



# Satisfaction With the Collaboration Between Families and Schools – The Parent’s View

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Families and schools are two of the central living environments of children. Their collaboration is therefore seen as an important factor in education, having a high impact on learning outcomes, motivation, and children’s health. Nevertheless, current research also shows potential tensions in the educational partnership of families and schools, as different opinions and expectations about goals, competences and roles in education can result in conflicts. Based on a nationwide survey of Swiss parents who assessed the school situation of their children ( $N = 1275$ ), this study examined parent’s experiences, needs and expectations regarding collaboration with schools, with a focus on important issues such as involvement in educational decisions, inclusion, and health. Results show a generally high level of satisfaction among parents, which is particularly related to the emotional well-being of their children at school, the quality of collaboration, and the trust in schools and teachers, both for parents of children with and without special educational needs (SEN). Nevertheless, involvement in educational decisions is perceived as rather marginal. Furthermore, the results indicate that parents of children with SEN are less confident about their children’s future. They are also less optimistic about their children’s academic self-concept and slightly more dissatisfied with their children’s school. Parents’ attitudes toward inclusion showed a wide range of opinions: on the one hand, inclusion is seen positively in terms of developing students’ social skills or promoting a more inclusive society. On the other hand, however, the resources of the school and the skills of the teachers were sometimes considered as insufficient. Our findings provide important insights regarding the further development of the educational partnership between schools and families. Good collaboration between schools and families can create an environment that promotes students’ emotional well-being as well as their academic skills. The positive impact of this partnership has been demonstrated in numerous studies and contributes to the implementation of an inclusive healthy school.

**Keywords:** family-school collaboration, parental school satisfaction, parental involvement, special educational needs, health promotion, emotional inclusion

## INTRODUCTION

In a literature review on health promotion and prevention in schools, Achermann Fawcett et al. (2018) highlight the complex relationships between well-being and health of the different school stakeholders (principals, teachers, and students) and students' academic success. Based on Hattie's (2012) research, the authors point out that children's individual skills, the school climate and the quality of teaching seem to be the main factors for this success. However, not only the school experiences but also the students' family context plays a crucial role in the development of the children's individual skills (ibid). Therefore, it is important to establish sustainable relationships between school principals, teachers, students, and families in order to promote students' academic success and well-being (Hattie, 2010; Sacher, 2016).

### Collaboration Between Families and Schools

Families and schools are two essential stakeholders in enabling healthy development and educational success of children and adolescents. Therefore, a well-functioning collaboration between the two actors is very important. However, this is a rather new concern, as families and schools historically had distinct roles: The school was in charge for the formal education of children, while the family was responsible for education in the extracurricular area (Prost, 1982; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Vasarik Staub et al., 2018). Nowadays, there's a broad consensus in the field of social and educational sciences that school and family should share those tasks, since both represent central places of socialization and learning for children and adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Epstein, 2011). School-family collaboration has been widely discussed in the international scientific literature. The effects of a "good" school-family collaboration on students' academic performance, motivation and well-being have been demonstrated (Cefai and Cooper, 2010; Stange, 2012; Skinner et al., 2014; Hertel, 2016; Hampden-Thompson and Galindo, 2017). Different aspects of this relationship are discussed in order to define what could or should be a good collaboration between schools and families. Communication is a key element, both at the organizational level and with regard to students' development and achievement. The trust between parents and school stakeholders is also essential, the latter notably implies mutual recognition of each other's expertise (parents and professionals expertise) as well as the identification of families' needs (Deslandes, 1999; Christenson, 2004; Larivée et al., 2006; Stange, 2012; Hertel, 2016). Finally, the framework created by the school to facilitate interactions between teachers and families is of high importance, including policy guidelines and recommendations on how to collaborate with families, as well as the provision of resources in terms of time, space and financial resources to meet and communicate with families (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Dumoulin et al., 2014; Egger et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that the benefits of a good school-family relationship have been widely demonstrated, and that elements

favoring collaboration have been identified long time ago, current research in the field highlights difficulties in the implementation of school-family collaboration, both in regular and in inclusive schools (Deslandes, 2006; Parsons et al., 2009; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Albers, 2013; Dumoulin et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2013; Deslandes et al., 2015; Brühlmann and Staehelin, 2017; Vasarik Staub et al., 2018). Research indicates several reasons for the failure of this implementation: In their literature review, Deslandes et al. (2015) mention the lack of teacher training and the fact that the responsibility for school-family collaboration lies mainly on teachers. Moreover, this failure is attributed to the increasing complexity of school-family relationship that has taken place in recent decades: First, some parents seem to be more difficult to reach than in the past due to several changes in family structures and increasing social heterogeneity (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 1997; Deslandes, 2006; Brühlmann and Staehelin, 2017; Vasarik Staub et al., 2018; Otterpohl and Wild, 2019). Second, parents' expectations regarding schools appear to have changed: Research investigating stress among teachers points out increasing parental demands for children's academic success, which may lead teachers to keep parents at distance in order to protect their professional autonomy (Van der Wolf and Everaert, 2005; Baeck, 2010, cited by Deslandes et al., 2015). Finally, Sacher (2016) mentions the development of inclusive schools as another challenging factor for school-family relations. In this social and political context, empirical research emphasizes that school-family collaboration needs to be differentiated: For schools, this means that they should involve parents at different levels. This has to be done taking into account the family's characteristics and living situations (such as educational level and cultural background, pedagogical beliefs, and occupation, etc.; Sanders et al., 1999; Hertel, 2016; Sacher, 2016).

