

COLLABORATING TO TRANSFORM AND IMPROVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

A playbook for family-school engagement

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1. Overview



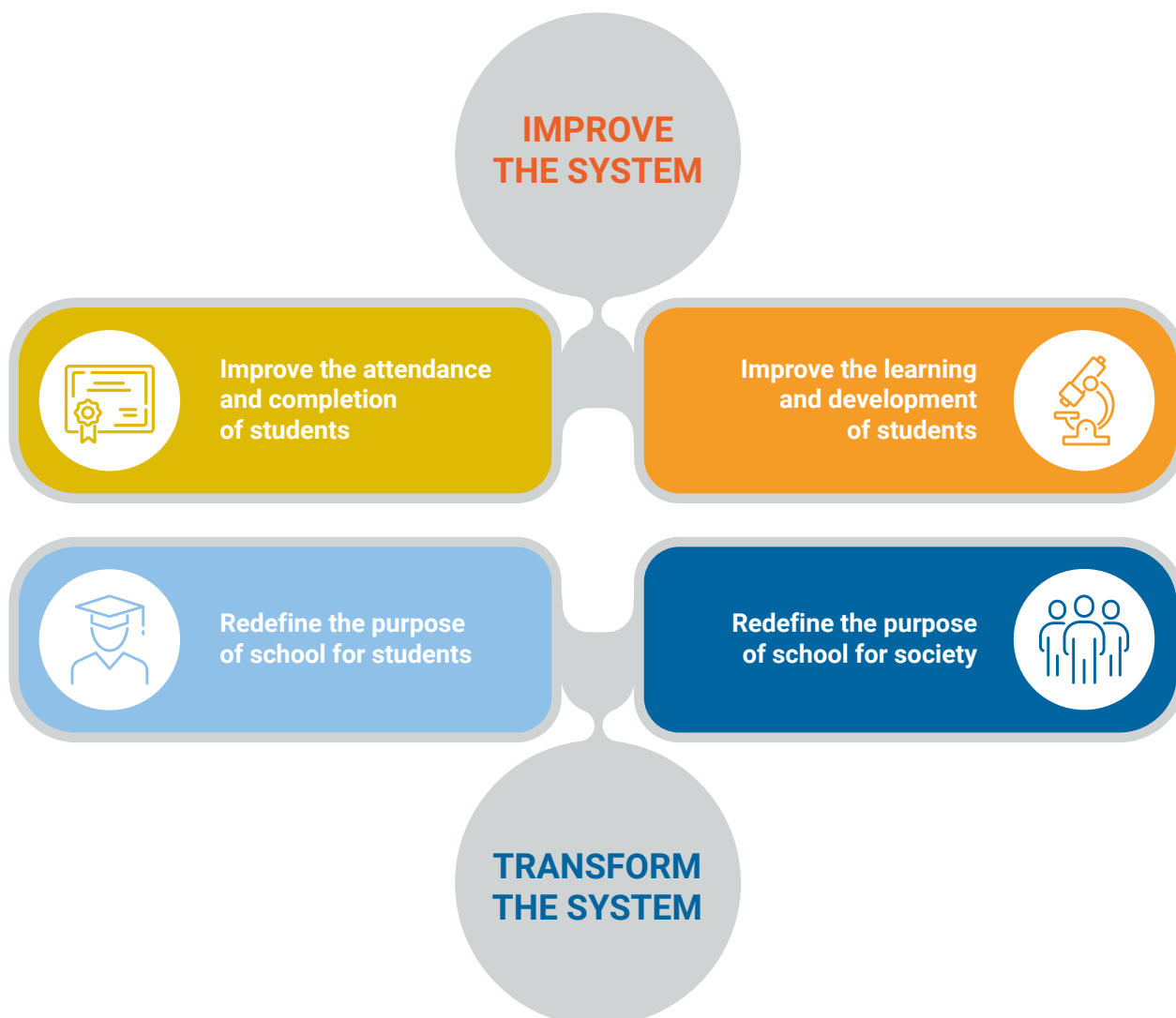
The COVID-19 pandemic has put the topic of families and schools working together to educate children at the center of virtually every country's education debate. Teachers around the world report developing creative ways of engaging with parents to help their students learn at home, including strategies they would like to continue even after the pandemic is over (Teach for All, 2020; Teach for Pakistan, 2020). In turn, parents—whom we define as any family members or guardians who are the primary caregivers (see Box 1 for important terms defined)—have responded to these new remote-learning experiences and new forms of communication. Their increased expectations of deeper engagement with schools are reflected in representative surveys of parents across Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and the United States—all pointing to this rising demand from families for new approaches to working with schools (Learning Heroes, 2020; Molina et al., 2020).

Many leaders of schools and school systems across the world had an “aha” moment when, after pivoting to new outreach and communication mechanisms, they saw major jumps in the level of engagement of families, especially among those who had been previously deemed hard to reach. From Argentina to India to the United States, leaders realized that hard-to-reach families were not opposed to engaging with schools; it was just that the schools' approaches to engagement were getting in the way. For example, when the government of Himachal Pradesh, a state of almost 7 million people in India, pivoted from asking parents to come to schools for meetings to finding multiple ways for schools to come to parents—through text messages, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook posts—engagement levels jumped from 20 percent to 80 percent in two months (Brookings Institution, 2021).

The four goals

This new focus on ways to connect families with schools presents an opportunity to markedly shift broader approaches, and the overall vision, for long-term collaboration. This playbook shows that family-school engagement—namely the collaboration between the multiple actors, from parents and community members to teachers and school leaders—has an important role to play in improving and transforming education systems to achieve four main goals (Figure 1):

Figure 1. The four goals



BOX 1. PLAYBOOK TERMS DEFINED

Parent and family: In this playbook, “parent” is shorthand for any family member, caregiver, or guardian who cares for children and youth. We rely most heavily on the term “family” to capture the varied contexts in which children live and are cared for, including extended family members—from grandparents to aunts, uncles, or cousins—who play leading roles in caregiving. The playbook uses the terms “parent” and “family” interchangeably.

Teacher: The playbook uses “teacher” instead of “educator” to distinguish between the education professional (whose vocation is to instruct and guide children in school) and parents (who are their child’s first educators, helping them develop and learn from birth on).

Involvement versus engagement: We find Ferlazzo’s distinction between family “involvement” and “engagement” helpful and use the terms accordingly. “A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute.” In contrast, “a school striving for parent engagement leads with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners” (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12).

Family-school engagement: This playbook uses the term “family-school engagement” instead of the more common “family engagement” not only to express the dual nature of the engagement but also to highlight the fact that either side can, and does, initiate the engagement process.

Alignment and the alignment gap: When families and schools share the same vision of the purpose of school, they are aligned in their beliefs and values, and this coherence is a powerful driver of education system transformation. An “alignment gap” exists when families and schools either do not share or perceive that they do not share the same views on the purpose of school and therefore what makes for a quality education for their children and communities.

Schools and education systems: “School” denotes children’s structured process of teaching and learning regardless of location (whether a school building, outdoors, a library, a museum, or home). “Education systems” comprise schools but also frequently include a range of actors in the community (such as parks, employers, or nonprofit programs) that can work with schools to provide an ecosystem of learning opportunities. Education systems can have different levels of jurisdiction (district, state, or national) that denote their limits of authority. Although governments in every country bear the responsibility for ensuring that all children, especially from marginalized communities, can access a quality education, this playbook also refers to nongovernmental school networks (for example, a private school chain or a nonprofit network) as jurisdictions.

System improvement: Certain efforts maximize how a system delivers education against the existing vision and set of outcomes. They aim to achieve the first two goals defined in this playbook: (a) improve student attendance and completion, and (b) improve student learning and development.

System transformation: Other efforts broaden engagement to redefine the purpose of an education system, hence shifting the beliefs and mindsets that guide it along with the operations that deliver on that vision. They aim to achieve the second two goals defined in this playbook: (a) redefine the purpose of school for students, and (b) redefine the purpose of school for society.

*I felt like I knew more during the school closures
what my child had been learning than the entire three
and a half other years she's been in school.*

Parent, United States

Improving how systems serve students

Robust evidence shows that family-school engagement can significantly improve how systems serve their students, especially those who have been poorly served. Studies that primarily assess school improvement have looked at students' educational outcomes as measured by attendance, completion, and achievement on literacy, numeracy, and other regularly assessed competencies. We classify these efforts as system "improvement" because they improve how the system delivers education against an established set of outcomes rather than shifting the overall vision of the system's purpose. Several such studies find that family-school engagement, when implemented effectively, not only boosts student outcomes but also can be a highly cost-effective investment.

Schools with strong family engagement are 10 times more likely to improve student learning outcomes. In one longitudinal study across 200 public elementary schools in Chicago (Byrk, 2010), researchers identified five key supports that together determined whether schools could substantially improve students' reading and math scores: school leadership, family and community engagement, education personnel capacity, school learning climate, and instructional guidance. Crucially, schools improved most when all five supports were present. A sustained weakness in even one of these elements led schools to stagnate, showing little improvement.



A boy creates a ball from scratch with the help of his mother in Zambezia Province in Mozambique.  Louise Wateridge

Our students come from very challenging backgrounds so we cannot focus only on academics. I feel it necessary for teachers to spend some time bonding with students. It is very important for me to bond with their families.

As the difficulties faced by the families are also related to my child's background. As a teacher, I feel having this complete triangle connected to each other is very important.

Teacher, India

The important role family-school engagement plays in improving students' achievement is also broadly supported by other research, including a meta-analysis of 52 studies that found that engaging parents in their children's schooling leads to improved grades for students in their classes and on standardized tests (Jeynes, 2007).

Communicating with families can be one of the most highly cost-effective approaches. Robust family engagement, as a core pillar of improving schools, certainly requires investment to shift mindsets and behaviors, but one particular component of this effort—direct communication with families—is a highly cost-effective way of improving student attendance and learning outcomes. A global study comparing evaluations of different types of education interventions (such as teacher training, materials provision, scholarships) across 46 low- and middle-income countries found sharing information about education to be at the top of the list in terms of cost-effectiveness (Angrist et al., 2020). The study showed that a particular approach to communicating information is what improves student outcomes at scale, namely context-specific information about the benefits, costs, and quality of local schooling from a messenger that families and students trust. For example, data that help families and their children to better assess the specific benefits of staying and doing well in school (like higher earnings and better health) as well as to better identify resources that could help students participate in higher education and understand the quality of schooling options available to them. In fact, targeted information campaigns about the benefits of education for students can deliver the equivalent of three additional years of high-quality education for a low per student cost.

The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel identified communicating with families in this manner, including through videos or parent meetings at school, as a “great buy” for education systems. For a modest investment, it can significantly improve student outcomes on important dimensions such as years of schooling and acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills across a large number of communities (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2020).

Transforming how systems envision success

The increased attention to family-school engagement also provides an opportunity for a broader debate and dialogue on the overall *purpose* of school. Families not only have increased expectations for ongoing engagement but also, in many contexts, have had front-row seats inside the schooling process during the COVID-19 pandemic and have opinions on what a quality education should look like for their children.

These discussions on the purpose of school would, of course, include an examination of strategies to ensure that students are attending school and learning well there. But they would also allow parents and families and teachers and schools to take a step back and ask each other, “What are schools for? What role should they play in society? And what types of competencies and skills should schools help our children develop?”

We refer to this broader engagement on the guiding *vision* of education as system “transformation” work because it does not take the current education system outcomes as a given. Although the family engagement literature offers only a limited focus on engaging families with this goal in mind, the system transformation field offers substantial insight on the important role family-school engagement plays in this process—and what it takes to achieve this engagement.

Redefining the purpose of education—one of the most powerful levers for sustainably transforming systems—requires participation by the whole community. Systems of any kind—education, health, or justice—are made up of many elements, from the concrete and visible (like people and resources) to the abstract and invisible (like group priorities and culture). Scholars of system dynamics point to changing “deep structures,” which include the invisible elements of a system like values and beliefs, as one of the most effective ways to transform what systems do (Gersick, 1991; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). They argue that frequently, when leaders seek to change the concrete or visible elements of a system without changing the deep structures of beliefs and values that guide that system, the results amount to tinkering around the edges.

Conversely, a shift in the beliefs and values that guide a system drives changes across the visible and invisible elements alike (Meadows, 2008; Munro et al., 2002).

In this way, aligning around a shared vision of the purpose of school is a powerful way for schools and families to shape the deep structures guiding how schools operate. For example, in communities where families or teachers or students have different beliefs about what school is *for* and hence what they should *do*, schools are likely to struggle, being pulled in multiple directions or experiencing considerable headwinds to any changes that are made. In contrast, communities with a well-aligned vision of the purpose of school can move forward constructively, with families, teachers, students, and others all playing their respective roles in helping to advance this vision. This type of family-school engagement has the added benefit of helping sustain a vision of quality schooling across multiple political cycles. An Achilles' heel of education system change is the short tenure of leaders. In Latin America, for example, most education ministers are only in office for an average of two to three years, which frequently means a revolving door of priorities guiding the system (Fiszbein & Saccucci, 2016).

No institution or one actor can reinvent the education system by themselves. So you need to spend the time to develop an answer to the question: What is it that we want for our children in this community? Only once we agree on where we're trying to go, can we then work in coordination and know what our respective roles are. Developing this shared vision is what good leaders do.

District superintendent, United States

Deep dialogue with families and schools is needed to unlock systemwide transformational processes. One study examined the greatest barriers to and enablers of systemwide change, tracking reform journeys across three countries: Canada, Finland, and Portugal (Barton, 2021). In all three cases, the primary barrier was a misalignment between members of the community—from education leaders to teachers to families—on their beliefs and values about school. They lacked a shared sense of “this is what school is about.” In all three countries, a process of deep and respectful dialogue, whereby families and schools along with others had equal places at the table, was crucial for unlocking the system transformation process. The study concludes that collectively defining and aligning the purpose of education, and the values that drive it, are among the essential enablers of systemwide transformation. This study reaffirms prior findings from U.S.-based research: education reforms are only successful when, among other things, they are consistent with stakeholders’ values, in other words when they are aligned to students, parents, and teachers’ beliefs about education (Cohen and Mehta, 2017).

The world is changing, and context matters

The COVID-19 pandemic has not been the first and will not be the last external force driving a need to change education systems. Strategies for families and communities to work together across all four goals of system improvement or transformation are needed now, particularly to address the growing inequality that has emerged from the pandemic. But they will also be needed in the future to navigate the skills needed for a rapidly changing world.

There is a growing consensus among education experts and learning scientists that education systems must focus more heavily on ensuring that students develop a wide range of competencies—from robust academic knowledge, to “learning how to learn,” to collaborative problem solving. Many also agree that to develop this breadth of skills and deliver a holistic education, teaching and learning experiences must shift to include more experiential, playful, real-world

application of academic learning (Winthrop et al., 2018). The forces that are already pushing education systems in this direction are set to accelerate over the coming decades. They include the advent of new technologies, the disruption of the world of work through automation of routine manual and cognitive skills, and the seriousness of complex social and environmental crises.

Although we subscribe to the argument that the fast pace of change requires education systems to improve and transform toward a more holistic vision of education and have written extensively on this before, we recognize that when it comes to family-school engagement, prescribing a vision undercuts the very power of the engagement process. For example, the deep dialogue needed to redefine the purpose of schools can only occur if parents and families and teachers and schools have an equal voice, whereby each brings their respective expertise to the table, and there is a level of trust that allows for the cocreation of a shared vision. We also realize that every context is different and together families, education professionals, students, and other stakeholders should be the ones to decide what a quality education looks like for them given their culture, history, aspirations, and community realities.

This is why this playbook focuses on offering ways of understanding the full landscape of family-school engagement strategies; so that communities may learn from each other but ultimately with the goal of adapting and making strategies relevant in their own contexts. It is also why, to complement this landscape of strategies, we have provided an in-depth look at one of the system transformation goals: “redefine the purpose of school for students.” Current family-school engagement work has focused much less energy and attention on transforming education systems than on improving them, and deepening the field’s understanding of how to approach this goal is one way of addressing this gap. This playbook includes six main components (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Playbook content and objectives



Objectives

1

We describe the four goals for family-school engagement (two goals for improving how systems serve students and two goals for transforming how systems are envisioned). The section provides context for family-school engagement in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and explains who should use the playbook. **p5**

2

This section discusses the evolving nature of family-school engagement. Historically schools were never designed to engage families, but their approaches have evolved. We highlight barriers to engagement, as well as the key features that today characterize effective family-school engagement. **p21**

3

This section provides a typology, or “map,” for understanding the breadth of family-school engagement strategies for achieving each of the four goals and highlights findings from our review of over 500 strategies. **p37**

4

This database database features more than 60 strategies from around the world that bring the strategy landscape to life. See Figure 6 for the quick snapshot or see Annex II for the comprehensive list. **p51**

5

This section provides an in-depth look at the third goal of family-school engagement: *redefining the purpose of school for students*. It provides an overview of our research on parent and teacher beliefs about what makes a good-quality education for their child that we conducted with our Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) across 10 countries and one global private school chain. **p58**

6

In this section, we continue the in-depth look at *redefining the purpose of school for students* by sharing our “Conversation Starter” tools. These tools will help anyone begin exploring how to help families and schools reach a shared understanding of what a good quality education looks like. **p88**

For more resources and tools,
visit: www.brookings.edu/familyengagement

Whom is this playbook for?

This playbook is for anyone interested in helping families and schools work better together to improve or transform how education is delivered or what goals it achieves. Given the power held by education system leaders and school heads, this playbook is particularly focused on supporting them in understanding the why, what, and how of working jointly with families to improve or transform schools (as further described in Box 2).

How was the playbook developed?

The playbook incorporates input from dozens of organizations and thousands of individuals around the world as well as extensive strategy analysis and research, as follows:



With project collaborators: Working closely with **49 organizations** from across 12 countries and one global private school chain in our Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN).



With parents: Surveying **24,759 parents** and conducting 54 parent focus groups.



With teachers: Surveying **6,146 teachers** and conducting 36 teacher focus groups.



With decisionmakers: Interviewing **50 education decisionmakers** across 15 countries.



With implementers: Analyzing **534 family engagement strategies** from governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) including parent organizations, and the private sector.



With academics: Reviewing the literature on system transformation, educational change, and family engagement as well as consulting with leading researchers in family engagement.

BOX 2. WHO SHOULD USE THIS PLAYBOOK?

We hope this playbook is particularly useful for school system leaders, teacher organizations, civil society partners, and funders. We also hope the many parent organizations around the world, whose work we lift up and highlight, will find this playbook helpful to their ongoing work. The list below is certainly not exhaustive, and if you find yourself outside of one of these groups, we encourage you to read on.

Education decisionmakers

- ✓ **Jurisdiction leaders and administrators.** At the broader systems level, the playbook can be especially relevant for jurisdiction leaders and administrators at the district, state, and national levels, including jurisdiction-level governing boards, private sector school networks, and education leaders with oversight of key functions such as strategic planning, teacher training, and community engagement.
- ✓ **School leaders and leadership teams.** At the school level, the playbook is designed for school leaders, principals, and their executive leadership teams, including staff with responsibilities over community engagement and student success, as well as any related school-level governing boards.
- ✓ **Leadership training programs.** In addition, the playbook can also be useful for trainers of school leaders, such as universities. We hope the playbook can inspire content for curricula around family engagement and systems transformation.

Teacher leaders

- ✓ **Teacher networks.** Teacher unions, networks, and organizations will also find this playbook useful, especially in their work on strategy, policy, and advocacy. Although the playbook is not designed for individual teachers, much of its content addresses topics that teachers regularly discuss and that figure in their concerns.



Families and teachers attend a project-based learning expo in Avonworth, Pennsylvania, USA. Avonworth District, PA.  Louise Wateridge

- ✓ **Teacher training programs.** In addition, the playbook can also be useful for trainers of teachers, such as universities. We hope it can inspire content for curricula around family engagement and systems transformation.

School partners

- ✓ **School partners.** In addition to systems-level administrators and school-level leaders, the playbook is useful for the many partners of schools. This includes NGOs, including those that support delivery of education to children; private sector organizations, such as for-profit education companies; and funders, including bilateral and multilateral agencies and philanthropic foundations.
- ✓ **Parent organizations.** We also designed the playbook for parent organizations—groups of parents that have organized themselves to provide input into school and community-level issues, such as curricula, school infrastructure, and public safety. These groups are well placed to advocate for strong family-school relationships, and we hope the playbook will inspire learning from the other parent organizations featured in the Strategy Finder.



2. Evolution of family-school engagement



Historically, schools have not been designed to engage families in the education of their children. As the idea of universal schooling spread around the globe—starting in Europe in the mid-1700s and spreading to the developing world in the latter half of the 1900s—the implicit understanding was communities would support school infrastructure (e.g. teacher housing, school buildings) and families would bring their children to the schoolhouse door and schools would take care of the rest (Lareau, 1987). In some communities around the world, this is still the prevailing mindset. The result has been that schools, which are not only social organizations but also products of society’s beliefs in any given era or context, have often operated with a missing tool in their toolbox: effective family-school engagement strategies.

This does not mean that families, particularly of the enfranchised and elite, did not develop strong opinions on where and with whom their children should attend school. In most countries, schooling was initially not expanded equally to all children. For example, in the United States, white boys have long been the principal beneficiaries, not girls or their black and brown peers (Reese, 2011). And when Native Americans were included in schooling, it was often within a broader project of assimilation, breaking apart native families and cultures. At the same time, the colonial powers in Asia and Africa were using access to schooling as an explicit strategy to divide and conquer, with those allowed into school being groomed to help run the country via the colonial civil service. In sub-Saharan Africa, this opportunity frequently fell to the sons of tribal chiefs and few others. In most parts of the world, the role of power in society—whether political, economic, or cultural—is inextricably linked to the expansion of the schooling story.

Hence, over the decades, schools have been caught in two competing dynamics. On the one hand, schools have increasingly become one of the main ways for individuals to advance in society (Baker, 2014). Today in the United States, for example, parents' level of education is even more influential than their level of income on their children's eventual economic position in society. This has led many highly educated parents to engage in what is characterized as "opportunity hoarding" behavior, namely actions that seek to ensure that their children have unfettered access to high-quality schooling (Reeves, 2017). On the other hand, schools have increasingly opened their doors to all children, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, both in response to government enforcement and with the rise of the powerful idea of inclusion and human rights—namely, that every child has a right to go to school no matter to whom or where they are born (United Nations, 1989).

*I can't support my daughter at home if I don't know
what's going on in the classroom.*
Parent, United Kingdom

Schools have long been handling the push-pull forces of inclusion (from first-generation learners to ethnic minorities) and pressure from elites who often fight to keep their children on top. This practice of pushback against inclusion has played out in different ways in different contexts. In Ghana, for example, when the government moved to a year-round schooling plan to admit all students qualified to enter senior secondary school, the most vocal opposition came from elite families whose students have traditionally been the few to attend senior secondary (Winthrop, 2020). In the United States, opportunity hoarding has left a long legacy, especially among white and well-off families who seek to exert power over schools—from opposing racial integration, to pulling children out of diverse inner-city schools and moving to the suburbs (Winerip, 2013), to even resorting recently to illegal schemes to ensure their children are admitted to prestigious colleges (Chappel & Kennedy, 2019).

Three barriers to family-school engagement

This history helps put into context why today schools face three main, interrelated barriers to working with families to improve or transform education systems.

I had to write to the school many times and asked them to get us involved: Why don't we meet? Why don't we talk? But the signature in the answers just read "Principal's Office." I didn't even get a name.
Parent, Argentina

Schools and education personnel lack family engagement competencies and related training and support.

Because working with families has not historically been at the heart of school design, education personnel have received only limited professional development or technical support on this topic. In the United States, for example, less than half of the 50 states require learning about effective family and community engagement strategies to become a school leader, and less than a third of states require it to become a teacher (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2020). Globally, family and community engagement also frequently gets short shrift in leadership and teacher development programs and policies.

When parents disregard teachers, it is hard to stand before the students and play an active role as an elder.
Teacher, Botswana

As a result, many jurisdiction leaders, schools, and their staff do not yet have the skill sets needed to effectively work with families both in navigating the frequent demands from elite parents and in effectively collaborating with parents from marginalized communities (Institute for Fiscal Studies & Innovations for Poverty

Action, 2020; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Without the training and skills to effectively build trusting relationships with families, miscommunication and misunderstanding can abound. As discussed below, this can result in families, especially from marginalized communities, feeling excluded. It can also result in school personnel, especially teachers, feeling blamed and disrespected by families (Schaedel et al., 2015). As one global teacher leader commented, “I recently spoke to a veteran teacher of 30 years who had a parent try and show her how to teach reading. She was understandably frustrated given she is a trained expert in the subject. This is not an uncommon experience for many teachers around the world” (D. Edwards, personal communication, February 2, 2018).

Families, especially from the most marginalized communities, feel uncertain and unwelcome in working with schools.

Many families feel unsure of how they should engage with their children’s schools, or worse, they feel unwelcome (Cooper, 2009; Kim, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009). Depending on context, this could be for a range of reasons—whether from lack of communication between teachers, school structures that do not adapt to parents’ realities, or a legacy of discrimination that parents experienced during their own schooling (Cashman et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 1994; Smith, 2000; Vincent, 1996).

I wish I was more educated about how do you converse with teachers from the very beginning when my kids were little and not assume that the teacher is this expert who can't be touched.

Parent, United States

In our focus group discussions across four countries (Botswana, Canada, India, and the United States) and a global private school chain (Nord Anglia Education), parents frequently mentioned that they would like to engage but lacked enough clarity or information from the school or teacher on how to do so. Parents also mentioned that schools were not set up to facilitate their engagement, citing examples such as teachers' limited time to speak with them throughout the year, scheduling of school events when parents were working, and parents' own limited money or time to fulfill schools' requests. In addition, without respectful relationships and two-way communication, teachers and education leaders may rely on inaccurate assumptions about the worldviews, experiences, and social capital of certain groups of parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Horvat et al., 2003; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Rudney, 2005).



A boy plays a game of soccer with his mother in the community in Zambezia Province in Mozambique.  Louise Wateridge

Family-school engagement receives limited attention, research, and funding.

A committed community of researchers and practitioners has led the field in gathering evidence, testing strategies, and advancing solutions on family-school engagement, but they have not received the attention or support they deserve. The literature on family-school engagement is diverse, including evidence-based compendiums focused on the U.S., Europe, and the developing world (Epstein et al., 2018; Nishimura, 2020; Paseka & Bryne, 2020). However, before the pandemic, this had been a comparatively small area of focus for education researchers and reformers. In the U.S. Department of Education's Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, searches for articles between 2001 and 2019 using the keyword "teachers" yielded four times the citations of searches using the keyword "parents." It remains to be seen if COVID-19 may lead to long-term change in this regard.

If we take a look at the role of parents in education, in the public school space, it's very limited. Historically, there has not been space for parents to have a voice in what and how schools teach children. Parents' participation has been limited to payment of additional fees.
Deputy Minister of Education, Ghana

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Harvard Graduate School of Education surveyed educators and education administrators across 59 countries in April–May 2020 about their schools' experiences, including their reopening strategies in the COVID-19 environment. Three-quarters of the respondents stated that the reopening plans were developed collaboratively with teachers, but only 25 percent said that the collaboration included parents as well (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Education philanthropy is another place where parents are often excluded from the conversation. By one estimate from John King, former U.S. Secretary of Education, investment that focuses on families' wants and needs receives only 2 percent of philanthropic funding in the United States (New Profit, 2019).

The evolving approach to family-school engagement

Education systems' approach to family-school engagement has evolved over the years. One of the most influential frameworks was developed in the early 1990s by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues. Identifying six main types of parental involvement in their children's schooling—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decisionmaking, and collaborating with the community—this framework quickly became widely used around the world (Epstein, 1996).

Subsequent research reviewing the effectiveness of these different types of parental involvement demonstrated that not all were equally helpful in improving children's school-related outcomes such as attendance, completion, grades, literacy and numeracy exam scores, and socio-emotional competencies (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family-school engagement activities that were intermittent, ad hoc, and not closely tied to children's school learning, such as attending events or volunteering at school, were not as impactful as other approaches. The most effective means were the more-sustained types of engagement that were linked to learning—including family-teacher partnership on goal setting, timely two-way communication between parents and teachers, assistance to parents in supporting their children's learning outside of school, integration of families' unique knowledge into teaching at school, and codesigning of family-school engagement approaches (Dowd et al., 2017; National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

Today, experts often distinguish between family involvement and family engagement. As Ferlazzo (2011, p. 12) puts it, "A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement leads with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners."

A family *involvement* approach can be helpful depending on the goal. For example, behavioral economists have demonstrated the significant impact when



Families attend the Remake Learning Days festival at the Providence Family Support Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.  Ben Filio

schools send families “nudges” by either letter or text message, which can increase students’ attendance, reduce dropouts, and sometimes improve learning (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.-b). However, there is a growing consensus that family *engagement*, which gives more power and agency to parents and welcomes them in as equal partners, should be at the heart of how families and schools work together (Weiss et al., 2018). This is why, reflecting the importance of true collaboration, we use the term “family-school engagement” in this playbook.

One recent framework that embraces this vision proposes that family-school engagement be an ongoing practice or way of doing things rather than a stand-alone program. It envisions family-school engagement as something everyone in the school does every day rather than as the responsibility of one person or team inside the school. This framework, called the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Figure 3), spells out the essential conditions for effective family-school engagement and argues that families and schools have

equally important, mutually supporting roles (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). The framework centers on respectful relationships between families and schools, arguing that “deficit-based” mindsets far too often get in the way—as a result, seeing each other’s weaknesses rather than strengths. The goal is to build the capacity of education personnel and families in four areas: capabilities (skills and knowledge), connections (networks), cognition (shifts in beliefs and values), and confidence (self-efficacy).

Figure 3. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships



Source: Mapp & Bergman (2021).

Putting family-school engagement in context

The various approaches to family-school engagement must ultimately be adapted to community-specific contexts. How schooling is perceived in communities around the world is not uniform. Some communities focus more on the *collective* benefits of having children educated in their community, while others tend to focus on the *individual* benefits to their children only (Kim, 2018). In some communities, families see school outreach to seek their engagement as a sign of unprofessional behavior or weakness. In other communities, parents feel they have no place in school-related discussions. It is important to consider which approach—from involvement to engagement—would be most appropriate to achieve a given goal in a given context.

Illustrating this point are the contrasting cases of two programs in Ghana that seek to support children's early learning outcomes, from academic to socio-emotional competencies. In rural Ghana, families, especially mothers—many of whom have not attended school themselves—frequently do not believe it is their role to help with their children's education. One initiative, Lively Minds, works closely with rural mothers to identify how they can, and would like to, play a role in their children's early education. Years of deep engagement in building relationships and trust have blossomed into innovative approaches enabling families and schools to work together to the significant benefit of children (Institute for Fiscal Studies & Innovations for Poverty Action [IFS & IPA], 2019).

However, another program to improve early learning in working-class urban schools operated in very different environments—where parents frequently dedicate large amounts of time and resources to supporting their children's schooling. One teacher training program in this context rolled out effective teaching strategies for playful learning that markedly improved children's outcomes but only when parents were *not* involved (Wolf et al., 2019). In some of the schools, the program chose a typical "family involvement" strategy of informing families in presentations and videos at school meetings about these

new interactive, child-centered teaching methods. But children in these schools performed worse than the control group, perhaps because parents worried that the new teaching style was not rigorous enough. Given that Ghanaian parents view the purpose of preschool as preparation for primary school through academic learning and socialization (Kabay et al., 2017), it could be that they doubled down on “drill and kill” methods at home, undermining the more engaging learning experiences in the classroom. It could also be that parents’ interaction with teachers discouraged teachers from fully embracing their new training, because, in the schools with parent involvement meetings, teachers became less likely over time to use the interactive teaching and learning methods in the classroom.

