RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transformative school–community collaboration as a positive school climate to prevent school absenteeism

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Abstract

School absenteeism has become a prevalent problem that affects student development and future societies across the world. We examined whether and how the framework for transformative school–community collaboration (TSCC) can be utilized to effectively reduce school absenteeism. To achieve this goal, we analyzed clustered data involving 3428 students within 14 schools that collaborated with communities in providing out-of-school time programs. A generalized ordered logit analysis with clustered standard errors showed that overall TSCC significantly decreased the likelihood of students' school absenteeism. Democratic and empowering structures in the collaboration were particularly significant for reducing the higher level of school absenteeism. We conclude our article with practice implications to translate the core dimensions of TSCC into effective practice.

KEYWORDS

critical theories, empowerment, school absenteeism, school–community collaboration, social justice

1　|　INTRODUCTION

School absenteeism has become a prevalent problem across the world although educational engagement has been declared as the basic human right of children and youth (Kearney, 2016). School absenteeism generally refers to students' absences from school regardless of whether the absences are excused or not (Conry & Richards, 2018). In the United States, school absenteeism is pervasive and prevalent. Chang, Bauer, and Byrnes (2018) analyzed the US Department of Educations' Office for Civil Rights data during the 2015–2016 school year. They reported that

approximately 8 million students (15% of overall students) were chronically absent and the absenteeism rates had increased from the previous school year. Even more troubling, school absenteeism was overrepresented among schools with high proportions of low-income, racial minority, and/or special education students (Chang et al., 2018).

School absenteeism has been demonstrated as a serious risk factor for students' a variety of well-being outcomes, especially when they are chronically absent. It is highly related to lower academic achievement, higher dropout, higher delinquency, and lower physical and emotional health (Kearney, 2008). School absenteeism can also negatively affect a future society because it can reduce students' opportunities to become competent citizens who contribute to social and economic development in society (Ekstrand, 2015). In addition to these detrimental outcomes, many researchers agree that school absenteeism is too complex to understand because it is influenced by the complex intersection of multidimensional factors at the individual, family, school, and community levels (Conry & Richards, 2018; Ingul, Klöckner, Silverman, & Nordahl, 2012).

Therefore, a paradigm shift has been suggested from individual to comprehensive approaches to addressing various risk and protective factors of school absenteeism to improve student outcomes through strong collaboration between schools, parents, and communities (Ekstrand, 2015; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Kearney, 2016). Although there is no unified definition of school-community collaboration, it can be broadly defined as an ongoing process of working together between schools, parents, and communities to accomplish mutual goals with a specific focus on student learning and development (Kim, 2017). Schools and community agencies are traditionally important members of the school-community collaboration. However, recent studies view parents and families as equal partners in the collaboration because of their critical role in their children's education (Anderson, Chen, Min, & Watkins, 2017; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

School–community collaboration can be beneficial for reducing school absenteeism because it brings all stakeholders and resources together to provide high-quality school-based programs that meet students' multifaceted needs regarding school absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2017; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007; Zyngier, 2011). In particular, out-of-school time (OST) programs that offer a variety of school-based activities to support students' educational, social, physical, and behavioral outcomes has been demonstrated to be effective for increasing students' attendance and reducing their absenteeism (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; O'Donnell and Kirkner, 2014; Reid, 2012; Teasley, 2004). In this sense, school–community collaboration that provides a high quality of OST programs can be viewed as a positive school climate to reduce school absenteeism universally and proactively by providing students with safe places and enhancing their active engagement in schools. Similarly, Epstein and Sheldon (2016) propose a conceptual framework suggesting that effective school–community collaboration can improve the quality of school-based programs designed to engage students and their parents in school activities, which in turn leads to increased students' daily school attendance. Despite the growing popularity of school–community collaboration, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that supports its potential effects on school absenteeism. Furthermore, little is known about what specific elements of school–community collaboration are more significantly associated with reduced school absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010). As Thomson and Perry (2006) argue, collaboration is a dynamic process consisting of multiple dimensions required to achieve intended outcomes. Without uncovering such a "black box of the collaboration process" (Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 21), schools may not be prepared well to build and maintain successful collaboration to achieve shared goals.

