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RELATIONSHIP QUALITY RATHER THAN LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

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Summary. Family-school partnerships enter students' lives not only through coordinated expectations and practical support, but through the meanings children attach to adult communication, encouragement, oversight, and control. The central question is therefore not simply whether parents are involved, but how that involvement is experienced. By separating the volume of parental activity from the relational and motivational quality of its enactment, the inquiry examines the pathways through which cooperation between home and school may shape motivation, school belonging, psychological safety, and educational adjustment. Particular attention is given to the conditions under which adult coordination becomes a source of confidence and shared direction, as well as those under which it is experienced as pressure, surveillance, or diminished trust in the child's capacities. A theoretically grounded, analytical synthesis brings together peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published primarily between 2021 and 2026. International findings are read alongside Czech and Central European scholarship, allowing broad empirical patterns to be considered in relation to the institutional and relational conditions in which family-school cooperation actually unfolds. The synthesis follows a thematically guided rather than exhaustive procedure and concentrates on relational trust, parental self-efficacy, autonomy support, competence, school belonging, psychological safety, and the work of school psychologists in conflict, mediation, and psychological crisis. Its purpose is not to reproduce the claims of a systematic review, but to clarify the mechanisms that may account for the markedly different outcomes associated with formally similar kinds of parental involvement. Across the literature, visible participation, frequent contact with teachers, and intensive support at home prove insufficient as indicators of constructive partnership. Beneficial outcomes are more likely when cooperation deepens relational trust, affirms the child's autonomy and competence, treats parental knowledge as a legitimate source of understanding, and leaves the student with a meaningful role in defining difficulties and shaping responses to them. Involvement becomes less protective when it is organized around evaluation, pressure, or conflict, since these conditions may intensify performance anxiety, weaken perceived competence, and make the disclosure of problems feel unsafe. Limited participation likewise cannot be equated with indifference. Previous experiences of humiliation, low parental self-efficacy, socioeconomic constraints, linguistic or institutional barriers, and a sense that the school is psychologically inaccessible may all reduce visible engagement. School psychologists are especially important at these points of ambiguity, where educational strain, relational conflict, and circumstances requiring crisis intervention or multidisciplinary care must be carefully distinguished. What determines the educational value of family-school partnership is not the sheer amount of parental activity, but the relational climate in which cooperation takes place and the motivational message it conveys to the child. Psychologically safe partnership combines reciprocity with professional clarity, remains socially accessible and developmentally responsive, and supports autonomy without withdrawing structure or responsibility. Such cooperation can strengthen belonging and adaptive engagement precisely because it allows expectations to remain demanding without becoming coercive. Its maturity is also reflected in the ability to recognize when ordinary educational difficulties can be addressed through consultation, when damaged relationships require mediation, and when the child's condition calls for specialized or multidisciplinary support.

Keywords: family-school partnership, parental involvement, relational trust, parental self-efficacy, autonomy support, school belonging, school psychology.

1. Introduction

Few assumptions in educational discourse appear as intuitively persuasive as the belief that greater parental involvement must produce better academic outcomes, more favorable behavior, and more stable

student adjustment. Large-scale syntheses do, on average, identify a positive association between parental involvement and educational outcomes, yet the magnitude of that association is generally small to moderate and varies markedly with the definition of involvement, the age of the students, the outcomes assessed, and the distinction between naturally occurring differences and targeted interventions. Kim's (2022) second-order meta-analysis, encompassing 23 meta-analyses and 1,177 primary studies, found the strongest associations for parental expectations and aspirations, whereas findings on homework assistance remained mixed. Holzberger et al. (2023), synthesizing 21 meta-analyses, likewise showed that observed relationships cannot be separated from family socioeconomic status, the child's developmental stage, or the methodological design of the underlying studies. The current evidence base therefore offers little support for the simple proposition that parental involvement is inherently protective, even though that proposition continues to shape school guidance and interpretations of parental behavior (Holzberger et al., 2023; Kim, 2022). That variability is not a peripheral qualification, because it changes how apparent parental activity should be interpreted and prevents a single visible behavior from being assigned a stable psychological value across children, families, and educational settings.