### Parental Involvement

Since collaboration between families and schools implies mutual commitment and coherent action toward a common goal (Ducret and Jendoubi, 2016; Monceau and Larivée, 2019), it is also necessary to focus on the concept of parental involvement (Monceau and Larivée, 2019). In the literature, various terms are used to address this topic, which can lead to difficulties in interpreting research findings. Whereas some authors use terms such as "parental participation," "school-family relations," or "educational partnership" more or less synonymously, there are others associating them with different forms and goals of collaboration (Driessen et al., 2005; Fleischmann and de Haas, 2016; Monceau and Larivée, 2019). A comprehensive framework of involvement is given by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005, p. 105): they describe parental involvement along three dimensions; "home-based behaviors (e.g., helping with homework), school-based activities (e.g., attending school events), and parent-teacher communication (e.g., talking with the teacher about homework)." This understanding of parental involvement is used in many other studies (see for example Anderson and Minke, 2007; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). However, some authors point out that the multidimensional nature of this concept makes it difficult

to operationalize for empirical research (Fan and Chen, 2001; Bakker and Denessen, 2007; Monceau and Larivée, 2019).

Parental involvement and its effects on the various school stakeholders were extensively investigated: It correlates positively with students' school performance (Fan and Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Anderson and Minke, 2007), good behavioral regulation and social skills (Izzo et al., 1999; Anderson and Minke, 2007; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), and better homework completion (Anderson and Minke, 2007). Furthermore, parental involvement is related to better mental health of students, higher self-esteem, and greater enjoyment of school and life in general (Shumow and Miller, 2001; Deslandes, 2005; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018). In the model developed by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) to identify barriers to parental involvement, several factors are identified at the student level that can influence parental involvement (positively or negatively, depending on the situation, and context), such as the child's age or whether he or she has learning difficulties or any disability, special talents, or behavioral disorders. Parental involvement also appears to have positive effects for the parents themselves, as well as for teachers and schools in general. Active involvement can foster relationships between parents and teachers, in particular by positively changing their respective attitudes (those of parents toward the school and the role of teacher and those of teachers toward parents as educators of their children; Deslandes, 2005; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Cankar et al., 2012; Fishman and Nickerson, 2015). Furthermore, parental involvement (home-based and school-based) correlates with parents' higher self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as with greater satisfaction with school (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Fishman and Nickerson, 2015). Finally, Christenson (1995) mentions a positive relationship between parental involvement and better communication between parents and children.

Regarding the benefits for school and teachers, parental involvement is a valuable resource because families can share their experiences about their children (Anderson and Minke, 2007; Parsons et al., 2009; Skinner et al., 2014). Moreover, school climate as well as teachers' satisfaction and professional competence can be enhanced when parents are actively involved in school activities (Haynes et al., 1989; Christenson, 1995).

Although there is a broad scientific consensus that active parental involvement in school is an important factor for healthy child development and well-being, good school-family collaboration, and a supportive school climate, there is considerable empirical evidence that such involvement remains relatively rare to date (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2005; Anderson and Minke, 2007; Chen and Gregory, 2009; Goepel, 2009; Parsons et al., 2009; Martinez et al., 2012), and when parental involvement exists, it often remains at a superficial level (e.g., Luder et al., 2020). Finally, there are also critical positions on parental involvement in the school setting, especially in French-speaking empirical literature. In some publications, there are warnings against the idea of parental involvement at any costs. Several authors point out the risk that professionals may be tempted to control or educate parents in order to make them adapt to the local context,

without taking into account their needs or beliefs (Dufournet and Monceau, 2019; Giuliani, 2019; Monceau and Larivée, 2019).

## Parents' Satisfaction With the School

Empirical literature on parents' satisfaction with school often shows a good level of satisfaction. This was found both for parents of children with and without SEN. Nevertheless, most of the studies do not compare the satisfaction of the two groups in the same school or the same context. Studies on the satisfaction of SEN-Children's parents usually have a focus on specific experiences and needs of those families in their relationship with the regular or special school [e.g., Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, special teaching methods, inclusion] (Lüke and Ritterfeld, 2011; Kaczan et al., 2014; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017; Luder et al., 2020). Several researches indicate that effective communication and easily accessible teachers (Friedman et al., 2006; Starr and Foy, 2012; Pietsch et al., 2015; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017), as well as information about teaching contents and goals, are helpful to build up trust in teachers, which in turn increases school satisfaction (Pietsch et al., 2015; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). Other important factors include opportunities for parental involvement and the feeling of being able to influence school activities and decisions about the child's support (Laws and Millward, 2001; Lüke and Ritterfeld, 2011). Further, the quality of teaching and the use of modern and innovative teaching methods (Mortag, 2012; Kaczan et al., 2014; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017), the ability of teachers and the school to address students' special needs (Mortag, 2012; Pietsch et al., 2015; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017), and to deal with students' difficult behaviors (Starr and Foy, 2012) are mentioned as important factors for parental school satisfaction. Parents' perception of a positive and healthy school climate, students' academic success and well-being (Fend, 1998; Laws and Millward, 2001; Friedman et al., 2006; Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017) and the fact that students enjoy going to school and are motivated to learn (Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Kaczan et al., 2014) are other important determinants.