This research gap warrants the current study to identify the core dimensions of successful school–community collaboration and examine their effects on school absenteeism. We attempt to achieve the main purposes of this study based on the concept of transformative school–community collaboration (TSCC) originally developed by Kim (2017). Drawing on a critical paradigm and relevant theories, TSCC is a value-laden framework for school–community collaboration that encompasses multiple dimensions at the individual, relational, and structural levels to transform schools and communities: critical member capacities, equal relations, and democratic and empowering structures. Although previous research identified the underlying principles and dimensions of TSCC

(2017) and developed a valid scale to measure the identified dimensions (2019), additional research should be conducted to examine its potential effect on individual students' outcomes, such as school absenteeism.

1.1 | TSCC and school absenteeism

In this section, we describe the mission, values, and dimensions of TSCC and discuss clear rationales for why TSCC may be useful for combating school absenteeism. Successful school–community collaboration does not occur in natural settings. It requires multiple dimensions and specific strategies to develop joint capacities, relations, and structures (Thomson & Perry, 2006). However, the suggested dimensions and strategies for successful collaboration may vary depending on different ideologies and theories (Green, 2017).

TSCC is primarily guided by the shared principles of a critical paradigm and its relevant theories: critical theory, organizational justice theory, and empowerment theory. Each theory's assumptions and its potential effects on collaborative outcomes have been described elsewhere in more detail (Kim, 2017). TSCC primarily aims to transform schools and communities by promoting member capacities, equal power, democracy, and empowerment within school–community collaboration. In other words, school-community collaboration can be transformative when collaboration partners enhance their critical capacities for building collaboration and analyzing local problems, equally treat each other with respect, make democratic decisions, and empower them to successfully coordinate their collaborative activities (Kim, 2019).

TSCC may provide a useful framework to effectively prevent school absenteeism for several reasons. First, TSCC can be used to promote the core values of social justice and human rights for students and their families. Students should have rights and opportunities to make their own decisions on their education. However, many students and their families, especially those who are historically marginalized, are often disempowered and excluded from decision-making in schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Kim (2017) demonstrated that TSCC was beneficial for enhancing the active engagement of students and their families in school activities. Therefore, TSCC may allow schools to share power with students and families in developing, implementing, and evaluating school-based programs for school absenteeism.

Second, although limited studies directly examine the relationship between TSCC and school absenteeism, some theoretical and empirical studies provide useful insights into how specific dimensions of TSCC can be effective for improving collaborative processes and outcomes. For example, individual partners' specific skills, such as critical awareness, negotiation, and advocacy, are necessary to successfully implement school–community collaboration (Warren, 2005). Critical theorists emphasize critical consciousness because it is essential to identify the root causes of social problems and develop effective strategies to confront social injustice and oppression (Lotia and Hardy, 2008). School absenteeism is a complex issue influenced by individual, family, and community factors. In particular, social injustice issues, such as racism and discrimination, are significant factors that limit students' active engagement in schools (Kearney, 2016). Therefore, Ekstrand (2015) argues that schools should build strong partnerships with families and communities to increase their resources and address complex social problems that affect school absenteeism.

Relational aspects of school–community collaboration are also critical for the success of the school–community collaboration. Critical theorists argue that equal relations that treat partners fairly and respectfully are important because collaboration does not always provide equal opportunities and benefits for all members (Hardy & Phillips, 1998). Similarly, the organizational justice theory underlying TSCC provides another rationale for the importance of equal relations within the collaboration. Collaboration partners improve their active engagement and willingness to share their resources when collaboration promotes interactional justice that treats partners with respect and dignity (Weiner, Alexander, & Shortell, 2002). Furthermore, this interactional justice is a necessary condition to promote procedural justice that makes collaborative decision-making fair and democratic (Luo, 2007). As a result, equal relations between collaboration partners may increase the quality of

OST services to reduce school absenteeism through their shared commitment and resources, which ultimately results in a decrease in school absenteeism.