The more consequential psychological question is not how often a parent enters the school building or checks schoolwork, but what those actions come to mean within the parent-child relationship and what kind of relational experience is created through communication between home and school. The same behavior can provide accessible support, predictable structure, and reassurance that difficulties can be addressed together, yet it can also become a form of surveillance that tells the child responsible action is impossible without constant oversight. A conversation between parent and teacher may deepen shared understanding, while an evaluative or punitive tone may intensify shame, anticipatory anxiety, and the impulse to conceal a problem. Developmental and school psychology therefore require an account that reaches beyond the organizational form of partnership to the motivational and relational processes through which it operates, including self-efficacy, relational trust, psychological safety, and school belonging. What functions as reassurance in one relationship may therefore be experienced as distrust in another, and the difference cannot be inferred from the outward form of the behavior alone.

Against this background, the discussion shifts attention from the quantity of parental involvement to the psychological quality of family-school partnership. The argument is developed through a critical synthesis of peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published primarily between 2021 and 2026, with older sources serving only a subsidiary role. The literature was selected thematically rather than through a systematic review designed to claim comprehensiveness, and the emphasis falls on mechanisms that help explain why formally similar forms of involvement may lead to markedly different outcomes. Cooperation itself is not called into question. Instead, the aim is to identify the conditions under which it supports child development and the points at which well-intentioned coordination between parents and schools can harden into excessive control, combined pressure, or the reproduction of social inequality. Following these mechanisms across family and school settings also makes it possible to connect apparently separate outcomes, such as motivation, disclosure, belonging, and adjustment, within a single relational account.

2. From Parental Involvement to the Psychological Quality of Partnership

Separating the amount of involvement from its quality requires more than classifying parents as involved or uninvolved. Attendance at school events, communication with teachers, learning support at home, the articulation of educational expectations, and the creation of a culturally enriching environment are not interchangeable expressions of a single construct, because each carries a different psychological meaning and may operate through a different mechanism. Recent syntheses identify academic socialization, through which parents communicate the value of education, connect present effort with future goals, and help children interpret success and failure, as a more consistent predictor of favorable outcomes than direct intervention in schoolwork. Some of the most consequential forms of support are therefore also the least visible to schools, taking shape in everyday conversations, implicit expectations, and the family's responses to mistakes, effort, uncertainty, and setbacks (Kim, 2022).

Findings reported by Lerner et al. (2022) sharpen this distinction by showing that the consequences of parental involvement depend not only on its extent, but also on how it is enacted and on the motives from which it arises. Among students in Grades 4 through 6, autonomy-supportive involvement was associated with less school-related worry, stronger perceived competence, more autonomous motivation, and higher grades, whereas controlled motives for involvement were linked to less autonomy-supportive behavior. The meaningful contrast is thus not between presence and absence, but between different ways of structuring the same educational situation. Help that preserves developmentally appropriate choice, acknowledges the child's perspective, and leaves room for genuine responsibility can strengthen competence. Taking over the task, correcting with impatience, or making relational acceptance contingent on performance can produce the opposite effect by weakening the child's confidence that difficulties can be managed through personal effort.

Self-determination theory provides a particularly coherent explanation for these contrasting outcomes by linking higher-quality motivation to the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy should not be confused with an absence of boundaries or with leaving a child without guidance. It refers instead to the experience that expectations have an intelligible rationale, that the child's perspective is taken seriously, and that compliance is not secured through shame, guilt, or threats to relational closeness. Competence grows when children can perceive a connection between their own effort and its consequences, while relatedness depends on the assurance that mistakes will not jeopardize their place in important relationships. Ratelle et al. (2021), in a three-year longitudinal study, found that parental autonomy support, structure, and involvement contributed to different dimensions of school adjustment, partly through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs at school. Family life consequently shapes school functioning not only through what happens during homework or preparation, but also through the mode of motivational regulation that children carry into the classroom. The applied implications of this mechanism are developed by Oláh and Šimek (2025), who situate activating approaches to education within pedagogical and psychological frameworks emphasizing autonomy, competence, and meaningful student participation, and by Šimek et al. (2025), who connect deep learning with relational dynamics, reflective guidance, and psychological safety. Neither contribution addresses family-school partnership directly, yet both illuminate the conditions under which adult support becomes a basis for active engagement rather than mere external compliance. The crucial issue is consequently not whether adults provide direction, but whether that direction enables the child to understand, participate, and develop a progressively stronger sense of authorship over learning.