In addition, a number of parents or family characteristics appear to be important for parental school satisfaction. Positive associations have been found when parents do not work full-time (Fantuzzo et al., 2006), have a high feeling of self-efficacy (Laws and Millward, 2001), have positive attitudes toward inclusion (Fish, 2008; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Chen, 2017; Luder et al., 2020), and when they live together and thus are better able to share responsibilities and worries about school (Fantuzzo et al., 2006; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). Conversely, low parental school satisfaction is correlated with higher parents' educational level (Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017), belonging to a minority (Friedman et al., 2006), and having a child with special educational needs (SENs) or a child experiencing bullying at school (Newman, 2005; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). Furthermore, parents' recollection of their own school experience (Räty et al., 2004) is considered as a predictor of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Finally, Friedman et al. (2006), Gibbons and Silva (2011), as well as Mortag (2012) identified several structural aspects of the school, such as safety, access to transportation for students, availability of midday and after-school care, the school's environment and equipment, the school's financial

resources, and the school's reputation as significant for parents' school satisfaction.

## The Present Study

Many studies on school-family collaboration focus on the school's perspective. Since successful collaboration is of high importance for children's well-being and achievement and cannot be defined unilaterally, we conducted a nationwide study in Switzerland to investigate the parents' view on this collaboration.

In this paper, we present some of the findings focusing on parental satisfaction with school, keeping in mind the context of an *inclusive healthy school* as defined in the scope of this research topic. The research questions are:

- 1) How satisfied are parents with the school of their children as a whole and with selected aspects of the school-family relationship?
- 2) What factors are related to parents' satisfaction with the school?

As mentioned above, it is difficult to operationalize the complexities of the school-family relationship. In this study, we followed the "Systemic Demands-Resources Model (SAR Model)" (Becker, 2006) as a theoretical framework. According to Luder et al. (2020)'s interpretation of this model for the school context, a family's overall situation depends on how well it manages to cope with external and internal demands with the help of external and internal resources. In order to assess parents' satisfaction with school, we selected different demands and resources of the school-family relationship that have been found to be significant in previous research (Von Marées, 2008; Ritterfeld et al., 2011; Venetz et al., 2014; Keller, 2018; Luder et al., 2020).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To answer the research questions, we conducted an online survey with standardized and open-ended questions (concurrent embedded design), followed by a sequential explanatory data evaluation (see, e.g., Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011).

### Participants and Procedures

Data were collected using an online questionnaire between July 2019 and February 2020 in three of the four language regions of Switzerland. Parents or legal guardians of children of school age (4–18 years old) were asked to evaluate the current school situation of their children.

Participants were recruited by the help of parent's associations in the German, French and Italian-speaking parts of the country. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. In total,  $N = 918$  parents or legal guardians filled out the questionnaire for  $N = 1275$  children. Among the participants, 74.9% responded in German, 15.8% in French, and 9.3% in Italian. Mothers represented 81.4% of the participants and the vast majority (75.8%) of the respondents had Swiss nationality (5.7% had dual nationality, 12.7% another nationality, and 5.8% did not provide information). 16.5% of the respondents had one child, 56.4% had

two, and 23.9% three or more children, and 3.2% did not provide information. The participants' level of education was slightly higher compared to the Swiss population: 48.0% of participants had a university or college degree, 17.9% a higher education degree, 8.5% a high school diploma, 20.5% a federal certificate of vocational training, and 5.1% did not provide any answer. Most of the children were enrolled in public schools (98.6%) and 78.0% attended schools with a traditional model (schools that do not have a continuous schedule including lunch). 11.5% of the students were in kindergarten, 64.8% were in elementary school, 19.0% in lower secondary school, and 4.7% in upper secondary school. Finally, 15.8% of these students had SEN. In the context of this study, the term "special educational needs" includes educational support for students with disabilities and/or learning disabilities, courses in the language of instruction for foreign language speakers, interventions for students with high intellectual potential, as well as various forms of school provided therapy such as speech therapy or psychomotricity.

### Instruments

To measure the different aspects of school-family collaboration and parental satisfaction with school, several validated German-language scales were used, translated in French and Italian. The translations were done by native speakers and validated by an independent back-translation. Two of the quantitative scales (EZI-D and PIQ) were already available in validated translations.

Parental satisfaction was measured with the scale *General parental satisfaction with school* (Ritterfeld et al., 2011) which consisted of three items. A sample item is "The school is very committed to us." The response scale ranged from 1 (not applicable at all) to 4 (fully applicable). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.85 ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ).

Parents' involvement was measured with a slightly adapted version of the scale *Perceived level of information* (Ritterfeld et al., 2011) which also consists of three items [as for example: "I feel well informed about the procedures and decisions of the school (e.g., homework, grades, and school career)"]. The response scale ranged from 1 (not applicable at all) to 4 (fully applicable). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.88 ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ).

Parents' confidence in the school personal was also measured with a scale from Ritterfeld et al. (2011) which was slightly modified and called *Mistrust of school professionals*. A sample item is "I have no confidence in my child's teachers." The response scale ranged from 1 (not applicable at all) to 4 (fully applicable) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.80 ( $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ).

Parents' confidence in the future of their child was investigated with the help of the scale *Confidence in the child's future* (Ritterfeld et al., 2011). A sample item is "My child will make its own way." The response scale ranged from 1 (not applicable at all) to 4 (fully applicable) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.81 ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ).

The dimension of collaboration was operationalized using a scale developed by the research team, based on instruments and results from Sodogé et al. (2012). This new scale was called *Collaboration with school*. The answer options were the same as those mentioned above and it consisted of 5 items. A sample item is "Teachers understand our concerns and problems" and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.88 ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ).

