

---

## [Parental support to learning](#)

### [Parental participation](#)

**This brief examines the role of parents in supporting their children’s learning in school and how planners and decision-makers can support this role. A related brief looks at issues of [school and learning readiness](#).**

Parents (or caregivers) are the first educators of their children. The support they provide affects children’s development, learning, and subsequent educational outcomes. This includes direct support to learning before and during formal education, as well as indirect facilitating of factors such as nutrition, health, and hygiene. Support tasks range from school and home communication, assistance in learning activities at home, participation in school events, and participation in school-decision-making bodies (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Support may vary according to the age of the child, ranging from preschool support in the home to direct support once the child has transitioned to school, including assistance with homework and volunteering in classrooms and with school functions.

### **What we know**

A large body of research shows that ‘at-home good parenting’ is a strong predictor of children’s achievement, even after other factors which impact achievement have been taken out of the equation, including the quality of schools at the primary age (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003: 4). Mahuro and Hungi (2016) found in Uganda that parental participation in the form of commitment of time and resources to their children’s education plays a pivotal role in motivating children to improve their academic grades.

Findings from the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) confirm that parental involvement in education is pivotal for the success of children throughout their learning pathways. By showing their children how to plan, monitor, and be aware of the learning process, involved parents help them develop the language and other skills needed for learning. Moreover, teachers may pay more attention to students if they know that their parents are more involved (OECD, 2012: 13).

Research shows how children’s literacy improves when their parents are involved in schools, regardless of the parents’ level of educational achievement (Marphatia et al., 2010). Promoting higher levels of parental involvement may help to reduce performance differences across socioeconomic groups (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012). Evidence suggests that with support disadvantaged parents can become more engaged with their children’s learning and that in turn, this can lead to better outcomes (Axford et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of parental support, as parents have

---

had to join the front-line teaching and learning process (Winthrop et al., 2020). Parents' lack of education and ability to provide support for homework may crucially affect child learning outcomes, especially during school closures (Brossard et al., 2020).

Overall, findings suggest that children of involved parents are more motivated to learn for learning's sake, because they adopt their parents' positive attitudes towards school and learning (OECD, 2012). Accompanying and supervising children's main school goals – that is, to study and to learn – modelling positive behaviours and attitudes towards school and conveying the importance of school have the strongest positive impact on learning (Castro et al., 2015). Family policies can also be used as entry points for promoting school attendance and learning at all stages of childhood, but these need strengthening to have an impact on promoting equitable learning outcomes. (Richardson et al., 2020).

## Challenges and limitations

**Evidence on the impact of parental involvement on children's learning outcomes in developing countries is minimal.** Most research has been conducted in urban settings in Western countries where supportive structures often exist to facilitate parental participation (Marphatia et al., 2010; Carter, 2017). Measures of parental involvement used in studies in developing countries are based on scales that have been established in the context of developed countries, where parental involvement may be different (Chowa et al., 2013).

**Not all forms of involvement have the same impact on learning.** According to Cao et al. (2014), the evidence from experimental and quasi-experimental studies on this issue is mixed, depending on the type of parental involvement and type of outcome considered. Some argue that supervision and control of homework and parental attendance at school activities are not necessarily related to children's academic achievements (Castro et al., 2015). Others indicate that school-based parental involvement is only modestly associated with student outcomes, at least when compared to 'at-home good parenting' (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). In Ghana, home-based parental involvement was found to be associated positively with academic performance, while school-based parental involvement had a negative association (Chowa et al., 2013).

**Evidence on the causal impact of parental involvement on academic achievement is scarce.** Most studies that document a strong correlation between parental involvement and education outcomes are descriptive but cannot show causality (Marphatia et al., 2010; Cao et al., 2014: 11; Carter, 2017).

**Differing definitions of parental involvement** and a general lack of consensus concerning which types of parent involvement lead to which educational outcomes means that establishing links between parental involvement and student learning is complicated, especially since educational outcomes are influenced by a number of different factors (Cao et al., 2014; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

## Obstacles to parental involvement

Some parents, in particular those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or minority groups, face barriers to involvement in their children's learning. According to Axford et al. (2019: 7), there are material and psychological obstacles 'which operate differentially (and discriminately) across the social classes' and evidence of a socioeconomic gradient to parents' engagement in their children's

---

learning and the home learning environment. Findings from the UK suggest that parents from ethnic and/or linguistic minority groups may not have the confidence or skills to guide their children or may be viewed by teachers and schools as having less ability and effectiveness to contribute to their children's education (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2010). This was also found to be the case for parents of migrant or refugee children (d'Addio, 2019). While most parents feel that they are able to assist their child with school-related work during the primary years, many feel less capable of helping their children as the curriculum becomes more advanced.