At the structural level, school–community collaboration may be more effective for preventing and reducing school absenteeism when democratic decision-making is ensured in school–community collaboration. Democracy is one of the core components suggested by critical and justice theories. It can be enhanced when the collaboration involves all partners in decision-making (Sheldon, 2007), provides open and transparent communication between partners (Anderson et al., 2017), and provide fair decision-making processes (Weiner et al., 2002). Zyngier (2011) also found that partners' empowerment was a critical component of successfully coordinating school–community collaboration. Partners can be empowered when they develop shared goals based on their consensus, respond to their changing needs through flexible procedures, and provide enough time and resources to coordinate successful collaboration (Anderson-Carpenter, Watson-Thompson, Jones, & Chaney, 2017; Himmelman, 2001; Stead, Lloyd, & Kendrick, 2004).

Finally, TSCC may be instrumental for addressing school absenteeism because it is originally designed to provide high-quality OST programs to support students' learning and other developmental outcomes (Kim, 2017). OST programs have been implemented as one of the effective universal interventions for school absenteeism (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; O'Donnell and Kirkner, 2014; Teasley, 2004). Reid (2005, 2012) suggests that effective OST programs can provide not only safe places, where students can be supervised by responsible adults but also effective activities that minimize students' risk factors and maximize their protective factors relating to school absenteeism. More importantly, some studies show that the positive effects of OST programs can be strengthened when the OST programs are offered by strong school–community collaboration. Anderson et al. (2017) found that effective school–community collaboration increased students' educational outcomes because it facilitates family and community engagement in OST programs and makes a better connection between OST programs and school curricular goals. Similarly, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that school–community collaboration was effective for providing high-quality OST programs through community resources, which motivated students to attend school regularly.

In summary, TSCC can provide a useful framework for building school–community collaboration to effectively reduce school absenteeism. We hypothesize that students may be less likely to be absent from school when their schools implement school–community collaboration with the high quality of critical member capacities, equal relations, and democratic and empowering structures. However, these hypotheses are theoretical and not yet fully supported by empirical evidence. Therefore, we examine whether TSCC is beneficial for preventing school absenteeism. We also examine what specific dimensions of TSCC are significantly associated with the different levels of school absenteeism.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Data collection and participants

We analyzed data that incorporated three different data sources collected during the 2015–2016 school year in Indiana in the United States: school surveys, student surveys, and the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) administrative data. The school surveys were collected from school staff to assess the quality of school–community collaboration implemented in their schools (i.e., TSCC). The student surveys were collected from students who attended the same schools to measure their school absenteeism and other individual characteristics. The IDOE data were secondary administrative data that publicly reported school characteristics. The three data sources were matched together by school names. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (ID: 34373671).

To collect school and student surveys, we used purposive sampling to recruit and select school participants based on two selection criteria. First, we focused on schools within a geographically clustered area characterized as metropolitan cities because the homogeneous sample could produce better predictions when nonprobability sampling methods are used (Guo & Hussey, 2004). Second, within this geographic area, we recruited schools implementing school–community collaboration in providing OST programs. We obtained the list of approximately 400 schools located in the selected areas from the state school directory and contacted them via emails and phone calls to solicit their participation in either school or student surveys or both. Once the schools met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to complete the school surveys by one school staff member who was mainly responsible for managing school–community collaboration as the school representative of the collaboration. Next, the selected schools were asked to choose their students at their convenience and help them complete the student surveys with an expectation of involving at least 100 students. Finally, additional school characteristics were obtained from the IDOE website which was freely accessible to the public.

