

Module 2, Session 3: Contact with home and the community

Inclusive and equitable education through family and community engagement

Hoover-Dempsey and her friends (2005) succinctly stated the importance of family engagement, whether construed as home-based behaviours (such as helping with homework), school-based activities (attending school events), or parent-teacher communication (talking with the teacher about homework), has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores (e.g., Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Fan & Chen, 1999; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Craft, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Wang, Wildman, & Calhoun, 1996). Family engagement has also been associated with other indicators of school success, including lower rates of retention in grade, lower drop-out rates, higher on-time high school graduation rates, and higher rates of participation in advanced courses (e.g., Barnard, 2004; Ma, 1999; Marcon, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Trusty, 1999; Henderson and Mapp, 2002). (Show video <https://youtu.be/Kr7odmvNFcQ>)

A report on various key aspects of a successful transition to the German school system (Punzeberger 2016, cited in EDINA, 2022) emphasises the importance of parents being involved and informed. She confirms that parents are a child's first teachers and that their continued support is crucial for success; even migrant and refugee families are unfamiliar with how things are done in the new country (EDINA, 2022). Well-planned and well-implemented family and community involvement activities contribute to pupils' achievement and success in school (Epstein, 2001). Families' and communities' engagement in children's education should be considered and valued as crucial educational partners of schools due to their contribution to children's education and general development. Achieving inclusive and equitable education requires interactive teaching strategies and actively acknowledging and appreciating cultural differences and similarities in and outside the classroom to foster skills and transfer knowledge between children with different language backgrounds (Axford et al., n.d.).

Dimensions of Engagement

"Family engagement may include the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; contact participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance" (Desforges

& Abouchaar, 2003; Pp 4). Providing an example regarding designing a family engagement programme (Comer & Haynes, 1991) involving parents brings a community perspective to planning and management activities due to their natural link to the communities in which schools are located. The authors further noted that parents also created awareness regarding the needs and experiences of their children that can help teachers plan target-oriented, responsive, age and culturally appropriate social and academic agendas in the classroom. They recommended that a well-planned family engagement plan can provide the linkage between home, community, and school essential to children's healthy growth and development.

Building an Equitable Relationship

Effective engagement occurs when families and schools commit to building an equitable relationship that offers a non-judgmental and supportive affinity (Digman and Soan, 2008, cited in Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Schools become successful when they make immense investments to provide families with the psychological support and physical resources necessary for success. Teachers' ability to create a collaborative effort to meet migrant families' needs is indispensable in working with a population whose needs are multifaceted and highly challenging within the context of schooling (López et al., 2001). Lopez has also found that schools under study were able to recognise the cultural and educational strengths of migrant families. However, they realised that parents might not have the social capital to negotiate the unfamiliar school policies and practices and/or the social services available in the larger community. By facilitating this process, schools- in collaboration with community agencies and other educational institutions- could effectively fulfil the educational needs of parents without subscribing to the deficit psyche. The fact that parents are made to feel that they are not alone when facing economic and physical hardships helps mitigate the stress associated with poverty. However minor and/or temporary, this relief helps parents focus their energies on engaging in ways that make a real difference in their children's educational lives (López et al., 2001). This effort will enhance two-way communication and is likely to be valuable and increase the effectiveness of home-school relationships (Axford et al., n.d.).

Positive communication

When initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they effectively create and sustain family and community connections with schools. Parent involvement programs that effectively engage diverse families acknowledge, respect, and address cultural and class differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A partnership underpinned by positive communication protects children's

mental health and wellbeing. Several barriers can get in the way of communicating with families, such as a one size fits all approach (in communication channels), language barriers, jargon and abbreviations and assumptions that families know the education system. Teachers need to check if they are really communicating with families and understand their own unconscious biases.

Empower Families

Facilitate opportunities for families to share their knowledge and experience to become better partners in education. If parents are viewed in unfavourable terms, then the expectation placed on them is minimal, relegating them to marginal players in their children's education and involvement with school activities. However, if parents are placed, valued and viewed as central to education's goal and essential players in their child's education, they will feel their input is highly valued and respected. In this context, elevated expectations are placed on parents. Parents feel empowered to get involved in their children's education and other school activities in new and fundamentally diverse ways (López et al., 2001). Teachers must explicitly tell families they are experts on their children and confirm families as equal partners in educating their children (Joyce Epstein, 2011). The family's role is significant in supporting their children by encouraging them to set goals, plan, and manage their time, effort, and emotions. This support can help children regulate their learning and will often be more valuable than solely help with homework tasks.