The *academic self-concept and emotional inclusion* of the children were measured through the estimation of the parents with two sub-scales from the Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ; Venetz et al., 2014). Each sub-scale consisted of 4 items with answer options ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (certainly true). For reason of better comparability with other research using the PIQ, the sum score was used instead of the mean. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were 0.90 for the emotional inclusion ( $M = 12.54$ ,  $SD = 3.01$ ) and 0.85 for the academic self-concept ( $M = 12.75$ ,  $SD = 3.01$ ).

Finally, the parents' perception of inclusion was operationalized with the instrument *Attitudes toward inclusion* (Kunz et al., 2010) which was developed based on Palmer et al. (1998). Answer-options ranged from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 6 (I fully agree), and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.80 ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ).

In addition to the scales presented above, the questionnaire also contained qualitative, open-ended questions, which were answered by the participants in the form of free text. These questions were related to the topics covered in the scales.

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package IBM SPSS (version 26). Group differences were tested using *T*-tests, analyses of variance (ANOVA), and Welch's ANOVA when the homogeneity assumption of variances was not met. In order to test which variables were most strongly related to parent's school satisfaction, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were calculated.

Qualitative data (open text boxes) were analyzed using the software MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2020). The answers to the open questions were coded with a qualitative content analysis (QCA) according to Mayring (2010). The coding was first done deductively, along the themes of the study and in a second step inductively, in order to consider topics that were not expected. The results of the QCA are presented in addition to the quantitative results and serve for a better understanding of quantitative analysis (parallel data triangulation during evaluation).

## RESULTS

In this section, we first present selected results on the parents' views of various aspects of family-school collaboration. These findings are enriched with exemplary statements from the qualitative analyses. In the second part, we show which factors are most strongly related to parents' satisfaction with the school.

### Parent's General School Satisfaction

On a scale of 1 to 4, the results showed that parents ( $N = 1269$ ) were in general satisfied to very satisfied with their children's overall school situation ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). However, there were statistically significant differences between the school levels [Welch's  $F(3, 202) = 20.28$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ]: Parents of children at lower secondary schools ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) were significantly less satisfied than parents of children in kindergarten. The analysis by language region also revealed that parents from Italian-speaking

Switzerland ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) are significantly more dissatisfied [ $F(2, 1266) = 22.43$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ] than parents from the other two language regions. Furthermore, there is a tendency toward less satisfaction for families with four or more than four children. This tendency was also observed in the other aspects of the school-family relationship.

In parents' answer to the open-ended questions, their relation to the classroom teacher seemed to be of great importance: *"The teacher's personal commitment in the classroom is of high quality and far exceeds all our expectations. Collaboration is respectful, discussions are honest and clear. We feel very supported in the current situation"* (lower secondary school, 459). Teacher's commitment, as well as the quality of communication were often mentioned.

## Selected Aspects of the School-Family Relationship

### Collaboration With School

Parents were further asked how they experience the collaboration with their children's school. Overall, collaboration was rated positively with an average of  $M = 3.21$  ( $SD = 0.65$ ) on a scale of 1 to 4 ( $N = 1267$ ). Significant differences were found while comparing school levels [ $F(3, 1252) = 22.18$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ]: parents of children in kindergarten rated the collaboration with the school more positively ( $M = 3.34$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ ), than parents of children in lower secondary school ( $M = 2.98$ ;  $SD = 0.64$ ). In addition, results also show that parents from the Italian-speaking region ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) are significantly more critical about the collaboration with school than parents from the two other language regions [ $F(2, 248) = 31.12$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ].

Various statements in the qualitative data highlighted the parents' satisfaction regarding collaboration with the school. Satisfaction with the child's classroom teacher was mentioned as an essential aspect of good collaboration with the school. Other positive aspects mentioned in this context were: a high level of teacher commitment, frequent exchanges on the child's developmental goals and learning progress, a friendly atmosphere during the exchanges with teachers, good communication and information flow between teacher and parent, the willingness of teachers to take the special needs of the child into account, and the possibility of influencing decisions made in school. An example of those positive statement was: *"His two teachers are very aware of L\*'s strengths and weaknesses and support him, inform us, involve us"* (elementary school, kid 12).

Parents who were less satisfied with their collaboration with the school often cited communication as a problem, either with the school as an institution or directly with the teachers. Furthermore, structural elements such as frequent changes of teachers also appeared to make collaboration more difficult in the eyes of parents, as well as the lack of care in the transitions between school grades (especially transition to elementary school and to lower secondary school). Finally, some parents of students with SEN reported difficulties related to the consideration of these special needs by the school, or to their increased need for communication that teachers sometimes had difficulty to satisfy. The following example comes from a family with one child having

SEN: “My child has severe dyscalculia as diagnosed by school psychology. The diagnosis was made at the beginning of elementary school. It took us several months to get an appointment. Then it took several more months until she received support classes. A lot of valuable time was lost. My daughter has fallen behind. The teacher doesn’t take it seriously and thinks that M\* could do it better if she wanted to” (lower secondary school, kid 366).

### Mistrust of School Professionals

As explained in the introduction and according to results above, teachers have a key role in the relationships between family and school, especially classroom teachers. Results on *mistrust of school professionals* ( $N = 1269$ ) revealed a low score ( $M = 1.74$ ;  $SD = 0.71$ ), which means that parents generally trusted teachers and specialists from the school. A significant difference was found, here as well, in relation to the school grade [ $F(3, 933) = 6.98, p \leq 0.001$ ]: Parents of children at the lower secondary level ( $M = 1.89$ ;  $SD = 0.68$ ) were more distrustful of the teachers and specialists than those in kindergarten ( $M = 1.58$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ).