The matched data for this study included a total of 3428 students across 14 schools. For the school-level characteristics, 11 school participants were public schools (78.6%) and 10 schools were middle/high schools (71.4%). The average percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunch was 51.8% (SD = 21.9) across the schools. For student-level characteristics, about 53% of students were females (n = 1726) and 59% were white students (n = 2024). More than 56% of students (n = 1905) were aged 6–15 years, whereas about 44% were aged 16–20 years.

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | School absenteeism

School absenteeism was self-reported by students using one question with six ordinal categories that measured days of missing school in the last school year: (a) less than 2 days, (b) 3–4 days, (c) 5–6 days, (d) 7–8 days, (e) 9–10 days, and (f) 11 or more days. Similar to the measure of school absenteeism by Ingul et al. (2012), the original question was collapsed into three categories: low absenteeism (<2 days of absence), normal absenteeism (3–10 days of absence), and high absenteeism (11 or more days of absence). Thirty-three percent of students (n = 1245) reported low absenteeism and 58% (n = 1892) reported normal absenteeism. About 9% of students (n = 291) were categorized as high absenteeism.

2.2.2 | Transformative school–community collaboration

TSCC is a school-level variable that measures the major dimensions of school-community collaboration perceived by school staff members who were responsible for coordinating school–community collaboration that provides OST programs. Schools often play a leading role in developing, implementing, and evaluating school–community collaboration. Understanding collaboration from the lead organization is commonly used in the study of collaboration because of feasibility and cost benefits. Once school staff members were selected as the representative of school–community collaboration, they were asked to evaluate the quality of their school–community collaboration using a valid scale with 15 items.

The original scale showed acceptable Cronbach's α for the subscales (ranges: 0.76–0.88) with the Cronbach's α of 0.91 for the entire scale (Kim, 2019). Critical member capacities were measured by four items assessing individual partners' organizing skills, negotiation skills, advocacy skills, and critical analysis skills. Equal relations were measured by three items assessing equality between partners with regard to joint membership, treatment, and resource distribution. The original scale evaluated democratic network governance (four items) and

empowering coordination (four items), separately. For this study, we used the average score of the two subscales to measure democratic and empowering structures because of the high correlation between them. It would be reasonable to make them a single variable because they are supposed to assess the structural aspects of school–community collaboration. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating the higher level of each dimension of TSCC.

2.2.3 | Student-level control variables

School absenteeism can be influenced by various student- and school-level factors. At the student level, demographic characteristics, including gender, ethnicity/race, and age, are associated with school absenteeism (Chang et al., 2018; Ekstrand, 2015). Furthermore, students' perceived school bonding and connections to schools have been identified as a significant protective factor that reduces school absenteeism, truancy, or dropout (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Students' demographic variables were all binary variables: gender (1 = males; 0 = females), age (1 = 16–20 age groups; 0 = 6–15 age groups), and race (1 = white; 0 = students of color). In addition, students' perception of school bonding was measured by a modified version of a valid scale, Perception of School Social Bonding (PSSB), developed by Gentle-Genitty and Chen (2013). PSSB was an 11-item scale that measured students' perceptions of attachment, involvement, and commitment/brief. All times were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating the higher level of school bonding. The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.85.

2.2.4 | School-level control variables

School absenteeism can be also influenced by school-level characteristics, such as size, grade, type, and socioeconomic status. For example, school absenteeism is often higher among middle/high schools than elementary schools (Chang et al., 2018) and low-income schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Three school-level variables were obtained from the IDOE administrative data and were included in final analyses as control variables. A school type is a binary variable indicating whether schools are public or not (1 = public schools; 0 = private schools). A school grade was coded 1 if schools were elementary schools; otherwise, coded 0 (i.e., middle/high schools). School income status was measured by the percentage of students who received free or reduced-price lunch out of the total students enrolled in a school.