Ultimately, these examples point to the importance of carefully considering what will be effective family-school engagement approaches in each context. Essential elements include the extent to which trust has been built—both between families and schools in general and between teachers and parents individually.

The importance of trust


Relational trust is emerging as an important factor underlying effective family-school engagement. When such engagement interventions fail, as described above and documented by others (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.-a), they likely were not only poorly designed but also failed to build the necessary trust between families and schools. Relational trust was an important driver in the Chicago study showing that students in schools with strong family-school engagement are 10 times more likely to improve academically (Bryk, 2010).

There's always reasons for a lack of parent engagement.

It may come across as parents not liking us teachers or not being a supportive parent, but there's always a reason behind it. And so if you can identify that you can build that relationship.

Teacher, United States



A family takes part in a “Fun with Phonics” course at a primary school in Doncaster in the United Kingdom.  Natalie Parfitt

In an earlier study of Chicago schools, researchers described relational trust as being built out of the daily interactions that take place in the school community, including between families and schools:

As individuals interact with one another around the work of schooling, they are constantly discerning the intentions embedded in the actions of others. They consider how others’ efforts advance their own interests or impinge on their own self-esteem. They ask whether others’ behavior reflects appropriately on their moral obligations to educate children well. These discernments take into account the history of previous interactions. In the absence of prior contact, participants may rely on the general reputation of the other and also on commonalities of race, gender, age, religion, or upbringing. These discernments tend to organize around four specific considerations: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. (Schneider, 2003)

Relational trust is generated when interactions are characterized by respectful exchanges, when people are willing to go above and beyond what their role dictates, and when people do what they say will do. And it can be a powerful driver of outcomes. In one study, trust between teachers, principals, parents, and students accounted for 78 percent of the variance in achievement on standardized reading and math assessments (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Two variables made strong independent contributions to this variance: teachers' trust in students and parents, and students' trust in their teachers.

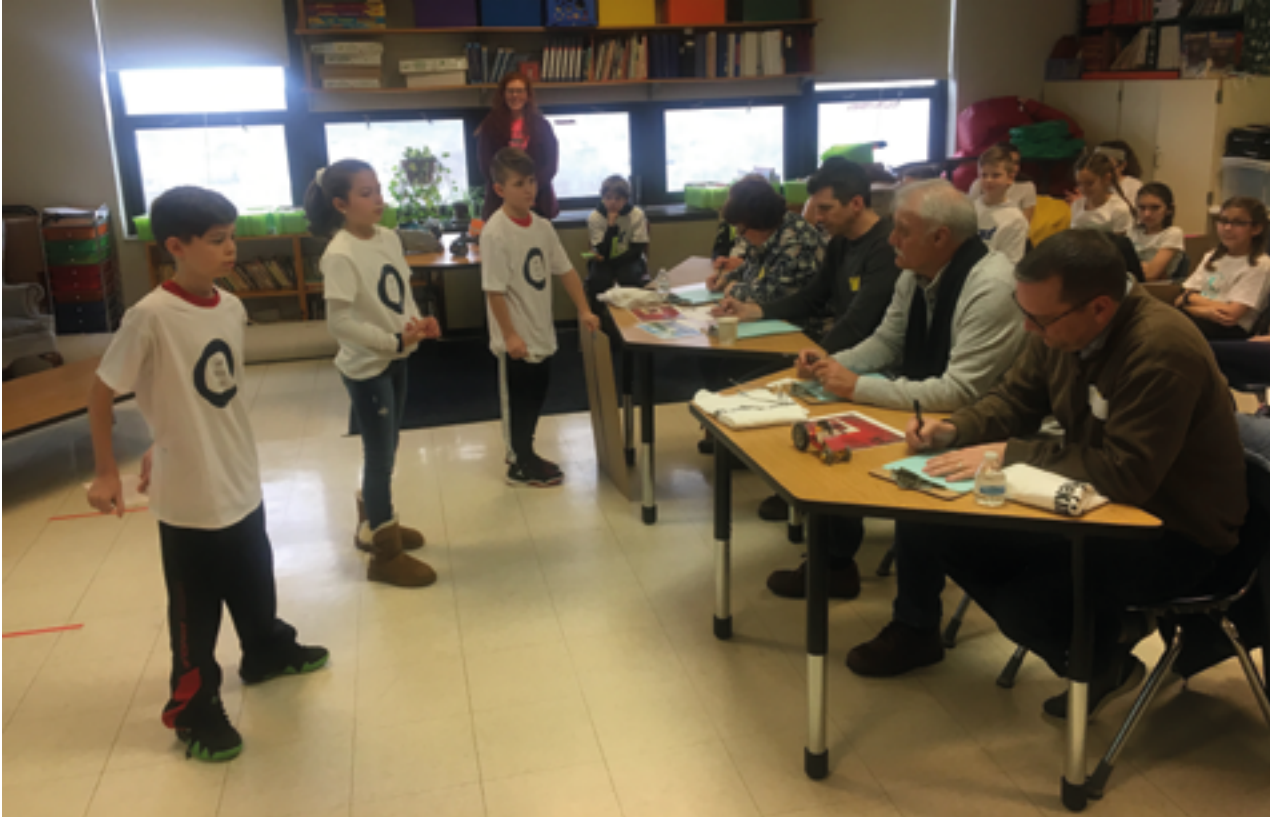
The importance of the teacher-parent relationship

Trusting relationships between parents and teachers have been shown to help students in numerous ways, including:

- 👤 Learning the knowledge taught in school through parental modeling and reinforcement at home (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).
- 👤 Setting shared goals, including classroom learning activities that parents can support at home (Christenson, 1995).
- 👤 Reducing behavior problems (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).
- 👤 Increasing teachers' understanding and empathy for their students' lives outside of school (Valdés, 1996).

If the teachers are open, I can go to the teacher to speak to them and we are able to speak about different things about the child. I trust that they can produce results that I would be happy about as a parent.

Parent, Botswana



Family members get a lesson from their children in the classroom in Avonworth District in Pennsylvania.  Avonworth District, PA

Ongoing communication is essential to these relationships. For example, teachers can advise parents on how best to reinforce skills learned in school—something that is especially important given that, as we saw in the case of Ghana above, when parents are unsure of how to support their children’s homework, their involvement can be counterproductive to academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Family-school engagement can help parents and teachers communicate to determine higher expectations for students, which is of particular importance. Research has shown that parental expectations of a child’s ability has a stronger effect on academic achievement than other aspects of parental involvement such as helping with homework and overall parenting style (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007).

For further details about how effective family-school engagement can help improve and transform education systems, see the background paper, “Understanding the connection between family-school engagement and education system transformation: A review of concepts and evidence.”



A photograph of two women sitting at a table in a meeting. The woman on the left is wearing glasses and a dark top. The woman on the right is gesturing with her hand. In the background, a flipchart is visible with several sticky notes attached to it. The entire image has a blue tint.

3. The Strategy landscape: Mapping family-school collaboration



Families and schools can—and do—work together in many ways. Strategies vary first and foremost by goal: what do families and schools want to achieve together? Some try to help at-risk students stay in school, while others try to help struggling students improve their academic outcomes. Still others try to fundamentally change students’ *experience* of school or to help the school serve families’ needs as well as students’.

Our analysis of 534 strategies across 64 countries has yielded four main goals (as introduced earlier and further described below) that can bring families and schools together to improve or transform education systems. These goals may go beyond what is commonly thought of as the remit of “family-school engagement” interventions. In doing so, they highlight the many diverse ways families and schools are working together.

These strategies came from parent organizations demanding change, governments scaling family-school engagement approaches across their jurisdictions, teachers developing new ways of collaborating, and nonprofit and private sector implementers

The school got in touch with us through the mentor teacher assistant. She created a new WhatsApp group for mentorship that included every family in the class. So, whatever we need we write it down in the WhatsApp group, and she replies immediately. I truly think that I can count on her. I feel someone is listening....
Parent, Argentina

The teacher used to call us in every 15 days. She used to ask about our well being because my husband had got stuck in our native place and only I and my son were here. During this time we got a lot of support from the school. We got groceries also. The school would say not worry and that in case of any difficulty just reach out to us.

Parent, India

working at the community level. We captured strategies developed before the COVID-19 pandemic as well as those that flourished to meet unprecedented needs during the pandemic. We cast a wide net, gathering strategies already backed by robust evidence as well as newer ones developed during the pandemic that were promising but lacked external evaluations. We looked across different spaces where families and schools collaborate—from homes and schools to school systems and communities. (See Box 3 for more details on the sources of these strategies.)

BOX 3. WHERE DID THE 534 STRATEGIES ACROSS 64 COUNTRIES COME FROM?

We analyzed a total of 534 strategies across 64 countries to develop the Strategy landscape. Ultimately, we showcase 62 of these strategies in the Strategy Finder. We used a wide range of sources to select the 534 strategies to analyze, including:

- ✔ **Parents:** We held 54 focus group discussions with family members in four countries and one global private school chain and also collaborated with the global design company, IDEO, which supported 15 parent-led design teams to develop education engagement strategies.
- ✔ **Teachers and school leaders:** We held 34 focus group discussions with teachers in four countries and one global private school chain and also collaborated with the nongovernmental organization HundrED on its Parental Engagement Spotlight project, which sourced strategies from educators and organizations around the globe. (See Box 5 for more information about the collaboration with HundrEd and other partners).

- ✔ Jurisdiction leaders and their partners: We partnered with the 49 member organizations across 12 countries and one global private sector school chain that make up our Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN).
- ✔ Organizations and networks: We put out an open call to approximately 500 entities engaged in this space, through interviews with organization leaders, and through organizations that are part of our Global Catalog of Education Innovations, which contains almost 3,000 education innovations.
- ✔ Academics: We reviewed the existing literature on parent engagement, including from gray literature in the practitioner space.

Ultimately this part of the playbook has a twofold purpose:

- ✔ **Provide a “Strategy landscape”** that helps anyone interested in family-school engagement map the landscape of strategies used around the globe. The Strategy landscape is oriented around the four goals for education system improvement and transformation and is meant to provide a wide lens on possible strategies that families and schools could use. It also provides a set of strategy dimensions that could help families and schools identify new strategies in new spaces.
- ✔ **Provide a “Strategy Finder”** that helps anyone interested in family-school engagement identify which of the 62 strategies we showcase could support their practices. Users can search for strategies by multiple dimensions: goal, country, student age, tech level, and lever of change. Each strategy is also tagged with relevant strategy dimensions from the Strategy landscape such as the place where the strategy occurs and family’s role in the strategy. (See Box 4 and Figures 4 and 5 for more information on the dimensions in the Strategy landscape and Strategy Finder.)



Siblings play outside their house as their mother carefully observes in Elu Etaya, Ethiopia.  Louise Wateridge

BOX 4. SELECTED DIMENSIONS OF THE PLAYBOOK'S STRATEGY LANDSCAPE AND STRATEGY FINDER

The Strategy landscape presents each family-school engagement strategy across a range of dimensions including place, lever for change, and family role as described above. Additionally, each strategy in the landscape and in the Strategy Finder is tagged with information ranging from the country where the strategy operates to the type of organization implementing the strategy, the level of education at which the strategy works, and the level of technology families need to use the strategy. For a more detailed description of the dimensions of the Strategy landscape and Strategy Finder, see Annex I.

Figure 4. Selected dimensions of the strategy landscape and Strategy Finder



The Strategy landscape presents a map for understanding the breadth of family-school engagement approaches for achieving each of the four goals.

PLACE: Where does the strategy mainly occur?

HOME: Strategies that seek to change factors in the home such as parental interactions with children and material resources.

SCHOOL: Strategies that seek to change factors involving teachers and school leaders whether or not a program of structured learning is taking place in a school building.

SCHOOL SYSTEM: Strategies that seek to change factors in formal education at a systemwide level—whether local, subnational, or national—including government-run jurisdictions as well as nongovernment school networks.

COMMUNITY: Strategies that seek to change factors in the broader community and society, including nonformal learning spaces such as community centers that reach beyond the usual scope of the formal education system.

LEVER: Which levers for change does the strategy use?

PROVIDING INFORMATION: Sharing knowledge and data.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: Building trust and connections between people.

SHIFTING MINDSETS: Changing beliefs and attitudes.

BUILDING SKILLS: Developing competencies and skills.

PROVIDING RESOURCES: Providing resources and assistance in the form of materials, food, cash, labor, and so on.

DESIGNING: Identifying problems and cocreating solutions.

FAMILY ROLE: How are families engaged in the strategy?

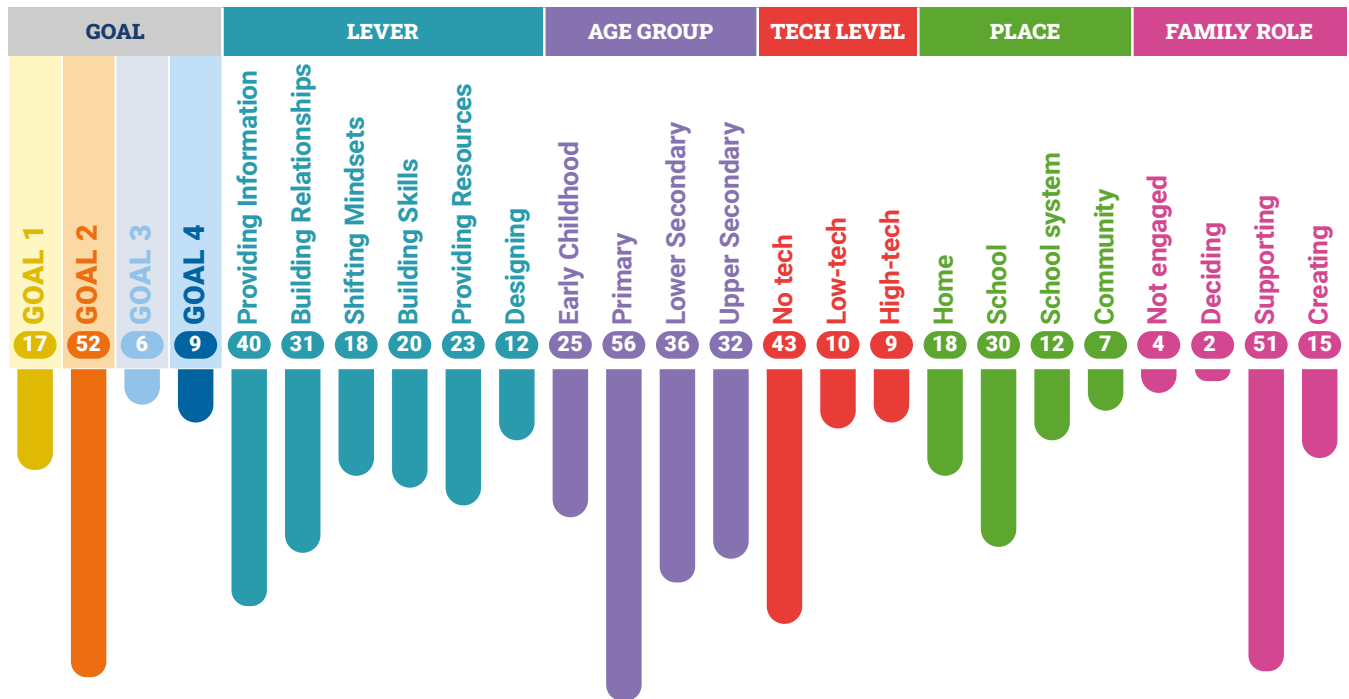
NOT ENGAGED: Families are not involved in any way.

DECIDING: Families are deciding between the available choices such as if, where, when, and how to send their children to school.

SUPPORTING: Families are helping in multiple ways (e.g., giving time or money) with their children's schooling experience either at home, at school, or in the community.

CREATING: Families have voice and agency to meaningfully inform or shape the design or execution of their children's school experience.

Figure 5. How are the dimensions and categories displayed in the strategies?



Four key goals of family-school engagement

Each goal we have identified is important. The context will determine which goal should be prioritized for family-school collaborations. Strategies may, and often do, work toward multiple goals. The four goals are paired within two overarching types of outcomes—for either system improvement or system transformation.

Improving how systems serve students. These strategies work within the existing sets of purposes and values that guide education systems to improve what students get out of those existing systems. They aim to achieve either or both of these two goals:

- #1. Improve the attendance and completion of students. Important outcomes include the improvement of student participation in school such as by increasing student enrollment, attendance, and completion of school.

#2. Improve the learning and development of students. Important outcomes include the improvement of student learning and development on such measures as academic skills and socio-emotional competencies.

Transforming how systems envision success. These strategies emerge from deep family-school engagement to redefine the purpose and values that guide education systems. They target either or both of these two goals:

#3. Redefine the purpose of school for students. Important outcomes would include a shared family-school vision that adapts, reorients, or changes the focus of education systems in terms of student experiences and outcomes.

#4. Redefine the purpose of school for society. Important outcomes would include a shared family-school vision that adapts, reorients, or changes the focus of education systems in terms of the school's role in the community.

Findings from the global review of family-school engagement strategies

More energy is dedicated to improving systems than to transforming them.

Our review of 534 strategies found that, around the world, family-school engagement focuses more on improving systems than on transforming them. The vast majority of strategies sought to improve students' participation and achievement within the existing paradigms of what school is for and should look like. These strategies were by no means a representative sample of all the different strategies in use today. But our findings are striking, considering that we specifically sought to surface *transformative* strategies whereby families and schools were working together to align around a vision of school that worked for both groups.

In some ways, it is not surprising that most family-school engagement efforts are focused on improving the participation, achievement, and development of children within existing structures and visions of what makes for a quality school experience. This focus reflects the daily tasks and goals of parents and teachers, schools and families, and can be expected to be front of mind when designing family-school engagement strategies. It also reflects the nature of human systems, which naturally maintain the status quo using existing, dominant logic in service of today's purposes and goals. However, it may also reflect a limited understanding of the important roles that families and communities play in charting a vision, for the long term, of what a quality school should be in terms of both its purpose and its lived experience.

A recurring theme across our discussions with parents—including 54 focus groups across four countries and one global private school chain—was that rarely had anyone asked them for *their* beliefs about the purpose of school or how *they* envisioned what a quality school experience would look like for their child.

Either families or schools can initiate action. The type of actor who articulates the goal and initiates family-school engagement can differ. Sometimes it is school and jurisdiction leaders who identify the goal and seek family participation. Such was the case when, worried about student attendance and completion rates, the government of India's Himachal Pradesh state started an SMS communication program to alert parents by text when a student was absent and to provide tips for follow-up, such as contacting their child's teacher. Other times, it is a parent organization that identifies the goal and advocates a particular solution to school and jurisdiction leaders. This was the case when, worried about the attendance and completion rates of students with disabilities, Colombia's national family advocacy network Red PaPaz waged a campaign for the national government to adopt inclusive education policies.

Context shapes the strategy. In addition to the goal pursued, context also greatly shapes what the strategies look like in practice—from the family and school role to the levers used to the place where strategies are implemented. In the cases of Himachal Pradesh in India and Red PaPaz in Colombia, the strategies shared similar goals—primarily to improve students' attendance and completion rates—but the strategies used could not have been more different. While the *government* initiated action in Himachal Pradesh, it was *civil society*

coalitions that mobilized the Colombian inclusion campaign. The former relied on digital information-sharing techniques to nudge parents to support their own children’s learning, while the latter trained networks of local parent champions to cultivate demand for political change. Both cases responded to local needs using community or institutional strengths, and ultimately both accomplished their improvement goals.

In all contexts, the various levers used in family-school engagement strategies can be “pulled” by either families or schools. For example, families can support school capacity by donating their time and labor to teaching activities or infrastructure improvement, or schools can support families with books for children or employment opportunities for parents. In some places, it may be schools and teachers that need to examine how welcoming their schools are to families and can shift their mindsets through empathy interviews with families— one-on-one conversations that use open-ended questions to elicit experiences that may uncover unacknowledged needs. In other places, schools may work with parents who feel they cannot help their children understand the important role they play.

Ultimately, there are unending permutations of strategies that can be used for families and schools to work together, depending on the many varied contextual factors—from the needs in the community, to leadership inside the education system, to political and financial opportunities for change, to family and community aspirations.

To advance transformation goals, key levers can foster a family-school alignment of vision. The context does greatly shape what a strategy looks like in practice, but system transformation goals require tapping particular levers and roles. Family-school engagement strategies that seek to redefine the purpose of school require both school personnel and families to come to the table in a designing role where each set of actors can provide their perspectives and views. Many levers may be used, such as providing information and building relationships, but it will be difficult to redefine the purpose of school without ensuring that families have the voice and agency needed to join school professionals in a cocreation process.

For example, Sea to Sky School District 48 in Canada's British Columbia province, through a community codesign process, reimagined what children should be, know, and do by the time they graduated. The process brought together family and community perspectives, especially from the district's Indigenous community, with the perspectives of teachers and school leaders. Ultimately, the vision was grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, the learning sciences, and data on the changing world of work. This joint process of developing a shared and aligned vision between families and schools sets up for success any efforts to transform education systems.

BOX 5. CROSS-BORDER SHARING THROUGH THE PARENTS AS ALLIES PROJECT

In early 2021, the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings joined the Parents as Allies project, which aims to increase cross-border sharing of family-school engagement solutions while bringing parents directly into the conversation (Rayworth, 2021). CUE is working with three organizations to accomplish the project goals: **Kidsburgh**, a media organization in Southwestern Pennsylvania that focuses on communicating the news in a family-friendly way; **IDEO**, an international design-thinking consulting firm with expertise in education; and **HundrED**, an international NGO that spotlights education innovations globally. With catalytic support from **The Grable Foundation**, a FEEN partner, these organizations came together.

Through an iterative approach, each partner's work informs the others, helping to surface existing and new family-school engagement strategies, including many that are parent-led, and translating the project's findings for a parent audience.

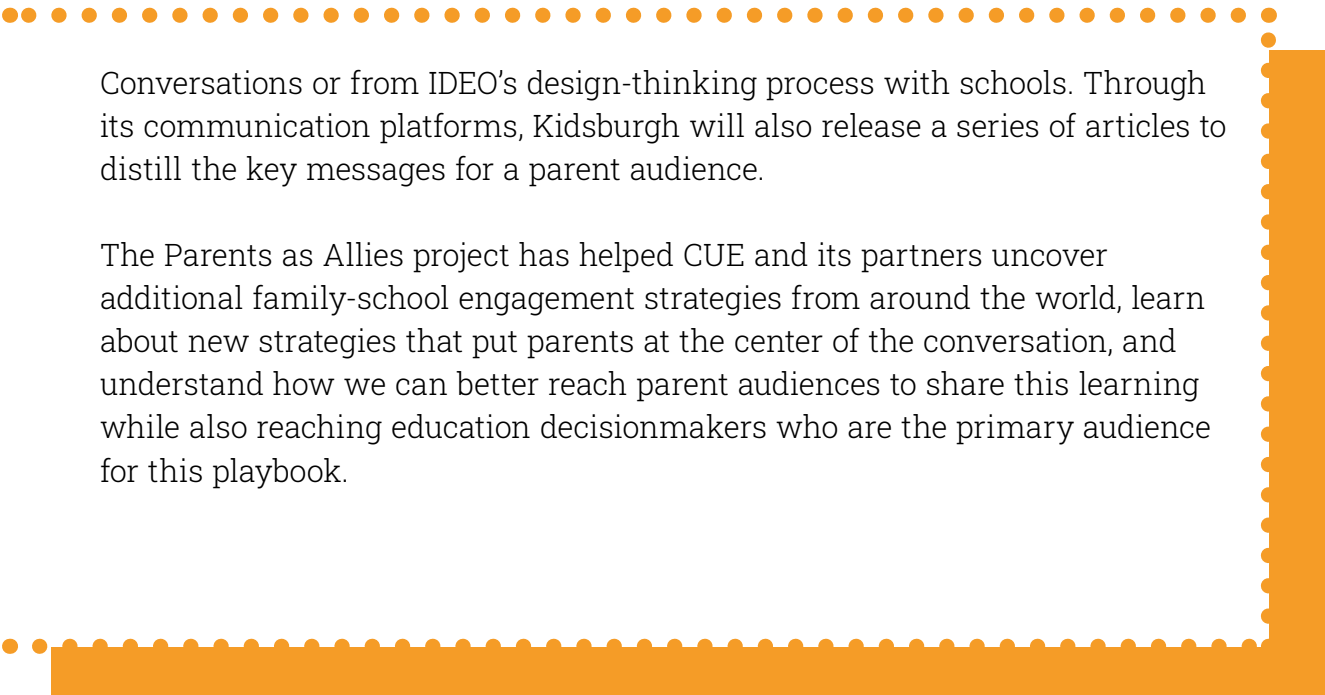
CUE's family-school engagement research (including the parent surveys and focus group discussions noted throughout the playbook) enabled it to develop a research framework to undergird the Parents as Allies project. The framework identifies gaps—or opportunities—in family engagement in

education and focuses on questions for further research and discovery, as viewed from the lens of schools, communities, and parent organizations. Questions raised by the framework include: *What are ways that schools and communities can understand parents' aspirations and motivations for sending their children to school?, and What are ways that schools and communities can understand parents' comfort level and preference for innovative pedagogical approaches?*

IDEO and HundrED adapted CUE's framework to develop and uncover solutions that meet some of these challenges. Looking to CUE's FEEN as well as Kidsburgh's links to the Greater Pittsburgh region in the United States, IDEO recruited 15 parent-led design teams from jurisdictions across Canada, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each design team selected an aspiration around which to design solutions. Teams generated ideas that ranged from inviting parents to observe classes, renaming the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to make it more inviting, and conducting well-being calls to students, in recognition of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on schooling and student routines (L. Corio, personal communication, May 27, 2021).

In addition, HundrED put out a call for family-school engagement solutions from around the world to identify strategies that are both impactful and scalable. HundrED's call generated 187 submissions from nearly 50 countries (O'Mara, 2021), a selection of which are highlighted in their Spotlight on Parental Engagement report (Green, Warren, & García-Millán, 2021). Both IDEO's and HundrED's work have helped to inform the family-school engagement strategies highlighted in this playbook.

Finally, Kidsburgh will cohost 11 "Community Conversations" events throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania, focusing on the communities that participated in IDEO's design sprints and will provide mini-grants to participating community groups to seed, jump-start, or implement innovative family-school engagement ideas that emerge from the Community

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Conversations or from IDEO's design-thinking process with schools. Through its communication platforms, Kidsburgh will also release a series of articles to distill the key messages for a parent audience.

The Parents as Allies project has helped CUE and its partners uncover additional family-school engagement strategies from around the world, learn about new strategies that put parents at the center of the conversation, and understand how we can better reach parent audiences to share this learning while also reaching education decisionmakers who are the primary audience for this playbook.



4. The Strategy Finder



This section details the 62 strategies and where they fall on the landscape map. [View the interactive database online here](#), or to review the strategies in this document, see Annex II. See Figure 6 for quick snapshot of all the strategies.

Figure 6. Strategy Finder

GOAL	LEVER	AGE GROUP	TECH LEVEL	PLACE	FAMILY ROLE
Categories Strategy Name	Improve attendance and completion Improve student learning and development Redefine purpose of education for students Redefine purpose of education for society	Providing Information Building Relationships Shifting Mindsets Building Skills Providing Resources Designing Early Childhood Primary Lower Secondary Upper Secondary	No tech Low-tech High-tech	Home School School system Community	Not engaged Deciding Supporting Creating
Helpline to support remote learning Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires [ARGENTINA] [CITY OF BUENOS AIRES] [GOVERNMENT]					
Text messages to parents on their child's school performance Himachal Pradesh Department of Education [INDIA] [HIMACHAL PRADESH] [GOVERNMENT]					
Text messages to parents on school logistics Himachal Pradesh Department of Education [INDIA] [HIMACHAL PRADESH] [GOVERNMENT]					
Online school data portal for transparency and accountability Himachal Pradesh Department of Education [INDIA] [HIMACHAL PRADESH] [GOVERNMENT]					
Mothers and fathers groups to support girls' education Consortium of partners including World Vision [ZIMBABWE] [MATABELELAND NORTH, MATABELELAND SOUTH, MIDLANDS, AND MASVINGO] [NGOs]					
Parent and teacher mentors for girls Consortium of partners including World Vision [ZIMBABWE] [MATABELELAND NORTH, MATABELELAND SOUTH, MIDLANDS, AND MASVINGO] [NGOs]					
Monthly parent-school meetings organized by parent networks Red PaPaz [COLOMBIA] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]					
Creating clear communication between content experts and parents Red PaPaz [COLOMBIA] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]					
Online resource hubs for parents Red PaPaz [COLOMBIA] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]					
Parent-led advocacy campaigns to address educational concerns Red PaPaz [COLOMBIA] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]					
Weekly savings group for mothers Luminos Fund [ETHIOPIA] [NGO]					
WhatsApp helpline for families of children with disabilities Inclusive Education [SOUTH AFRICA] [NGO]					
Parents shadowing students during Parent Week Akanksha Foundation [INDIA] [MAHARASHTRA] [NGO]					
Parent skill-building team Akanksha Foundation [INDIA] [MAHARASHTRA] [NGO]					
English language workshops and materials for parents Akanksha Foundation [INDIA] [MAHARASHTRA] [NGO]					

GOAL		LEVER						AGE GROUP			TECH LEVEL			PLACE			FAMILY ROLE							
GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	Providing Information	Building Relationships	Shifting Mindsets	Building Skills	Providing Resources	Designing	Early Childhood	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	No tech	Low-tech	High-tech	Home	School	School system	Community	Not engaged	Deciding	Supporting	Creating
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	GOAL				LEVER						AGE GROUP			TECH LEVEL			PLACE			FAMILY ROLE					
	GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	Providing Information	Building Relationships	Shifting Mindsets	Building Skills	Providing Resources	Designing	Early Childhood	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	No tech	Low-tech	High-tech	Home	School	School system	Community	Not engaged	Deciding	Supporting	Creating
Teacher training on mother engagement Lively Minds [GHANA, UGANDA] [NGO]	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓					✓				✓			✓			
Play-based learning groups led by mothers Lively Minds [GHANA, UGANDA] [NGO]		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				✓					✓	✓
Group parenting workshops Lively Minds [GHANA, UGANDA] [NGO]		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				✓					✓	
Resources for newcomer and immigrant families Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township [U.S.] [INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA] [GOVERNMENT]		✓			✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓			✓			✓					✓	
Community schools built on family-school relationships Community Schools Department of the New Mexico Public Education Department [U.S.] [NEW MEXICO] [GOVERNMENT]	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	✓
Parent-school coffee mornings Nord Anglia Education [INTERNATIONAL] [PRIVATE SECTOR]		✓				✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	
Remote learning resources Nord Anglia Education [INTERNATIONAL] [PRIVATE SECTOR]		✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓						✓	
Parent engagement volunteers Doncaster Council [U.K.] [DONCASTER, ENGLAND] [GOVERNMENT]	✓	✓			✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	
Support helplines for parents Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information [JAMAICA] [GOVERNMENT]	✓	✓						✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓						✓	
Two-way teacher-parent mentorship program Consortium of partners including Parents International [HUNGARY, PORTUGAL, ROMANIA, SPAIN] [NGOS, GOVERNMENT]	✓	✓				✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	
Parent-led advocacy campaigns for policy change Parentkind [U.K.] [ENGLAND, WALES, NORTHERN IRELAND] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓					✓	
Digital parent learning communities Rocket Learning [INDIA] [NGO]		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓					✓			✓						✓	
Weekly text messages and calls to strengthen learning at home Younglove [BOTSWANA] [NGO]		✓			✓			✓	✓		✓				✓			✓						✓	
Parent-focused school policy Escola Integradora [BRAZIL] [JUAZEIRO DO NORTE] [GOVERNMENT]		✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	
Public learning festivals Remake Learning [U.S.] [VARIOUS REGIONS] [NGO]				✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓				✓	
Parent participation in district education plan design School District 48: Sea to Sky [CANADA] [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [GOVERNMENT]		✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓					✓	✓
Community working groups for education planning School District 48: Sea to Sky [CANADA] [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [GOVERNMENT]		✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓					✓	✓
Regular communication on district activities and opportunities School District 48: Sea to Sky [CANADA] [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [GOVERNMENT]		✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓					✓	

	GOAL	LEVER	AGE GROUP	TECH LEVEL	PLACE	FAMILY ROLE
	GOAL 1 GOAL 2 GOAL 3 GOAL 4	Providing Information Building Relationships Shifting Mindsets Building Skills Providing Resources Designing	Early Childhood Primary Lower Secondary Upper Secondary	No tech Low-tech High-tech	Home School School system Community	Not engaged Deciding Supporting Creating
Collaboration with local Indigenous parent action committees School District 48: Sea to Sky [CANADA] [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 2 GOAL 3	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Education on career opportunities for students School District 48: Sea to Sky [CANADA] [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 2 GOAL 3	✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓
Open door policy for school-community engagement Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weekly democratic assemblies and discussion board Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Digital parent-school chat groups Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓
Parents as community teachers Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weekly feedback on innovation implementation Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Annual collaborative revision of the school's guiding document Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community member tutors Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community visioning workshops Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia [BRAZIL] [AMAZONAS] [GOVERNMENT]	GOAL 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parent-led advocacy for students and community Green Dot Public Schools, United Parents and Students [U.S.] [VARIOUS REGIONS] [NGOS]	GOAL 4	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓





5. Aligning beliefs



Aligning beliefs for system transformation: A framework

As discussed in the Overview, beliefs about the purpose of school drive the “deep structures” of education systems. They are also “high leverage points” for transformation. Myriad frameworks exist for understanding systems change, cutting across fields and disciplines. Each presents a unique angle, such as a focus on collective creativity (Liedtka et al., 2017) or networked learning (Bryk et al., 2011). Among them, the “Leverage Points” framework by American systems theorist Donella Meadows stands out for demonstrating the comparative power of different change approaches—a scale of ways to change a system (Meadows, 2008). Her framework builds on decades of research into complex human-environment systems, reflecting a wealth of empirical data on how people affect and are affected by their contexts, from the natural world to institutions. It is among the few frameworks that serve as both a utility-based classification system and a practical tool. Its insights prove useful for scholars and practitioners alike (Figure 7).