Parents’ statements about trust in the school professional were of two different types: Some parents reported positive experiences regarding trust with teachers, while other statements indicated a lack of mutual trust between teachers and parents. A positive example of those statements is as follows: “The Teacher sees the qualities [of our child] and discusses how to achieve developmental goals together. Trust between teacher and parents is very important!” (elementary school, kid 375).

### Perceived Level of Information and Parental Involvement

Communication and information exchange are two key elements for a good school-family collaboration (see section “Introduction”). In this study, parents’ involvement was assessed with the scale *perceived level of information* ( $N = 1271$ ) and with some open-ended questions about opportunities for participation. With a mean of  $M = 3.13$  ( $SD = 0.71$ ) on a scale of 1 to 4, parents generally felt well informed about the school. However, there were clear differences in terms of school level [ $F(3, 1256) = 9.16, p \leq 0.001$ ]: Parents of children in kindergarten felt better informed ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ) than parents of children at upper secondary schools ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). Moreover, differences were observed between language regions, with Italian-speaking parents ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) feeling less well informed than parents in the two other language regions [ $F(2, 1268) = 7.75, p \leq 0.001$ ].

In the open-ended questions, parents who felt bad informed or who thought they could not involve enough in school mentioned for example the lack of communication with the teachers, or they considered teachers-parents’ meetings too short or too infrequent. Some of them found teachers hard to reach while others mentioned the means of communication as ineffective (notes in the diary or forms to sign rather than e-mail). Another example was the one of that parent complaining that contact with the school had always to be initiated by the family: “The teacher does not give any information to the parents as long as the child is calm and not disturbing, even if the child has poor grades and is discouraged and desperate. It is always up to us to seek exchange

and contact with the school” (elementary school, kid 94). Other parents expressed the wish that teachers and parents collaborate more closely and that the expertise of each be recognized and used to plan the student’s care: “In my opinion the teacher and the parents should form a team. Both are experts on the children, but in two different ways. I wish that this is recognized and that we look together how an optimal support and learning guidance could look like” (elementary school, kid 580). On the other hand, some parents were very little involved in the school, but this was not necessarily a problem for them: “I think that his school and his teacher do a good job and that’s why I want to interfere as little as possible. We have hardly any problems at school, so there is no need for any contact with the school outside of the regular parent-teacher meetings.” (elementary school, kid 189). Finally, some structural barriers to parental involvement were also mentioned, for example: “It would be helpful if parent-teacher meetings could take place at off-peak times or even after work. Meetings during the day are often difficult, because my husband also wants to participate, but cannot during the day (too far from work)” (elementary school, kid 477b).

### Aspects Related to Parents and Children Academic Self-Concept and Emotional Inclusion of the Children

Both the academic self-concept and the social inclusion were evaluated with the PIQ (Venetz et al., 2014). The academic self-concept of the children was rated rather positively by the parents ( $N = 1193$ ), with a mean of  $M = 12.75$  ( $SD = 2.47$ ) on a scale from 4 to 16. There was a significant difference between school levels [Welch’s  $F(3, 211) = 5.69, p \leq 0.01$ ]: Parents of children in kindergarten rated the academic self-concept of their children higher than parents of children in lower secondary school. Furthermore, parents of pupils with SEN evaluated the academic self-concept of their children much lower than the other parents [Welch’s  $F(1, 252) = 135.14, p \leq 0.001$ ].

The emotional inclusion of the children ( $N = 1193$ ) was rated by the parents in a medium to positive range ( $M = 12.54$ ;  $SD = 3.01$ ). Parents of children in kindergarten rated the emotional inclusion of their children higher than parents of children in lower secondary school. The difference was highly statistically significant [ $F(3, 1248) = 34.11, p \leq 0.001$ ]. For this dimension, there were no significant differences in the estimation of the child’s emotional inclusion between parents of children with and without SEN.

In the open-ended questions, some less satisfied parents pointed out that interdisciplinary skills and social learning are important to them. Those parents argued that not enough attention is given to these skills compared to the importance given to academic skills. They reported a strong pressure on the students, who are expected to demonstrate more and more academic skills, sometimes without taking into account their emotional needs.

### Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Attitudes toward inclusion are an important factor in the development of an inclusive school, whether it is the attitude of teachers, parents or students (Stanley et al., 2003; Feyerer, 2014;

Hollenbach-Biele, 2015). Furthermore, several studies showed that positive parental attitudes toward inclusion are linked to better school satisfaction (Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Luder et al., 2020). In this study, results indicated medium to positive parental attitudes toward inclusion with a mean of  $M = 4.38$  ( $SD = 1.07$ ) on a scale of 1 to 6 ( $N = 886$ ). The differences between school levels and between parents of children with and without SEN were not statistically significant. However, significant differences were found between language regions [ $F(2, 883) = 6.04, p \leq 0.01$ ]: parents from the French-speaking ( $M = 4.57, SD = 1.06$ ) and the Italian-speaking ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.09$ ) parts of Switzerland have more positive attitudes than parents from the German-speaking part ( $M = 4.3, SD = 1.07$ ).

Parents' statements on inclusive education showed a wide range of opinions. For example, inclusion is seen as positive in terms of the development of students' social skills, or to promote a more inclusive society, but school resources and teachers' skills were sometimes seen as insufficient. An example of positive attitudes is as follows: "If the stronger ones can help the weaker ones, both have something to gain, e.g., strengthening social competences" (lower secondary school, kid 465), while another example shows some doubts about school resources: "I find that leaving students with difficulties in a regular class is a noble goal, but in this case, teachers should have smaller classes. If not, it is difficult to manage and therefore counterproductive" (lower secondary school, kid 45). In addition, some parents with more negative attitudes toward inclusion seemed to have had adverse experiences with children showing behavioral problems.

