
  - What keeps you putting in that much work?
  - Does anything make your involvement difficult?
    - Anything the school has done?
- Anything the teachers have done?
- Anything your student has done?
- Anything from other aspects of your life?

  o Does anything make your involvement a little easier?
  - Anything the school has done?
    - Or could do?
  - Anything the teachers have done?
    - Or could do?
  - Anything your student has done?
    - Or could do?
  - Anything from other aspects of your life?

  o Looking back, was there something that you could have done to help your student but didn’t for whatever reason?

  - We’ve talked about a typical week; now imagine that all of the stars aligned so that you could do as much or as little with your child’s online schooling as you want. What would you do if that was the case?
    - What prevents that from happening now?
    - What does your current situation have in common with what you just described?

**Perceived Ability and Desire to Participate (10-16 minutes) (27-40)**

- Support sometimes is talked about in terms of supporting students’ knowledge, behavior, or emotions. Do you think your child needs the most support in the knowledge, behavioral, or emotional aspects of their schooling?
  - The least support?
• What aspects of support do you feel should come primarily from you?
  o Which aspects should come primarily from the school and teachers?

• Do you currently feel qualified to help your child when they ask you for support?
  o What are some areas you feel especially qualified to help your child?
  o Complete this sentence for me: “I like it when my child asks for my help doing _____ because ______.”
    ▪ Why?
  o What are some areas you may feel less qualified to help your child?
  o Complete this sentence for me: “I am nervous when my child asks for my help doing _____ because ______.”
    ▪ Why?
  o (If the parent has experience in homeschool/traditional): How do these areas differ from what you would have said when parenting in homeschool/traditional school?

• How do you normally find out if your child needs extra support in their online schooling?

• If your child asked you to help more in their online schooling, what, if anything, might stop you from offering that support?

• What aspects of online schooling make you want to be involved?
  o Make you not want to be involved?

• If I were to survey 100 parents at your school, what do you guess might be the top 3 reasons why they choose to engage with their student’s education?
  o What would be the top 3 barriers?
  o How much do these reasons/barriers align with your own?
Demands/Requirements of Online Education (3-5 minutes) (30-45)

- On a typical week, do you feel like you have the time that you want to support your child’s needs?
  - (No) What is the biggest obstacle to having that time?
  - (Yes) What makes having that time possible in your life?

- If one of your friends were to tell you that they were thinking about enrolling their child in an online school, but weren’t sure what would be expected of them, what would you tell them?
  - Based on your own experience, what should they be aware of in terms of time commitments?
  - What should they be aware of in terms of other demands?

- Do you have any experience parenting a child in homeschool or in traditional school?
  - What would you say are the biggest differences in terms of time commitments and other demands?

Member Checking (30 seconds)

- Would you be willing to look over a one-page summary of our findings at the end of these interviews to see if you agree with what we have found or if you would add anything else?