Age changes the psychological meaning of supervision. A level of parental oversight that offers necessary external structure in the early school years may later be experienced as distrust, intrusion into privacy, or a refusal to recognize the adolescent's growing capacity for responsibility. The heterogeneity documented by Holzberger et al. (2023) is therefore more than a methodological complication, since it also reflects the developmental contingency of parental behavior. A meaningful partnership between family and school must allow responsibility to move gradually toward the student. When adults coordinate around the child while excluding the child from decisions, they may weaken during adolescence precisely the self-regulatory capacities that education is intended to cultivate. Developmental appropriateness cannot be reduced to a fixed age threshold, because it also depends on the child's existing capacities, the demands of the situation, and the extent to which support is gradually withdrawn as competence grows. What counts as structure at one point in development may later become an obstacle to agency if the relational pattern remains unchanged.

3. Trust, Self-Efficacy, and Interpretive Frames of Communication

No exchange between a parent and a teacher begins with the message alone. Long before its explicit content is interpreted, the history of the relationship and the expectations carried by both parties have already shaped its meaning. In a climate of trust, notice of declining performance may be heard as an early invitation to seek a solution together. In a chronically conflictual relationship, the same message may sound like an accusation against the family or an attempt by the school to displace responsibility. A parent's question may be received as legitimate concern, or as a challenge to professional competence

when previous encounters have established an expectation of attack. Relational trust accordingly extends well beyond interpersonal warmth and includes judgments about the other party's competence, benevolence, predictability, and integrity. Shayo et al. (2021), in a scoping review of 79 quantitative studies, further observed that research often conflates trust with perceived trustworthiness, making it impossible to reduce the construct to a single indicator of satisfaction with an institution. Meaning is thus negotiated through an interpretive frame that precedes the immediate exchange and influences whether information is heard as support, criticism, intrusion, or withdrawal of respect.

Evidence from intervention research underscores the practical importance of this distinction. Smith et al. (2022) found that family-school engagement interventions produced a small but statistically significant improvement in parent-teacher relationships, with more noticeable gains in communication and connectedness than in deeper relational conditions. Contact can therefore be made more frequent and more orderly far more quickly than defensive expectations, memories of humiliation, or doubts about the other party's intentions can be transformed. Digital communication systems, scheduled consultation hours, and mandatory meetings may improve access, but none creates partnership when communication remains one-directional and parents are cast primarily as recipients of evaluation or implementers of corrective instructions. The distinction matters because procedural improvements may create the appearance of cooperation while leaving the underlying conditions of mistrust intact. Increased contact is beneficial only when the interaction itself becomes more intelligible, reciprocal, and respectful.

A further complication lies in the institutional asymmetry between schools and families. Schools possess specialized language, control much of the structure and timing of contact, and evaluate a child whose progress is closely bound to parental identity. Formal rights to comment on education do not, by themselves, create a subjective experience of equal standing. Psychological accessibility emerges only when parents can ask questions without fearing that disagreement will disadvantage their child and when teachers can treat parental knowledge as different from, rather than inferior to, professional knowledge. In Czech and Central European contexts, Šimek's work on the pedagogical and psychological dimensions of family-school cooperation draws attention to communication barriers, regional disparities, unequal opportunities for participation, and the preventive significance of cooperation in relation to risk behavior (Šimek, 2025a, 2025b). These contributions do not replace international meta-analytic evidence, but they place broader mechanisms within the social and institutional environments in which relationships between families and schools are actually formed.