Top Tips

- ✓ Be optimistic about the potential of collaborating with parents but cautious about the best approaches.
- ✓ Communicate with parents for positive reasons first and focus on building trust and relationships.
- ✓ Talk to less involved parents about what support they would find helpful.
- ✓ Teachers guide their subject areas for parents to support pupils at home.
- ✓ Create space- EAL Coffee mornings
- ✓ Support parents with communication at home and parent's evening.
- ✓ Consistency approach to what is happening at home and school.
- ✓ Use techniques like asking for a meeting or visiting a family home; visit the ones you do not hear from. Ensure such a visit is culturally accepted and not seen as an intrusion.
- ✓ Departments draw from people in the community as teaching or learning aids. Use this learning to engage pupils in the lessons.
- ✓ Avoid assumptions - we assume that everybody understands each other, and they don't.

- ✓ Develop collaborating and signposting trends with housing, social care and other relevant sectors, which are vital to alleviate families' challenges and support them to engage actively with their children's education.
- ✓ Leadership- prioritise family engagement and build ability to support student achievement. The school leader needs to set the tone and culture that this is a welcoming environment that opens doors to the community, value parent input, and look at things from different angles/perspectives.

Reflection/discussion points

Leadership: Are all the communications you send out accessible for the parents at your school? How could you improve communications for those who struggle to speak English?

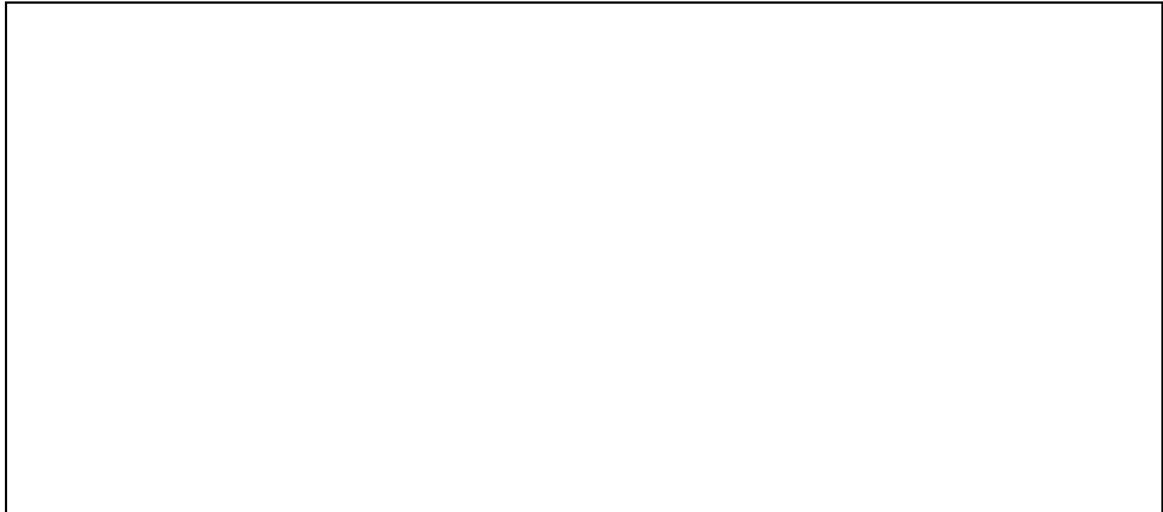
Whole school: Do you struggle to communicate with any EAL parents? What things could you put in place to improve relations and communications with EAL parents? Think about the examples raised in the video. Could any of these things work in your school?

Activity

Reflection. Involvement of relatives.

Strategies to involve relatives	How does your school score on involving relatives?
1. The active engagement of parents/relatives in school activities;	
2. Regular contact with the parents/relatives about the education of the pupil;	
3. Use of the mother tongue within the school;	
4. Increasing teachers' positive attitudes towards pupils' prospects and the use of their own languages;	
5. Listing activities for pupils and parents/relatives on the website	

How can your school engage the relatives in the school's activities and the children's education further?



Source: (Edina, 2022) <https://edinaplatform.eu/content/7-communication-with-stakeholder/4-reflection-and-exercises/involvement-of-relatives.pdf>

Reading list

CPD College Ltd, 2014. *Teachers TV: Parental Involvement*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr7odmvNFcQ> [Accessed 01 10 2022].

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Hoover-Dempsey, K. v., Walker, J. M. T., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal* (Vol. 106, Issue 2, pp. 105–130). <https://doi.org/10.1086/499194>

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