Most importantly, the Leverage Points framework has been shown to work. Since its publication in 1999, a wealth of evidence has emerged to support the model. It has been cited extensively in the sustainable development literature as a path to impact and efficiency (Abson et al., 2017; Hjorth & Bagheri, 2006). Health systems analysts have popularized the work as well; in fact, a 2009 report by the World Health Organization proposed systems-strengthening activities using Meadows's paradigm (World Health Organization, 2009).

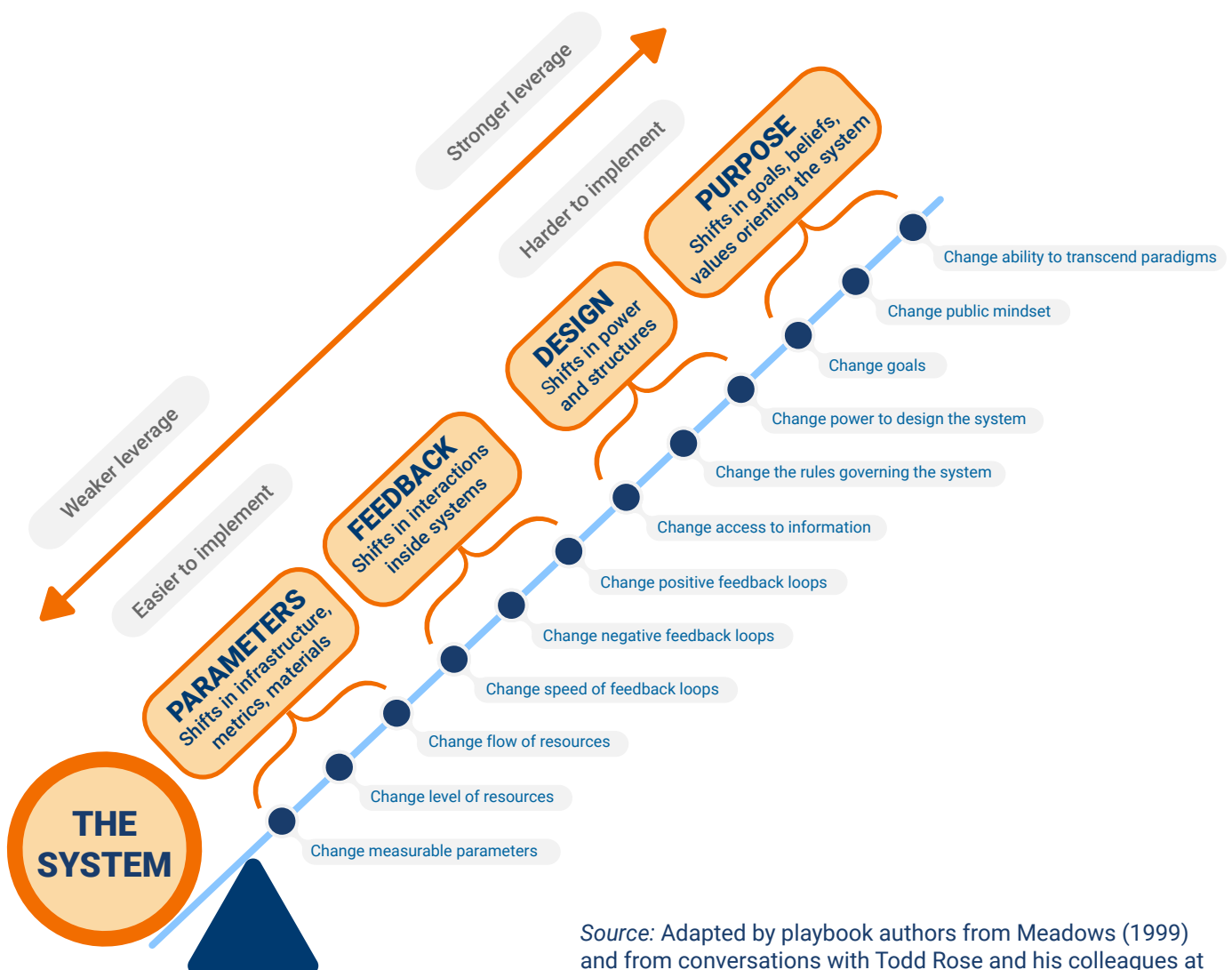
The Leverage Points framework identifies and arranges 12 ways to intervene in a system, in order of transformative power from weakest to strongest (Meadows, 2008). Interventions such as shifting parameters (like reading benchmarks and funding per pupil) or remaking physical infrastructure populate the base of this hierarchy. Changing parameters or shifting feedback loops are visible and practical steps to help shift systems and hence often receive the most attention from decisionmakers. Although they are crucial to system functioning, their transformative power lies only in their alignment with and support of the points at the top of the framework.

Topping the list are transformations in system design and system goals and paradigms. Structural shifts in power and rules that govern the design of a system and hence manage the parameters and feedback loops are essential for system transformation. But ultimately, the most important shift is in the purpose of the system—in our shared beliefs and values. According to Meadows, changing mindsets and paradigms can have a profound impact because they guide behavior (Meadows, 1999). Put simply, this means that the most powerful change involves shifting collective purposes and mindsets. In practice, this involves not simply redefining a system's purpose but also showing why existing practices do not fit with those purported goals. This shift forces system members to confront the misalignment between their perceptions and lived reality—between deeply held beliefs and an outmoded systems logic.

Every single policy I was doing, I was testing it with parents and teachers and principals. Three times a week. It looks very obvious, but it had never happened. The parents were like, "Were you sent by the ministry?" I had to say, "No, I'm the minister! Let's sit down and talk."
State Minister of Education, Argentina

This is why family-school engagement is so important to transforming education systems. Collective alignment behind a shared vision on the purpose of education will shape how systems are designed, what feedback loops are needed, and what parameters should be put in place to achieve the shared vision. Achieving this type of alignment is not easy and requires deep engagement on the fundamental beliefs about education across a wide range of stakeholders in a system (like school administrators, teachers, families, students, community members, and employers). It is for this reason that together with FEEN we have explored the educational beliefs of parents and teachers.

Figure 7. The “Leverage Points” framework of systems change



Source: Adapted by playbook authors from Meadows (1999) and from conversations with Todd Rose and his colleagues at Populace (T. Rose, personal communication, June 19, 2019).

What do parents believe about education?

Many studies examine parent and family perspectives and beliefs about education. These studies range from assessing parents' satisfaction and experience with their child's schools to understanding parents' beliefs about their role in supporting their child's education to examining the school characteristics that parents value most. For example, parental satisfaction with school is regularly tracked in some countries and generally family members' satisfaction of their child's school is high, often higher than the satisfaction levels of the general public (Brenan, 2021). The reason for this could be attributed to various factors, as discussed below.

However, in general, understanding parental satisfaction only provides a limited "quick picture" of parental perspectives on education. Some studies examine if family members have an accurate picture of the quality of their children's school. The results vary depending on context. For example, in the United States parents frequently believe their child is excelling academically when they are not, but in Pakistan parents usually accurately assess not only their child's academic level but also the quality of the schools in their community (Andrabi et al., 2008; Learning Heroes, 2020). Other studies look to parents' experiences of their child's school, such as if the school climate is welcoming and if they have a trusting relationship with their child's teachers (Queensland Government Department of Education, 2019).

Another area of research examines the underlying beliefs influencing parents' experience, perception, and behavior related to their child's education. For example, some research examines what motivates parents to be involved in their child's education, noting it is heavily influenced by their "role beliefs" or what they believe their role is in their child's education and their beliefs on their own "efficacy" or ability to positively contribute to their child's educational progress and outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Notably, parents' level of education and socio-economic status has a complex relationship to parental

engagement across contexts. In the United States, for example, one study forcefully rejected “the culture of poverty thesis” that working class families cared less or were significantly less involved in their child’s education while the same researchers found that this was not the case in Hong Kong (Ho, 2006; Ho & Willms, 1996). Other research examines parents’ beliefs about the skills children should develop with variable findings across contexts: parents have different perspectives on what types of competencies are the responsibility of families to teach children above and beyond academics, which most families strongly agree is an important role for the school (Care et al., 2017). Some studies point to the contrasting perspectives between parents and teachers on what the most important competencies are, especially in early learning, for children to develop (Jukes et al., 2018). While still other studies try to understand what parents believe makes a good school, including by looking at how parents choose schools. Around the world, studies from Kenya to India to Brazil to Europe and beyond highlight that parents often look to homework, discipline and school environment, safety, test scores, teacher attendance, distance, school reputation among other things, as indicators of what makes for a good school for their child (Gallego & Hernando, 2009; Lohan et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015; Plano CDE & Omidyar Network, 2017; Varkey Foundation, 2018; Zuilkowski et al., 2018).

To date, however, little empirical research has examined parents’ overall beliefs on the purposes of school and education. A qualitative study in New Zealand explored students’, parents’, and teachers’ beliefs about the purpose of school and found limited attention to the economic purpose, namely preparing students for the world of work (Widdowson et al., 2014). Whereas other studies in the United States highlight how parents focus more on their child’s happiness and well-being in relation to school when their child is younger and shift their focus to their child’s academic preparation when their child is older (Learning Heroes, 2017). System transformation efforts require us to dig deeper and ask questions above and beyond what frequently is studied in family-school engagement. We sought to add to the existing family-school engagement evidence base by conducting surveys of 24,759 parents across 14 jurisdiction clusters and 6,146 teachers across 8 jurisdictions—in all, spanning 10 countries and one global private sector school chain—between May 14, 2020, and March 9, 2021 (see



Families participate in arts and crafts in the Remake Learning Days festival at the Providence Family Support Center in Pittsburgh. © Natalie Parfitt

Figure 8). We asked questions about parents' and teachers' beliefs about the most important purpose of school, what a quality education looks like, what types of teaching and learning experiences they thought were most important for their children and students, and how their educational beliefs were formed (see Box 6). Our goal was to delve deeply into guiding values and beliefs and to surface a detailed picture of family and teacher mindsets—insights that are important if families and schools are to work together *to redefine the purpose of school for students*.

We conducted these surveys in close collaboration with several of the project collaborators in our Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) (see Box 7). Project collaborators were invited to join the network based on several criteria such as their focus on addressing equity in highly diverse populations of students, their commitment to providing a quality 21st-century education, and their interest in sharing and learning about how families and schools can work better together. Many jurisdictions already had ongoing family-school engagement initiatives when they joined FEEN. Hence this is not a randomly selected set of jurisdictions, and the survey findings should be read with that in mind.

BOX 6. DEFINING CONCEPTS IN THE CUE PARENT AND TEACHER SURVEYS

Here we summarize the concepts used in our surveys. These descriptions, however, do not represent how the questions were worded for respondents.

Purpose: What is the most important reason for parents to send their children to school and for teachers to teach them: the academic, economic, civic, or socio-emotional development of the students?

Pedagogy: What pedagogical approaches do parents and teachers prefer: innovative pedagogy (e.g., interactive, experiential, playful) or traditional pedagogy (e.g., teacher-led instruction in person or online)?

Indicators of quality: When are parents and teachers most satisfied with their children's or students' school: when they see *academic indicators* of quality (e.g., when students are achieving at grade level, getting good grades on exams, being prepared for postsecondary) or *well-being indicators* (e.g., when students are enjoying school, developing friendships and social skills, participating in extracurricular activities)?

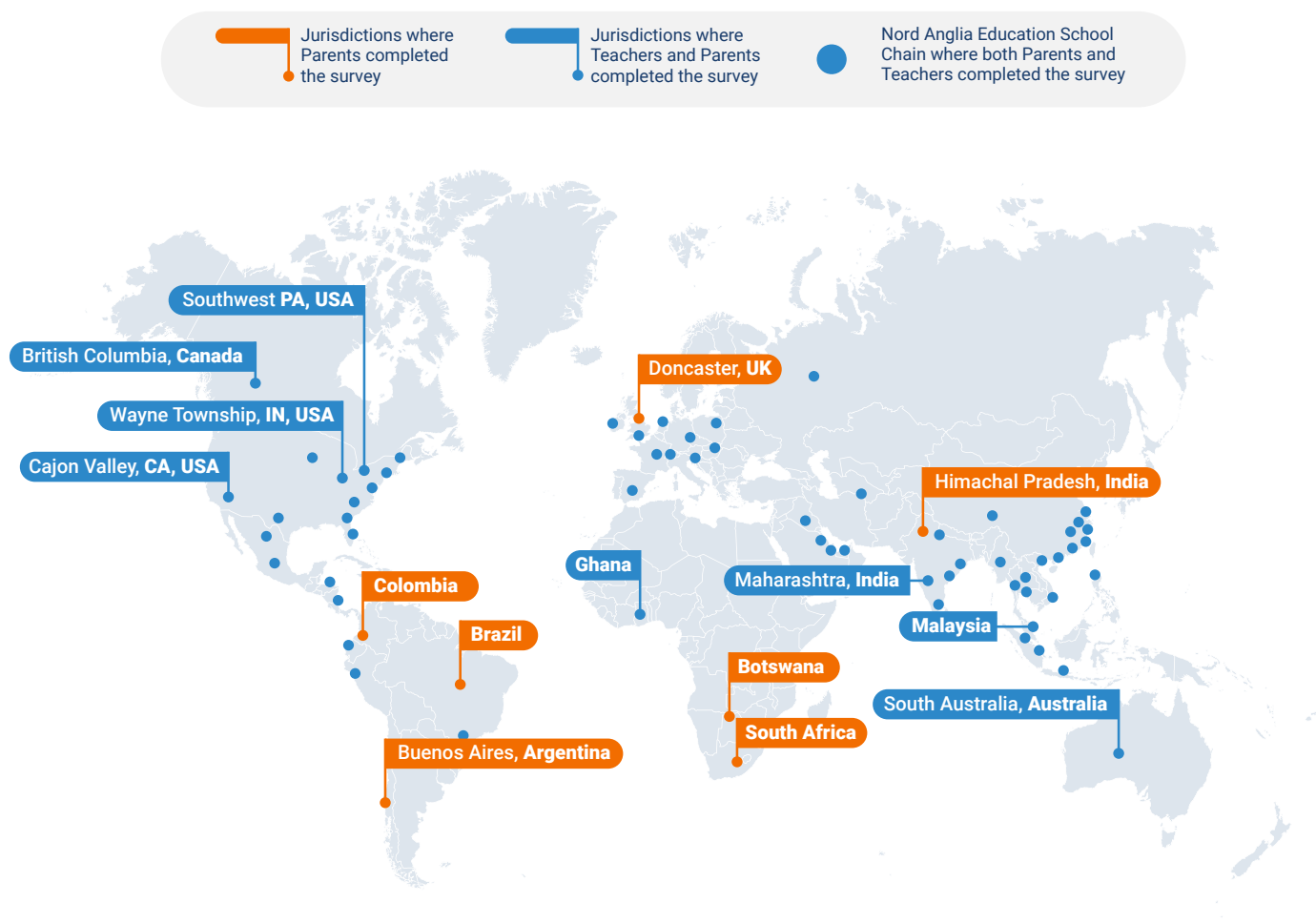
Sources of information: Who influences parents' beliefs about education:

- (a) *Education-related sources* (e.g., actors directly involved in education such as teachers, school leaders, higher education admissions criteria, scientific research from the learning sciences); or (b) *non-education related sources* (e.g., actors related to the community at large such as other parents, civil society or faith-based leaders, elected officials, the media).
- (a) *Close sources* (e.g., actors who are part of parents' daily lives such as other parents, teachers, school leaders, civil society leaders, and elected officials); or (b) *far sources* (e.g., actors that are unlikely to be part of parents' daily lives such as the media, higher education admissions officers, scientific findings).

Trust: To what extent do parents believe their child's teacher is receptive to their inputs and suggestions?

Alignment: To what extent do parents believe their child's teacher shares their beliefs about what makes a good-quality education for their child?

Figure 8. Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) member locations



BOX 7. CUE'S FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION NETWORK AND ITS ROLE IN THE PARENT AND TEACHER SURVEYS

The Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) consists of 49 project collaborators (32 governments, 14 civil society and funder organizations, and 3 private school networks) from 12 countries around the world and one global private sector school chain with schools in 31 countries (Nord Anglia Education).

For coordination and data analysis purposes, project collaborators are grouped into 16 jurisdiction clusters (e.g., we have grouped the 15 school districts located in Southwestern Pennsylvania together). These jurisdiction clusters include Botswana; Brazil; British Columbia, Canada; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Cajon Valley, California, U.S.; Colombia; Doncaster, U.K.; Ghana; Himachal Pradesh, India; Maharashtra, India; Malaysia; Nord Anglia Education; South Africa; Southwestern Pennsylvania, U.S.; South Australia, Australia; and Wayne Township, Indiana, U.S.

Parent surveys analyzed in this playbook were conducted across 14 jurisdiction clusters spanning 10 countries and Nord Anglia Education, while teacher surveys were conducted across 8 jurisdiction clusters from across 5 countries and Nord Anglia Education.

Top five insights from parents and teachers

We learned a great deal from parents and teachers in these surveys, as our top five insights across all the jurisdictions indicate below. However, one surprise, which is in line with findings from other surveys discussed above, is that parents report resoundingly that they are satisfied with their child's education. This especially surprised us, considering that parents completed our survey during COVID-19 school closures, when many were coping with difficult changes to schooling. Parents might tend to respond favorably to these general satisfaction questions, even amid dire circumstances, for many reasons: they could, of course, be very happy with the school. They could be grateful for the custodial care of their children. They could also want to show their gratitude for the teachers' efforts. Or they might have little else to compare the school with (especially if they have limited education themselves). Finally, they might find it hard to admit, even to themselves, that the school they send their children to every day does not meet their expectations.

We really need to teach in school, how important it is to be kind to each other, to accept people's differences, and learn about people's differences.

Parent, United Kingdom

Beyond parents' level of satisfaction, we ultimately found that the parents in each jurisdiction have a unique set of beliefs and expectations—and that frequently there is misalignment between parents and teachers. While there are some common themes across jurisdictions, as covered below, the differences between them confirm a central conclusion: for any school or education system seeking to *redefine the purpose of school for students* and therefore to determine the operational practices to deliver on this goal, a better understanding of parents' and teachers' beliefs is an important place to start.

The following section of this playbook provides a set of Conversation Starter tools adapted from our parent and teacher surveys to guide those wishing to embark on this journey. For a detailed discussion of the survey methods and findings, please see [What we have learned from parents: A review of CUE's parent survey findings by jurisdiction](#).

*My son, he is doing well with academics.
Still I feel they should do something for self-growth.*
Parent, India

Insight No. 1: Different communities have different motivations

Perhaps the most important insight is that it is risky to assume you understand family beliefs and perceptions about what makes for a quality education without asking families directly. Although the surveys reveal some similar patterns across jurisdictions, each context presents a unique picture of what parents value and perceive to be true. It is especially important to guard against long-standing narratives in education about the ways in which parents' socio-economic status shapes their beliefs about what a quality education looks like for their child, such as assuming that low-income parents are more focused on school as a means for their children to get a job and advance economically. In fact, our data across jurisdictions reveal no consistent relationship between parents' level of education (a good indication of socio-economic status) and their educational beliefs.

If nothing else, this data has shown us that it is important for school and jurisdiction leaders to spend the time to get to know the parents in their community and what their beliefs, motivations, and perceptions are around education. Indeed, this is why, in the findings that follow, we present the data by each jurisdiction separately rather than as an aggregate picture. The connections, relationships, and trust that can develop between families and schools from such an exercise would be helpful across the board, regardless of whether the interest is in improving systems or in transforming them. But understanding parents' beliefs and perceptions about the purpose and related experiences of schooling must be an integral part to any endeavor to transform education systems.

Insight No. 2: Both parents and teachers broadly support a holistic vision of education, but each group believes the other is narrowly focused on academics

Each jurisdiction has a particular prevailing set of beliefs that parents hold about the purpose of school, the pedagogy they support, and the indicators of quality they think are most important. Across jurisdictions, however, there is strong support for a holistic vision of school. Many parents prioritize their child's socio-emotional development equally to, if not more than, their academic development as the most important purpose of school. This is the case in 9 of the 14 jurisdictions (see Figure 9).

Relatedly, parents in all but one jurisdiction prioritize approaches that are interactive and experiential over didactic, teacher-led instruction methods when asked to rank their preferred ways of teaching and learning for their children during school closures from a list of pedagogies. Interestingly, in South Africa, parents report a preference for didactic, traditional approaches when presented with a list of pedagogies but prefer interactive, innovative methods when asked to choose between two contrasting vignettes that describe a classroom where teachers use interactive pedagogy versus a classroom where teachers use direct instruction. To test a novel approach to surveying, we included this vignette-based question in the Colombia, Ghana, and South Africa parent surveys (Winthrop & Ershadi, 2020). This discrepancy may be because parents in South Africa are generally supportive of what we term innovative pedagogy, namely interactive and experiential teaching and learning approaches, as seen by their response to the vignette question; but had reservations about specific types of pedagogies we classified as innovative as seen from their limited support for playing games (on or offline) when ranking their preferences.

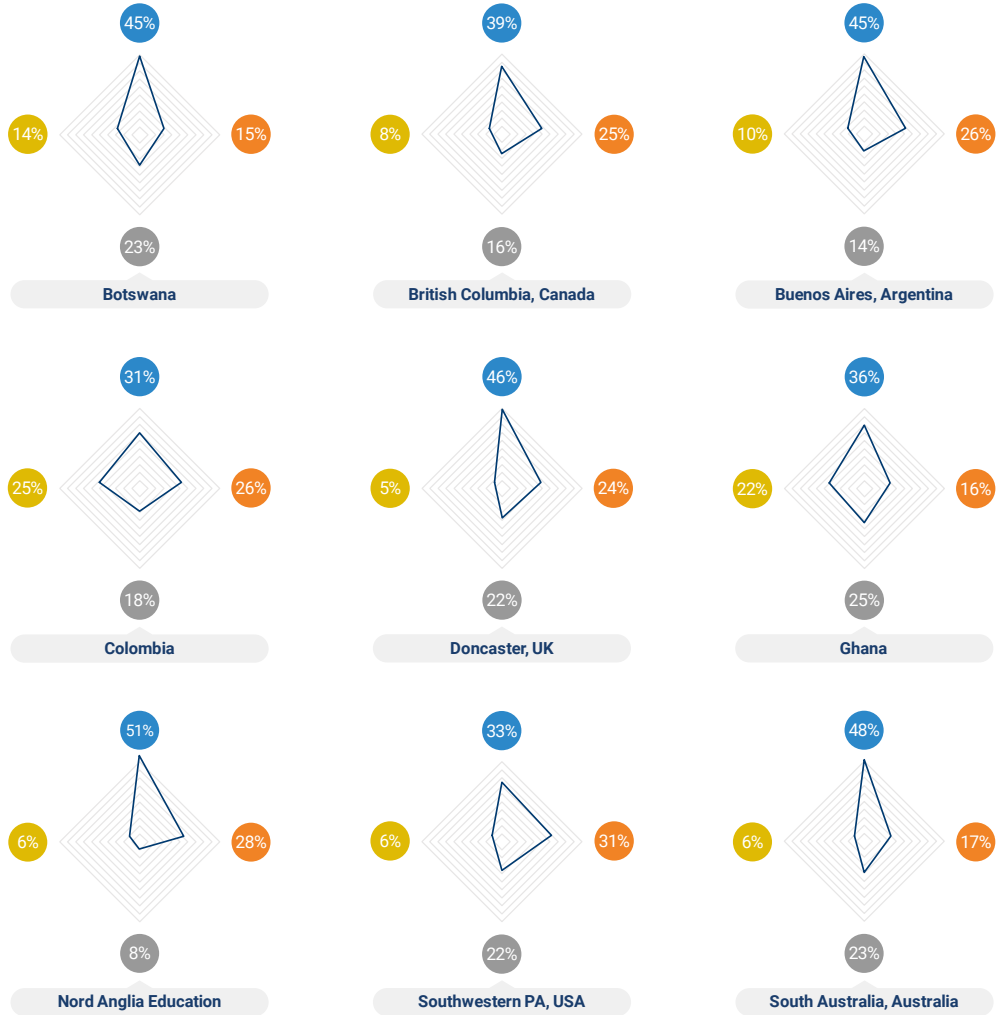
The surveys also included questions to understand which indicators of quality most inform parents' assessment of their child's school, divided into two main categories: academic indicators and well-being indicators. These questions elicited more of a mixed response across jurisdictions (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Parents' beliefs on the most important purpose of school

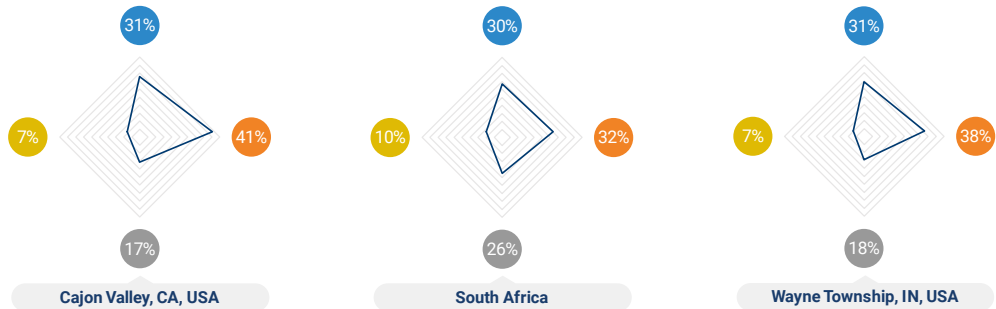
TAKEAWAY: In 9 of 14 jurisdictions, parents prioritize a socio-emotional purpose of school.

● Socio-emotional ● Academic ● Economic ● Civic

Jurisdictions that prioritize a socio-emotional purpose of school



Jurisdictions that prioritize an academic purpose of school



Jurisdictions that prioritize a civic purpose of school

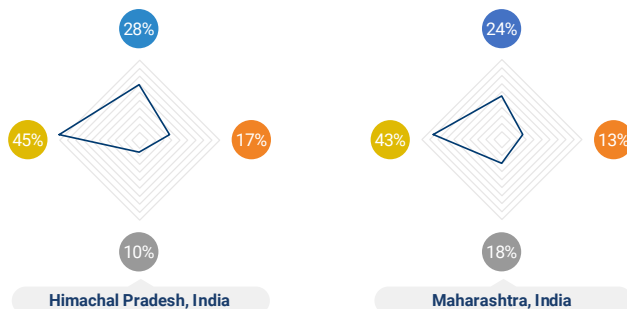
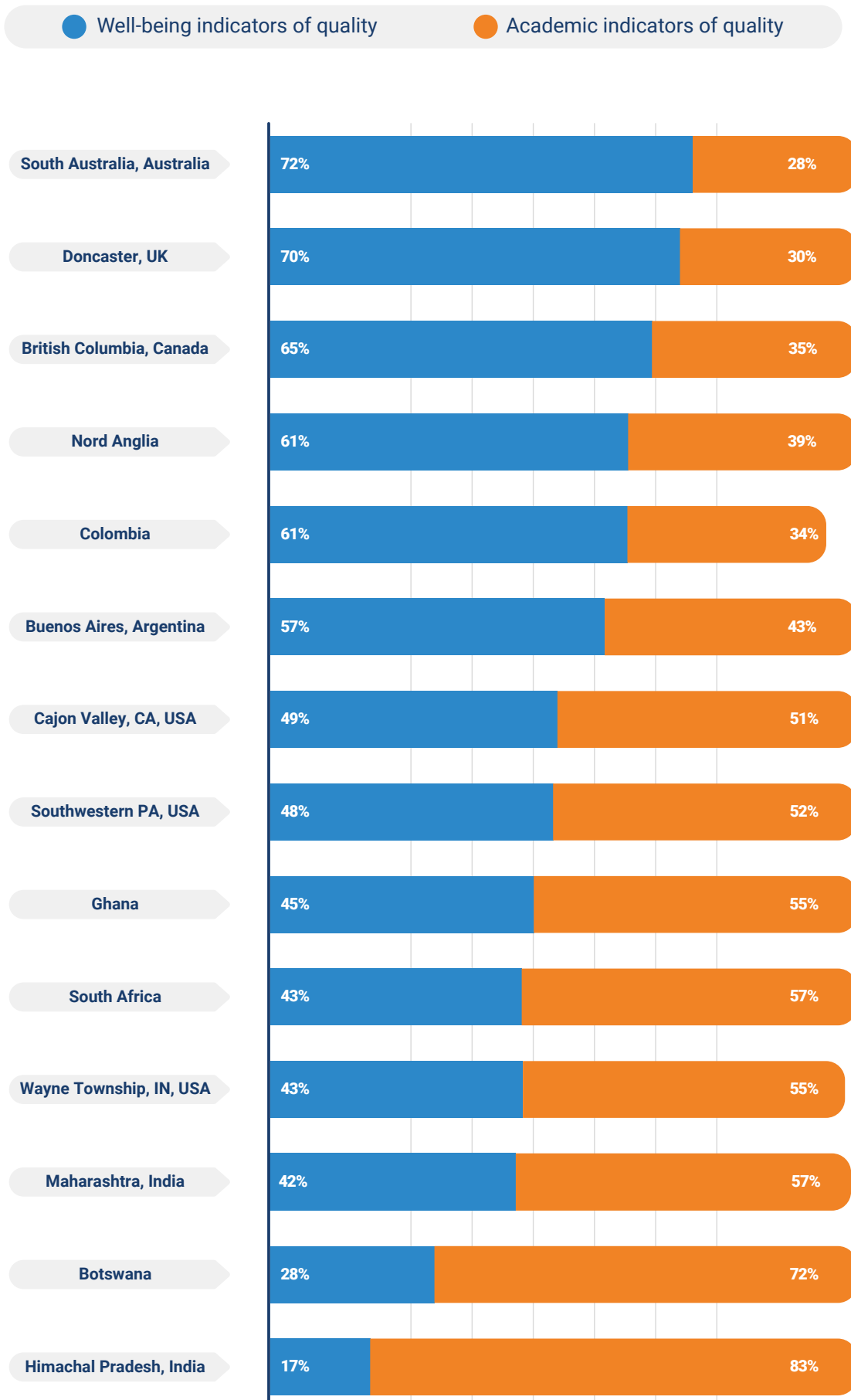


Figure 10. Parents' preferences for well-being vs. academic indicators of quality

TAKEAWAY: In 8 of the 14 jurisdictions, parents are more focused on academics than on well-being.