2.3 | Analysis plan

We first conducted descriptive analyses to assess the scope and status of TSCC among 14 schools. Next, we employed a generalized ordered logit analysis with clustered standard errors to test major hypotheses using Stata 15. This specific method would be appropriate because the dependent variable, school absenteeism, is ordinal in nature and the parallel-lines assumption for a traditional ordered logit regression analysis was not met; some independent variables' regression coefficients were not the same across all levels of the dependent variable (χ^2 (8) = 17.04, $p < .05$). In this case, the special type of the generalized ordered logit analysis, called a partial proportional odds model, is suggested to perform (Williams, 2006). Furthermore, the data we analyzed included individual students nested with schools. Clustered data often violate the independence of observations required for traditional regression analysis. As Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo (2007) suggest, we used a clustered standard errors technique to estimate accurate standard errors, especially of school-level variables (i.e., TSCC), after accounting for residual correlations between individuals within groups.

3 | FINDINGS

3.1 | Scope and status of TSCC

Table 1 presents the results of a multiple response analysis assessing varying types of partners involved in school–community collaboration. About 14 school participants provided a total of 87 responses, suggesting that on average, schools involved at least six different types of partners in their school–community collaboration. The most common partners were nonprofit organizations serving children and youth, and parents/community residents (n = 11, 78.6% of cases, respectively). Schools also collaborated frequently with business/corporations and faith-based organizations (n = 10, 71.4% of cases, respectively). This result is understandable because, as seen in Table 2, schools more frequently created school–community collaboration when they provided prosocial activities in OST, such as mentoring, volunteer/service activities, prevention, other social-emotional programs (M = 3.36, SD = 0.67; full-range 1 = never to 5 = very often).

TABLE 1 Multiple responses analysis of the types of partners

Types of partners	N	% of responses	% of cases
Nonprofit organizations serving children and youth	11	12.6	78.6
Parents and community residents	11	12.6	78.6
Business/corporations	10	11.5	71.4
Faith-based organizations	10	11.5	71.4
National service and volunteer organizations	8	9.2	57.1
Universities and educational institutions	7	8.0	50.0
Healthcare organizations	7	8.0	50.0
Government organizations	7	8.0	50.0
Social service organizations	7	8.0	50.0
Cultural and recreational organizations	5	5.7	35.7
Senior citizen organizations	3	3.4	21.4
Other organizations	1	1.1	7.1
Total	87	100.0	621.4

TABLE 2 Frequency of school–community collaboration in OST programs

OST programs	M	SD
Prosocial activities (e.g., mentoring or volunteer)	3.36	0.67
Academic clubs (e.g., tutoring or career development)	2.46	0.78
Sports (e.g., soccer or basketball)	2.45	0.93
Performing arts (e.g., band or dance)	2.42	0.79
School involvement (e.g., pride events or cheerleading)	2.33	0.89

Abbreviations: OST, out-of-school time; SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 3 Average ratings of transformative school–community collaboration (TSCC)

Dimensions	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Critical member capacities	4.03	0.39	3.25	5.00
Equal relations	3.98	0.42	3.33	5.00
Democratic and empowering structures	3.77	0.37	3.06	4.75
Total TSCC	3.89	0.34	3.30	4.88

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.

Table 3 shows the dimensions of TSCC perceived by 14 school participants. The average rating of the overall TSCC was 3.89 (SD = 0.34). More specifically, school participants reported the highest score on critical member capacities (M = 4.03, SD = 0.39), followed by equal relations (M = 3.98, SD = 0.42) and democratic and empowering structures (M = 3.77, SD = 0.37). The results imply that it may be more difficult to build the structural aspects of school–community collaboration than other individual and relational aspects.