Parental self-efficacy, understood as confidence in one's capacity to influence a child's development and meet the demands of the parenting role, is also relationally shaped rather than produced solely within the individual. Glatz et al. (2024), reviewing 35 studies of parents of school-age children and adolescents, described a bidirectional relationship between self-efficacy and parenting behavior. Challenging behavior may erode parental confidence, just as diminished confidence may make consistent responses harder to sustain. The possibility that self-efficacy declines across the school years and adolescence is especially relevant to school-family cooperation. Repeated messages that parents must monitor or correct their child more intensively can deepen helplessness unless schools also provide a clear account of the difficulty and a form of support that is both specific and realistically manageable. School communication can either stabilize or unsettle that confidence, depending on whether feedback gives parents a workable understanding of the problem or merely intensifies the sense that they have failed to manage it.

The same pattern appears in Ma et al.'s (2024) multilevel meta-analysis, which drew on 50 independent studies and 185 effect sizes. Parental self-efficacy showed a small to moderate positive association with parents' contributions to family-school partnership, with stronger relationships for home-based support and parental expectations than for physical presence at school or communication with teachers alone. Visibility in the school setting is therefore a poor proxy for parental competence. A parent who cannot attend events regularly may still provide stable emotional and motivational support, while frequent presence at school may coexist with distrust or ineffective involvement. Calls for greater participation must consequently take account of the unequal time, linguistic, psychological, and economic resources available to families.

Misinterpretation can easily become self-reinforcing. Once a school reads limited visible participation as indifference, the parent may anticipate condemnation and withdraw further, while the teacher interprets the growing distance as confirmation of the original judgment. Breaking this cycle requires both parties to reconsider the attributions through which they make sense of one another. Otherwise, each new encounter is absorbed into an already established image of either an uncooperative family or an insensitive school. Psychologically informed communication begins not by persuading parents to accept the school's account, but by defining the problem together, separating observation from interpretation, and agreeing on a small number of steps whose effects can later be evaluated.

4. The Child Between Family and School

Between family and school stands a child who is not merely the recipient of agreements reached by adults, but an active interpreter of their tone, content, and consequences. From those exchanges, children draw conclusions about their own worth, competence, and safety. Agreement between parent and teacher may therefore become harmful when it takes the form of jointly escalating performance pressure, collectively questioning the child's abilities, or deciding on the child's behalf without allowing the student to explain their experience. Open conflict can be equally destabilizing, especially when the child fears that information disclosed to one side will be used against the other. Psychological safety does not depend on complete adult agreement. It depends on a predictable and respectful way of handling differences so that disagreement does not threaten the child's relational security.

School belonging is where family and school experience most visibly converge. It reflects a student's sense of having a legitimate place at school, being accepted by significant others, and being able to participate without continually proving personal worth. Hagenauer et al. (2021) found that support from teachers and parents was associated with a stronger sense of belonging, which was in turn related to greater life satisfaction and academic achievement and to lower absenteeism. Although the correlational design does not establish belonging as the sole causal mechanism, the pattern supports an account in which family and school relationships are mutually implicated rather than psychologically separate. Hoferichter et al. (2021) similarly found that support from parents, teachers, and peers was associated with distinct dimensions of adolescent well-being, reminding us that no single relational system can fully compensate for sustained disruption in the others.

These relational processes become especially consequential when cultural, linguistic, or social difference is interpreted as deficiency. Narrow institutional definitions of appropriate involvement tend to privilege parents who speak the school's language fluently, can attend events at prescribed times, and understand the unwritten conventions of interaction with teachers. Drawing on the experiences of Black families in the United States, Collins et al. (2024) show how traditional partnership models may reproduce exclusion when schools recognize only forms of participation that conform to dominant cultural expectations. Directly transferring that context to the Czech setting would be unwarranted, but the underlying psychological mechanism remains relevant. Any institution can mistake a different form of engagement for an absence of concern and then communicate in ways that confirm parents' sense that they do not belong. The risk lies not only in overt exclusion, but also in routine institutional practices that silently define one culturally familiar form of participation as the standard against which all families are judged.