### Confidence in the Child's Future

Another important element in assessing the school situation of the child was that the parents have confidence in the child's future. Overall, parents were very confident about the school career and later life of their children ( $N = 1267$ ), with a mean of  $M = 3.61$  ( $SD = 0.53$ ) on a scale of 1 to 4. There were statistically significant differences between parents with a monthly household income below 8,000 Swiss francs ( $M = 3.54; SD = 0.58$ ) and parents with a higher household income [Welch's  $F(2, 625) = 5.74, p \leq 0.01$ ]. Moreover, parents whose children have special educational needs were significantly less confident ( $M = 3.42, SD = 0.59$ ) than the other parents [Welch's  $F(1, 281) = 23.13, p \leq 0.001$ ]. Finally, here again, significant differences were found between language regions with parents from the Italian-speaking part of the country ( $M = 3.21; SD = 0.65$ ) being less confident in their child's future than the two other groups [ $F(2, 240) = 27.80, p \leq 0.001$ ].

### Factors Influencing Parent's General Satisfaction With School

To find out which aspects are related to parents' general school satisfaction, a multiple hierarchical regression was calculated (see Table 1). In the first model, the correlates of proximal factors on the parents' satisfaction were considered (language region, school level, and school type: public or private, school with or without day-care, and any special educational needs of the child). In Model 2, parents' attitudes toward inclusion and confidence in the child's future were added. In Model 3, two supplemental factors related to children's well-being at school (emotional

**TABLE 1 |** Multiple hierarchical regression analysis for parent's general school satisfaction ( $N = 1151$ ).

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1	Language region	-0.11	0.04	-0.11**
	School level	-0.27	0.05	-0.17***
	School type (public/private)	0.36	0.20	0.05
	School with/without day-care	0.11	0.05	0.07**
	With/without SEN	0.04	0.05	0.03
Step 2	Language region	-0.10	0.03	-0.09**
	School level	-0.23	0.05	-0.14***
	School type (public/private)	0.36	0.19	0.05
	School with/without day-care	0.11	0.05	0.07*
	With/without SEN	0.02	0.04	0.01
Step 3	Attitudes toward inclusion	0.10	0.02	0.17***
	Confidence in the child's future	0.23	0.04	0.18***
	Language region	-0.04	0.03	-0.04
	School level	-0.05	0.04	-0.03
	School type (public/private)	0.31	0.16	0.05
Step 4	School with/without day-care	0.04	0.04	0.03
	With/without SEN	-0.08	0.04	-0.05
	Attitudes toward inclusion	0.07	0.02	0.12**
	Confidence in the child's future	0.07	0.03	0.06*
	Emotional inclusion	0.12	0.01	0.54***
Step 4	Academic self-concept	0.00	0.01	-0.01
	Language region	-0.03	0.02	-0.03
	School level	0.00	0.03	0.00
	School type (public/private)	0.20	0.13	0.03
	School with/without day-care	0.05	0.03	0.03
Step 4	With/without SEN	-0.07	0.03	-0.05*
	Attitudes toward inclusion	0.02	0.01	0.04*
	Confidence in the child's future	0.00	0.03	0.00
	Emotional inclusion	0.06	0.01	0.29***
	Academic self-concept	0.00	0.01	0.01
Step 4	Perceived level of information	0.20	0.03	0.21***
	Mistrust of school professionals	-0.21	0.03	-0.22***
	Collaboration with school	0.26	0.03	0.25***

Step 1:  $F(5, 1145) = 12.25, p \leq 0.001, R^2 = 0.051$ ; Step 2:  $F(7, 1143) = 22.15, p \leq 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.069$ ; Step 3:  $F(9, 1141) = 71.23, p \leq 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.240$ ; and Step 4:  $F(12, 1138) = 158.24, p \leq 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.266$ ; \* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , and \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ .

inclusion and academic self-concept) were included. Finally, in the full model 4, the influence of three aspects of the school-family relationship was entered (perceived level of information, mistrust of professionals and collaboration with school).

The following six predictors made a significant contribution to parents' school satisfaction and explain a total of 62% of the variance ( $R^2_{\text{corr}} = 0.62$ , in order of the importance for variance explanation  $\beta$ ):

1. Emotional inclusion of the child
2. Quality of collaboration with the school
3. Mistrust of professionals
4. Perceived level of information of the parents
5. Special educational needs of the child
6. Parents' attitudes toward inclusion.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

International research over the past 40 years has provided clear evidence that school-family collaboration and parental involvement have a significant influence on the development of students' academic skills, their motivation and their general well-being (Cefai and Cooper, 2010; Stange, 2012; Hertel, 2016; Hampden-Thompson and Galindo, 2017). The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between school and family in Switzerland, more specifically parental satisfaction with school and the factors related to it. The empirical literature on this topic has shown that school-family collaboration has changed a lot in recent decades (Vasarik Staub et al., 2018). The collaboration is increasingly regulated by law, but often not established successfully in school practice (Chen and Gregory, 2009; Brühlmann and Staehelin, 2017). Concerning parental satisfaction, these findings are not encouraging, since the latter depends to a large extent on school-family relationships and opportunities for parental involvement (Lüke and Ritterfeld, 2011; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). Furthermore, children's experiences at school (Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Kaczan et al., 2014) as well as structural and organizational factors related to school (Friedman et al., 2006; Mortag, 2012) do also have an influence on parental satisfaction. To date, school-family collaboration has mostly been investigated from the school's perspective. Therefore, this study examined parents' views and needs about school-family collaboration.