3.2 | Generalized ordered logit model with clustered standard errors

Table 4 depicts the results of the generalized ordered logit model that examined the association between the dimensions of TSCC and school absenteeism after controlling for student- and school-level variables. As seen in Model 1, the overall TSCC significantly decreased the odds of school absenteeism, suggesting that students were less likely to miss school days when their school implemented equal, democratic, and empowering school–community collaboration in providing OST programs. Furthermore, TSCC was more strongly associated with the decreased odds of school absenteeism from low/normal to high levels (odds ratio [OR] = 0.36, $p < .001$) than those of school absenteeism from low to normal/high levels (OR = 0.63, $p < .01$). Therefore, it can be suggested that TSCC may be more beneficial for addressing the higher level of school absenteeism.

Model 2 indicates more detailed information about which dimensions of TSCC are significantly associated with students' different levels of school absenteeism. Critical member capacities significantly decreased the odds of school absenteeism from low to normal/high levels (OR = 0.65, $p < .01$). However, this effect was not significant for the low/normal versus high absenteeism (OR = 0.81, $p = .32$). Democratic and empowering structures significantly decreased the odds of school absenteeism from low/normal to high levels (OR = 0.59, $p < .001$), whereas this variable was not significant for the low versus normal/high absenteeism (OR = 1.05, $p = .73$). We did not find the significant effect of equal relations on all the levels of school absenteeism.

Of control variables included in the full model (Model 2 in Table 4), older students aged 16–20 were more likely than younger students aged 6–15 to report the normal/high level of school absenteeism (OR = 1.51, $p < .05$). School bonding significantly reduced the odds of school absenteeism across all levels, but the stronger effect was found with the high level of school absenteeism (low vs. normal/high, OR = 0.71, $p < .001$; low/normal vs. high, OR = 0.57, $p < .001$). For school-level variables, the odds of school absenteeism were significantly higher among elementary schools than middle/high schools (OR = 1.47, $p < .01$). The percentage of free/reduced-price lunch was significantly associated with the increased odds of school absenteeism (OR = 1.01, $p < .001$). The significant effects of these school-level factors were the same across the levels of school absenteeism.

TABLE 4 Generalized ordered logit regression with clustered standard errors for the association between TSCC and school absenteeism

| | Model 1 | | | | Model 2 | | | |
| | Low versus normal/high absenteeism | | Low/normal versus high absenteeism | | Low versus normal/high absenteeism | | Low/normal versus high absenteeism | |
Variables	OR	Robust SE	OR	Robust SE	OR	Robust SE	OR	Robust SE
Student-level variables								
Males	0.89	0.07	0.89	0.07	0.89	0.07	0.89	0.07
White	1.17	0.12	1.17	0.12	1.16	0.12	1.16	0.12
Aged 16–20	1.44**	0.18	1.44**	0.18	1.51*	0.24	1.17	0.20
School bonding	0.71***	0.04	0.57***	0.03	0.71***	0.04	0.57***	0.03
School-level variable								
Public schools	1.14	0.20	1.14	0.20	1.20	0.21	0.94	0.22
Elementary schools	1.64***	0.20	1.64***	0.20	1.47**	0.18	1.47**	0.18
% of free/reduced-price lunch	1.01***	0.00	1.01***	0.00	1.01***	0.00	1.01***	0.00
TSCC variables								
Overall TSCC	0.63**	0.09	0.36***	0.05				
Critical member capacities					0.65**	0.11	0.81	0.17
Equal relations					0.88	0.12	0.88	0.12
Democratic/empowering structures					1.05	0.15	0.59***	0.07
N	3111				3111			
LR χ^2 (df)	327.40 (10)***				8617.25 (11)***			

Abbreviations: OR, odds ratio; SE, standard error; TSCC, transformative school–community collaboration.

*p < .5.
**p < .01.
***p < .001.