Note: Preferences do not always total 100% because respondents in some jurisdictions had the option to select Other.

In 8 of the 14 jurisdictions, parents are more focused on academic indicators than on well-being indicators, even though parents in many of these same jurisdictions also believe that the socio-emotional or civic purpose of school is the most important. In these jurisdictions, parents are most satisfied when their children are performing at grade level, doing well on exams, and preparing for postsecondary education. In the other 6 jurisdictions, parents are more satisfied when they see indicators of children's well-being like making friends, enjoying school, and participating in extracurricular activities.

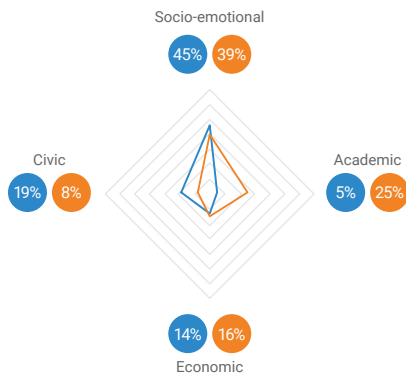
The availability of different indicators on children's experience in school may be one reason why in some jurisdictions, such as Botswana, parents believe that children's socio-emotional development is the most important *purpose* of school, but they rely heavily on academic indicators to assess the *quality* of their child's school. It could simply be that exam pass rates and other similar indicators are all the information they are receiving.

Teachers, in all eight jurisdictions where we surveyed them, hold much more cohesive views than parents about both the purpose of education and the indicators they focus on for achieving a quality school experience. They overwhelmingly identify the socio-emotional *purpose* of school as most important and identify the well-being indicators of *quality* as the most important for students (see Figures 11 and 12). Teachers in all jurisdictions also prefer innovative pedagogy over traditional pedagogy (see Figures 13). Overall, teachers strongly prefer holistic education that prioritizes student well-being.

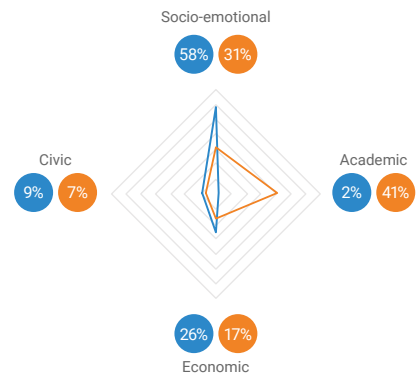
Figure 11. Parents' vs. teachers' beliefs on the most important purpose of school

TAKEAWAY: Teachers have a stronger preference for a socio-emotional purpose of school than parents.

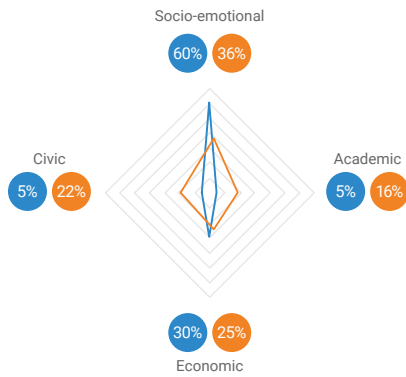
— Teachers — Parents



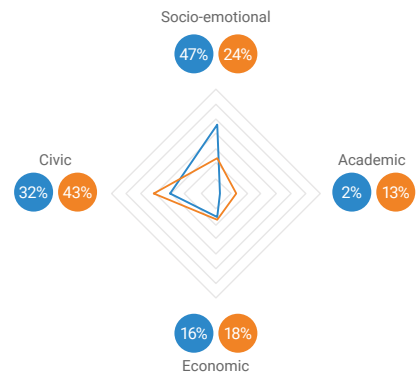
British Columbia, Canada



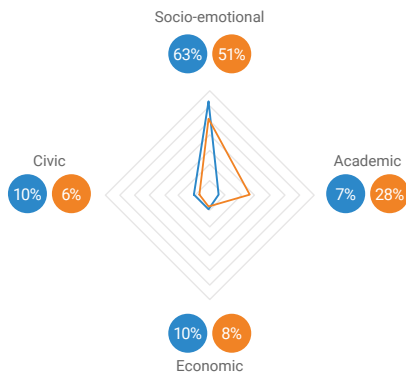
Cajon Valley, CA, USA



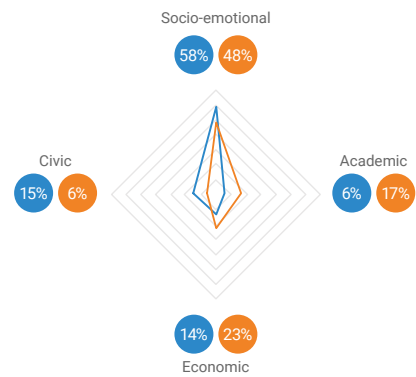
Ghana



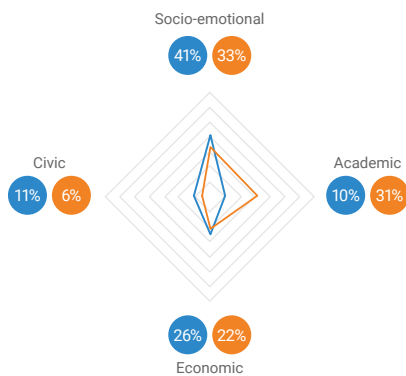
Maharashtra, India



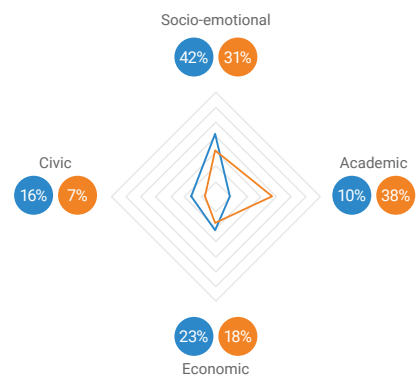
Nord Anglia



South Australia, Australia



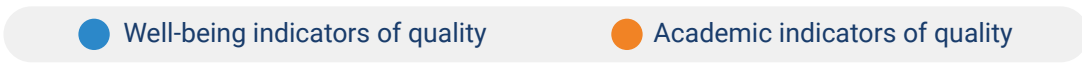
Southwestern, PA, USA



Wayne Township, IN, USA

Figure 12. Parents' and teachers' preferences for well-being vs. academic indicators of quality

TAKEAWAY: Teachers tend to prefer well-being indicators of quality more than parents.

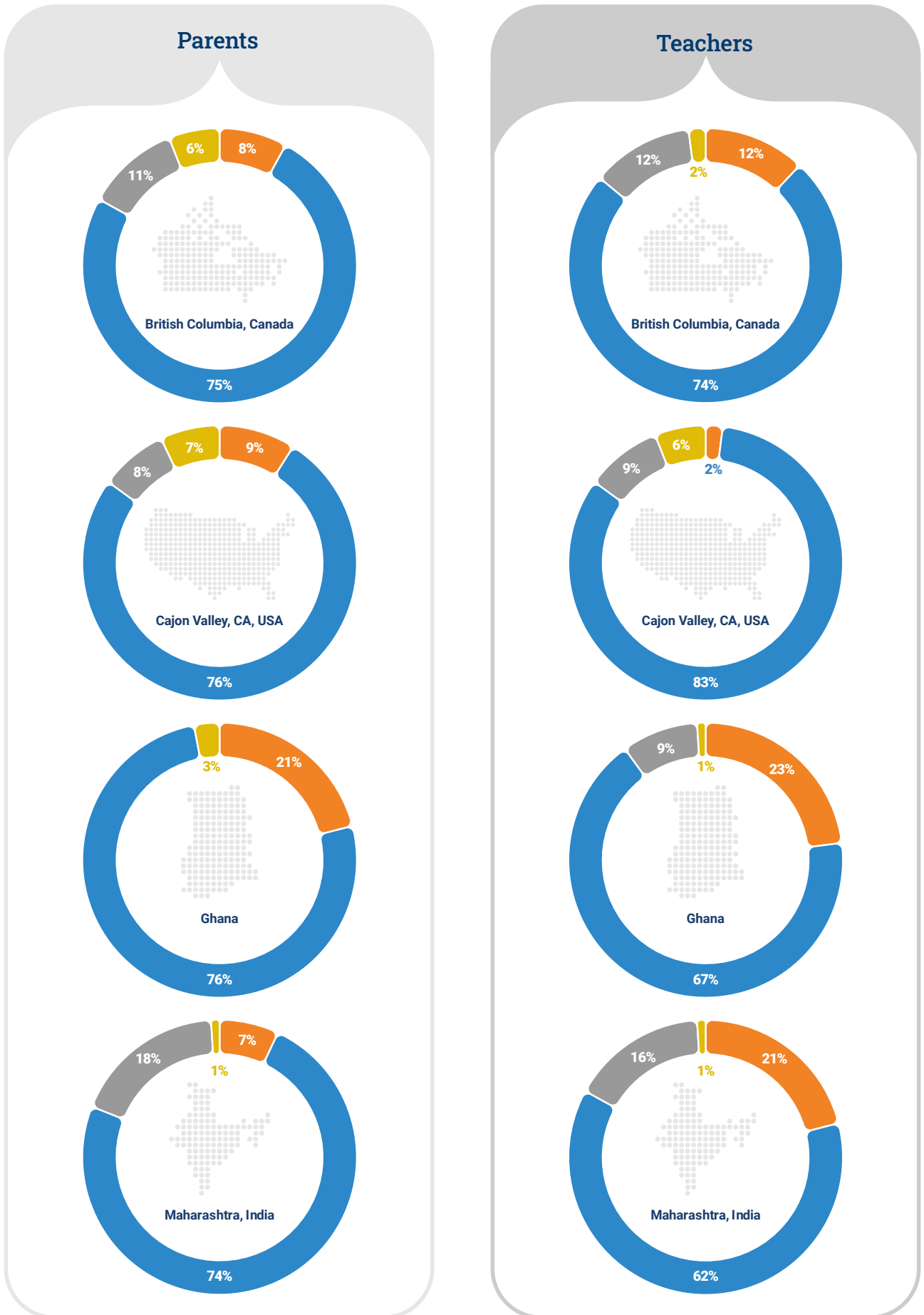


Note: Preferences do not always total 100% because respondents in some jurisdictions had the option to select Other.

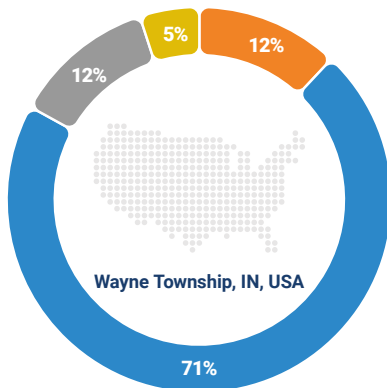
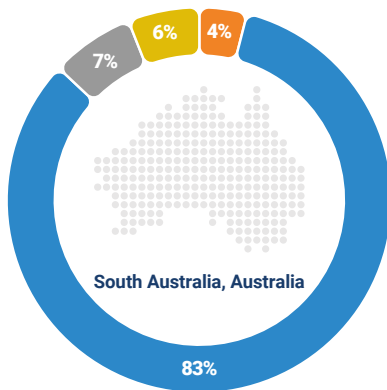
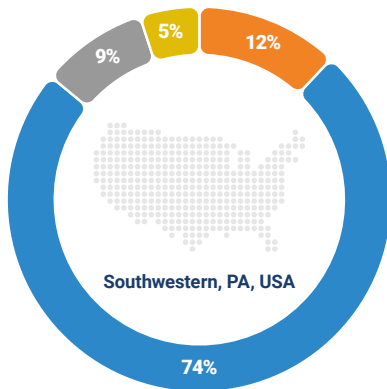
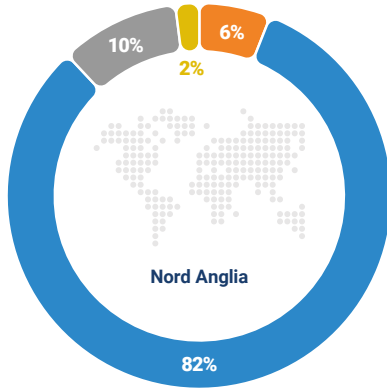
Figure 13. Preference for innovative vs. traditional pedagogy

TAKEAWAY: Teachers, like parents, prefer innovative vs. traditional pedagogical approaches.

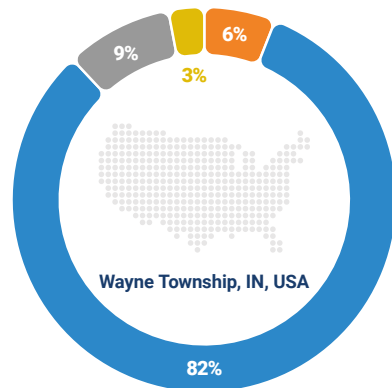
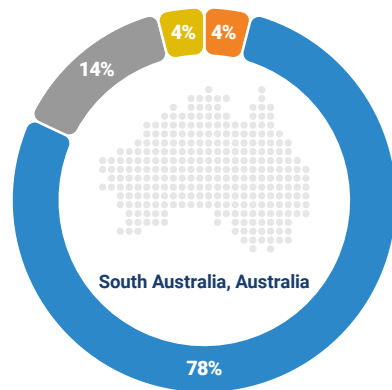
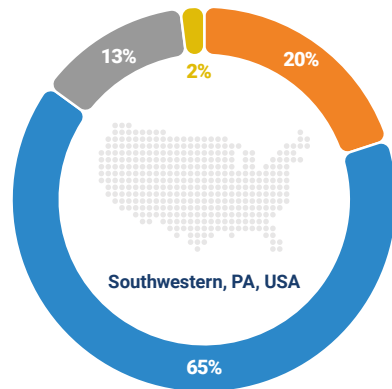
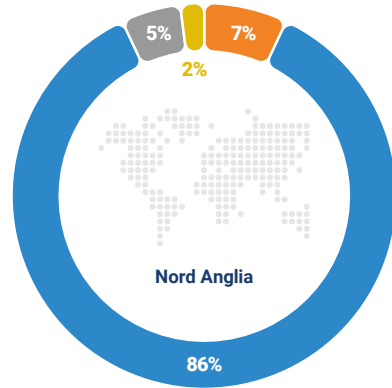
● Traditional pedagogy
 ● Innovative pedagogy
 ● Equal preference
 ● Other



Parents



Teachers

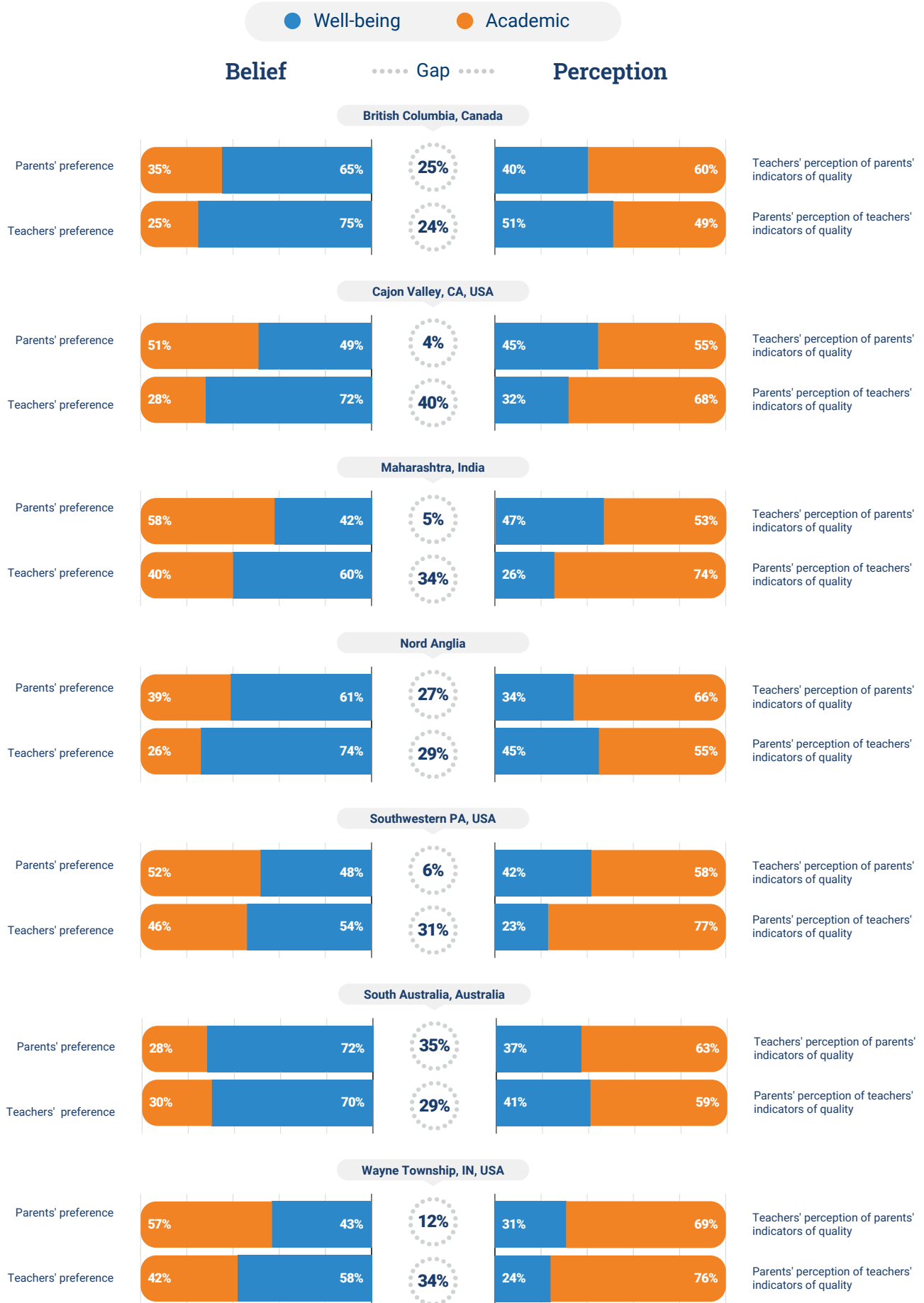


Parents and teachers however have very different perceptions of *each other's* beliefs about school. Perhaps most striking are their perceptions regarding what makes for a good school experience: the academic indicators of quality versus the well-being indicators (see Figure 14). While most teachers in every jurisdiction feel that the well-being indicators are most important, in every jurisdiction they also feel that parents prioritize the academic indicators of quality. Clearly in some jurisdictions teachers believe parents want different things than they do. The truth is that although *parents* in several of the surveyed jurisdictions do prioritize academic indicators of quality, many are more focused on their children's well-being, just like teachers. A similar dynamic affects what parents believe *teachers* think is most important. Across all jurisdictions except British Columbia, parents believe the academic indicators of quality are most important for teachers—virtually the opposite of what teachers say they prioritize.

When it comes to beliefs about the *purpose* of school, parents and teachers are no more accurate in perceiving each other's beliefs. A comparison of responses about the most important purpose of school shows that what parents think about teachers' beliefs is rarely similar to what teachers say their *own* beliefs are, and vice versa (see Figure 15). In many jurisdictions, both groups perceive the other as being much more focused on the academic purpose of school than they really are.

Figure 14. Indicators of quality: Belief vs. perception

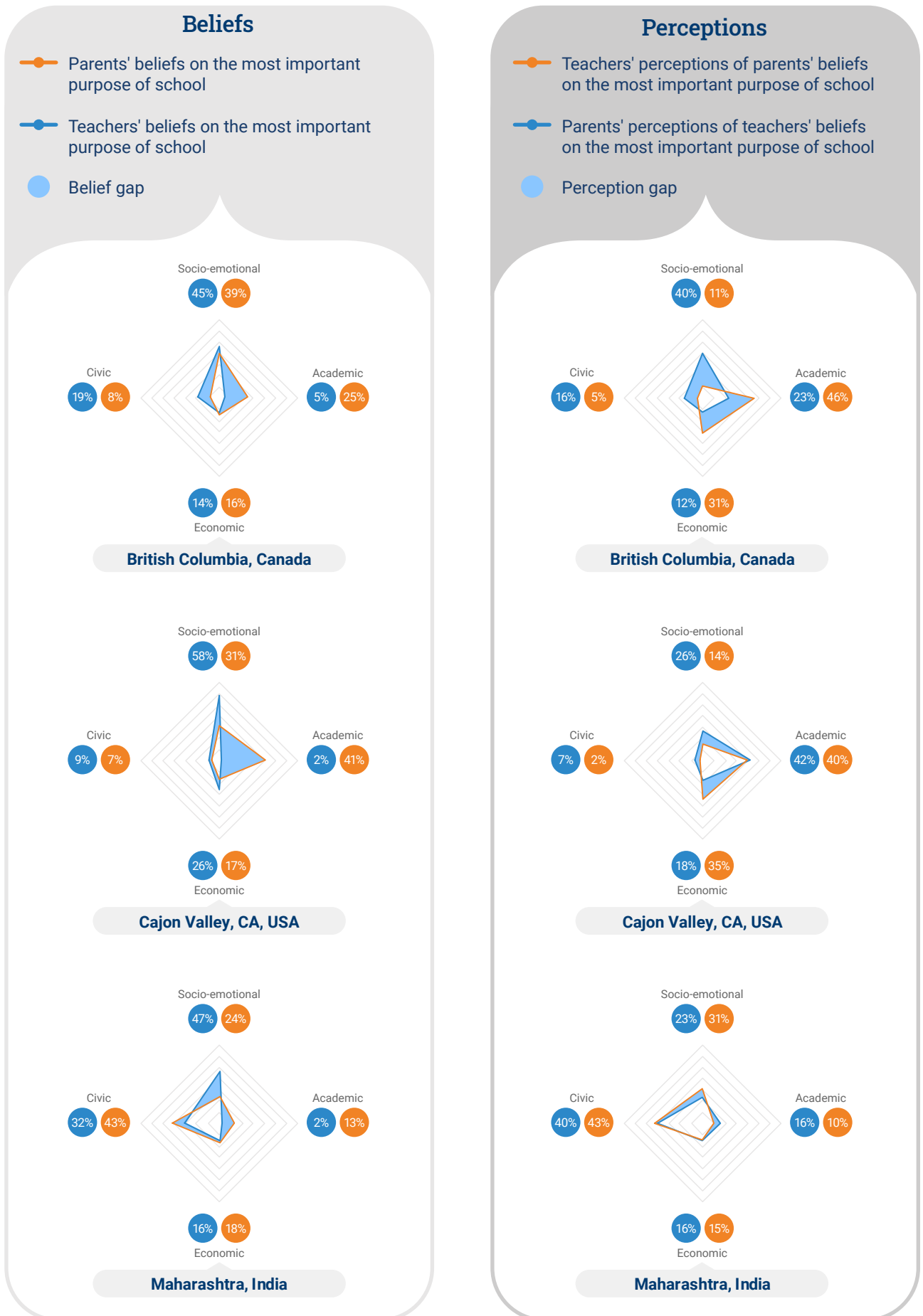
TAKEAWAY: More often, parents incorrectly believe that teachers prefer academics compared to well-being, whereas teachers correctly understand parent preferences more frequently.



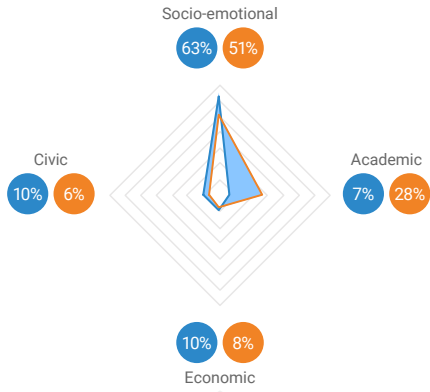
Note: The parent survey in Maharashtra allowed respondents to select Other. For visualization purposes, Other responses (<3%) are included in the academic category.

Figure 15. Beliefs on the most important purpose of school: Belief vs. perception

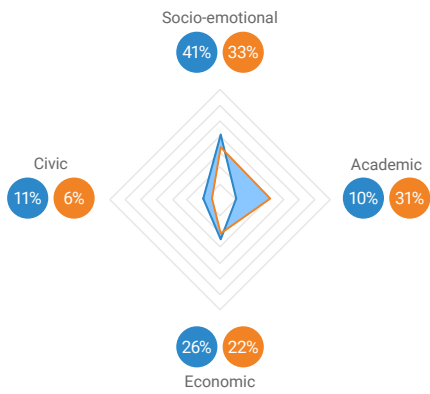
TAKEAWAY: In 5 of the 7 jurisdictions, parents' and teachers' beliefs are more closely aligned than they think.



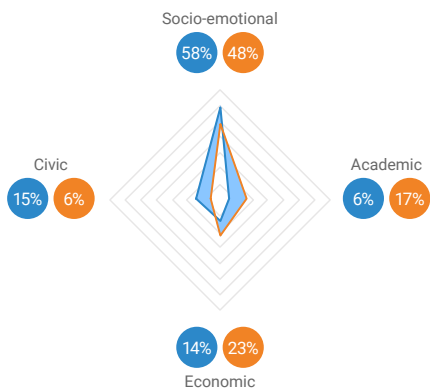
Beliefs



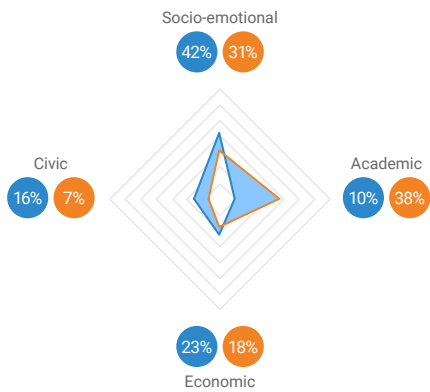
Nord Anglia



Southwestern, PA, USA

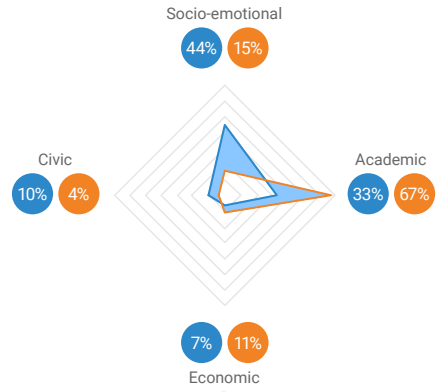


South Australia, Australia

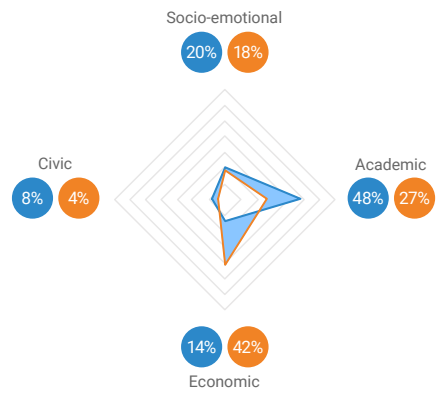


Wayne Township, IN, USA

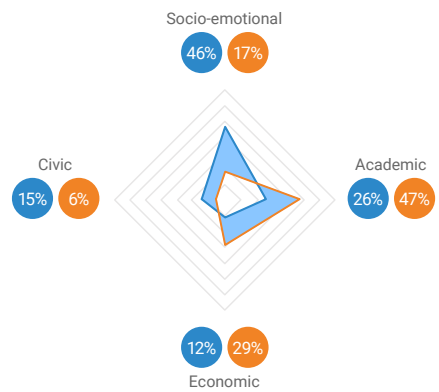
Perceptions



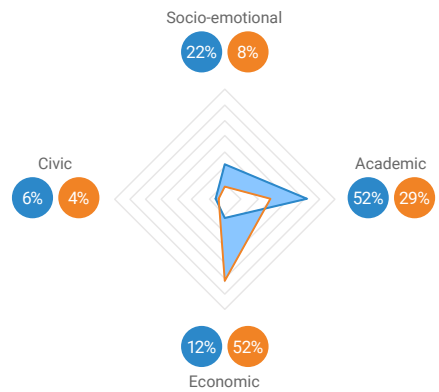
Nord Anglia



Southwestern, PA, USA



South Australia, Australia



Wayne Township, IN, USA

Interestingly, in about half the jurisdictions, parents who have higher levels of trust and alignment are also more likely to believe that teachers care more about students' well-being than about academics. The exceptions are parents in India's Himachal Pradesh state and in the Nord Anglia global network of private schools, who are more likely to have high levels of trust or alignment if they believe teachers care more about students' academics than about well-being.

The idea that more-educated parents will feel that teachers are more receptive to their inputs and that they will be more likely to share teachers' beliefs because of their familiarity with school does not seem to hold. In all but a few jurisdictions, parents' own educational attainment appears to have limited influence on their levels of trust in or alignment with teachers. In fact, parents with lower education levels in four jurisdictions—South Australia; Colombia; India's Maharashtra state; and Wayne Township, Indiana, in the United States—are more likely than their more highly educated peers to have higher trust or alignment with their children's teachers. Instead, as we see below in Figure 17, it is the age of the parents' child that influences their levels of trust and alignment with their child's teacher.

Figure 17. Who has more trust and alignment by child's age?

TAKEAWAY: Parents of younger children tend to have higher levels of trust and alignment.

■ Parents of younger children ■ Parents of older children ■ Not asked ■ No significant finding



Jurisdictions

Insight No. 4: Parents' beliefs about school are dynamic, changing greatly with their children's age

A child's age greatly influences the parents' beliefs and perceptions about what indicates a quality school experience. This is a much more profound lens shaping parents' views than their level of education, which in a few jurisdictions does appear to influence their responses to a few survey questions but not nearly to the extent that their children's ages do. By and large, in all but three of the jurisdictions, parents of younger children are more satisfied with their education when they see indicators of the child's well-being, whereas parents of older children focus more on success of the academic indicators.

In nine of the 14 jurisdictions, children's age also shape parents' preferences on the most important purpose of school, with parents of older children preferring the academic and/or economic purposes of school. As for the style of pedagogy, however, except in Buenos Aires, the age of parents' children has no influence on their preference for innovative or traditional pedagogy.

Interestingly, parents' level of education, a good indicator of their socio-economic status, is much less influential on their beliefs about school. When assessing the quality of their children's schools, in six of the jurisdictions, parents with higher education are more likely to be satisfied when their child shows indicators of well-being, and parents with lower education are more likely to prefer seeing their child's success on the academic indicators. However, parents' education has little influence over their preference for innovative or traditional pedagogical approaches, except in contexts such as Buenos Aires and Himachal Pradesh, where parents with higher education are more likely to prefer innovative pedagogy.