## **Policy and planning**

### **Embedding parental engagement in education plans and policies**

Parental engagement is increasingly recognized by policy-makers as one of the integral parts of educational reforms (Wilder, 2014). At the national level, the constitution and/or the education sector policy should define the parameters for parental engagement in schools as well as provide incentives and support for engagement (Marphatia et al., 2010). At the decentralized level, district education offices can support parents with regard to their roles and responsibilities (Kayabwe, Asiimwe, and Nkaada, 2014). Parental engagement must be planned for and embedded in a whole-school or service strategy, including in needs analysis, establishment of priorities, monitoring and evaluation, and raising of public awareness (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2010: 9).

### **Capacity-building for teachers and administrators**

Teachers and administrators may need training to sensitize them to ways in which they can involve parents in the education of their children (Bray, 2001; OECD, 2012). Suggestions include for teachers to organize 'just drop in' sessions, establish an open-door policy in their classrooms, create a class website with a dedicated space for questions and answers from parents, and organize home visits. Education systems can help by identifying milestones and objectives as well as providing adequate financial resources to meet the objectives (OECD, 2012).

### **Parenting and parental involvement programmes**

Parenting programmes aim to create awareness of the importance of parents' role in supporting their children's growth and development and to strengthen or modify their attitudes, beliefs, and practices in relation to caring for a child (Evans, 2006). Parental involvement programmes aim to strengthen home-school relations with the objective of improving educational outcomes (Barrera-Osorio, 2021). Most programmes focus on marginalized or disadvantaged parents or ethnic minority families, for example, the HIPPY ([Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters](#)) programme, implemented in a wide range of countries, provides support to socially disadvantaged families and parents of young children. In Romania, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are collaborating on a [National Parenting Education Platform](#) through which 31,000 parents and caregivers have received parenting classes. UNICEF reports that such classes contribute to higher school participation and improved communication between parents and schools.

### **Inclusion of parental involvement in teacher training and curricula**

Parents can serve as educational allies of teachers by assisting them in developing children's full academic potential and monitoring the quality of teaching and teaching strategies (Marphatia et al., 2010). The importance for teachers of working with parents to support children's learning and development is also underscored in curriculum frameworks in many countries (OECD, 2017). For

---

example, the [new Kenyan curriculum](#) (2018) emphasizes the role of parents as essential to their children's education with '[parental empowerment and engagement](#)' as one of its guiding principles. In Malta, [the National Curriculum Framework](#) (2012) highlights the fact that educators need to work with parents and the wider community in order to ensure a successful educational process.

### **Promotion of parents' associations**

The positive impact of parents' involvement and support is significant, both on school governance and on children's learning outcomes (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Balarin and Cueto, 2007). While such policies have a particularly notable impact on governance, they also have a learning component. Evidence from Mexico suggests that trust between parents and teachers, and clear rules about parents' expectations are key factors to any improvement (Barrera-Osorio, 2021). School governance policies can also provide a starting point for parental engagement within schools. However, roles and responsibilities of parents in relation to other stakeholders are not clearly defined in most countries, and the roles of different stakeholders need to be made clear and accepted by all (Marphatia et al., 2010; Bray, 2001).

### **Parental support during school closures**

Policy decisions on school closures and continuing education remotely need to take into account parents' capability to help their child learn. Parents can be supported with home learning packages, particularly where there is no IT connectivity or electricity (Brossard et al., 2020). Angrist et al. (2020) found that engaging parents through SMS and phone calls led to increased parental participation in their children's education and improved parents' understanding of their child's learning level. It is important that any strategies developed also take into account parents' busy lives and the variety of family situations with support targeted to those who need it most (Winthrop, 2020).

#### Plans and policies

- **Kenya:** [Guidelines on parental empowerment and engagement](#) (2019)
- **South Africa:** [Practical guidelines: How parents can contribute meaningfully to the success of their children in schools](#) (2016)

#### Tools

- Education Scotland. [Engaging parents and families - A toolkit for practitioners](#)
- Garcia, M.E.; Frunzi, K.; Dean, C. B.; Flores, N.; Miller, K.B. 2016. [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; Institute of Education Sciences; National Center for Education.