4 | DISCUSSION

We attempted to examine whether and how the framework for TSCC can be utilized for successfully reducing school absenteeism which is a globally prevalent challenge affecting student development and future society. TSCC is a comprehensive framework consisting of multiple dimensions required to facilitate critical member capacities, equal relations, and democratic and empowering structures in school–community collaboration. As we hypothesized, high-quality TSCC was significantly associated with reduced school absenteeism. In particular, the effect of TSCC appeared to be stronger for reducing the higher level of absenteeism. The overall findings are consistent with previous studies that demonstrated the positive effect of school–community collaboration on school absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007; Zyngier, 2011). According to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, students can benefit when schools, families, and communities work together for their attendance and learning because the collaboration decreases potential conflicts between the major stakeholders and increases the quality of school-based programs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Thus, it seems to promise that TSCC may provide useful guidelines to develop school–community collaboration as a positive school climate that brings all stakeholders and resources together to reduce all levels of school absenteeism.

Furthermore, this study suggests specific dimensions of TSCC that affect the different levels of school absenteeism. Critical member capacities significantly decreased the relatively lower level of school absenteeism. In contrast, democratic and empowering structures were significant in reducing the relatively higher level of school absenteeism. The data do not provide additional information to delve into possible explanations for these interesting results. However, the results may be explained by the nature of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is more difficult to address because it is often influenced by the intersections of various risk factors (Kearney, 2008, 2016). Therefore, school–community partners should develop more insensitive and comprehensive interventions to meet the complex needs of chronically absent students. To do so, democratic and empowering structures may be required to allow all stakeholders' more diverse voices to be heard equally in a decision-making process and then help them to coordinate the intensive and comprehensive interventions through the flexible, responsive, and supportive processes of collaborative coordination. Similarly, Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, and Eggins (2017) found that a successful police–school partnership for reducing truancy required fair decision-making procedures that ensured all partners' equal opportunities for inputs and contributions to addressing students' truancy.

Unlike our hypothesis, equal relations did not have a significant effect on school absenteeism. However, this does not mean that the relational aspect of TSCC is not entirely important, given that the overall TSCC with all dimensions was significantly associated with school absenteeism. As we discussed above, collaboration is a dynamic process by which its major dimensions influence each other simultaneously or sequentially as the collaboration evolves. Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that relationship building is a critical task at the early collaborative process because, without trustful relationships between partners, partners are less likely to reach consensual decision-making through fair and transparent procedures. As a result, we suggest a future hypothesis that equal relations may be a precondition to enhance democratic and empowering structures, which in turn results in decreased school absenteeism.

4.1 | Limitations

We acknowledge some limitations of this current study. The first limitation is related to the measure of school absenteeism. In this study, school absenteeism was self-reported by the students themselves due to not having permission to access to schools' attendance records. Thus, there maybe a discrepancy between their self-reported absenteeism and actual absenteeism. Furthermore, the current measure did not specify chronic absenteeism normally defined as missing 10% of a school year (~18 days). It also did not distinguish whether absences were excused or unexcused because of the limited information in the survey. Indeed, absenteeism can take various

forms of school refusal behaviors from "school attendance with stress and pleas for nonattendance" to "complete absence from school for an extended period of time" (Kearney, 2016, pp. 3–5). We also acknowledge that the meanings of school absenteeism could vary across different age groups although students have the same days of missing school. Future research should use more objective and comprehensive measures that assess the varying forms of age-appropriate school absenteeism.

Second, the sample may not be representative of the overall population because of using a nonprobability sampling method to select schools and their students. The sample seems to have a relatively higher proportion of middle/high and low-income schools as compared to the entire schools in the state where the data were collected. The findings of the current study may be less generalizable to other schools with different backgrounds, such as elementary and high-income schools. Furthermore, the sample includes a relatively small number of schools ($n = 14$). Although a clustered standard errors technique to account for group-level errors works well for the generalized ordered logit model, this technique is better performed for the larger number of clusters (Primo et al., 2007). Therefore, representative and larger data at the school level may produce more valid and reliable estimates in the future.