Students have to be able to write and think and tell. They have to have an opinion on the subject they study.

Parent, United States

As for parents' views about the most important *purpose* of school, their level of education has a limited but mixed influence. For example, in Colombia, Ghana, and South Africa, the more highly educated parents are more likely to prefer the socio-emotional or economic purposes of schools. However, in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the more highly educated parents are more likely to prefer the civic purpose of school. And in Maharashtra, parents with less education are more likely to prefer the academic purpose of school.

As with parents' beliefs about school, it is the age of children and not parents' level of education that appears, across jurisdictions, to most frequently influence parents' levels of trust in and alignment with their children's teachers. In all but one jurisdiction, Himachal Pradesh, it is the parents of younger children who are more likely to say their children's teachers are receptive to their inputs and share their beliefs about what makes a good-quality education. Interestingly, in Himachal Pradesh, where parents are more focused on academic indicators of quality, it is parents of older children who feel higher levels of trust and alignment with their child's teachers.

Insight No. 5: The shapers of parents' beliefs about education vary greatly by the parents' own education level

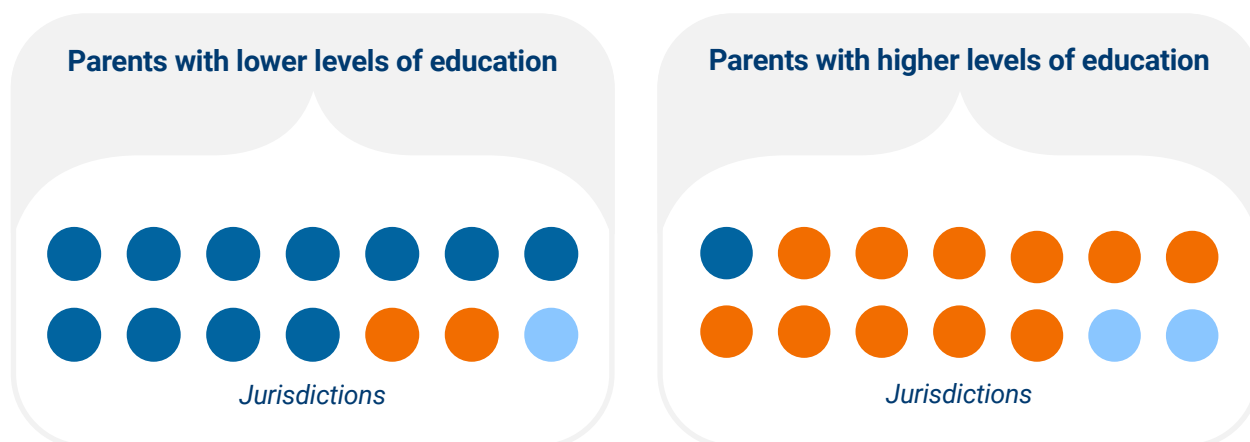
Parents turn to many people and places for advice and guidance on their children's education—primarily their own children. Parents around the world, through focus group discussions, told us how important observing and talking with their children is to parents' assessment of the school. Beyond their children, though, who and what shapes parents' beliefs?

Across many jurisdictions, we found that parents' own level of education heavily influences who they say is most influential in shaping their beliefs about education (see Figure 18). In nine jurisdictions, less-educated parents are more likely to be influenced by people in their everyday lives—whom we term “close” sources of information. A close source could be their child's teacher, their local religious leader or other community leader, or other parents in their community. However, more highly educated parents are more likely to be influenced by people outside of their local community—or “far” sources—such as university admissions officers, academics studying education, and journalists or others in the media.

Figure 18. What is the relationship between parents' level of education and sources of information?

TAKEAWAY: Parents with lower levels of education tend to rely on close sources of information to shape their beliefs about education.

● Close sources ● Far sources ● No significant finding



In some places, such as Buenos Aires and South Africa, the less-educated parents are more likely to be influenced by people in their community who are not part of the education system, such as local community leaders instead of teachers. The more highly educated parents are more likely to listen to experts outside their community but who are part of the education profession such as admissions officers and education researchers.

Parents' level of trust also influences whom they turn to. Generally, across multiple jurisdictions, parents with higher trust levels are more likely to listen to people in their daily lives who are in the education system, whereas those with lower trust levels are more likely to listen to people outside of their community who are not part of the education system such as those working in the media.

Interestingly, the age of parents' children has very limited influence across the jurisdictions on whom parents listen to. In a few jurisdictions (such as Southwestern Pennsylvania, British Columbia, and the Nord Anglia locations), parents of younger children are more likely to be influenced by sources of information in their community, like teachers, and parents with older children are more likely to be influenced by people outside the community, like researchers.





6. Conversation Starter tools



Understanding parent and teacher beliefs and perceptions about education is a first step toward finding alignment. As discussed in the previous section, attempts at educational change can be difficult when families and schools are not on the same page regarding the purpose of school or the types of teaching and learning experiences children and youth should have in school. Alignment around the vision of what a good-quality education looks like can be helpful for improving and transforming education systems, but it is essential for one of the transformation goals: *redefine the purpose of school for students*.

We started a school reform process that was going well and to my mind the quality of education in the schools was going up. Then in PTA meetings, the parents were sitting here telling me that the quality of education was going down! I had to really spend a lot of time listening to parents to understand how we could see things so differently. It turns out we valued different things.

School network leader, India

In communities where family and school perceptions are not understood or shared, each group's priorities and actions can create resistance and limit the possibility for change. If, for example, a district believes it should prioritize social responsibilities without consulting families, yet families prefer a greater focus on academic preparation for postsecondary opportunities, this mismatch of beliefs and actions will create friction and hamper the community's ability to advance a unified vision around education.

Because families are not a monolith, beliefs will naturally vary within and across jurisdictions. CUE's surveys of parents and teachers around the world reveal a wide variety of beliefs across and within communities and jurisdictions. For education leaders and advocates to effectively work with communities to advance educational transformation, they need to systematically gather a nuanced picture of parents, teachers, and other stakeholders' beliefs and perceptions. One way to start doing this is by using the "Conversation Starter" tools, which include an adapted version of CUE's survey. We share these tools as prototypes to be tried by interested jurisdictions, organizations, and communities.

The tools include:

- *A contextualization checklist* of the steps for adapting the tools to a specific context and to other actors.
- *A short parent survey* that can also be adapted to other stakeholders, such as students.
- *A short teacher survey* that can also be adapted to other stakeholders, such as school administrators or employers.
- *A guide for analyzing and discussing survey results* within your community.

What are the Conversation Starter tools for?

If you are interested in better understanding the level of alignment between different members of your school community (e.g., parents, teachers, students, administrators, and employers), the Conversation Starter tools can help you. The tools are specifically designed to understand the alignment of each stakeholder group's vision of what makes for a quality education. The tools can help education leaders and community advocates learn:

- The most important purpose of school for each stakeholder group.
- The aspects of a child's educational experience each stakeholder group most relies on to assess quality.
- The types of teaching and learning experiences each stakeholder group prefers.
- The sources each stakeholder group relies on to inform their beliefs about education.
- The level of trust and alignment felt between stakeholder groups.

The data generated from the tools can be used in various ways. It can shed light on areas of misalignment between stakeholder groups, and it can highlight the most prominent perspectives within stakeholder groups. Most importantly, it can be used to begin a dialogue within and across stakeholder groups on what the purpose of school should be and what types of experiences children, families, and communities should have with school.

Who should use the Conversation Starter tools?

The tools should be used by anyone who would like to better understand the perspectives of one or more education stakeholder groups. The tools can help education decisionmakers or community advocates start a conversation across stakeholder groups. They will also help anyone interested in moving forward with educational change initiatives to have a more in-depth understanding of the perspectives of different groups. The tools are particularly suited to helping inform those leaders looking to embark on initiatives to help transform education—meaning to change how the current school system works, particularly around *redefining the purpose of education for students*. They can be used by:

- School leaders.
- Jurisdiction leaders.
- Leaders of school networks.
- Teacher organizations.
- Parent organizations.
- Civil society organizations working with schools to support education system transformation.

How were the Conversation Starter tools developed?

The tools are based on CUE's parent and teacher surveys that it conducted in collaboration with its Family Engagement in Education Network. The parent survey was administered to almost 25,000 parents and the teacher survey to over 6,000 teachers across jurisdictions in 10 countries and across one global private sector school chain. A selection of the questions used in the parent and teacher surveys have been used in the respective Conversation Starter tools.

Although the questions used in these short surveys have been rigorously selected and trialed, these surveys themselves have not yet been used as stand-alone tools that education leaders and advocates could use in their communities. Therefore, the tools, including the contextualization checklist and discussion guide, are prototypes. It is our hope that we can collaborate with those interested in administering the tools to learn how they work and to refine and adapt the tools. Our ultimate goal is to produce a rigorous, internationally validated instrument that anyone can use free of charge.

Can I adapt the tools to my community?

Yes you can! The tools are specifically designed for you to adapt to your context. In fact, it will be impossible to use the tools without doing at the minimum some basic contextualization such as editing the sample text introduction of the tools to your needs.

You can adapt the tools to your particular needs in a range of ways. We have however indicated the parts of the tools where we do not advise making edits, which is solely related to rigor and survey-design good practice. For example, we designed the parent survey for the primary caregiver to answer based on their

oldest child. This is because we know from our research that parents have different perspectives based on a child's age, and it is therefore quite difficult for them to use the tool accurately when thinking about all their children at once.

These tools are for you to use in your school, jurisdiction, or community. We encourage you to try them and give us feedback at leapfrogging@brookings.edu. Your inputs will help us further develop an internationally validated tool for exploring alignment between communities and schools.

The tools are available in Annex III on page 282.

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FEEN has grown since its inception and currently represents 49 organizations from 12 countries and one global private school chain with schools in 31 countries. The members are:

- Aliquippa School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Allegheny Intermediate Unit, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
- Avonworth School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Brentwood Borough School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Buenos Aires Ministry of Education, Argentina
- Butler School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Cajon Valley Union School District, California, U.S.
- Chartiers Valley School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Doncaster Council, UK
- Duquesne School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Fort Cherry School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Ghana Education Service, Ghana
- Hampton Township School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Himachal Pradesh Department of Education, India
- Hopewell School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Inter-American Development Bank
- Itau Social Foundation, Brazil
- Keystone Oaks School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Khed Taluka District, Maharashtra, India
- Leadership for Equity, Maharashtra, India
- LeapEd Services, Malaysia
- Learning Creates Australia
- Lively Minds, Ghana
- Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, Indiana, U.S.
- Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, India
- Ministry of Education, Colombia
- Nashik District, Maharashtra, India
- Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education, Canada
- New Brighton School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- New Castle School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.

- Nord Anglia Education
- Northgate School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- Parentkind, UK
- Pune Municipal Corporation, Maharashtra, India
- RedPaPaz, Colombia
- Right to Play, Ghana
- Samagra, Himachal Pradesh, India
- School District 8 Kootenay Lake, British Columbia, Canada
- School District 23 Central Okanagan, British Columbia, Canada
- School District 37 Delta, British Columbia, Canada
- School District 38 Richmond, British Columbia, Canada
- School District 39 Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
- School District 48 Sea to Sky, British Columbia, Canada
- South Fayette School District, Pennsylvania, U.S.
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The playbook is a living document that we plan to add to over time. If you have questions about the material or would like to see additional topics or information, please let us know at leapfrogging@brookings.edu.





ANNEX I HOW THE LANDSCAPE MAP WAS DEVELOPED

September 2021



How was the family engagement landscape map developed?

To develop the landscape map, we systematically analyzed 534 examples of family engagement strategies across at least 64 countries. These strategies came from multiple sources, including parents, teachers and school heads, education system leaders, organizations and networks, and academics. Using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti, we coded each strategy for a range of characteristics. These characteristics included the strategy's ultimate goal, the levers for change it employed, and who was involved in its implementation. While we also coded for evidence on the effectiveness of the strategy, we did not eliminate any strategies based on lack of evidence. We wanted to capture the full breadth of ways parent engagement happens globally; we were interested in promising practices, particularly those that had emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our fundamental inclusion criterion was whether a given engagement strategy logically or demonstrably furthered its stated programmatic goals. Using inductive analysis, we identified emerging themes and categories reflecting the diverse ways in which parents around the world engage in their children's education. We then compared our thematic findings to existing frameworks in the academic and practitioner literature on parent engagement. We refined our map first through this iterative process of comparing our categories to existing frameworks. We then tested these themes against a set of randomly selected strategies from our dataset.

What makes the family engagement landscape map different from other parent engagement frameworks?

In developing our landscape map, we took inspiration from a range of existing frameworks and typologies for understanding family engagement in education. We searched broadly, considering frameworks presented in academic articles for understanding family engagement in low- and middle-income countries, models guiding practitioners in the United States, system transformation literature, and government policy frameworks in Europe (see Box 8 for further details). Many elements in our landscape map reflect the language and levels used in existing frameworks; for example, our landscape map identifies the home, classroom, and school as places family engagement strategies take place. But our landscape map also differs from many previous typologies across three main dimensions.

- 1. Purpose.** The purpose of our landscape map is to describe rather than proscribe. The map describes with as broad a lens as possible the many ways in which parents, families, teachers, and schools can work together. Other typologies often analyze strategies that support a particular engagement goal, such as student achievement. Our map, in contrast, does not advocate for a specific strategy or judge the effectiveness of or evidence behind a particular approach. Rather, it seeks to provide a full picture of the many ways in which family and school engagement happens and how engagement by these diverse approaches might contribute to systems transformation.
- 2. Scope.** Our landscape map is meant to provide a global picture of parent engagement in education. While each community and context is different, there is value in sharing learning across borders. Many of the current parent engagement typologies are derived from and focused on specific national, or often sub-national, contexts. Providing a picture of parent engagement that is informed by experiences across six continents can help widen the perspective of what is possible for any given user of the landscape map.

- 3. Focus.** Education system transformation is the lens through which we are examining family and school engagement. The broad descriptive nature of our landscape map helps put in context the wide range of ways in which families interact and influence education systems, several of which are frequently overlooked by the education community. In contrast, many existing typologies focus on just one important and clearly articulated piece of school improvement or transformation, such as changing school culture or increasing attendance.

BOX 8. WHAT PARENT ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS INSPIRED US?

Our landscape map has been informed by a wide range of parent engagement typologies.

Parent engagement through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Many researchers and practitioners discussing parent engagement reference Bronfenbrenner’s (1992) seminal theory on child development. The core of Bronfenbrenner’s work is the importance of social context—individuals actively shape their own development and, in turn, are profoundly affected by the people, structures, and cultures around them.

We found helpful Seginer’s (2006) approach of directly overlaying parent involvement strategies from high-income countries (e.g., in North America, Europe, Australia) across the different “systems” (e.g., family, school, healthcare, government, cultural norms) that Bronfenbrenner argues shape children’s development. Kim (2018) adapts this approach to examine parent engagement strategies in low- and middle-income countries (e.g., in Africa, Latin America, Asia). Both authors informed our thinking especially around the “places” in which parent engagement can take place.

Parent engagement as co-creation

In recent years, U.S. parent engagement literature in particular has shifted strongly toward a “co-creation” approach. This approach argues that any meaningful parent engagement has true partnership with parents at its core. The co-creation approach thus contrasts with the “parents as the problem” approach that has characterized much of the parent engagement field, particularly in relation to families from marginalized communities (e.g., low-income, immigrant, minority). We found Mapp and Bergman’s (2019) Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, Weiss et al.’s (2018) Carnegie Challenge Paper, and Caspe et al.’s (2019) Family Engagement Playbook particularly helpful in shaping our perspective on bringing an equity lens to understanding the multiple ways in which families, communities, schools, and education systems can and should interact.

Parent engagement as system transformation

Though few parent engagement frameworks explicitly focus on system transformation, several such frameworks did shape our thinking. We drew on the government of Scotland’s national policy frameworks, including its national action plan on parental engagement, family learning, and learning at home (Education Scotland, 2019). Parental engagement is an essential component of Scotland’s national education reforms and studying the country’s holistic approach to family engagement has helped us broaden our vision of the parent engagement landscape across an education system. We also drew on the community school movement in the U.S., in which practitioners and researchers describe parent engagement as an essential component of codesigning a school that works not only for all children but also for the broader community (see, for example, Maier et al., 2017). Lastly, we have been informed by New Profit’s (n.d.) Parent Power in Education framework, which distinguishes between strategies that help parents “maximize value from the existing system” versus strategies that help parents “change how the existing system operates.” This distinction helped us refine our focus on system transformation along a spectrum of improving and transforming.

What dimensions are analyzed in the landscape map?

We have analyzed each parent engagement strategy in our dataset according to seven dimensions: 1) the strategy's ultimate purpose, 2) where the strategy mainly occurs, 3) what types of change levers the strategy primarily deploys, 4) parents' role (if any) in the strategy, 5) what level of technology the strategy requires if any, 6) the geographic location of the strategy implementers, and 7) the types of organizations that are leading the strategy (e.g., government, nongovernmental organization). We note all the relevant dimensions of each strategy by "tagging" the strategy accordingly. The dimensions are defined below.

Goal: What is the strategy's ultimate purpose?

The goal or goals of each strategy is the main dimension we have used in analyzing the strategies. We have defined four main goals that fall into two categories: goals that aim to improve the system and goals that aim to transform the system.

Improving the system

Strategies that are focused on system improvement work within the existing set of purposes and values that currently guide the system. Such strategies seek to enhance what students get out of the existing system. Two connected but distinct goals of parent engagement strategies fall within this category:

1. **Improve attendance and completion:** Important outcomes may include increased student participation in school, higher student enrollment, better attendance, and higher rates of completion of school.
2. **Improve learning and development:** Important outcomes may include improvement of academic skills and socio-emotional competencies.

Transforming the system

Strategies that are focused on system transformation work to redefine the purpose and values of the system. In our parent engagement landscape, this process of redefinition is a collective one involving families, communities, and education system actors. Two connected but distinct goals of parent engagement strategies fall within this category:

- ⊕ **3. Redefine purpose of school for students:** Important outcomes include a shared family-school vision that adapts, re-orient, or changes the focus of the education system in relation to student experiences and outcomes. The shared vision will differ by community.
- ⊕ **4. Redefine purpose of school for society:** Important outcomes include a shared family-school vision that adapts, re-orient, or changes the focus of education systems in relation to the school's role in the community. The shared vision will differ by community and should include but go beyond redefining students' experiences and outcomes.

Lever: What types of change levers does the strategy deploy?


We have analyzed each strategy in relation to the types of levers it uses to improve and transform systems. Frequently, strategies combine multiple levers to produce the desired outcome. For example, the providing information lever, which could involve sharing parent-friendly information on child development, is often accompanied by the building skills lever, which could manifest in a workshop on parenting tools based on that information. All levers are bi-directional; they can be "pulled" by either families or schools. For example, just as families can provide material resources to schools in the form of their time, labor, or financial contributions, schools can provide material resources to families in the form of books, food, or employment.


- ⊕ **Providing Information:** The strategy employs information exchange.
- ⊕ **Building Relationships:** The strategy aims to build relationships and trust between people.
- ⊕ **Shifting Mindsets:** The strategy aims to change beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets.
- ⊕ **Building Skills:** The strategy aims to develop competencies and skills.
- ⊕ **Providing Resources:** The strategy aims to gather tangible resources and assistance in the form of materials (e.g., books, food, or cash) or in-kind assistance (e.g., volunteer labor or advice and guidance).
- ⊕ **Designing:** The strategy aims to fully involve families and schools in answering design questions about the structure and implementation of schooling, the measures of success used, and the overarching purpose of education. For an example of a strategy that focuses on design, see Box 9.


Place: Where does the strategy mainly occur?

We have examined each strategy with an eye toward understanding the main focus of the effort. Of course, a strategy can operate at multiple levels. But each strategy primarily operates through actions in one particular space. We have identified four main places:

- ⊕ **Home:** Parent engagement strategies that seek to change factors in the home tend to target parental interaction with children. These strategies may promote certain parenting approaches and school learning support activities to increase the home environment's support for children's learning and development, taking into consideration the books available for children to read at home or the employment status of parents.

-  **School:** Parent engagement strategies that seek to change factors in classrooms and schools tend to target the communication between parents and teachers. Efforts to improve the school climate related to parent engagement may include supporting teachers' and administrators' capacity to effectively engage with parents and communities and developing channels by which parents can participate in school-related initiatives, activities, and governance. We use the term "school" broadly to refer to structured formal learning experiences regardless of whether these experiences take place in school buildings, libraries, museums, parks, or other spaces and places in the community. Homeschooling is an exception, as in this context, the parent and the home are the educator and the space where learning takes place.

-  **School System:** Parent engagement strategies that seek to change factors in school systems are focused on system-wide factors in formal education, whether at a local, sub-national, or national level. Most school systems correspond to government jurisdictions and are led and frequently administered by government personnel. However, the term "school system" in our landscape map also refers to school networks run by nonprofit organizations, faith-based school chains, and private school networks. Parent engagement strategies in education systems can include family and community activism that exerts pressure on systems to change, parent representation in system wide governance bodies, and parent involvement in system design processes.

-  **Community:** Parent engagement strategies that seek to change factors in the broader community involve non-formal learning spaces beyond the usual scope of the school system, such as community centers or museums. Such strategies may address family needs around employment, healthcare, or outdoor recreational space. These strategies may also inform parents about learning and development opportunities in community spaces (e.g., libraries, parks, laundry mats) or engage parents along with other community members such as employers in community-wide discussions on the vision for children's learning and development.

Family role: How are parents engaging in the strategy?

We have examined the role of parents in each strategy. We chose to focus on parents and families rather than on a wider range of actors in order to highlight parental agency and shed light on common expectations for family engagement. Not every parent in a community is necessarily fulfilling one of the following four roles. For example, a small number of parents may fulfill a role while representing a larger group of parents. Note that the following broadly defined roles only generally indicate how a strategy deals with parent participation; there are many roles that parents could take on related to their children's education.

- ⊕ **Not engaged:** Sometimes parents have no role to play at all. Several strategies are focused exclusively on building awareness and capacity within education personnel and schools to be more welcoming and open to parents, for example, strategies aimed at translating school signs and materials into multiple languages or at training teachers on implicit bias.
- ⊕ **Deciding:** On a daily basis, parents decide whether to send their child to school or not. Parents also have to choose among the options available to them. Depending on the context, parents need to consider the distance their child will have to travel to attend potential schools; the possibility of moving to communities where schooling options are perceived to be better; and the advantages and disadvantages of public, private, religious, in-person or technologically mediated, and home-schooling education options. Parents may have to decide whether to pull a child out of school for a period of time due to safety issues, family need, or another prerogative. Parents also impact their child's educational pathway as the child gets older, as parents decide whether to send their child to vocational or academic preparatory programs.
- ⊕ **Supporting:** Parents may participate in, but not actively shape, the strategy by supporting their child. Support from parents may include providing financial support for books and uniforms, making time and space at home for

studying, helping with homework, talking with children about what they are learning, encouraging children when they face difficulties, communicating with teachers, and engaging in school activities. Parental support for children's education may manifest at home, at school, or in the community.

- ⊕ **Creating:** Parents may also meaningfully inform or shape the design or execution of a child's education. The distinction between supporting and creating is not always clear. In a creating role, parents' voices and agency are substantially present in decisions that shape the educational experience; in a supporting role, though parents are often deeply engaged, they have less influence on the actual design of education. A parent responding to a one-time survey could certainly provide valuable information to their child's school. However, we consider the creating role to be a step beyond that, with parents exerting more extended or more profound influence. For an example of a strategy that focuses on creating, see Box 9.

Technology: What level of technology does the strategy require?

We assessed each strategy as having no tech, low-tech, or high-tech requirements.

- ⊕ **No Tech:** No technology at all is required, such as with holding in-person parent meetings or sending hardcopy materials to the home.
- ⊕ **Low-tech:** Only simple devices such as radios or SMS-enabled phones are required.
- ⊕ **High-tech:** Fast internet connection and digital devices such as tablets or computers are required. The strategy may involve streaming video conferences or providing community resource rooms with computers.

This dimension reflects the level of technology required for the end user (e.g., usually families), which is often referred to as the “front office”. We did not take into consideration the “back office” technology requirements, such as whether a strategy implementer would require an internet-based data system. For instance, if a strategy involved a district utilizing a mobile application to send parents text messages, we focused on the parents’ experience and hence tagged the strategy as low-tech, even though the district would need to design and implement the application, which would be a high-tech process. Thus, some strategies tagged as low-tech or no tech, despite requiring little to no technology on the part of families or other end users, may require more sophisticated technology on the part of schools.

Often, strategies were adaptable. In low-resource environments, analog versions of high-tech methods emerged—such as switching from video parent-teacher meetings to text message exchanges. Conversely, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many no tech methods, such as in person meetings, became high-tech methods such as online Zoom meetings. In cases where strategies showed such adaptability, we tagged the strategy with the lower tech level in order to acknowledge that the strategy could be employed in an environment with limited technology available to end users.

Student age: What age group of students does the strategy support?

We looked at strategies that supported students in early childhood, primary, and lower and upper secondary school.

Location: In what part of the world is the strategy being implemented?

This dimension involved assessing the geographic location in which the strategy takes place.

Organization type: What kind of organization is leading the strategy?

We identified four organization types:

- ⊕ **Government:** Examples include public school districts and education ministries.
- ⊕ **Nongovernmental Organization:** Examples include nongovernmental organizations that assist public schools in the delivery of education as well as U.S.-based non-profit charter schools.
- ⊕ **Parent Organization:** Though parent organizations are also nongovernmental organizations, we separated parent organizations given their important role in family-school engagement.
- ⊕ **Private Sector:** The private sector consists mainly of private school chains.

BOX 9. PARENT-LED EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: FAMILY-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES CREATED FROM PARENT-CENTERED “DESIGN SPRINTS”

This family-school engagement strategy utilizes the design lever for change and engages parents as creators.

IDEO, a design thinking and consulting firm, is one of CUE’s partner organizations in the Parents as Allies project (described in Box 5). To identify family-school engagement solutions that put parents’ voices at the center, IDEO worked with 15 design teams comprising parents,

administrators, and teachers from Canada, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Representing diverse jurisdictions spanning global boundaries and cultures, as well as being a part of CUE's Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN), each design team consisted of five members, four of whom were parents with a child in the participating school and one school representative who provided a school-based perspective.

Over nine weeks, the design teams compiled strategies they could experiment with to increase family-school engagement in a process known as "design sprints." Teams were asked to generate ideas around one of five aspirations derived from CUE's research framework.

After selecting an aspiration, each design team conducted empathy interviews to gather different viewpoints from parents and teachers to uncover new insights. The teams then brainstormed ideas, or "hacks," that are small and conducive to experimentation within their communities, some of which are highlighted below.

At Willow Primary School in Doncaster, U.K., parents prioritized the strengthening of trusting relationships between families and the school in a way that felt more informal. They appreciated how during the COVID-19 lockdown, teachers called parents to praise their children in their group work and comment on students' progress with online learning. These calls improved both student and parent morale. To build upon this engagement as schools reopen, parents suggested additional ways of incorporating trust building activities into the school's identity, including the following:

- ✓ Teachers and administrators posting more on social media so parents can see their children's day-to-day interactions and activities in school.

- ✔ Teachers and parents engaging in more frequent, regular calls to talk about how the child is doing, rather than only at the year's end.
- ✔ Making the school newsletter more accessible on a mobile device so it can reach more parents.

In School District 23 in Central Okanagan, British Columbia, there is a rich diversity of community members, most of whom are of European ancestry in addition to a sizable aboriginal population and an increasing immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Through empathy interviews, the design team learned that both parents and teachers were willing to engage with one another but were sometimes nervous and did not know how. To create a relaxed and casual atmosphere conducive to engagement among a diverse population, the group entertained ideas such as these:

- ✔ Coffee and Connect, an informal meeting hosted by the school where families can chat, ask questions, share insights, and meet newly hired staff.
- ✔ Kindness cards, a way for students, teachers, and parents to write one another to communicate positive topics.

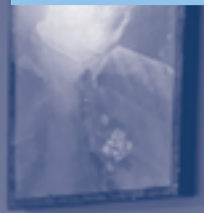
In New Brighton Area School District in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, empathy interviews revealed that parents often lack confidence to engage with teachers and administrators, to the extent that some are apprehensive about even walking into a school building. The design team, consisting solely of fathers, expressed that "school communities need strong men to stand up for their children and support their education" (L. Corio, personal communication, May 27, 2021). In the spirit of fostering closer ties between fathers and school and among fathers themselves, the team suggested the following hacks:

- ✔ Teachers can invite fathers into the school for discussion and information sharing on the importance of family-school engagement, including through well-produced videos.
- ✔ Working as a support group, fathers can invite other fathers to school-sponsored tournaments so they have a chance to connect and engage with other fathers to discuss engagement strategies and know they are not alone with issues they may be dealing with.

The design sprints revealed that parents can and do have agency in improving family-school engagement regardless of contextual factors across jurisdictions and countries. By placing parents at the center of designing solutions, schools and communities can benefit from generating feasible solutions that resonate with families and make them excited to participate.

NUMERICAL CHART

1	11	21	31	41	51	61	71	81	91
2	12	22	32	42	52	62	72	82	92
3	13	23	33	43	53	63	73	83	93
4	14	24	34	44	54	64	74	84	94
5	15	25	35	45	55	65	75	85	95
6	16	26	36	46	56	66	76	86	96
7	17	27	37	47	57	67	77	87	97
8	18	28	38	48	58	68	78	88	98
9	19	29	39	49	59	69	79	89	99
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100



ANNEX II FAMILY-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

September 2021



Strategies that primarily improve the attendance and completion of students

Connected Educational Community Helpline

💡 STRATEGY NAME: HELPLINE TO SUPPORT REMOTE LEARNING

ORGANIZATION: [MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [BUENOS AIRES] [ARGENTINA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires set up an initiative called Comunidad Educativa Conectada (Connected Educational Community) which serves as a phone helpline for parents seeking information on various educational needs while supporting their children's learning at home. Guidance provided by the helpline included learning activities, teaching strategies, timetable planning, and technological support (Buenos Aires Ciudad, n.d.). Simultaneously, the ministry appointed volunteers to call families seeking resources for sustaining their child's educational progress. More than 75,000 of these calls focused on access to

technological setup, devices, connectivity, and study support. Additionally, the ministry sent weekly informational emails to families on promoting learning organization and healthy habits (Buenos Aires Ciudad, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, the government had a direct line to school administrations but not the teachers employed in these administrations or the families. Parents, similarly, never had a direct line to the government; they usually spoke with teachers or principals—or, in secondary school, with intermediaries known as tutors (M. Finoli, personal communication, April 21, 2021). The structure of the Argentinian education system resembles a traditional chain of command. The Ministry of Education contacts principals, who reach out to families. The pandemic proved an ideal opportunity for the government to directly listen to and speak with parents. This direct, real-time communication enabled the ministry to deploy several surveys to gain further insight into parents' opinions, which helped inform reopening strategies. The ministry hoped this learning experience would help expand parent-government communication channels, ultimately demonstrating to principals, teachers, and families the promise of consistent and open communication (Zinny, 2020).