---

## References and sources

- Angrist, N.; Bergman, P.; Brewster, C.; Matsheng, M. 2020. [Stemming learning loss during the pandemic: A rapid randomized trial of a low-tech intervention in Botswana](#). CSAE Working Paper WPS/2020-13. Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE).
- Axford, N.; Berry, V., Lloyd, J.; Moore, D.; Rogers, M.; Hurst, A.; Blockley, K.; Durkin, H.; Minton, J. 2019. [How can schools support parents' engagement in their children's learning? Evidence from research and practice](#). London: Education Endowment Foundation.
- Balarin, M.; Cueto, S. 2007. [The quality of parental participation and student achievement in Peruvian government schools](#). Working Paper 35. Oxford: Young Lives.
- Barrera-Osorio, F.; Gertler, P.; Nozomi Nakajima, N.; Patrinos, H.A. 2021. [Promoting parental involvement in schools: Evidence from two randomized experiments](#). RISE Working Paper Series. 21/060.
- Borgonovi, F.; Montt, G. 2012. [Parental involvement in selected PISA countries and economies](#). OECD Education Working Papers No. 73. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Bray, M. 2001. [Community partnerships in education: Dimensions, variations and implications](#). Education for All: 2000 Assessment. Paris: UNESCO.
- Brossard, M.; Cardoso, M.; Kamei, A.; Mishra, S.; Mizunoya, S.; Reuge, N. 2020. [Parental engagement in children's learning: Insights for remote learning response during COVID-19](#). Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2020-09, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
- Cao, Y.; Ramesh, A.; Menendez, A.; Dayaratna, V. 2014. [Out-of-school parents and community involvement interventions](#). Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.
- Carter, N. 2017. [Engaging parents in their children's education](#). K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Castro, M.; Expósito-Casas, E.; López-Martín, E.; Lizasoain, L.; Navarro-Asencio, E.; Gaviria, J.L. 2015. [Parental involvement on student academic achievement: A meta-analysis](#). In: *Educational Research Review*, 14, 33–46.
- Chowa, G.A.N.; Masa, R.; Tucker, J. 2013. [Parental involvement's effects on academic performance: Evidence from the YouthSave Ghana experiment](#). St. Louis, MO: Washington University Center for Social Development.
- D'Addio, A. 2019. ['Parents and communities need to be engaged in migrant children's education'](#). World Education Blog, 3 July 2019.

---

Desforges, C.; Abouchaar, A. 2003. [The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: A literature review](#). Research Report, 443. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Evans, J.L. 2006. [Parenting programmes: An important ECD intervention strategy](#). Background paper for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007. Paris: UNESCO.

Goodall, J.; Vorhaus, J. 2010. [Review of best practice in parental engagement](#). Research report DFE-RR-156. London: Department for Education.

Kayabwe, S.; Asiimwe, W.; Nkaada, D. 2014. [Successful decentralization: The roles and challenges of DEOs in Uganda](#). Paris: UNESCO-IIEP.

Mahuro, G.M.; Hungi, N. 2016. [Parental participation improves student academic achievement: A case of Iganga and Mayuge districts in Uganda](#). In: *Cogent Education*, 3(1).

Marphatia, A.A.; Edge, K.; Legault, E.; Archer, D. 2010. [Politics of participation: Parental support for children's learning and school governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda](#). Johannesburg: ActionAid; London: Institute of Education.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2017. [Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education](#). Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2012. [Let's read them a story! The parent factor in education](#). Paris: OECD Publishing.

Richardson, D.; Dugarova, E.; Higgins, D.; Hirao, K.; Karamperidou, D.; Mokomane, Z.; Robila, M. 2020. [Families, family policy and the sustainable development goals](#). Innocenti Research Report. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Wilder, S. 2014. [Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: A meta-synthesis](#). In: *Educational Review*, 66(3), 377–97.

Winthrop, R.; Ershadi, M.; Angrist, N.; Bortsie, E.; Matsheng, M. 2020. [A historic shock to parental engagement in education: Parent perspectives in Botswana during COVID-19](#). Washington, DC: Brookings Center for Universal Education.

[print](#)