An equity-centered partnership does not lower expectations of families. Rather, it distinguishes responsibility from accessibility. Lindstrom Johnson et al. (2024) propose a framework grounded in family strengths, cultural responsiveness, and the removal of barriers to participation, while urging schools to examine their own practices alongside parental behavior. The shift is psychologically significant because it positions parents not as carriers of deficits to be corrected, but as partners who bring knowledge of the child, a shared relational history, and resources that may be indispensable to collaborative problem solving. Such recognition does not entail uncritical endorsement of every parental view. It requires only that professional authority not be mistaken for an automatically fuller or more accurate interpretation. In practical terms, this means that schools must examine whether their invitations, schedules, communication channels, and expectations make participation genuinely possible before interpreting a family's limited visibility as unwillingness.

Seen in this light, academic achievement is one possible outcome of partnership rather than its only valid measure. Sustainable cooperation should also help children disclose difficulties, accept proportionate support, retain an active role in resolving problems, and experience mistakes as information rather than as threats to relationships. When parents and schools focus too narrowly on grades, they may create the appearance of effective coordination while simultaneously weakening autonomy and safety. Avoidance, concealment, perfectionistic coping, and dependence on external evaluation can follow. Partnership becomes genuinely protective only when its demands are accompanied by a clear relational message that the child's current performance is not equivalent to the child's personal worth.

5. Psychologically Informed Intervention and the Role of the School Psychologist

Simply asking parents and teachers to communicate more is unlikely to improve cooperation when the structure of communication itself remains unchanged. More frequent contact may, in fact, intensify an established conflict pattern. A psychologically informed intervention must first clarify whether the difficulty arises from missing information, competing interpretations, damaged trust, low self-efficacy among one or more participants, developmentally inappropriate control, or social barriers that the school has mistaken for unwillingness. Only after that differentiation is it possible to determine whether the situation calls for a joint consultation, separate conversations, support for a teacher in framing feedback, work with parental expectations, or the deliberate inclusion of the child in planning change.

Within this process, the school psychologist can translate between interpretive frameworks without becoming an arbiter of which party is right or constructing a superficial compromise. Professional value lies in separating observable events from the attributions attached to them, recognizing emotional threat that restricts the capacity to listen, and ensuring that the child's perspective is not lost in adult conflict. Šimek and Slavík (2026) describe the school psychologist as a professionally grounded component of systemic care that integrates individual work with the child, support for classroom groups, consultation with teaching staff, communication with parents, conflict mediation, and coordination with related services. Such a systemic perspective is indispensable because a communication difficulty may simultaneously express a crisis in the child, parental overload, professional uncertainty in the teacher, and inadequately designed school procedures. Intervention directed at only one participant may therefore relocate the problem within the system rather than resolve it. Rather than locating the difficulty exclusively within one person, this approach asks how individual distress, relational history, professional roles, and institutional arrangements interact to sustain the problem.

A useful consultation culminates in a shared working formulation that is specific enough to guide action without fixing the child within a diagnostic label or moral judgment. Broad claims that the student is not trying, the parents are not cooperating, or the teacher does not understand the child should give way to descriptions of when the difficulty occurs, how often it occurs, what precedes it, and what follows. Agreed steps should remain limited, realistic, and open to evaluation, since an overly ambitious plan makes it easier to attribute subsequent failure once again to inadequate motivation in the child or family. Boundaries of responsibility also need to be explicit, so that support at home does not take over the school's role and the school does not transfer professional tasks to parents who cannot reasonably perform them. Budayová (2025) identifies voluntariness, confidentiality, equality among participants, active listening, and a jointly acceptable solution as central conditions of mediation, while also noting that mediation becomes inappropriate in the presence of severe power imbalance, fear, aggression, or danger. In schools, it can restore communication only when parent, teacher, and child each have a genuine opportunity to speak and when procedural neutrality does not obscure the need for protective or directive action. Moving from global judgments to observable patterns changes the quality of the conversation, because it allows disagreement to be examined without requiring any participant to accept a fixed identity as the source of the problem.