In this study, we measured parental satisfaction both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results are in line with previous research mentioned above (Kaczan et al., 2014; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017; Luder et al., 2020), and indicate a relatively high level of satisfaction among parents with their children's schools. Collaboration with teachers and with the school is rated as good, and mistrust of school staff is relatively low. In addition, parents feel quite well informed by the school. Despite the overall positive picture parents draw about the four variables mentioned above, some significant group differences emerge: On the one hand, significant differences appear with respect to the students' school level for all four variables. There are several possible interpretations why parental general satisfaction, the perceived level of information, the perceived quality of collaboration and the trust in school staff are smaller in lower secondary schools than in primary schools or kindergarten: (a) the pressure to perform is lower for younger students, (b) children in kindergarten and elementary school have fewer teachers than students in secondary school, which can facilitate communication with the teacher and the school, and (c) adolescence, with the behavioral and relationship changes that often accompany it, may also have an influence on the child-parent-school triad. On the other hand, parents in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland seem to be less satisfied than in the other language regions, they have a lower perceived level of information and they rate the quality of collaboration more negatively. One possible explanation might be the fact that Ticino region has geographical peculiarities. It is made up of numerous valleys and small villages that are not always easily accessible. This means that schools are

often small and that the implementation of extra-curricular activities, daycare and special educational support can be more complex than in more urban areas. Further investigation about this topic is necessary to better understand the school-family relationship in Switzerland.

Variables directly related to the student's well-being in the classroom (emotional inclusion and academic self-concept) were also assessed rather positively by the parents surveyed, and a significant difference was observed between parents of kindergarten children and those of secondary schools' students for both variables: the younger the children, the higher the academic self-concept and the emotional inclusion. Adolescence (with its behavioral and relationship changes), as well as the increased pressure to perform that children face while growing, might explain these results. Finally, parents of students with SEN rated their child's academic self-concept significantly more pessimistically than parents of students without SEN. This was to be expected, given the general academic difficulties associated with SEN and the challenges and concerns experienced by parents of students with SEN (e.g., Doege et al., 2011; Beuys, 2017). Surprisingly, contrary to what might have been expected given the empirical literature in this field, having a child with SEN was not related to the parents' estimation of the emotional inclusion of students (e.g., Koster et al., 2010; Dworschak and Inckemann, 2014; Schwab, 2015). However, as this measure is only the parents' assessment (not combined with the children's self-assessment, nor with the evaluation of teachers or peers) and does not consider the specificity of special educational needs, this result should be interpreted with caution.

In the present study, parents' attitudes toward inclusion were medium to positive, which is consistent with previous research on this topic (de Boer et al., 2010; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Paseka and Schwab, 2020). The language region was the only variable found to be related to those attitudes: parents of children in the German-speaking part of the country were less positive about inclusive education. This result should be further investigated in future research. In our results about this topic, no other socio-demographic or student-related variables were found to be significantly related to the parents' attitudes toward inclusion, in contrast to the results of several studies. Indeed, current scientific literature mentions following factors to be related to parental attitudes toward inclusive education: having a child with SEN, parents' socio-economic status and level of education, as well as parental prior experiences of inclusion (de Boer et al., 2012; Paseka and Schwab, 2020). The qualitative results concerning parental attitudes, however, are in line with the empirical literature on this topic: concerns related to school resources and teachers' competences appear in the results of this study as they do in the literature (de Boer et al., 2010; Hollenbach-Biele, 2015), as well as the variation of parental attitudes according to the type of disability of the students being included (de Boer et al., 2010; Schwab, 2018; Paseka and Schwab, 2020). Furthermore, our results show the concerns of some parents of SEN-children about the support received by their own children in the regular school, some similar results are also reported by de Boer et al. (2010), Luder et al. (2020) as well as Paseka and Schwab (2020).



Among the parents surveyed in this study, confidence in their child's future is high overall. This confidence is significantly higher when the monthly household income is above average, which reflects the results of Ritterfeld et al. (2011). Moreover, having a child with SEN is also related to this variable: parents of SEN students have significantly less confidence in their child's future than parents of students without SEN. This finding is not surprising, as it is well known that families of children with academic difficulties or disabilities face significant challenges in terms of their children's schooling and transition to the vocational world (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2001; Doege et al., 2011; Beuys, 2017; Luder et al., 2020). However, this latter result raises questions about how schools might better help parents of children with SEN during the preparation and the transition to the vocational world.

To determine which factors were most strongly related to parental satisfaction with the school, a regression analysis was calculated. The results highlighted the strong role played by children's emotional well-being. In addition, collaboration with the school, the perceived level of information and the mistrust of professionals are also good predictors of parental satisfaction. Finally, parental attitudes toward inclusion are also associated with parents' school satisfaction, as the fact of having a child with special educational needs. But both variables have clearly smaller effect sizes than the four variables discussed above. These results are partly comparable to results of prior research. Indeed, children's well-being, having fun at school and being motivated to learn are highly predictive of parental satisfaction (Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Kaczan et al., 2014; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). However, among the factors related to children, the empirical literature also reports students' academic performance as having a major influence on parental satisfaction (Friedman et al., 2007; Gibbons and Silva, 2011). In the present study, data about students' academic performance are not available, however, parents' assessment of children's academic self-concept does not seem to be directly related to their satisfaction. The way in which students' academic performance was measured in this study may explain this difference in results, as well as the composition of the sample. Indeed, only 25% of the students in the sample were in lower or upper secondary school, the levels where the pressure on academic performance is greatest. Finally, having a child with special educational needs is also reported in the empirical literature as a factor negatively influencing parents' satisfaction with school (Newman, 2005; Jónsdóttir et al., 2017). The needs of SEN students educated in inclusive contexts often require more communication and collaboration between school and family, as well as between professionals. Given that these two elements are crucial for parents' satisfaction with the school, but are also key areas reported to need improvement in the field of inclusive education (Kunz et al., 2012; Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Kreis et al., 2014), our findings was not surprising. However, in a school system like the swiss one, which aims to become always more inclusive, it would be important that schools and professionals have enough resources and know-how, and are convinced of the benefit of inclusive education, in order to better be able to meet the needs of parents of SEN-children. Several key factors