Resources

- 🌐 [“Post-Pandemic Education: Family Involvement as a Driver of Change” \(Spanish\)](#)
- 🌐 [Helpline information \(Spanish\)](#)
- 🌐 [Video on helpline \(Spanish\)](#)
- 🌐 [Government information on helpline \(Spanish\)](#)

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E-Samwad

ORGANIZATION: [HIMACHAL PRADESH DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [HIMACHAL PRADESH] [INDIA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW:

In 2019 the government of Himachal Pradesh in India moved to close the gap in communication between teachers and parents in under-resourced school systems. The efforts were a response to worrisome systemwide reports of low parent attendance at School Management Committee (SMC) meetings and insufficient, inaccessible parent-teacher communication channels. The rift in communication was especially noticeable in the pervasive unexcused student absences in Himachal Pradesh government schools, which parents were generally unaware of. Following research that shows learning outcomes greatly improve when parents participate in and support their child's learning, the government implemented a one-way text-based platform called e-Samwad ("samwad" means conversation in Hindi) (e-Samwad, n.d.). The Department of Education developed the application in partnership with private sector firm Samagra. Because a government body developed e-Samwad, the app could be implemented statewide.

Himachal Pradesh is a state in northern India. In 2011 it was home to around 6.8 million people (Census of India, 2011). The state has approximately 800,000 students in more than 15,000 primary and secondary schools (Winthrop et al., 2021). The adjusted net enrollment rate of students in classes 1-10 is 93 percent, while the average dropout rate of secondary school student is around 7 percent (Winthrop et al., 2021).

The state government of Himachal Pradesh has taken an active role in increasing learning within its borders, focusing most recently on educational innovation. The e-Samwad app is one such innovation. The government identified a barrier to parent-teacher communication: Busy parents lacked time for in-person meetings and phone conferences. To remove this obstacle, the government partnered with network providers to create the e-Samwad

app and SMS portal. Working in the app is simple, and district-level trainers visit schools and train teachers and administrators on the app's use. Once trained, teachers are able to use the e-Samwad app to easily send one-way text messages to parents, including information about vacation dates, absences, SMC meetings, assessment dates and results, and homework completion. Many of the messages are automatically sent to parents' phones as the teacher enters information about students in the mobile application. For example, when a teacher marks a student absent from class that day, the app sends a message to the child's parents. The parents are then expected to speak with their child about the absence. Messages often contain tips for parents, such as attending the next parent-teacher meeting if their child has been performing poorly in assessments. The pilot of e-Samwad, carried out in the district of Mandi, successfully reached 53 percent of parents and received positive feedback (e-Samwad, n.d.). The pilot ultimately included 38,224 parents and 2,240 schools registered (e-Samwad, n.d.).

Today, 99 percent of government schools in the state use the app to address their communication needs (S. Chaudry, personal communication, April 14, 2021). Furthermore, assessment data for all government schools is collected via the app. This streamlines the collection of information about attendance, assessments, and grades and informs academic and administrative decisionmaking bodies in the state on such issues as budget allocation and school monitoring visits (e-Samwad, n.d.; S. Varghese, personal communication, August 5, 2021). The e-Samwad intervention successfully bridges a major gap identified by parents, both in India and globally. The need for this intervention is further validated by CUE's survey of 2,500 parents in Himachal Pradesh in October 2020, wherein 97 percent of parent respondents indicated they would like to receive regular text message updates about their child's education (Winthrop et al., 2021).

Strategies

💡 TEXT MESSAGES TO PARENTS ON THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

Teachers use e-Samwad to send parents regular updates on their child's performance at school via text messages. As teachers fill in data about students in the application, e-Samwad sends parents daily absenteeism alerts, weekly homework noncompletion notifications, and the results of assessments. These messages follow a template and often include tips for parents, such as reminding them to attend upcoming parent-teacher conferences, especially if their child did not perform well on a test.

💡 TEXT MESSAGES TO PARENTS ON SCHOOL LOGISTICS

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

Schools use e-Samwad to encourage parents to attend school and community events. For example, the app notifies parents about parent-teacher or SMC meetings. The app also keeps parents informed about school infrastructure projects and school holidays. Furthermore, schools can use the app to send guidance or alerts to parents during natural disasters like floods or cyclones.

💡 ONLINE SCHOOL DATA PORTAL FOR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM]

FAMILY ROLE: [DECIDING] [SUPPORTING]

The data the government collects through e-Samwad also benefits communities. The government publishes the information in real time to online portals, allowing the community to see how their schools' academic indicators compare to those of other schools across the state. This helps families make informed decisions about their child's schooling and helps families and other community members hold education leaders accountable for providing quality education.

Roles

Staff

- District-level trainers instruct teachers on app usage through cascade training within schools to ensure technical ability and awareness of school assessment procedures.
- Government officials establish partnerships with network providers. For example, the Department of Education sends one-way text messages using a portal built by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Teachers fill in student data on absenteeism, homework noncompletion, assessment results, and more using the e-Samwad app, which automatically sends text notifications to parents.

Family

- Parents receive regular one-way communications from teachers via the e-Samwad app.
- Parents use information from the text messages to make education decisions for their child.

Resources required

People

- At the district level, a three-member team manages all aspects of the app. The team comprises the district school management committee and community mobilization coordinator; the district research and evaluation coordinator, who is in charge of assessments; and the district technical coordinator, who provides technical support (S. Varghese, personal communication, August 5, 2021).
- Government staff members train teachers in proper app usage. Technical support staff members oversee quality control and continued development of the app for efficiency. The e-Samwad app was developed by a partner organization working closely with the Department of Education. Ensuring the state can manage and build upon the app requires a full-fledged technical team with a minimum of five developers (S. Varghese, personal communication, August 5, 2021).

Financial

- Cost of maintaining the app and other technological aspects
- Cost of training and technical staff
- Cost of text messages sent via the app

Technology

- At least one phone per family at home (may be a basic mobile phone without internet connectivity)
- One phone per teacher
- Mobile network provider partnerships
- Real time data processing capability in the Department of Education

How do they do it?

The e-Samwad app works by lowering time and resource barriers to family engagement. It uses everyday technologies available at home and school and captures parents' attention by meeting them where they are: on their mobile devices. The low-tech nature of the app helps improve communication, and parents' availability is no longer a barrier to teachers sharing crucial information. Moreover, to support analysis and sharing of data, the app draws on a task that teachers are already doing—reporting student statistics. The technology frees up teacher time while increasing transparency for parents. It relies on insights from behavioral science, nudging parents to change their behavior. The app provides personalized information in a way that is easily accessible and is accompanied by bite-sized, actionable recommendations. For example, by learning about missed homework as well as the importance of homework completion for academic success, parents are primed to motivate their children to focus on learning while at home.

Much of the success of e-Samwad comes from its ease of use. Since piloting the program, e-Samwad's creators have improved the app and have provided a technical support line to respond to parents' and teachers' questions. Furthermore, delivery timelines for text messages were established knowing that the speed of text message dispatch slows down during peak periods of information input. Lastly, proactive communication between technicians,

government officials, and teachers is important to ensure smooth usage going forward. The e-Samwad app allows for regular engagement between teachers and parents by bridging the communication gap between schools and parents and adapting to parents' needs, especially for parents with busy schedules or limited technical ability. Given the few resources required, these strategies can be used not only on a large-scale basis but also by smaller states and school districts.

Resources and testimonials

"Healthy discussion was carried out by parents and teachers for the betterment of the students, and ideas were discussed to uplift the learning level of poor students."
– Teacher from the pilot, describing the effect of e-Samwad (e-Samwad, n.d.)

"e-Samwad has helped parents of government school students in Himachal Pradesh experience the power of proactive personalised SMS-based communication from teachers. We hope this becomes a new normal for all government schools in India."
– Angmo Katwal, SMC and community mobilization coordinator (Samagra Technology, n.d.)

 [e-Samwad Enrollment and Usage Dashboards](#)

 [e-Samwad video and technical information](#)

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Improving Girls' Access through Transforming Education (IGATE)

ORGANIZATION: [UKAID AND WORLD VISION] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS]

LOCATION: [MATABELELAND NORTH] [MATABELELAND SOUTH] [MIDLANDS] [MASVINGO] [ZIMBABWE]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW

Improving Girls' Access through Transformative Education (IGATE) was a project put in place in 10 districts across four provinces of Zimbabwe from 2013 to 2017 by a consortium of nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners including World Vision and funded by UK Aid. The project received \$25 million from UK Aid to eliminate barriers to education for girls by working within communities to change attitudes about girls' education. To that end, IGATE engaged a diversity of actors, including parents, religious organizations, and teachers. All told, the project reached over 101,000 girls in 10 districts (World Vision, n.d.).

Strategies

💡 MOTHERS AND FATHERS GROUPS TO SUPPORT GIRLS' EDUCATION

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] PLACE: [HOME] [COMMUNITY]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The project established mothers groups of, on average, 15 parents each, which met regularly in homes and community centers to discuss the importance of girls' education. It also implemented "male champions" programs, or fathers groups centered on the importance of girls' education, to encourage men to advocate for their daughters' learning in their homes and communities.

💡 PARENT AND TEACHER MENTORS FOR GIRLS

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING SKILLS]

PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

IGATE also supported the creation of Power Within clubs in schools. These clubs chose teachers to act as student mentors, who worked with parents from the mothers group to help girls develop self-confidence, learn to articulate the value of girls' education, and cultivate life skills such as planning and decisionmaking. Additionally, the program put in place a series of trainings and meetings by public sector employees on the value of girls' education and the standards communities should hold their schools to. IGATE even reached out to local religious leaders to determine where they could collaborate on promoting girls' education.

How did they do it?

IGATE relied on the power of mindset shift for all of its interventions in Zimbabwe. It provided general information on the importance of girls' education but also demonstrated how girls' education affects local communities directly, such as through improved child health outcomes. The project also empowered students to champion learning alongside their parents by building girls' capacity for self-advocacy. It further built support for girls' education by forging relationships with community leaders, such as local religious officials, who historically would have presided over early marriages. This grass-roots approach to behavior change demonstrates the power of family attitudes. Getting parents on board as advocates for their children's learning proved a highly effective way to get girls into and through school. An external impact evaluation showed the potential effects of this wide-reaching work on mindset shift. The study showed that participation in the program increased girls' school enrollment rates by 2.5 percentage points and improved their standardized test scores in math by 3.27 percentage points (Cotton et al., 2020).

Resources and testimonials

“We have been taught about child rights, career guidance, and also communication. I think as I continue with this project, I will grow up to be a more clever and confident person.” – Basitsana, 11-year-old participant in Power Within IGATE club (World Vision, 2015)

“By looking at how to comprehensively target all key actors in a girl’s life, IGATE is moving beyond a traditional ‘one model fits all’ style of development programming and is collaborating with all leaders and influencers to initiate change and support girls’ education.” – Craig Geddes, IGATE consortium leader (World Vision, 2015)

“For me as a traditional leader, a Mother’s Group is not a group of mothers. Rather, it is a ‘mother figure’ for the community. Therefore, I feel honoured to participate in such a platform as it will assist the girls in my area of jurisdiction.” – Headman of the Lupane District in Zimbabwe (World Vision, 2015)

🌐 [IGATE Endline Evaluation Report](#)

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Red PaPaz

ORGANIZATION: [RED PAPAZ] [PARENT ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [COLOMBIA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW

Red PaPaz empowers families to understand the issues their children face and to take action to transform the Colombian education system. As an advocacy coalition, Red PaPaz engages parent networks in schools across the nation to identify challenges, debate solutions, generate local demand for change, and share political action strategies. It leverages diverse engagement channels, from WhatsApp videos to regional conferences, to help parents understand and address important issues ranging from nutrition to abuse and neglect. Parents work in partnership with their communities to move beyond raising awareness to pursuing political action, such as lobbying Congress or demanding funding from their local school board (C. Piñeros & A. Vélez, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Founded in 2003, Red PaPaz was designed by parents, for parents. For years, parent associations from 34 schools across Bogotá lamented the lack of consolidated information networks for families (Red PaPaz, 2017a). Where such education networks existed, they rarely addressed the issues parents cared most about—those that prevented their child from thriving. What discouraged parents from advocating for their children was not a lack of desire or drive but rather lack of knowledge about their child's safety and development. Additionally, parents lacked the resources to take action. Red PaPaz was formed as an education, engagement, and advocacy network that meets each parent where they are and walks them through a process of awareness raising, capacity building, and change making.

Red PaPaz's campaigns flexibly focus on broad issues affecting children's lives, such as safety, inclusion, and school environment. Among its many achievements, Red PaPaz spearheaded the signing of a 2018 pact by the Office of the Attorney General, which called for the eradication of human

trafficking and sexual exploitation of youths in digital environments (Red PaPaz, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization's network reported surging child abuse as a result of lockdowns. In response, Red PaPaz quickly turned its attention to school reopening, collecting data, and eventually suing the government to force a return to schooling (C. Piñeros & A. Vélez, personal communication, May 18, 2021; Red PaPaz, 2017b). This, like all Red PaPaz campaigns, was guided by a three-step strategy: First, community members and experts partnered to identify a problem affecting children. Second, stakeholders developed parent-accessible communication tools and strategies that allowed for awareness and encouraged a mindset shift. Third, the network disseminated concrete opportunities for collective action.

To support its advocacy efforts, Red PaPaz has a resource hub that includes virtual events, tools, and libraries. Red PaPaz works with nearly 700,000 parents across 481 educational institutions and operates in 22 of Colombia's 32 geographic departments (C. Piñeros & A. Vélez, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In 2010 Red PaPaz received a partnership invitation from an organization working to support children with disabilities. Red PaPaz members quickly mobilized to learn about the issue through their networks, tapping into parent hubs and contacting experts across the nation. Leaders soon learned that, at the time, children were segregated by ability in schools and often were refused access to classrooms based on the nature of their disabilities. Red PaPaz designed an online network that enabled all community members—including children themselves—to follow the organization's findings on this issue of inclusion. Through meetings with schools across the nation, the organization quickly learned that a core barrier for principals was lack of funding, staff, and resources to support children with disabilities.

Red PaPaz mounted a solutions-based campaign that began, as always, with developing and disseminating information on the injustice of exclusion and the resource constraints on diverse schools. Local parent networks soon took up the cause using action recommendations from Red PaPaz. Parents lobbied their local school boards for additional funding and wrote letters to Congress to demand changes in national legislation. A few years later, in 2014, Congress passed a new law mandating access for all students to every school. As a result of this visible success, parents began entering the network to share their own challenges and struggles. This led to diverse campaigns ranging from child abuse legislation to funding to combat drugs at school (C. Piñeros & A. Vélez, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Strategies

💡 MONTHLY PARENT-SCHOOL MEETINGS ORGANIZED BY PARENT NETWORKS

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [DESIGNING]

PLACE: [COMMUNITY] FAMILY ROLE: [CREATING]

Red PaPaz organizes its networks into hubs of 20-30 schools, each coordinated by a regional head. These hubs tap two parents and two staff leaders from each school to participate in monthly meetings—either virtual or in-person. At the monthly gatherings, parents share emergent concerns and suggestions, which are relayed to the national team. At the same time, facilitators introduce issues compiled by the national team for local discussion. Red PaPaz arranges meeting logistics, and participants receive tools and resources to support their needs. Afterward, the hub organizes further trainings and political actions to implement any relevant advocacy campaigns at the regional level.

💡 CREATING CLEAR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CONTENT EXPERTS AND PARENTS

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING SKILLS] PLACE: [COMMUNITY]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

To bridge the communication gap between parents and the more than 40 experts who work with Red PaPaz, the organization provides comprehensive training on how to communicate with parents. Once a major youth development problem such as mental health or internet accessibility is identified, Red PaPaz works with allies and partners to identify the best experts to speak with parents and the best approaches for accessible, impactful communication. Red PaPaz first conducts parent focus groups led by communications experts to determine how parents understand various language choices and data points. This informs trainings for content experts, such as child protection lawyers, on how to translate their knowledge into a parent-friendly format. Beyond content delivery, trainings have an empathetic component such that experts are made aware of terms that may be uncomfortable or challenging for parents—for example, the term “learning deficit.” Red PaPaz encourages experts to communicate in ways that ground their insights in issues of systemic inequalities rather than in individual choice.

💡 ONLINE RESOURCE HUBS FOR PARENTS

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] PLACE: [HOME] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [PROVIDING RESOURCES]

[BUILDING SKILLS] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

Red PaPaz offers a suite of evidence-based resources and activities to help parents respond to the developmental needs of their children. Specific focus areas include promoting family-school alliances and creating protective home environments. For example, some pedagogical guides might help parents navigate learning disabilities in the home. Others promote educational uses of

mobile devices and computers, such as by linking to online math games. Toolkits provide resources ranging from grief management exercises for children experiencing trauma to activities that foster appreciation of diversity. Additional resources include research studies, reports, and podcasts, which are translated for parents' use. The multitude of engagement options empowers parents to understand and address key issues facing their children in a format of their choice.

PARENT-LED ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS TO ADDRESS EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS

GOAL: **IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION** **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** **PRIMARY** **LOWER SECONDARY** **UPPER SECONDARY**

TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** **SHIFTING MINDSETS**

BUILDING SKILLS **DESIGNING** PLACE: **COMMUNITY** FAMILY ROLE: **CREATING**

Red PaPaz empowers families to demand action and advocate for their child's rights through a three-step campaign strategy. Through parent-school meetings, parents' ideas and challenges filter up through the organization. Red PaPaz uses this information to select its campaign issues. Next, experts work with parents through focus groups to develop parent-accessible communication tools and strategies. With this awareness and demand for change, Red PaPaz shares concrete calls to action throughout its parent networks across the country. Mobilization efforts have focused on issues such as promoting positive parenting practices, healthy eating, and responsible and constructive use of information and communication technologies, as well as prevention of substance and child abuse. Through these efforts, families become reform warriors and play an integral role in transforming the systems and policies that directly affect their children.

Roles

Staff

- Red PaPaz staff convenes monthly meetings with school representatives, including parents and the school's staff.
- Network experts create informational and advocacy materials using parent feedback.

Families

- Red PaPaz members share resources with other parents at their school to raise awareness among their peers.
- Parents relay concerns and ideas to Red PaPaz representatives.
- Families use Red PaPaz resources to take collective action.

Resources required

People

- 34 staff
- 44 members of the network of experts
- 481 private and public educational institutions as network members
- 186 partner organizations as network members
- Large group of volunteers in each region

Spaces

- School facilities used for monthly leader hub meetings

Technology

- Some of Red PaPaz's strategies can be implemented with no technology, such as in-person meetings.
- Other strategies require some technology, including:
- Web browser for Red PaPaz staff to post online tools, resources, and events to a webpage and for families to access information
- Mobile devices for families to access message threads, podcasts, and video content and participate in phone campaigns

COVID-19 considerations

- Campaign to promote early childhood education services and their increased importance as a result of the pandemic, emphasizing the best interests of students in the development of school reintegration strategies

How do they do it?

Red PaPaz's advocacy successes depend heavily on accessible communication strategies. Each campaign begins with extensive background research in partnership with expert networks, including communications specialists and academics studying inclusive schools. After these preparatory meetings, Red PaPaz collaboratively translates complex policy problems into simple materials, such as WhatsApp videos. Focus group meetings with parents across Colombia enable the organization to further hone its message. Trainings with regional facilitators ensure a collective understanding of why certain language was selected. Red PaPaz focuses first on achieving basic

awareness with a unified language, before advancing mindset shift and, eventually, tangible actions for each community, such as making phone calls to Congressional representatives or speaking with school principals. All of this depends on building consistent communication channels between parents, school staff, and Red PaPaz facilitators. Meetings are regularly scheduled and democratically structured, ensuring parents know exactly when they can share emergent concerns from their communities and precisely how they will receive resources to contribute to advocacy campaigns.

Red PaPaz emphasizes building an extended network of human capital in order to cultivate knowledge and execute campaigns. Its decentralized structure helps it respond to the needs of local parents by tapping local resources. The organization as a whole maintains partnerships with stakeholders including schools, parents, and other organizations throughout Colombia that seek to defend children's rights. These strong relationships allow Red PaPaz to spread its work across the country despite massive variations in local circumstances and capacity. To facilitate this effort, Red PaPaz also cultivates alliances between parents, teachers, and education administrators. The organization encourages leaders to maintain ongoing dialogues at the school level that focus on children's current needs and the resources required to meet them. For example, when parents sat down with principals to discuss the injustice of excluding students with disabilities, leaders quickly expressed their support for change but noted that they required additional resources to make this shared ambition a reality. These two-way conversations use deep listening practices to ensure all stakeholders are united under collective goals instead of passing blame onto local education systems (C. Piñeros & A. Vélez, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Resources and Testimonials

- 🌐 [Red PaPaz organizational overview video](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Red PaPaz organizational overview document](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Red PaPaz management report 2020](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Red PaPaz monthly newsletter](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Pedagogical guide to building a family-school alliance model](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Leadership and peace building toolkit](#) (Spanish)
- 🌐 [Red PaPaz commercial for promoting healthy eating habits for children](#) (Spanish with English subtitles)
- 🌐 [Red PaPaz Twitter](#)

References

- RED PAPAZ. (2017A). Cómo nace la red [How the network was born]. <https://www.redpapaz.org/category/sobre-red-papaz/como-nace-la-red/>
- RED PAPAZ. (2017B). Entre todos: Exijo el derecho al recreo YA [Among everyone: I demand the right to education NOW]. <https://entretodos.redpapaz.org/es/movilizaciones/yoexijoelderechoalrecreoya>
- RED PAPAZ. (2018, SEPTEMBER 26). Colombia firmó el Gran Pacto por la erradicación de la Trata de personas y la Explotación sexual comercial de niños, niñas y adolescentes en los entornos digitales [Achievements: Colombia signed the grand pact for the eradication of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and

adolescents in digital environments]. Logros. <https://www.redpapaz.org/conectados-para-protegerlos-vi-encuentro-internacional-para-el-manejo-y-la-prevencion-de-la-explotacion-sexual-en-linea-de-ninas-ninos-y-adolescentes/>

Second Chance Savings Groups

💡 WEEKLY SAVINGS GROUP FOR MOTHERS

ORGANIZATION: [LUMINOS FUND] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION] LOCATION: [ETHIOPIA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [SHIFTING MINDSETS] [PROVIDING RESOURCES]

PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

The Luminos Fund is a nongovernmental organization guided by the belief that all children deserve a basic education. With support from government and local partner organizations, Luminos has served approximately 150,000 students since 2016 and has provided training to more than 20,000 teachers in nearly 6,000 classrooms in Ethiopia, Liberia, and Lebanon (Luminos Fund, n.d.c).

The organization's [Second Chance program](#) covers the first three grades of school in only 10 months. This catch-up program targets children aged 8–14 who were previously kept out of school due to poverty, conflict, or discrimination. Second Chance students learn to read, write, and do math through an accelerated learning curriculum centered on activity-based approaches. Class sizes are capped at 30 students, and each school day is seven to eight hours in length (Luminos Fund, n.d.b). Supervisors and coaches from Luminos regularly visit classrooms to provide feedback and resources to teachers (Luminos Fund, n.d.c).

The Second Chance program currently operates in Ethiopia (where it is called Speed School) and Liberia. As of August 2021, it had enabled more than 147,300 children to return to mainstream school (Luminos Fund, n.d.b). In Ethiopia, Luminos is working with the government to adopt Second Chance on a national scale. An [external evaluation](#) led by the University of Sussex Centre for International Education in 2018 revealed that Luminos students completed primary school at a rate nearly double that of government students and that they outperformed their peers in English and math, were

happier and more confident, and had higher aspirations to continue their education beyond the primary years (Luminos Fund, n.d.a).

Key to the success of the Second Chance program is parent and community engagement and mobilization. Parents and local leaders work with Luminos to identify the most marginalized out-of-school children and to find beneficial places within local communities to host Second Chance classes. Local young adults who understand their community's needs and challenges are recruited and trained to become Second Chance teachers. Luminos also works closely with the mothers of Second Chance students to build community support for keeping their children in school (Luminos Fund, n.d.b). Mothers can volunteer as class parents in Second Chance schools in Liberia, where they support their child's education through in-school activities such as preparing the class's midday meal with ingredients Luminos provides.

In Ethiopia, Luminos organizes a weekly savings group for mothers of students from Second Chance. These groups, comprised of 25-30 mothers each, meet at the school to contribute a small amount to the group savings and learn financial skills and business management (M. Silverman, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Over the course of the school year, mothers develop business plans and are given capital boosts to get them started in their business endeavors. At the end of the year, Luminos connects the mothers to local micro-finance groups so they can expand their businesses and ultimately have the financial ability to cover the costs of future schooling for their children (Luminos Fund, n.d.-c). Luminos reports that savings groups for mothers help to incentivize student attendance and maintain high attendance levels at Second Chance schools. The Ethiopian government is currently laying groundwork to adopt the Second Chance school model nationally. However, savings groups are not included in the government's adoption plan, providing a unique opportunity in the coming years to compare the success of the Second Chance model without this component of financial support for families (M. Silverman, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Resources

- 🌐 [2020 annual report](#)
- 🌐 [Community mobilization video](#)

References

LUMINOS FUND. (N.D.A). Long-term impact. <https://luminosfund.org/long-term-impact/>

LUMINOS FUND. (N.D.B). Second chance. <https://luminosfund.org/second-chance/>

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WhatsApp Helpline

💡 WHATSAPP HELPLINE FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

ORGANIZATION: **[INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA]** [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [SOUTH AFRICA]

GOAL: **[IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]** **[IMPROVING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[EARLY CHILDHOOD]** **[PRIMARY]** **[LOWER SECONDARY]** **[UPPER SECONDARY]**

TECH LEVEL: **[LOW-TECH]** LEVER: **[PROVIDING INFORMATION]** **[PROVIDING RESOURCES]**

PLACE: **[HOME]** FAMILY ROLE: **[SUPPORTING]**

OVERVIEW

In April 2020, the nongovernmental organization Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA) launched a national multilanguage WhatsApp helpline for parents to maintain an effective and creative learning environment from home during the nationwide lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The helpline was developed with the goal of supporting inclusive education, specifically for parents with children from minority groups, including those with disabilities. Helpline facilitators, made up of local school and IESA employees, provide support to parents on how to plan activities for their children, help with their homework, and stimulate learning (Inclusive Education South Africa, 2020). The organization also provides an online portal for parents to engage with trained facilitators on planning home routines, supporting student homework, and providing stimulating early childhood care. Over the course of the project, the support line facilitated a total of 835 calls with 1,013 inquiries (P. Barendse, personal communication, August 12, 2021). Around half of the total inquiries were around “general activities,” in which parents would ask for productive and educational methods to occupy their children learning from home. For example, facilitators might suggest working with your child to create a bowling set using items around the home, to encourage physical activity alongside creativity. Providing parents with access to reliable and consistent learning at home advice empowered them to support their children’s learning during the difficult period of national lockdown.

Resources

- 🌐 [Inclusive Education South Africa Helpline Announcement](#)

References

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA. (2020, APRIL 1). IESA support for parents–learning at home during SA lockdown. <http://www.included.org.za/iesa-support-for-parents-learning-at-home-during-sa-lockdown/>



Strategies that primarily improve the learning and development of students

Akanksha Foundation Schools

ORGANIZATION: **[AKANKSHA FOUNDATION]** [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: **[MAHARASHTRA]** [INDIA]

GOAL: **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

OVERVIEW

The [Akanksha Foundation](#) was founded in 1991 with the goal of delivering high-quality education to every child, regardless of the child's background. Founder Shaheen Mistri, then an 18-year-old college student, realized how many thousands of children lacked access to a quality education. After volunteering to teach 15 students after school in a donated classroom, Mistri expanded the after-school initiative to improve learning and well-being outcomes for disadvantaged students to a network of 60 centers over the next 16 years (Akanksha Foundation, n.d.a). The idea was simple: leverage underutilized spaces and support students with professional social workers and community volunteers. Realizing the need to work with government schools to make an impact at scale, the Akanksha School Project was established in 2007. The project works in collaboration with the Municipal Corporations of Mumbai and Pune, which govern the civic needs and infrastructure in each city.

Both Mumbai and Pune are cities in the state of Maharashtra, which is India's second-most populous state and home to 18.9 million primary- and secondary-level students enrolled in 113,526 public and private schools

(Government of Maharashtra School Education and Sports Department, n.d.). Despite a poverty rate 4 percentage points lower than the national average and an enrollment rate 4 percentage points above the national average for students in classes 1-10 (N. Aayog, 2020), Maharashtra still has a significant problem with school dropout rates, which have risen by around half a percentage point for upper primary and upper secondary students from 2016 to 2018 (S. Murudkar, personal communication, July 20, 2021).

Rather than developing a one-time program, Akanksha has created a scalable [school model](#) within the government system that drives wider system reform. To this end, it has codified a school development plan focusing first on its core educational values of academic achievement, community engagement, and holistic youth development and well-being. These values are framed as social, emotional, and ethical learning. Each new school in the network begins with a goal-setting process to develop its own ethos in line with these values. Parent engagement, however, serves as a grounding mission across all schools.

Akanksha schools hold themselves accountable for four major community engagement goals: engaging parents as partners in learning, engaging parents as partners in student socio-emotional development, nurturing whole-family well-being, and building family economic resilience. Engagement takes a variety of forms, including representation in School Management Committees (SMCs), parent education programs, in-school partnership opportunities, and individual psychosocial support through dedicated social workers. Parents are invited to regularly participate in their child's education through events such as quarterly home visits and annual goal-setting meetings that focus on nurturing children who can contribute positively to society. Families actively participate in the SMCs. Engaging parents as partners goes beyond specific programming; it is embedded into the community culture. Parents affectionately call teachers "big brother" or "big sister," while families mill about in administrative offices to chat before school (Akanksha Foundation, n.d.b).

As of August 2021, there were 27 Akanksha schools in Mumbai and Pune, reaching over 9,800 students. Akanksha students outperform their state school peers in the class 10 state board examinations. They also have higher levels of completion, with 95 percent of the 2019-20 cohort passing class 12, as opposed to 91 percent in the state overall (Akanksha Foundation, n.d.b).

Strategies

PARENTS SHADOWING STUDENTS DURING PARENT WEEK

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** **LOWER SECONDARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH**

LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS** PLACE: **SCHOOL**

FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Akanksha schools invite parents to week-long open houses, where parents can experience their child's schooling firsthand. Teachers first speak with parents about the school's teaching and learning model, as well as annual goals and pedagogical changes. This represents, for example, a switch to presenting students with the practical, real-life purpose of all lessons at the start of class. Parents then sit in on classes anywhere in the school. During and after class, parents are encouraged to provide general feedback on the curriculum and teaching methods. Rather than redesign the curriculum, parents give feedback about how practices could better align with the school's shared goals. One father, for instance, noted that the teacher had forgotten to present the applicability of a math concept at the start of the lesson. He proceeded to share how he used this topic in his own construction work and prompted teachers to solicit real-world examples from parents for future lessons (S. Murudkar, personal communication, July 20, 2021). This practice of open dialogue and constructive feedback reportedly builds parent-school trust, showing families that they are welcome to share their thoughts and concerns. It further ensures parents feel they have a role in their child's education and prepares them to confidently support learning at home.

PARENT SKILL-BUILDING TEAM

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** **LOWER SECONDARY** **UPPER SECONDARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH**

LEVER: **DESIGNING** PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING** **CREATING**

Every Akanksha school has a team of volunteer parents tasked with identifying skill and knowledge gaps in the broader parent community. This volunteer team meets semimonthly with a school social worker, who helps the team members informally survey their peers and analyze emergent needs. Specifically, the team focuses on the gaps most preventing parents from supporting student development in the home. The school social worker then develops individually targeted and group training based on these needs. For example, if parents identify struggles with financial planning, social workers walk families through money management materials. Staff might note household issues around sanitation and nutrition and then invite parents to enroll in a weekend course on the topic.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE WORKSHOPS AND MATERIALS FOR PARENTS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **BUILDING SKILLS**

PROVIDING RESOURCE PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Akanksha schools supply bilingual materials at the preprimary level to help parents reinforce their child's learning of the English language at home, regardless of parents' level of proficiency with the English language. As the majority of Akanksha students are first- or second-generation English speakers, these resources allow parents to support their child's learning of the English language while also improving parents' language skills. Many Akanksha schools also run optional spoken English workshops for parents to build their confidence in English and better support their child's learning journey.