Particular care is required when intensified parental control grows out of anxiety and an attempt to prevent failure. Telling a parent simply to step back may sound like a dismissal of risk unless another source of support and a predictable way of monitoring progress are offered at the same time. Autonomy support does not remove structure. It recalibrates structure so that children have developmentally appropriate

choices, understand the reasons behind expectations, and gradually assume responsibility. Teachers may need comparable support when prolonged conflict has made their communication increasingly rigid, since controlling adult behavior often intensifies precisely when adults themselves feel ineffective and unable to anticipate what will happen next. A fundamentally different threshold is crossed, however, when relational or school difficulties are accompanied by acute mental health risk, self-harm, or suicidality. Routine consultation and mediation cannot substitute for crisis intervention and clinical care. In a qualitative study of 15 adults in a presuicidal state, Šrobárová (2026) identified family and social support, together with the therapeutic relationship, as important protective resources and emphasized the need to combine crisis counseling, psychotherapy, psychiatric treatment, and social support. The age-heterogeneous adult sample does not permit direct generalization to school populations, yet the findings reinforce a broader principle. School psychologists must recognize the limits of school-based intervention, mobilize specialist services, and protect continuity of care, while family and school continue to provide the child with a supportive social environment. The same logic applies to the transition from school-based support to specialist care, which should be organized as a continuation of responsibility rather than as the abrupt transfer of a difficult child beyond the school's concern.

Prevention begins long before a serious problem becomes visible. Trust is more likely to develop when communication is not reserved for failure, when parents can contribute information from home, and when schools respect that some families find alternatives to formal face-to-face meetings more accessible. Reciprocity nevertheless has limits. Schools must preserve professional boundaries, protect the child's privacy, and reject the idea that partnership requires unlimited teacher availability or parental involvement in every pedagogical decision. A reciprocal relationship is not one without boundaries, but one in which the competence, responsibility, and limits of every participant remain visible and respected.

6. Discussion

Taken together, the literature unsettles a familiar but overly simple equation between visible parental activity and effective family-school partnership. Contact frequency, attendance at school events, and the intensity of homework support are readily counted, yet none of them reveals whether the relationship being formed strengthens the child's autonomy, competence, or psychological safety. Meta-analytic findings are especially instructive here. Parental expectations and academic socialization tend to show stronger associations with educational outcomes, whereas direct homework assistance yields far less consistent results. Reading this pattern merely as a ranking of more and less effective activities would miss its psychological significance. The same outward behavior can communicate confidence, structure, and availability, or it can communicate doubt, surveillance, and conditional acceptance. Parental influence acquires its force within that relational and motivational field, where children interpret not only what adults ask of them, but what those requests imply about their abilities, their place in the relationship, and their right to participate in decisions that concern them (Holzberger et al., 2023; Kim, 2022; Lerner et al., 2022).

What emerges, then, is not a collection of independent variables whose effects can simply be added together. Relational trust, parental self-efficacy, autonomy support, and school belonging form a transactional configuration in which movement in one domain may alter the others. Respectful communication, intelligible expectations, and feedback that can be translated into action may strengthen parents' confidence in their capacity to support the child. Greater confidence, in turn, may reduce the urge to respond to academic difficulty with anxiety-driven monitoring. Under these conditions, coordination between adults need not be experienced as a loss of autonomy, because expectations remain connected to available support and genuine participation in problem solving. A very different sequence unfolds when communication is predominantly evaluative. Parental competence may be weakened, control may intensify, and the child may read the escalation as evidence that adults no longer trust their judgment or abilities. Such reciprocal movement helps explain why an intervention that opens space for agency in one family-school relationship may deepen defensiveness in another. Outcomes are generated not by involvement in the abstract, but by the pattern linking adult interpretations, adult behavior, and the child's response.

Once partnership is understood in these transactional terms, low parental visibility also takes on a different meaning. Sparse contact with school may arise from earlier humiliation, uncertainty about

institutional procedures, competing demands on time and finances, or the expectation that parental knowledge will carry little weight in subsequent decisions. None of these conditions is adequately captured by the label of indifference. Scholarship concerned with the social and cultural accessibility of partnership is valuable precisely because it interrupts deficit-based interpretations that turn institutional conventions into judgments about families and treat unfamiliar forms of engagement as evidence of inadequacy (Collins et al., 2024; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2024). Research by Šimek in Czech and Central European settings brings the same problem closer to the regional context by drawing attention to communication barriers, territorial disparities, and unequal opportunities for cooperation. Responsibility for relationship quality must consequently be distributed across the institutional setting as well as the individuals who enter it, rather than assigned to parents according to how closely their participation resembles the school's preferred model (Šimek, 2025a, 2025b).