Finally, although this study controlled for both student- and school-level factors to examine the association between TSCC and school absenteeism, other important factors affecting school absenteeism were not included in the final analysis. Again, school absenteeism is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of multidimensional factors. Some studies have shown that family and community factors affect school absenteeism and they are also interconnected with other individual and school factors (Reid, 2005; Teasley, 2004). We suggest future research to examine the effect of TSCC on school absenteeism by considering other risk and protective factors in multiple domains. It may be also beneficial to examine how TSCC interacts with other risk and protective factors in influencing school absenteeism. Such a future study can help us better understand a full mechanism through which TSCC leads to better student outcomes.

4.2 | Practice implications

This study suggests several practice implications for practitioners working with vulnerable children and youth within schools and communities to reduce school absenteeism. In particular, social workers can play a leading role in building school–community collaboration because of their major responsibilities in schools as school and community liaisons and their competency level of working at both micro and macro levels (Sutphen et al., 2010; Teasley, 2004). As a boundary spanner and team facilitator, they should create, implement, and sustain TSCC in constant and comprehensive ways because this particular model is suggested to operate with multiple dimensions —critical member capacities, equal relations, and democratic and empowering structures—through a cyclical process. Without the full implementation of the suggested dimensions, school–community collaboration may not be beneficial to maximize its desired outcomes and even may engender unexpected consequences that negatively affect its success (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2016). It is also important to highlight that our true intention is not to suggest "cookie-cutter solutions" which can be applied to every context of school–community collaboration. Rather, we hope to suggest a basic framework that helps partners develop their own school–community colla-boration that has the best fit with their unique contexts through equal, democratic, and empowering structures and processes.

Although all the dimensions are equally important, we found that critical member capacities and democratic and empowering structures were more directly associated with students' reduced absenteeism. For the critical member capacities, partners should develop their knowledge and skills to organize and facilitate collaborative processes, negotiate group differences, advocate for marginalized members, and critically analyze community issues that students face. Although additional research is needed to identify the clear relationships between the core dimensions of TSCC, we suggest that partners' capacities and relationships building could be implemented at

the beginning of the collaborative process because the individual and relational aspects of collaboration are fundamental to developing collaborative structures to make democratic decisions and facilitate empowering co-ordination (Kim, 2017).

The findings also suggest that democratic and empowering structures within school–community collaboration are beneficial to prevent school absenteeism, especially for chronically absent students. The lack of structured coordination that prevents frequent and transparent communication between partners is the most significant barrier to the success of partnerships for reducing truancy (Mazerolle et al., 2017). Some researchers offer useful guidelines and strategies to promote democracy and empowerment in collaboration. For example, Agger and Löfgren (2008) suggest that democratic network governance can be achieved when partners allow all re-presentative stakeholders to participate in transparent decision-making processes, to freely express their thoughts and ideas through fair procedures, to respond consistently to each members' changing needs, to be accountable for their collective decisions, and to improve their democratic capacities and identities. Furthermore, empowering coordination requires a more flexible and supportive operating system. As we discussed above, flexibility provides partners with enough time to develop shared goals and strategies with a constant negotiation process and restructure an existing system to effectively respond to their changing needs and environments (Kim, 2017). Consistent with Gutierrez, GlenMaye, and DeLois (1995), technical and administrative support is also fundamental for empowering partners because it enhances their capacities, teamwork, and institutional culture to ensure active engagement in school–community collaboration.

5 | CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that supports the usefulness of TSCC on school absenteeism. However, ongoing efforts are necessary to develop a theory of change that clearly explains how TSCC leads to better outcomes from the formation to the evolution of school–community collaboration. It is also important to further investigate how the promising outcomes of TSCC may differ by different purposes, target populations, specific collaborative activities, and contextual environments. For example, TSCC was demonstrated to become a positive school climate that provided universal prevention services (i.e., OST programs). Future research should be con-ducted to examine the effectiveness of TSCC on secondary or tertiary interventions that require more intensive and targeted interventions to address emerging or chronic school absenteeism. We hope that these future studies provide useful insights into understanding a holistic, comprehensive, or even paradoxical process of TSCC to ultimately translates the conceptual framework of TSCC into effective practice.

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