ONGOING TEACHER HOME VISITS

GOAL: **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[PRIMARY]** **[LOWER SECONDARY]** **[UPPER SECONDARY]** LEVER: **[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]**

TECH LEVEL: **[NO TECH]** PLACE: **[HOME]** FAMILY ROLE: **[NOT ENGAGED]**

Every Akanksha teacher, leader, and social worker is required to visit the home of each of their students at least once a quarter. Students who face more significant challenges at home receive additional visits each month. These regular check-ins allow teachers to understand the family's unique routines and needs in order to better support their learning and well-being. With this direct communication channel, teachers can develop genuine connections with parents through conversations in an informal setting. For example, if a teacher realizes a student is not getting homework done on time because the student's home environment is too loud, the teacher might strategize with the parents to implement "quiet hours" in the home or connect the student with another Akanksha student to study with. Home visits reportedly create significant improvements in communication and trust between schools and families.

WORKSHOPS FOR STUDENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

GOAL: **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[LOWER SECONDARY]** **[UPPER SECONDARY]** TECH LEVEL: **[NO TECH]**

LEVER: **[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]** **[SHIFTING MINDSETS]** PLACE: **[SCHOOL]** FAMILY ROLE: **[SUPPORTING]**

Given the strong correlation between parent engagement and improved learning outcomes, the Akanksha Foundation attempts to curtail the loss of meaningful relationships between parents and their children as their children age. In order to combat this, Akanksha schools hold annual in-school workshops to maintain and rebuild these connections. Workshops take place in a controlled classroom environment, facilitated by a teacher and a social worker. Parents and their children are asked to sit facing each other, look into each other's eyes, hold hands, and have conversations through a series of scripted questions. These questions begin with lighthearted topics, such as favorite foods, and progress to deeper subjects, such as most embarrassing moments or life aspirations. Facilitators note marked changes, as parents

who were initially embarrassed to look into their child's eyes or sit close together become much more comfortable doing so by the end of the school year.

💡 ANNUAL PARENT-STUDENT GOAL SETTING

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [BUILDING SKILLS] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]
[CREATING]

Teachers meet annually with each parent and student to discuss aims and expectations for the year, with a focus on parents' role in supporting their child's development. Goals range from academic to social or even home-based engagement, such as developing stronger family ties. Goal setting is always framed as a positive development: Parents are not called in to discuss student problems. Teachers then bring in social workers to focus on improving parents' skills in areas that support this goal, such as using a calculator to help students with their homework or creating a homework schedule to facilitate the child's at-home studies.

Roles

Staff

- Teachers and school leaders cofacilitate School Management Committees through monthly meetings alongside parents.
- Social workers teach parents skills ranging from hygiene and nutritional awareness to effective parenting and financial organization, to build their knowledge and to support students' well-being.
- Teachers invite parents to visit their child's classrooms to increase their familiarity with the material and communicate with teachers.

Families

- Parents represent their interests on SMCs to advise the school team on school improvement and take ownership of plan implementation.
- Parents volunteer in their child's school and in workshops, theater productions, and other activities that address key issues such as women's empowerment, substance abuse, and physical violence.
- Parents sit in on their child's classrooms to better understand and contribute to school lesson plans and curricula to support their child's learning.
- Parents participate in extracurricular activities, including theater productions. For example, parents and staff of one Akanksha school produced and performed "Theatre of the Oppressed," an interactive play with the goal of raising awareness on the topic of the physical abuse of children.
- Parents reinforce their child's English language learning at home through bilingual materials and the English parent literacy program.

Resources required

People

- Approximately nine central office staff
- At least one trained social worker at each Akanksha school

Spaces

- Akanksha model schools may be newly built or designed in existing school structures.

Financial

- Government municipal corporations provide Akanksha with school buildings and student essentials. Nongovernment funders support the Akanksha Foundation by funding the operational costs of the school and programs.

How do they do it?

In order to achieve vision alignment within Akanksha schools, parents are guided through an exploration of their personal goals for their children. Often, students are first-generation learners, so their parents tend to first express their aspirations around academic and professional outcomes, such as learning English or getting into university. The Akanksha team probes deeper aspirations in line with its vision of developing value-driven citizens by asking how parents want their students to be as people. Through ongoing conversations, Akanksha has determined that the greatest point of alignment between schools and parents is the desire for children to be people who contribute positively to society. With this reflection, Akanksha unlocks shared goals around cultivating good people. The schools further cement this shared vision, which discounts neither academic achievement nor holistic development, by inviting successful Akanksha alumni, such as those who have started nongovernmental organizations, to share their stories.

A codified but flexible school model enables Akanksha schools to support student achievement, youth development, and community engagement. This model, implemented in all Akanksha schools, includes values such as excellent educators, progressive pedagogy, maximizing resources, parents as partners, and accountability to learning. No one individual leads parent

engagement; instead, this value is ingrained in every member of the staff. Engaging parents as partners is a core pillar of all network schools. Adaptable measurements, procedures, and strategies are centrally documented to ensure all schools are striving toward the same core educational vision.

Collaborative goal setting is understood as an ongoing process. Formal events are held throughout the year, including a series of value discussions with new families and annual parent-student goal meetings. But these are enabled by the idea that the school is a family, where teachers are referred to as “big brother” or “big sister” and invite parents to sit and share with students and staff at any time.

The cultural partnership and respect between schools and parents, stemming from family and student needs, allows parents to be actively involved and supportive of their child’s education and development through various hands-on, in-school strategies for parents, directly guided by school staff. Furthermore, the focus on holistic well-being through progressive pedagogy extends not only to students but also to parents and community members. This established focus on 21st-century skills, socio-emotional learning, and social awareness equips parents with the tools they need to productively and confidently engage with the school community and society as a whole.

Resources and testimonials

Participant voices from independent CUE-led parent focus group discussions

"My younger son Tanishk is in Akanksha. His teachers teach with the help of games, so my younger son attends the classes happily. But for my elder son [who is not in an Akanksha school], his teachers only give lectures and keep on talking one-sided, so he gets bored. Younger son joins classes happily, not the elder one." – Maharashtra parent 1 (personal communication, December 2020)

"The teachers of Akanksha Foundation, who think so much about the children, we also like it that these people also think so much about our children." – Maharashtra parent 2 (personal communication, December 2020)

Voices from the foundation

"Instead of referring to their teachers as sir or ma'am, students and parents alike address teachers as 'didi' or 'bhaiya': big bro or big sis. If a student fails to complete their homework regularly, instead of punishment, the student's parents will be brought into the school to have a planning meeting with the student and teacher, where they will collaboratively implement a working plan to support the child both at school and at home." – S. Murudkar, director of Akanksha Foundation schools (personal communication, June 10, 2021)

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Allegheny County Family Centers

HOLISTIC FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS

ORGANIZATION: [ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [ALLEGHENY COUNTY] [PENNSYLVANIA] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [BUILDING SKILLS]

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] [DESIGNING] PLACE: [COMMUNITY] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

OVERVIEW

Allegheny County [Family Centers](#) empower and enable families to support their children's development by focusing on essential services and capacity building. The first family support centers (FSCs) were established in 1997 in response to the State of Pennsylvania's identified need for family-centered early childhood development programs in poor neighborhoods, which could not be met using district funding (Allegheny County Family Centers, n.d.b). The Allegheny Intermediate Unit stepped up to fill this gap in services given its existing community work with prenatal and early childhood development.

The first FSC was established using a phased approach, connecting with first the superintendent, followed by principals, and then local actors such as the police, librarians, doctors, and other community leaders (L. Vollman & C. Lobaugh, personal communication, April 29, 2021). This progressive community involvement allowed FSCs to establish meaningful connections so stakeholders could understand the importance of, and ultimately support, the centers' purpose. FSCs multiplied throughout local communities, aided by the legitimacy and support created by the deep relationships they had formed.

FSCs take the time to immerse themselves in each neighborhood, drawing on the knowledge of community leaders to identify the services needed most and working with families to chart their development. Centers emphasize rapport, trust, respect, and asset-based partnerships when engaging with families. They commit to deeply knowing and longitudinally following each

family without judgment of the family's circumstances. Families can access any FSC and its services at no cost, removing income as a barrier to participation (Allegheny County, n.d.). FSCs start with the fundamentals, recognizing that they must first help meet families' basic needs before expanding focus to long-term child development.

Each family is matched with a long-term personal mentor from the FSC team. Mentors are often former FSC participants, which encourages community connection and parent leadership. Together, families and mentors design a family goal plan in which families lay out what they want to accomplish over the next few years. Staff then connect families with or directly provide services identified during the goal-setting process. Service areas include child care and early learning, parenting essentials, physical and behavioral health, employment and education, and community interaction activities, such as game nights or peer support groups (Allegheny County, n.d.a). Leadership development and advocacy training classes are also offered to parents so they can play an active role in their child's development.

FSCs also organize parent-led collaboration cafés, based on the Strengthening Families model, where parents have space to discuss struggles and successes in fostering whole-child development. A mother might, for instance, share insights from a recent training about playful approaches to reading picture books. There are breakout opportunities to connect with specific groups such as mothers, fathers, or single parents. Families at the collaboration cafés also have access to professionals who can help inform and shape strategies around parenting best practices (Be Strong Families, 2021).

The FSCs serve as a conduit for families to access services both within the centers and in the surrounding community. The centers form partnerships with local actors such as food and diaper banks, community colleges, and school districts to expand service capacity. They then follow-up with local community providers to ensure families are benefiting from and taking full advantage of the service offerings.

Transition teams ensure that families can transition out of receiving direct support from FSCs with the tools needed to support their child's developmental journey. Teams meet quarterly to discuss transition plans for specific families and tap partnerships with community organizations that provide specific services to help parents navigate major transitions (L. Vollman & C. Lobaugh, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

In 2020, FSCs expanded their focus to include services for parents of children up to age 18, while maintaining a core focus on programming for children under age 5. Over 4,000 families have taken part in the range of services offered at the 27 FSCs (L. Vollman & C. Lobaugh, personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Roles

Staff

- Build one-on-one relationships with families.
- Connect families with local resources and follow up on continuing family needs.

Families

- Create personalized goal plans.
- Participate in personalized classes and activities to support their child's development.
- Connect with peers to share experiences and lessons on creating the best home environment for their children.

Resources required

People

- Roughly five staff per center, hired from within the community
- Stakeholders from the education system and community actors, who are integral to the success of each FSC by identifying neighborhood needs and providing services
- Partnerships with dozens of community organizations that provide key services to alleviate direct costs to the FSC

Spaces

- Strategically located centers house multiple meeting rooms and staff offices in at-risk areas where there may be a low level of resources to support families.
- FSCs are based in a variety of settings, such as commercial buildings, community centers, storefronts, and public housing buildings.

Financial

- Direct funding for family-centered services for children, prenatal to age 18, from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning of the Pennsylvania Departments of Human Services and Education
- No cost to families to ensure accessibility for all

COVID-19 considerations

- Core programming has been adapted to virtual platforms. New parents, for example, can join monthly online sessions with a registered nurse to ask questions about their baby's growth or other health and safety topics.
- Remote service provision has been expanded, such as emergency transportation and delivery of goods.

How do they do it?

FSCs first focus on identifying local leaders and shifting their mindsets about the value of comprehensive, asset-based family support. These leaders—both formal ones and those whose names repeatedly come up during community consultations—become community-based champions who extend the FSCs' capacity. They unlock new resource hubs, mobilizing their networks to, for example, provide free transport to family events. To win over champions and families alike, FSCs prioritize showing up in community spaces for sustained and informal contact. They make it a point to be present at all possible community events, taking the opportunity to build organic relationships and check in with champions and families. A church fair, for example, becomes a place to chat about local child care needs or to simply inquire about a parent's job hunt. Here, following through is of central importance. FSCs endeavor to be a reliable resource for the community by not only providing resources or connections but also walking families through their use. For example, FSCs connect families with an after-school program, help them register, and then follow up on how their child is enjoying the experience. Additionally, FSCs have found that the quickest way to achieve parental support is to first win over children with interesting and playful learning programming. Once kids begin nagging their parents, asking to attend FSC events and activities, families begin to understand the tangible value this network can provide.

One-on-one relationships between staff and families are a central priority. In some cases, families are reluctant to engage because it requires them to admit the need and accept help or because of negative experiences with other service provision agencies where trust was never established. Parent support and trust are developed through several channels. Many staff members and volunteers come from within the community or were previous participants, which helps foster authentic connections with families. Staff ensure they always follow through on promises, follow up via continuous check-ins, and employ their training on trauma-informed care to better connect with families and understand how trauma trickles down to kids. This helps to reinforce a safe and supportive atmosphere where families feel welcome to engage. A nonjudgmental, asset-based approach underpins the FSC process. Staff always begin conversations by highlighting family strengths, such as how to use the food in the fridge to create a healthy meal. The goal is to demonstrate trust and respect, which instills in families a shared understanding that they are their child's first and most knowledgeable teacher and advocate.

Resources and testimonials

"Once a week, for an hour and a half, they had some kind of class. . . . Some taught about positive parenting—things like how to take care of babies, Ages and Stages [child development assessments] and Love and Logic [discipline without force]. Then on Thursdays, we have an exercise class that teaches routines that we can do at home. It's great because it helps me to keep my [chronic illness] in check. While the parents are in their group, the kids are doing a program for school readiness." – Parent participant in FSC classes (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2011)

"We include single dads, married dads, dads who share custody, stepdads . . . any man who cares for children is welcome to join. . . . It's all about meeting different people from different backgrounds and learning that you're not alone." – Parent in fathers group (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2011)

🌐 [Allegheny County Family Centers](#)

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Cajon Valley Union School District

ORGANIZATION: [CAJON VALLEY UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [EL CAJON] [CALIFORNIA] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW

Since 2000, Cajon Valley Union School District has become increasingly ethnically and linguistically diverse. By the end of the Iraq War in 2011, the district had welcomed a large influx of families from Iraq and surrounding areas. Many of these families were nonnative English speakers and unfamiliar with the U.S. education system. The school district was unprepared to help build authentic relationships with these parents to help them understand how to effectively support their child's education. Hence, district leaders began a concerted effort to develop parent engagement strategies (S. Candler & M. Serban, personal communication, June 11, 2021). State offices supported this endeavor, allocating additional funding for refugee family engagement. Some funding sources were new and local, such as the three-year California Newcomer Education and Well-Being grant, while others included grants from the Kaiser Foundation and Jimmie Johnson Foundation and existing federal monies, such as Title I and Title III funding, which assist local agencies in supporting low-income and nonnative English-speaking students (California Department of Social Services, n.d.). Another important grant came from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which allowed for the building of Parent University and the creation of teacher training workshops and a central office administrator position (E. Bergman, personal communication, July 26, 2021).

Cajon Valley Union School District used these funds in service of its diverse families. Today, it is home to a diverse population of over 17,000 students from kindergarten to eighth grade. As of the 2020-21 school year, 52 percent of the student body were from minority groups and 33 percent were classified as English language learners (Public School Review, n.d.). Approximately 70 percent of students receive free or reduced-price meals, a common measure of the proportion of low-income families in a district (Education Data Partnership, n.d.).

In order to engage and support families and act as a bridge to schools, the district began hiring bilingual community liaisons to better communicate with parents who were struggling financially or lacked English fluency. What began with unstructured recruitment of liaisons developed over the next decade into a highly organized culture of family-school engagement, with most initiatives developed by or alongside the [Family and Community Engagement \(FACE\) office](#), established in 2016 to build the capacity of teachers and families to form closer partnerships (Cajon Valley Union School District, n.d.a). FACE employs myriad research-based and personalized strategies to better engage parents from across socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. It is guided by the national [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#), a framework designed by Dr. Karen Mapp and Dr. Eyal Bergman to support the development of family-school engagement strategies, policies, and programs (Mapp & Bergman, 2013).

FACE strategies focus on enhancing relationships between school staff and families to improve students' academic and socio-emotional development during their schooling and in their careers after graduation. These strategies include training community liaisons to support [home visits](#), host [career workshops](#) and [parent skill-building courses](#), and provide parents with the tools they need to support their children. Further initiatives include an annual parent survey to gauge participation with the district and before- and after-school programs, which were redeveloped during the COVID-19 pandemic to serve working parents. Each of the 28 schools in the district is encouraged to take part in these interventions, though given the decentralized nature of the district, individual schools and teachers are encouraged to personalize strategies based on their students' needs. (S. Candler & M. Serban, personal communication, June 11, 2021). These interventions have created a culture of listening, understanding, and relationship building in the district. This is evidenced through the annual survey of parents conducted in partnership with Gallup, which in 2019 showed that parents in the district engaged at a rate almost twice the national average—39 percent compared to 20 percent (E. Hidalgo, personal communication, September 6, 2019).

Strategies

PARENT COMMUNITY LIAISONS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Cajon Valley Union School District has hired 16 itinerant bilingual community liaisons from the community of local parents. They work in high-need schools in the district in order to create and maintain long-lasting relationships between school staff and parents. The goal of the liaison position is to drive family-school engagement through strategy implementation and provide opportunities for staff and families to build authentic relationships to improve students' academic and socio-emotional development. Community liaisons take part in weekly team-building activities with the FACE office supervisor and FACE teacher facilitator, a school representative who works alongside the liaison. Community liaisons facilitate many elements of family-school engagement, including Parent University, positive home visits, and regular phone calls to all families. All community liaisons are parents in Cajon Valley Union School District who speak English and at least one other language commonly found in the district.

BUILDING PARENTS' SKILLS THROUGH THE PARENT UNIVERSITY PROGRAM

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION**

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS **SHIFTING MINDSETS** PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Parent University is an eight-week in-person program using the Families in Schools Reading Roads curriculum and WestEd Positive Solutions for Families, adapted for use by FACE and the California Collaborative on the Social-Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. The goal of the Parent University program is to build parent literacy skills and confidence through weekly lessons facilitated by one teacher and one community liaison. Parents

can also participate in individual hour-long courses. Given the diverse nature of the district, the 24 classes offered are provided in the four most common languages spoken by parents: English, Spanish, Arabic, and Farsi. Since 2018, community liaisons and teachers have facilitated 120 [Parent University](#) cohorts, or around 1,230 parents, in the fall and spring of each school year. A total of 4,599 parents have participated in individual courses to build their skill sets. Courses include learning Zoom, creating and using email, learning Google Classroom, navigating the district's parent website, and internet safety. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these courses were continued online.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS VIA FAMILY-TEACHER TEAM MEETINGS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION**

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS **SHIFTING MINDSETS** PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

[Family-teacher team](#) meetings serve as a relationship-building activity for schools and their parents. The district adopted and modified this strategy from San Francisco nonprofit WestEd's Academic Parent-Teacher Teams model of family-school engagement. In the beginning of each 30-to-60-minute meeting, students perform a song or dance for their parents and teachers before leaving the room for supervised activity time. Chairs are then arranged in a circle, and parents are asked one question: "What are your hopes and dreams for your kids?" After each parent has the chance to respond, a school representative then shares one piece of academic data about every child, such as reading scores. Parents can compare their child's data with that of their classmates. Parents then receive one strategy they can consistently do at home to support their child's academic growth before the next meeting. Before a school conducts these meetings, the FACE leadership team facilitates one or two meetings in the spring, followed by another in the fall, where staff receive flyers, translator information, and organizational and logistical tips. Meetings are conducted two to three times a year, either with individual parents or in a group setting, to follow up on the previous session's academic and strategy focus.

💡 ANNUAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The yearly parent engagement survey organized by Gallup determines the level of support parents feel they are receiving from the district. For example, the 2021 survey focused on a specific survey item: “My school delivers on promises.” Through parent responses, the district can determine which families require more attention. Results actively inform ongoing and new engagement strategies. In many instances, parents who require more attention are invited to share their needs and concerns at listening sessions facilitated by school staff and supported by community liaisons. Other interventions shaped by the Gallup survey results include a framework for principals to more effectively and empathetically engage their families.

💡 HOME VISITS FROM TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY LIAISONS

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] PLACE: [HOME]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The district conducts voluntary positive home visits using the model established by Parent Teacher Home Visits, a nonprofit organization that works with public schools and partners across the United States to support relationship-building home visits between teachers and families. Positive home visits are optional preplanned visits by teachers and community liaisons to students’ homes with the goal of helping schools bridge gaps by building trust and increasing understanding of cultural and socio-economic differences. Visits are made to a cross section of students, and staff members are compensated for their time. Staff members are trained to facilitate discussions with parents around their hopes, dreams, and expectations for their child during the visits and to work collaboratively with parents on how to best support the student.

💡 POVERTY EMPATHY SIMULATIONS FOR EDUCATION PERSONNEL

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]

[SHIFTING MINDSETS] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The [poverty empathy simulation](#), conducted during a two-hour staff meeting, followed by an hour-long debrief, allows teachers and principals at participating schools to understand what it would be like to live in poverty for a month. During the session, parents and community liaisons also share their lived experiences. The district purchased the program and received training in the program from the Missouri Community Action Network. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the simulation had been implemented at three to six schools per year since 2016.

💡 WORLD OF WORK WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING SKILLS] [PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The Cajon Valley Union School District created the World of Work curriculum to help prepare students for employment after graduation. This in-school curriculum uses Dr. John Holland's RIASEC (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional) framework to help children understand their strengths, interests, and values before they are exposed to a variety of different careers (McHugh, 2020). Starting in the early grades, the RIASEC framework can help students identify careers that might interest them. To complement the students' curriculum, the district conducts one to two workshops annually for families at participating schools. Hosted by a community liaison and a World of Work program specialist, these workshops allow parents to take their own RIASEC inventory and identify their strengths in relation to career paths. Not only does this allow parents to better understand and support their child's learning, but it can also help parents achieve their own employment goals through the district's partnerships with workforce boards and local community college career centers. Annually, 16 [World of Work workshops](#), in series of three, are planned with the World of

Work program specialists (Cajon Valley Union School District, 2019). These have been provided at 16 of the district's 27 schools since the program's inception in 2018.

Roles

Staff

- Community liaisons, who are parents from the school community, create and maintain trusting and collaborative relationships between nonnative English-speaking families and their schools.
- Community liaisons conduct home visits with families in the district to help students discuss their hopes, dreams, and desires with their parents.
- Community liaisons support, facilitate, and remove language barriers through Parent University courses.
- FACE office leadership facilitate poverty empathy simulations with teachers, administration, and community liaisons to build empathy toward their community.
- Teachers participate in poverty empathy simulations.
- Teachers conduct home visits alongside community liaisons in pairs.
- Teachers host parent literacy workshops and courses.
- Teachers are trained to create more meaningful and effective relationships with parents through regular meetings around their child's learning.

Families

- Parents participate in Parent University programs and other courses to improve their skills.
- Parents attend World of Work workshops to understand the RIASEC curriculum and, if desired, engage with career office representatives about career opportunities.
- Parents implement strategies for learning at home to improve their child's academic outcomes, following the guidance given at family-teacher team meetings.
- Parents who act as community liaisons provide advice and guidance to teachers and school staff participating in poverty empathy simulations.
- Parents who feel frustrated share their thoughts and perspectives while the school staff listens in listening sessions.

Resources required

People

- 16 itinerant community liaisons

Finances

- Funding from state bodies

Technology

- Computers for online Parent University courses
- All other activities can be done in-person and without parents using technology, though during the COVID-19 pandemic, some activities did move online.

Spaces

- Parent engagement activities take place on Cajon Valley Union School District school sites.

How do they do it?

With such a diverse district, working with cultural and language differences is essential in effectively engaging families. Many families come from cultural backgrounds that position a child's education as the responsibility of teachers alone, without parent input. Language barriers further hinder community engagement in school spaces. To circumvent previously held belief systems and overcome language obstacles, the Cajon Valley Union School District developed individual longitudinal relationships with each family through its bilingual community liaison program.

Through the program, the district leveraged community diversity to hire parent ambassadors to serve as community liaisons. These liaisons were selected from every major ethnic group in order to understand and work with the parents' diverse worldviews. Liaison-led phone calls and meetings targeted toward nonnative English-speaking parents helped reveal the gaps that needed to be filled. For example, based on parent demand, liaisons began providing bilingual books and financial workshops for parents new to the United States. Often, cultural beliefs about gender roles initially prevented fathers from getting involved in their child's education. After realizing this, one community liaison started a dads' soccer and reading club, where fathers and their kids would visit school on Saturdays to engage in reading activities followed by a soccer game and pizza party.

By tasking, training, and financing a dedicated team of family-school engagement workers, the FACE office ensured role clarity and responsibility around engagement. Rather than leave individual teachers or schools to manage engagement practices, this well-resourced unit took charge of uniting best practice research and deep relationships with local families to design and implement family programming. Strategies like the annual Gallup survey and family-teacher teams create clear feedback loops to identify and target interventions to parents' needs and desires. Furthermore, allowing every school flexibility in implementing and devising strategies based on the community's unique needs ensures that engagement is always evolving, guided by research-based interventions and the input of district parents.

Resources and testimonials

Parent focus group discussion quotes:

"I see that they help us if we ask them for something. Like, to help our child to improve in their subject. They do it. They help us. They offer things to help our child. And then Cajon Valley District, they offer laptops, they offer after-school programs like tutoring, before-school programs, and child care after school." – Cajon Valley Union School District parent 1 (personal communication, August 4, 2020)

"I feel like the teacher had a really good grasp on exactly where my son was at and exactly where he needed to work on and communicated that with us. Like, on a pretty regular basis. Like, after school, when we would pick him up, she would give ideas about, why don't you guys work on this at home? I've noticed this. Why don't you guys start working on this? So, giving me very concrete things to work on. That was nice and super helpful." – Cajon Valley Union School District parent 2 (personal communication, August 4, 2020)

🌐 [FACE general overview video](#)

🌐 [FACE World of Work workshop video](#)

🌐 [Video of the poverty empathy simulation in action with reflections](#)

● Parent University testimonials

🌐 [Madison Parent University](#) (Arabic)

🌐 [Madison Parent University](#) (Spanish)

🌐 [Parent University video](#)

- Family-teacher teams

- 🌐 [Cajon Valley Union School District family-teacher team video](#)

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EdNavigator

ORGANIZATION: **[EDNAVIGATOR]** [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: **[NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA]** **[BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS]** [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

OVERVIEW

EdNavigator is a nongovernmental organization founded in 2015 with the goal of empowering every family in the United States with access to affordable and high-quality education support. The organization's Navigators, made up of school staff, policy experts, and community leaders, are all parents who use their expertise and personal experiences to assist parents through the often confusing U.S. education system, from preschool to college. There is an expressed focus on "leveling the playing field" to help families from disadvantaged backgrounds obtain access to every possible opportunity for their child to have a "good-quality" education.

Strategies

💡 HELPING PARENTS MAKE KEY DECISIONS FOR THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

GOAL: **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[PRIMARY]** TECH LEVEL: **[HIGH-TECH]** LEVER: **[PROVIDING INFORMATION]**

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: **[HOME]** **[SCHOOL]** FAMILY ROLE: **[DECIDING]**

Navigators provide guidance without enforcing strict protocols or adherence to the steps recommended; parents are empowered to make informed decisions about their children's education. Navigators assist parents with a range of challenges, including finding the right school for a child, identifying affordable summer camps, ensuring children are ready for the workforce, and advancing parents' own education. Navigators become well-informed on the student and their family, as every registration begins with a review of the child's academic records and an establishment of short and long-term goals, followed by ongoing and consistent support.

EdNavigator uses in-person and online communication to connect with parents via a free mobile app, allowing parents across the United States to access their services regardless of busy schedules or location. In-person staff are available through offices in Boston, Massachusetts and New Orleans, Louisiana.

Since the organization's inception in 2015, 93 percent of EdNavigator users have reported that their Navigator is their most trusted source of information and advice about schools. In 2018, Education Week named the organization one of its "10 Big Ideas in Education".

CONGRATULATORY PACKETS FOR HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **SHIFTING MINDSETS**

PROVIDING INFORMATION PLACE: **HOME** **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

In 2018 CEO Timothy Daly and his colleagues in New Orleans, Louisiana, set out to investigate a statewide trend: declining standardized test scores for initially high-achieving students of color from low-income families. Through interactions with families across Louisiana, the EdNavigator team hypothesized that one cause of achievement slippage might be lack of recognition for high-performing students. Perhaps students, families, teachers, and school leaders were overlooking the achievements of these students and missing opportunities to encourage their continued growth and success (Daly, 2019).

To test this possibility, the EdNavigator team, in collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Education, launched the [honors packet experiment](#). In this study, schools across four districts in Louisiana were assigned to either treatment or control groups. In schools within the treatment group, students with the highest scores on the state's annual standardized exam (the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program, or LEAP) received a packet in the mail congratulating them on their achievement. More than 1,500 students were in the treatment group. They received a congratulatory letter

signed by the state superintendent, a certificate of achievement, and a \$10 gift card. Parents and teachers of high-achieving students received additional engagement: Parents received a list of strategies to sustain their child's achievements, and teachers received a letter and were thanked for their efforts. To test this intervention, high-achieving students in control groups did not receive a packet. The overall cost of this intervention was less than \$30 per packet (Daly, 2019).

Analysis of standardized test scores in the year following the experiment revealed that, while the packets did not benefit all students equally, they led to significant improvements in average achievement among Black students. The effect was particularly strong in the English language arts portion of the exam. Overall, the estimated impact of the program was equivalent to two months of additional learning for Black students (Daly, 2019). The honors packet experiment relied on the power of social recognition and students' self-efficacy beliefs. It sought to motivate students by giving them positive reinforcement for their hard work. The EdNavigator staff believed targeted positive recognition for students could activate the motivational power of parents and teachers and encourage them to push their students further.

Resources

- 🌐 [Tips, guides, and tools for busy parents](#)
- 🌐 [Report on the honors packet experiment](#)

References

- DALY, T. (2019, DECEMBER 11). The honors packet experiment: Can celebrating high-achieving students encourage future success? EdNavigator. <https://www.ednavigator.org/ideas/the-honors-packet-experiment-can-celebrating-high-achieving-students-encourage-future-success>
- EDNAVIGATOR. (2021). How we help. <https://www.ednavigator.org/how-we-help/families-students>

Fair Education

💡 BUILDING SCHOOL LEADER AND TEACHER CAPACITY FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

ORGANIZATION: [SCHOOLS PLUS] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [NEW SOUTH WALES, QUEENSLAND, VICTORIA] [AUSTRALIA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING RESOURCES] [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [NOT ENGAGED]

OVERVIEW

Schools Plus is a nongovernmental organization in Australia that partners with philanthropic trusts and foundations to provide schools in disadvantaged communities with funding, coaching, and resources to improve students' learning outcomes. With support from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Schools Plus launched the [Fair Education](#) program in 2016. The goal of Fair Education is to equip school leaders and teachers in areas with low socio-economic status with the resources and knowledge needed to more effectively engage families and communities in student learning. Since its founding, the program has launched 46 projects across 132 schools in New South Wales and 15 projects across 35 schools in Queensland. Two additional pilot projects were launched across smaller clusters of schools in Victoria in 2019 and 2020 (K. Robertson, personal communication, May 30, 2021; Schools Plus, 2021a). As of 2021, more than 50,000 students across 175 schools were involved in the Fair Education program. Schools Plus aims to widen the program's reach in the coming years (Schools Plus, 2021b).