The same caution applies to consensus. Agreement between parents and teachers may offer the child stability when it produces predictable expectations, accessible help, and a clear distinction between present performance and personal worth. Harmony is not psychologically beneficial merely because it is visible, however. Adult coordination becomes burdensome when both sides reinforce the same pressure, make decisions without the child's participation, or interpret every difficulty as a failure of effort or character. Children do not encounter family-school cooperation as the final recipients of an arrangement negotiated elsewhere. They read its emotional tone, its distribution of authority, and the consequences that follow disclosure. From these cues, they learn whether a problem can be spoken about safely, whether disagreement is permitted, and whether seeking help will lead to support or to intensified scrutiny. Even apparently seamless cooperation can therefore conceal a relational arrangement in which the child's voice has disappeared and compliance has been mistaken for adjustment. Psychological safety depends less on the absence of disagreement than on the way difference is handled when it inevitably arises.

Restoring the child's agency to the center of the partnership also creates a direct bridge to self-determination theory and to research on deep learning. Oláh and Šimek (2025) and Šimek et al. (2025) show that genuine student activation cannot be produced by adding superficially engaging methods to an otherwise controlling environment. Meaningful participation requires competence, relational security, and guidance that invites reflection rather than mere compliance. Family-school cooperation follows the same psychological logic. Educational goals are more likely to be internalized when the child is recognized as a participant in the process rather than treated as the object of coordinated adult intervention. Developmentally appropriate involvement in describing the problem, considering alternatives, and planning change does not erode parental or professional authority. It gives that authority a form through which self-regulation can develop. The point becomes particularly important in adolescence, when responsibility cannot mature if adults continue to make consequential decisions around the young person while leaving no room for explanation, negotiation, or ownership.

A relational understanding of partnership also changes what should count as successful practice. Calls for more communication are inadequate when the structure, tone, and purpose of communication remain untouched. Smith et al. (2022) found that interventions can improve the frequency and organization of parent-teacher contact relatively readily, while the deeper foundations of the relationship prove more resistant to change. Neither the number of consultations nor the speed with which information is exchanged can therefore serve as a convincing measure of quality. More revealing questions concern whether communication is predictable, whether disagreement can be voiced without fear of retaliation, whether recommendations are specific enough to guide action, whether professional boundaries remain clear, and whether agreed steps lead to observable improvement. Trust does not arise from a single successful meeting or a newly introduced communication platform. It accumulates through repeated encounters in which the other party is experienced as competent, intelligible, responsive, and unwilling to humiliate. Organizational access may create the opportunity for partnership, but only relational experience can make that opportunity psychologically credible.

Within such a framework, the school psychologist's contribution is primarily diagnostic in the broad functional sense of differentiation, formulation, and consultation. Mediation is not automatically the appropriate response to every disagreement, nor is consensus always the desired endpoint. Professional judgment

is needed to determine whether the difficulty arises from incomplete information, incompatible interpretations, damaged trust, low self-efficacy, developmentally disproportionate control, or an emerging psychological crisis in the child. The systemic model proposed by Šimek and Slavík (2026) is particularly well suited to this task because it connects work with the student, family, teaching staff, classroom environment, and external services. School psychologists add value not by taking over the responsibilities of parents or teachers, but by creating a frame in which those responsibilities can be understood and coordinated more accurately. Such a frame helps prevent psychological distress from being reduced to misconduct, relational conflict from being mistaken for individual pathology, and a genuine clinical crisis from being managed as though it were merely a communication problem.