for a "good" collaboration between family and school emerged from the literature review. These are crucial both for parents of children with and without SEN. In the qualitative results of the present study, parents of children with SEN highlighted some specific aspects that seem to be particularly important in their situation: respect and recognition of the child's needs, strengths and weaknesses, clear communication between teachers and parents, especially about goals to be achieved and the possibilities of collaboration, opportunities for parents to be involved in the support of their children and the decisions made about this support, and finally to feel supported by the school. In order to continuously develop schools toward inclusion, human and financial resources should be strengthened, and school staff should be better trained and sensitized about the needs and rights of children with SEN, as well as the needs and rights of their families.

## Limitations and Future Research Direction

The sample in this study is not representative for the total population of parents in Switzerland. It contains an overrepresentation of parents with a high socioeconomic status and a high level of education. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents with Swiss nationality in the sample is higher than the one in the population (81.5% vs. 75%; Federal Statistical Office, 2020a) and the German-speaking part of the country is significantly more represented in the sample than it is in the population (74.9% vs. 62.6%; Federal Statistical Office, 2020b). Those biases may be due to the fact that the research team contacted parents' associations to access the sample, and to the fact that the survey was organized online, and only accessible in three national languages. To verify the impact of these biases in the sample, the research team is planning an additional study targeting families with lower levels of schooling, lower incomes, and migration backgrounds.

Another limitation concerns the measurement of parental involvement. For this dimension, two scales from Ritterfeld et al. (2011) were selected, adapted, and translated into French and Italian. Unfortunately, one of them (*Feeling of having an influence on school's decisions*) did not show sufficient reliability, which may be due to the adaptations made and/or the translation. For this reason, the dimension of parental involvement, which is of great importance in this study, is only assessed using one quantitative scale. However, the parents surveyed made many contributions in the open-ended questions, which makes it possible to put some nuances in the quantitative results about this topic.

In this study, Becker's SAR model was used as a theoretical framework, and several aspects of family-school collaboration that have been shown to be relevant in previous studies were included in the questionnaire. However, this approach risks ignoring key components. Therefore, it is important to advance modeling in this area to develop theoretically and empirically based approaches to better understand parental satisfaction with school and improve family-school collaboration.

Finally, the translation of several scales used in this study should be validated by future research. This concerns all scales

coming from Ritterfeld et al. (2011) as well as the self-developed scale called *collaboration with school*.

## Conclusion

This study largely confirms prior knowledge about school-family collaboration and parental satisfaction with the school. It also highlights how important it is to parents that children are feeling well at school.

In today's socio-economic and cultural context, with an increasing pressure in the working environment and high expectations of performance and efficiency, the pressure at school also seems to have increased. This can be observed in many countries (including Switzerland), for example through the use of external evaluations of schools, which tend to generate competition between students, between schools and between countries (e.g., Yerly, 2014; Schleicher, 2019). In this context, and with an inclusive, healthy school in mind, it is essential that the school and its stakeholders provide an environment for students that promotes both their emotional well-being and academic skills. Indeed, when students do not feel comfortable and are not socially included, their performance is also reduced.

The attitudes toward inclusion of the various school stakeholders (teachers, professionals, students, and parents) are considered essential in the development of an inclusive school. But to date, parents' attitudes have been much less investigated than those of teachers and students (de Boer et al., 2012; Paseka and Schwab, 2020). However, it is well established that parents' attitudes have a major influence on the development of their children's ones. Thus, considering parents' attitudes and working on them can be a fruitful way to contribute to the development of inclusive education.

Furthermore, our study confirmed important aspects related to parents' satisfaction with the school: the child's emotional inclusion, the quality of collaboration with the school, trust in the school staff, the perceived level of information, the fact that the student has special educational needs, and parents' attitudes toward inclusive education. The results offer schools some ideas on how to improve their work with and for families. On the one hand, schools can provide support systems to help parents to cope with internal and external demands. On the other hand, they can use families as a resource to create an environment that offers children optimal learning and development opportunities.

Finally, parental involvement is seen as a key factor in the school-family relationship, and its positive effects are proven, both in the area of special educational needs and health promotion. Parental involvement should therefore be encouraged in schools. However, some parents in the present study report

not wanting to get involved in what happens in school as long as everything is going well for their children. They trust the school and the professionals and do not have the need to participate. In addition, some authors mention various risks related to the idea of involvement at all costs. It is therefore necessary to look for a balance between the desire (both from school stakeholders and from parents) and benefits of implementing parental involvement and the desire of some parents not to participate, or to participate in their way, in order to best meet the needs of each family.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original raw data generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author. They will be provided for further analysis within suitable projects in .xlsx and/or .txt format.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RK, RL, AP, and GP conceptualized the study. RK, RL, AP, GP, and AK contributed to data collection and data analysis. AP and RK wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors edited the manuscript.

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**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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