Professional judgment becomes most consequential at the point where consultation reaches its limits. Budayová (2025) appropriately associates mediation with voluntariness, confidentiality, equality among participants, active listening, and the possibility of arriving at a mutually acceptable solution. Those conditions cannot be presumed where fear, aggression, acute danger, or a pronounced imbalance of power deprives one party of a genuinely free voice. From the perspective of crisis care, Šrobárová (2026) marks the same boundary by emphasizing that suicide risk and severe psychological crisis require multidisciplinary intervention, continuity of support, and access to specialized services. Bringing mediation and crisis awareness into the conceptualization of family-school partnership does not imply that every difficulty can be resolved within the partnership itself. Greater maturity lies in recognizing when ordinary consultation remains sufficient, when damaged communication calls for carefully structured mediation, and when the ethical priority must shift toward protection and clinical care. Neutrality loses its legitimacy when it obscures danger or treats unequal participation as though it were voluntary and balanced.

Interpretive confidence must nevertheless remain proportionate to the limits of the available evidence. The literature was assembled through a thematically guided rather than systematic procedure, which means that relevant empirical studies and theoretical perspectives may not have been captured. Causal claims are further constrained by the predominance of correlational designs. Heightened parental activity may contribute to school functioning, but it may just as plausibly arise in response to difficulties that are already developing. Direct comparison is also complicated by the considerable variation in how parental involvement, trust, self-efficacy, and school belonging are conceptualized and measured across studies. Czech and Central European contributions were included to situate broader psychological mechanisms within a regionally meaningful setting, although their presence cannot substitute for large-scale empirical verification. These limitations do not invalidate the proposed framework, but they require its claims to be understood as theoretically integrated and empirically informed rather than conclusively causal.

Those limitations point directly toward the next empirical task. Research needs to measure the extent of parental involvement separately from its psychological quality, since a single composite score may conceal processes that operate in opposite directions. Longitudinal designs could clarify whether relational trust and parental self-efficacy precede autonomy-supportive behavior, whether successful cooperation strengthens them over time, or whether the relationship is genuinely reciprocal. The child's perspective deserves equally systematic attention, not as an additional opinion appended to adult reports, but as evidence capable of revealing a gap between benevolent intentions and the lived experience of support. Within the Czech context, the psychological accessibility of schools should be examined in relation to regional inequality, family socioeconomic circumstances, age and developmental stage, the availability of school psychological services, and parents' previous encounters with educational and other public institutions. Progress will depend on moving beyond the question of how much families participate and asking, with greater precision, what kind of relationship that participation creates for everyone involved.

7. Conclusion

Family-school partnership becomes educationally valuable not when parental activity reaches its greatest visible extent, but when cooperation gives the child a coherent experience of support, responsibility, and relational security. Trust, parental self-efficacy, developmentally appropriate autonomy, and school belonging do not operate as peripheral advantages added to an otherwise administrative arrangement. Together, they shape whether educational expectations are experienced as meaningful and manageable

or as evidence of doubt, pressure, and conditional acceptance. Under supportive conditions, mistakes can remain part of learning rather than becoming threats to personal worth, and adult guidance can provide structure without displacing the child's capacity to think, speak, and act. The decisive question is therefore not how closely home and school are connected in organizational terms, but what psychological meaning that connection acquires in the child's everyday experience.

Mature partnership does not seek maximum parental presence or effortless agreement among adults. It depends on communication that is predictable without becoming rigid, reciprocal without dissolving professional boundaries, and accessible to families whose resources and institutional familiarity differ. Space must remain for the child's account of the situation, because cooperation that proceeds around the child may be efficient while still being psychologically unsafe. Equal care is required in distinguishing ordinary educational strain from damaged relationships and from circumstances in which specialized crisis or multidisciplinary intervention is necessary. Responsibility for sustaining such a relationship cannot rest with families alone. Schools must recognize parental knowledge, examine the barriers created by their own procedures, and resist forms of coordination that merely intensify control from two directions at once. When these conditions are maintained over time, partnership can remain demanding without becoming coercive, supportive without becoming intrusive, and professionally bounded without becoming emotionally inaccessible. Relationship quality is what ultimately determines whether the connection between family and school enlarges the child's sense of agency, belonging, and safety, or adds another layer of pressure to an already demanding educational world.

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