Schools design and implement their own programs based on their knowledge of local conditions and challenges. This flexibility and adaption of the overarching program structure based on local needs is key to successful implementation. Fair Education supports schools in their development of innovative engagement strategies primarily through funding and project coaching. Funding is provided for three-year projects. Individual schools

receive up to \$70,000 (AUD), and school clusters receive up to \$250,000 (AUD). Fair Education coaches advise project leadership teams each term of the project. Participating schools are brought into the Fair Education community of practice, a space to share lessons and new approaches and build collective knowledge across the network. Examples of projects that schools have designed and implemented include a program in Queensland that provides local families with English language learning opportunities that help them participate in their child's learning, and a student learning hub to support vulnerable students in New South Wales (Schools Plus, 2021a).

Three central objectives guide the Fair Education program: family and community engagement, school leadership capability, and a community of practice. These objectives are both beneficial intermediate outcomes and necessary inputs for a final result of improved student learning outcomes. [Program evaluations](#) indicate that Fair Education projects are contributing to more effective family and community engagement: 53 percent of participating schools in Queensland achieved their family and community engagement objectives at the end of their first year in the Fair Education program. Encouraging impacts on leadership development have also been found in Queensland, where over 70 percent of schools reported improvements in leadership capabilities after one year in the program. Evidence also shows a growing community of practice among Fair Education schools. In 2019, 171 teachers and school leaders representing 71 schools and 41 projects in New South Wales and Queensland participated in Fair Education conferences, where they shared successes and challenges of projects, crowdsourced solutions, and established connections and partnerships with other schools (Schools Plus, 2021a).

Resources and testimonials

On the community of practice: "The (Fair Education) project has provided us with a framework to work collegiately. Everything about the project has allowed this to happen, the money allows teachers to be trained, the time allows things to come

together and the coaching allows us to reflect and develop.” – Dubbo College AVID project (Schools Plus, 2021a)

- 🌐 [Fair Education in New South Wales: Final Evaluation Report 2020](#)
- 🌐 [Fair Education Program Funding Guidelines](#)

References

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SCHOOLS PLUS. (2021B). Fair education: Engaging families in student learning. <https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/what-we-do/fair-education/>

FASTalk

💡 NATIVE-LANGUAGE TEXT MESSAGES TO STRENGTHEN LEARNING AT HOME

ORGANIZATION: [FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LAB] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [CALIFORNIA] [LOUISIANA] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

FASTalk, which stands for Families and Schools Talk, is a family-school engagement tool that uses text messages to reinforce classroom learning at home. Designed to promote equity and engage historically underserved families in their child's learning, FASTalk provides families with regular accessible information about their child's learning in school (Family Engagement Lab, n.d.). Three times per week, teachers send parents updates and reminders about their child's activities in the classroom, as well as fun and easy activities that parents can do with their children to facilitate continued learning at home. Messages are translated into more than 100 languages to ensure teachers can communicate with families in their home language. By bridging language gaps, FASTalk creates a clearer channel of communication between teachers and families who might otherwise face obstacles to effective engagement (O'Bryon & Sundaram, 2021).

Aligning with preset curricula and national standards such as Common Core, FASTalk helps teachers send messages with quick, engaging activities and conversation starters that facilitate learning at home. For example, when third graders are practicing comparing and contrasting characters from a book they read in class, parents might receive a FASTalk text message asking their child to compare and contrast their favorite songs or the weather. Text messages also include quick polls that ask parents to indicate whether they completed the activity and to record the difficulty of the task. This provides teachers with feedback on families' experiences with the activities. After each

learning-at-home activity is completed, families receive messages of positive reinforcement thanking parents and providing information on how and why these exercises help develop students' learning.

This intervention supports the idea that providing parents with concrete activities and positive reinforcement can foster increased student learning. An evaluation of FASTalk found that the program had a high likelihood of effectiveness for students whose home language differed from their teacher's language (Welch, 2018).

Resources and testimonials

- 💬 “Speaking from the parent perspective, the messages, not only are they welcoming, but they're not overcomplicated. So it's like anyone could get this simple task that it's asking me to do with my child and execute it.”
Georgia Gross, Parent, Baton Rouge, LA (O'Bryon & Sundaram, 2021)

🌐 [Video on FASTalk](#)

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- O'BRYON, E., & SUNDARAM, V.** (2021, JUNE 22). Family engagement in action: Family Engagement Lab. <https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/family-community-engagement/family-engagement-action-family-engagement-lab-text-message-home-activities/>
- WELCH, K.** (2018, AUGUST). Evaluation of the FASTalk Program in. Family Engagement Lab. https://www.familyengagementlab.org/uploads/1/0/0/1/100109266/1718_fastalk_eval_findings_brief_.pdf

The First Educators

💡 SEMIMONTHLY PARENT EMPOWERMENT TRAININGS

ORGANIZATION: [SCHOOL THE WORLD] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [GUATEMALA] [HONDURAS]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] [BUILDING SKILLS] PLACE: [HOME]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

Founded in 2009, School the World aims to cultivate parents' role as the first educators in their child's life. The program uses children's natural love of learning to combat failing school systems, improve learning outcomes, and disrupt generational poverty (School the World, n.d.c). The First Educators project is one component of this larger strategy. It aims to make students more effective learners by empowering parents to increase their understanding of their role in education and their capacity to engage (School the World, n.d.a). In the First Educators project, parents participate in semimonthly empowerment trainings, where they learn about their rights as a parent, the educational rights of their child, the responsibilities of their teachers, and basic information about the performance of the education system in their community and country.

The initial focus of these trainings is to show parents how they can help their children learn, typically through simple actions like asking their child about their day. Trainers then encourage parents to focus on improving the educational inputs they have control over. For example, parents are asked to ensure their child arrives at school on time and expect that the teacher will be on time as well. The First Educators approach also encourages parents to hold teachers, schools, and governments accountable for delivering quality education. Parents receive resources to guide advocacy efforts for educational change in areas that may initially seem beyond their reach as

parents. They are encouraged, for instance, to advocate for policy changes regarding instructional time or curriculum content.

The First Educators program is guided by the belief that empowering parents with knowledge and making clear their importance in the education process can lead to dramatic improvements in education quality. To date, more than 6,800 parents have participated in trainings across more than 100 communities and schools in rural Guatemala and Honduras (K. Curran, personal communication, April 21, 2021). Because these empowerment trainings for parents were implemented in conjunction with a number of other interventions, it is difficult to parse the direct impact of the trainings alone. However, an analysis of the Fair Education program as a whole showed the program created greater adherence to school schedules, a decline in dropout rates, a stronger belief among parents that they are responsible for their child's education, and an increase in the percentage of students who received homework help from their parents (K. Curran, personal communication, April 21, 2021; School the World, n.d.b).

Resources

- 🌐 [Description of School the World's programs](#)

References

- SCHOOL THE WORLD. (N.D.A). Community schools. <https://schooltheworld.org/community-schools-2/>
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- SCHOOL THE WORLD. (N.D.C). Meet our team. <https://schooltheworld.org/meet-our-team/>

Flamboyant Foundation

💡 TEACHER TRAINING AND HOME VISITS TO BUILD TRUST

ORGANIZATION: [FLAMBOYANT FOUNDATION] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [WASHINGTON, D.C.] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]

[SHIFTING MINDSETS] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

The Flamboyant Foundation believes students do better when families and teachers work together. Partnering with local public schools in the District of Columbia, Flamboyant engages in multiyear relationships to build trust between teachers and families (Flamboyant Foundation, n.d.). As of 2018, the foundation had supported family-school engagement for 49 schools, 1,500 teachers, and 20,000 students. Reflecting Flamboyant's spirit of equal partnership, teachers and parents pair up to lead family-school engagement trainings across the district. These trainings focus on mindset shift, pushing teachers to challenge negative assumptions about families and students and instead focus on systemic inequities and family assets. The aim is to create mutual trust and a culture of collective ownership because teachers cannot succeed without parents and parents cannot succeed without teachers.

Home visits can align parents and teachers by humanizing teachers and making them appear less like distant authority figures. Home visits can also help teachers better understand families' lived realities and reduce implicit bias, especially if the teacher and student are from different racial backgrounds (McKnight et al., 2017). A recent study confirms that implicit bias among teachers is associated with disparities in achievement and school discipline between Black and white students (Chin et al., 2020). The home visits help teachers and families recognize their human similarities. In addition, teachers draw on their positive communications training when discussing the child's struggles and areas for improvement so that parents do not automatically respond defensively.

Resources

- 🌐 [Home visit training video](#)

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Learning Together National Action Plan

💡 NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

ORGANIZATION: [THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [SCOTLAND] [UNITED KINGDOM]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [BUILDING SKILLS] [PROVIDING RESOURCES] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

Scotland has enacted a suite of educational reforms since the 1980s. It passed the Education (Scotland) Act in 1980, Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act in 2000, and Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act in 2004 to increase the quality of Scottish schools (Education Scotland, n.d.). Until recently, however, national legislation did not explicitly focus on the issue of parent engagement. In 2006 this began to change. The Scottish Government began looking for ways to promote more meaningful interactions between families and schools. This was in response to research highlighting the benefits of parent involvement and engagement in children's learning, as well as a general consensus that the previous school board arrangements, which had been in place since 1988, required reform.

To this end, the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act was passed in 2006. The legislation mandated that Scottish ministers and education authorities take a number of actions to increase parent involvement. These included transforming school boards into parent councils, along with mandating that local officials develop strategies to increase parent involvement (Scottish Government, 2006). Subsequent to the implementation of the Parental Involvement Act, independent reviews concluded that the act had been successful in increasing parent involvement (National Parent Forum of Scotland, n.d.). Government officials felt, however, there was still work to be done. They wanted to build on the previous policy changes to create a national framework for parent engagement, where the government would

work in conjunction with local actors to create a more parent-focused education system. In order to accomplish this, the Scottish Government worked alongside Education Scotland (the Scottish Government executive agency for education) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to create the National Action Plan on Parental Involvement, Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home, established in 2018. The plan was created in consultation with a number of partners and stakeholder organizations, including parents groups and teachers associations.

The 2018 National Action Plan set out a vision and structure for how the Scottish Government would promote parent engagement within the education system from 2018 to 2021, covering the journey a child takes from before birth to age 18 (Scottish Government, 2018). The plan is divided into five main sections: parent involvement; parent engagement, family learning, and learning from home; equalities and equity; leadership and skills; and evidence, inspection, and improvement. Each section contains multiple goals. Under each goal, there are several discrete actions for the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to implement. For example, one of the five goals of the parent involvement section is focused on expanding opportunities for parents to collaborate at every level of the education system. To achieve this goal, the Scottish Government commits to, among other actions, developing a policymaker's toolkit for parent involvement and increasing the use of participatory budgeting—a system where parents are involved in the budgeting process. Sections also include spotlights and case studies of specific examples of parent engagement, along with key steps for local authorities, practitioners, managers, and families to achieve each goal. Overall, the plan contains 13 goals and 52 national actions to be completed by the government and its partners.

The National Action Plan has had a positive impact on the entire Scottish school system for the three years it has been in place, which includes 2,476 schools and 2,587 early learning centers (Scottish Government, 2020). The plan directly affects the 702,197 students currently in these schools and the 53,400 teachers working within them (Scottish Government, 2020). To make implementation more effective, the Scottish Government convened a number

of working groups for high-priority actions. The government also created a Learning Together network, in which practitioners, academics, and policymakers were brought together to collaborate on how best to encourage parent engagement. The network additionally worked to identify and provide support for local champions of parent engagement. The Scottish Government also created a Learning Together steering group to ensure accountability for the action plan. Made up of a number of different education-focused organizations and governmental bodies, the group coordinates implementation of the plan and tracks its progress, in addition to reviewing monthly reports submitted by actors within the plan. The group ensures local actors are working toward the actions and goals laid out in the plan but avoids micromanaging them.

Roles

Staff

- The Scottish Government collaborates with partners like the National Parent Forum of Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, principals associations, and more to create the National Action Plan.
- The Scottish Government and its partners implement the plan and its 52 actions, including funding programs, updating old frameworks and policies, and developing new reports and materials.
- Both the National Parent Forum and the Learning Together steering group monitor progress toward achieving larger objectives and goals.
- Local government officials, schools, organizations, and working groups work with the government as outlined in the plan, provide suggestions on ways to increase engagement, and incorporate the plan into their own parent engagement strategy documents.

Families

- Families participate in programs implemented through the plan and use the new resources and learning materials the plan has created.
- Members of parent councils and other parents provide feedback on the National Action Plan and recommend additional activities.

Resources required

People

- Staff at the Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government and at Education Scotland work together to create the plan

Financial

- Salaries for employees making the plan

Technology

- The plan is published on the Scottish Government's website.
- The plan is promoted via email and social media.

How do they do it?

The National Action Plan provides a national vision but allows for local and community innovation and flexibility. The plan breaks down the work needed into manageable goals and actions to be taken by the Scottish Government over three years. Importantly, the plan highlights the leadership of those who make a difference every day: parents and families, teachers, head teachers, managers, practitioners, and other partners. The framework provides

suggestions for how leaders can align themselves to the framework but ultimately allows them to adapt it to their local context as they see fit. The plan is based on the guiding principle of “getting it right for every child,” which encourages youth service providers to streamline their systems and work together so “young people can receive the right help, at the right time, from the right people” (Scottish Government, n.d.). The aim is to help them to grow up feeling loved, safe, and respected so that they can realize their full potential.

The theme at the heart of the plan is building relationships between the parents and their school based on trust, mutual respect, and collaboration. Through its methodology, the plan also creates collaborative relationships between the Scottish Government, national parenting organizations, practitioners, partner organizations, education nongovernmental organizations, and schools. In addition, the plan focuses on equity in all its goals and actions. Under the plan, policymakers recognize that each family can face barriers to engagement and work to provide local leaders with the tools and flexibility to effectively connect with all families.

Resources

- 🌐 [Learning Together: National Action Plan on Parental Involvement, Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home, 2018–21](#)
- 🌐 [Review of the Impact of the Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#)
- 🌐 [Douglas Academy’s response to National Action Plan](#)
- 🌐 [South West Educational Improvement Collaborative’s response to National Action Plan](#)

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Lively Minds

ORGANIZATION: [LIVELY MINDS] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [GHANA] [UGANDA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW

Lively Minds helps marginalized mothers in subsistence farming communities in rural Ghana and Uganda to support their child's early development. It focuses on capacity and mindsets, empowering mothers with the skills and confidence needed to provide learning opportunities and nurturing support for their preschool-age children. When founder Alison Naftalin began the nonprofit in 2008, she had intended for the children's older siblings to lead the early childhood development program. Many mothers, however, expressed interest in being trained to support their children and articulated their frustration in being overlooked as capable resources because of a lack of literacy or formal education. (A. Naftalin, personal communication, April 19, 2021). Subsequently, the goal of Lively Minds expanded to improving school readiness by improving the well-being and skill sets of mothers. The program is now delivered through government. Lively Minds trains local government teams, who in turn train teachers to provide monthly workshops where parents learn simple, locally tailored methods to support their children's learning and development at home. The trained parents in return run no-cost [play schemes](#) for the community's preschoolers.

Lively Minds works in partnership with local governments, which own and implement the program. Governments receive two years of initial technical support from Lively Minds, as well as a full curriculum, training workshops, and methods for ongoing quality control after the two-year funding period ends (Lively Minds, n.d.).

Prior to participating in the program, most parents did not know the name of their child's teachers, one-fifth of the children had not received any form of play or stimulation in the last three days, and the vast majority of children could not identify any numbers, according to the results of a baseline

randomized control trial (A. Naftalin, personal communication, April 19, 2021). The Lively Minds early childhood development program significantly improved each of these metrics, in addition to children's cognition and socio-emotional development, particularly for the most marginalized students. In fact, a recent randomized control study showed that the effect of the program on the cognitive skills of children from the poorest 20 percent of households was twice as great as on children from better-off households. Additionally, the program reduced acute malnutrition among participating children (Institute for Fiscal Studies and Innovations for Poverty Action, 2020). By building parents' confidence and skills around child care, the Lively Minds program can shift the false perception that mothers are unable to make a crucial difference in their child's education due to a lack of training or education.

Empowering mothers through holistic development strategies at home and in their children's school ultimately benefits their children, their community, and the mothers themselves. A 2019 randomized control trial by [Institute for Fiscal Studies and Innovations for Poverty Action](#) showed the Lively Minds program positively affected all development domains of participating children: cognitive, socio-emotional, and health. Mothers also showed improved parenting practices and knowledge of early childhood development. Additionally, the report showed teacher job satisfaction improved as teachers appreciated having more support from parents, especially given the average teacher-to-student ratio of 1 to 55. The program reaches around 49,800 children and 11,000 mothers annually (Lively Minds, 2019).

Strategies

💡 TEACHER TRAINING ON MOTHER ENGAGEMENT

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **BUILDING SKILLS**

PROVIDING INFORMATION **PROVIDING RESOURCES** PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **NOT ENGAGED**

Kindergarten teachers from every school attend a start-up course lasting 5.5 days covering play scheme management, mother training, and learning through play. The program helps teachers to better support mothers who go on to lead the play-based learning groups for preschool-aged children. The head teacher and Parent Teacher Association chair also attend a portion of the training, which is supported by district teams from the Ministry of Education's Ghana Education Service (GES). Teachers then attend two half day "top up" trainings each school term.

💡 PLAY-BASED LEARNING GROUPS LED BY MOTHERS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION**

SHIFTING MINDSETS **BUILDING SKILLS** **PROVIDING RESOURCES** PLACE: **SCHOOL**

FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING** **CREATING**

The two trained kindergarten teachers train 30-40 marginalized mothers per community to run free play schemes for their community's preschoolers, giving children a vital opportunity to learn through play. Mothers also receive basic health and sanitation training. The course is specifically designed for illiterate mothers and takes place over two 2-hour community meetings and eight 2-hour participatory workshops. In Ghana, the trainings are supervised by GES district teams. Content includes how to make and play games, child-friendly teaching, and health practices. The syllabus uses behavior change and play-based approaches to transform mindsets and gain buy-in and volunteers. The trained mothers go on to facilitate play schemes at their local Kindergarten, with each mother teaching in groups for 1.5 hours a week. The children are divided into groups, and each group participates in the play scheme once a week for one hour. The remaining children play outdoor games facilitated by some of the trained mothers. Each mother runs a play station and teaches using discovery-based methods. Children rotate through

five stations: senses and sizes, matching, numbers and counting, building, and storytelling. Additionally, children must wash their hands before participating to help develop sanitary habits. These crosscutting skills develop executive functions, providing the foundation for learning. Mothers teach using discovery and play-based methods rather than the rote method, which is the norm in schools.

GROUP PARENTING WORKSHOPS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** **SHIFTING MINDSETS**

BUILDING SKILLS **PROVIDING RESOURCES** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** PLACE: **SCHOOL**

FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Kindergarten teachers conduct monthly group parenting workshops for mothers where they deliver simple scripted methods to improve parenting using local materials. Workshop topics include nutrition, hygiene, children's rights, play, communication, malaria prevention, financial awareness, self-esteem, and inclusive education (Institute for Fiscal Studies and Innovations for Poverty Action, 2020). This increases awareness of a variety of child care and public health issues, reinforces new behaviors, and acts as a powerful incentive to keep mothers committed to teaching at the Play Scheme.

Roles

Staff

- District staff members participate in early childhood development sensitization activities facilitated by Lively Minds and receive an ongoing package of capacity-building support.
- District staff members facilitate monthly top-up trainings for two kindergarten teachers from every school.
- District staff members supervise play scheme training for mothers over two 2-hour community meetings and eight 2-hour participatory workshops.

- District staff members conduct regular unannounced visits to play schemes to ensure quality control and ongoing training.
- District staff and kindergarten teachers broadcast weekly radio programmes for parents, using scripts provided by Lively Minds.
- Lively Minds, district staff members and high performing teachers from existing Play Scheme school train two kindergarten teachers from each school in play scheme management, mother training, and learning through play.
- Lively Minds engages district staff regularly through engagement and sensitization activities.
- Kindergarten teachers train 30-40 marginalized mothers per community in conducting play schemes and in basic health and sanitation.
- Lively Minds supplies kindergarten teachers with scripts to conduct monthly parent workshops and weekly radio episodes on improving parenting skills.
- Lively Minds coach district staff to monitor play schemes to ensure quality control and ongoing training.

Families

- Mothers facilitate play schemes, teaching in groups once a week for 1.5 hrs four times a week for one hour at their local kindergarten.
- Mothers implement new parenting methods in their home and share these methods with their communities.
- Mothers participate in monthly group parenting workshops hosted by kindergarten teachers trained by the district staff.
- Parents tune in to radio programme to learn parenting practices to adopt at home.

Resources required

People

- Lively Minds employs staff to train and support local agencies.
- In Ghana, district staff members from the Ministry of Education's Ghana Education Services facilitate program implementation.
- In Uganda, a network of Village Health Team volunteers from the national community health worker program facilitate program implementation.
- 30-40 local mothers participate per community.
- Two kindergarten teachers per participating school conduct monthly parent workshops and manage play schemes alongside mothers.

Spaces

- Play schemes and training workshops are held at local kindergarten schools or, if access to a local school is not possible, at any community building.

Financial

- Average total costs for Lively Minds during the initial evaluation period were \$150 per mother and \$37 per child.
- The cost per child for Lively Minds over a three-year implementation period across 257 schools averaged \$19.
- Each school purchases its own games.

How do they do it?

One important tactic in implementing the Lively Minds program was using a grassroots approach to design for the user. Program leaders invested significant time and resources in the design process in order to understand the contextual barriers and mindset challenges that affect parent involvement in early childhood development. The organization spent four years trialing dozens of goals and messages to find what would most resonate with mothers. While initial conversations drew mothers to focus on issues such as microfinance, deeper discussion revealed that creating enabling family environments for child development would most benefit the community. Further discussions underscored that to overcome the belief that parents have no role to play in their child's learning, any intervention must focus holistically on mothers' well-being and mindset.

A challenge to creating this attitudinal shift was disproving long-held preconceived notions around both early childhood development and the capabilities of parents (A. Naftalin, personal communication, April 19, 2021). Both parents themselves and the broader education system had to overcome the systematic bias of viewing mothers as incapable teachers due to lack of formal education. Community members expressed a desire to have mothers see themselves as an asset to their child's education. This involved a broader mindset shift around early childhood development by focusing on its fundamental importance for a child's lifetime.

Although the government of Ghana added two years of preprimary education as part of the country's requirements in 2007, many rural schools and parents lacked resources for early childhood education and did not understand its effects on long-term education. Many opted to let children play among themselves instead of attending school. Using story-based participatory vignettes, Lively Minds representatives worked with communities to demonstrate the problem of leaving children's developmental potential untapped and explained that a mother-empowerment program like Lively Minds could provide a solution. This was especially important given the range

of competing nongovernmental organizations in northern Ghana. Lively Minds had to convince individuals to participate even though they would not receive the financial incentives or material support that many nongovernmental organizations provided in exchange for participation. Therefore, Lively Minds had to sensitize families to the problem of child development in order to get local communities to see value in the program.

Lively Minds also focused on organized and systematic program implementation, as clear quality standards and ground rules were essential in maintaining the low cost of the intervention. In the early days of the organization, funding was scarce, so all nonessential activities were removed. For example, the parenting course is considered a formal course, not an optional or voluntary one. As such, if a mother is consistently tardy or absent, she may be removed from the course and prevented from receiving certification. Keeping the program simple is key to the program's sustainability and effectiveness. Understanding the need for accountability and sustainability, in addition to the unique contexts of communities, has allowed the program to be maintained and scaled in a competitive environment.

Resources and testimonials

"Before the LM program, I could shy away myself not speaking to people. I now stopped fearing people and I can speak to hundreds of them" – Mother from Nalwesambula A, Uganda (Lively Minds, 2019)

"At the beginning, the children didn't know anything, especially in the local language. They didn't know the colours. . . . But now they understand most of the terms easily, and they even know it more than us. . . . Those in the past did not learn enough. Those we are currently teaching are smart and far different. They are able to think faster than those who have not had the chance to play in the Play Scheme." – Dorcas, a play scheme mother from Bongo District, Upper East Region, Ghana (Lively Minds, 2019)

🌐 [Impact stories video](#)

● Examples of play-based learning

🌐 [Naming objects video](#)

🌐 [Communication video](#)

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Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township

💡 RESOURCES FOR NEWCOMER AND IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

ORGANIZATION: [METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WAYNE TOWNSHIP]

LOCATION: [INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [PROVIDING RESOURCES]

PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

The Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township is a small district of around 16,500 students located in the U.S. state of Indiana (Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, n.d.). The district has a diverse population in its 21 schools. As of 2019, around 36% percent of the prekindergarten to grade 12 population identified as Black, with a large majority of these students being of Nigerian descent. The Hispanic population was around 29 percent, and 29 percent of the district's student population identified as white (Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, n.d.). In 2019 alone, 1,023 newcomer families, defined as those who have resided in the United States for three years or less, joined the school district (D. Harris, personal communication, July 21, 2021).

Given the significant and growing number of immigrant and nonnative English-speaking families, the school district has made a concerted effort to engage these families in their child's education. Newcomer families understandably often struggle with adapting to the U.S. education system due to factors such as language barriers and cultural differences around what a good quality education looks like. The district uses dedicated parent liaisons, newcomer welcome packets, and [monthly newcomer meetings](#) to streamline the welcome process. These strategies help parents understand and engage with their child's school and other entities in the community. These efforts were formally validated and consolidated in April 2017 when the district board of education approved a resolution reaffirming

its commitment to a “safe and supportive learning environment for all students regardless of immigration status” (Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, 2017). This [resolution](#) served to affirm the steps the district had already taken to effectively and fully engage immigrant families.

Efforts to increase engagement among newcomer and immigrant families include employing a family liaison in every elementary and junior high school in Wayne Township. This individual is responsible for engaging with families around their child’s education. The district also employs two family liaisons specifically dedicated to newcomer families, including one Nigerian-speaking individual to liaise with the growing Nigerian population. While around 20 percent of newcomer families speak English, having an appointed individual with similar lived experiences can open doors of communication with these families and add another level of support (D. Harris, personal communication, July 21, 2021). A significant role for newcomer liaisons is to help parents understand the differences between their own educational experiences and those of their children. One point of frequent discussion was the matter of in-school discipline for children and parents’ frustration with the lack of strict rule enforcement in schools. Through parent liaisons, newcomer parents could learn about the district’s values and attitudes regarding student discipline, which often differ greatly from the norms in parents’ home countries. Newcomer liaisons also attend the monthly newcomer meetings and serve as translators to parents.

With the large and varied immigrant population of Wayne Township, over 70 native languages are spoken in the community (Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, n.d.). In addition to use of the two newcomer parent liaisons, every school has access to a “language line” that allows teachers to quickly access a translator, should no employees in the building speak the same language as a visiting parent or family member.

Every newcomer family in the district also receives a newcomer booklet at the beginning of the school year or upon their arrival to the community. This strategy, established in 2019, is intended to help parents understand and engage not only with their child’s education but also with all aspects of life in

Wayne Township (D. Harris, personal communication, July 21, 2021). For example, the booklet contains a section titled “How To Do U.S. Schools,” which outlines how to access educational resources within the community and online. Parents also receive access to other local resources like food pantries and career centers. Additionally, the newcomer booklet gives parents the contact information for their educational leaders and liaisons and encourages them to reach out for guidance at any time. The booklet is used as a reference point throughout the school year, with portions of the booklet often being reviewed or discussed during the monthly newcomer family meetings.

[Monthly newcomer meetings](#), previously held in person and transferred to Zoom as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, are an opportunity for district leaders to communicate vital and timely information to newcomer families. Meetings take place once a month in two time slots—one at noon and one in the evening—to account for parents’ busy schedules. All meetings are also held separately in Spanish. Topics for discussion are selected based on what district leaders feel will be most beneficial to the parents every month and include a question-and-answer session (D. Harris, personal communication, July 21, 2021). For example, when school enrollment was moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one monthly meeting covered the steps necessary for parents to easily enroll their children online and how to navigate the ParentSquare forum. Prior to the winter, parents receive information on what radio stations to listen to in order to be notified of a weather-related delay. The district also uses this time to host guest speakers they feel can communicate essential information to newcomer families. After the COVID-19 vaccine was released, the district invited Antoniette M. Holt, the director for the Office of Minority Health at the Indiana State Department of Health, to speak with families about the importance of vaccinations. Fun activities are also planned for the parents, including a [magic show](#) and a virtual trip to the Great Wall of China. Every session is uploaded to YouTube in both English and Spanish so that parents unable to attend can still receive the information discussed. By using individualized and consistent communication methods to engage the growing number of immigrant and nonnative English-speaking

families in the district, the district aims to adapt its approach so that all families can engage equally with the school and their child's education.

Resources and testimonials

- 🌐 [Parent testimonial video for monthly meetings](#)
- 🌐 [Newcomer family meeting](#) (Spanish)

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New Mexico Community Schools Movement

💡 COMMUNITY SCHOOLS BUILT ON FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

ORGANIZATION: [COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT OF THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [NEW MEXICO] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [DESIGNING] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

OVERVIEW

The [Community Schools Department](#) of the New Mexico Public Education Department provides resources, funding, and support for eligible public schools that want to implement the state's community school framework. Community schools are built collaboratively with families in response to their wants and needs. Schools work with the local community to expand available opportunities, services, and resources.

Although community schools have existed since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, only in recent decades have they gained significant attention in New Mexico. As of 2018, more than 60 percent of New Mexico's 300,000 students identified as Hispanic or Latino (NewMexicoKidsCAN, 2018). The state has long struggled with chronic absenteeism and low academic performance. In 2019 less than 30 percent of fourth graders achieved proficiency benchmarks in math or reading (Nation's Report Card, n.d.). Education leaders identified a lack of family and student engagement in learning as a root cause of these low achievement marks, noting that parent engagement appeared to break down especially when children reached adolescence. In response, education leaders began experimenting with responsive, localized community schooling models to bridge this gap. Community discussions revealed that parents wished to be involved in their child's learning, but they did not feel welcome or engaged at their child's school. As a result, community schools like South Valley High School, one of

New Mexico's first community schools, were born. In the last two decades, the community schools program of the New Mexico Public Education Department has pioneered a scalable model to incubate and empower community schools statewide.

Although every community school is unique, a number of family-school engagement practices unite efforts across New Mexico. Central among these is relationship building. Every community school is supported by an advisory system, whereby one teacher counsels and supports a maximum of 10 children and their families. Each day begins with an advisory check-in. The advisor takes attendance and promptly calls a parent if their student is absent. This accountability not only assures busy parents that the school cares for their child but also builds trust between parents and the school by establishing a direct line of communication. Advisors serve as primary contact points between a family and their school, ensuring the needs of individual families and students do not fall through the cracks. Advisors are trained to build authentic relationships with their students and families. They share their own interests and talents, from music to sports, and encourage students and their families to do the same. Through personalized phone calls and conversations at community events, advisors work to develop deep relationships with each family member and regularly check in to offer diverse supports from homework help to health care contacts.

Other interventions that contribute to the success of the New Mexico community school model include communicating with parents in their native language, conducting home visits, and giving parents responsibility to create their own "parent rooms," or school sites where parents are encouraged to visit, share, and lead student activities. Parent champions are also key to the community school framework. These families have both deep school knowledge and lived experiences that can help them authentically engage new cohorts of parents at school (K. Sandoval, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

Statewide policy efforts have helped community schools flourish throughout New Mexico. In 2019 the Community Schools Act, originally passed in 1978,

was amended to allow for dedicated funding and support for localities seeking to design their own community schools. This amendment was achieved with support from a statewide community schools coalition, including academics and teachers unions, which formally codified a cooperative model to support nascent community schools. In the first year of the grant, \$2 million was dedicated toward planning and implementation to systematize community schools not only in big cities but also in small towns throughout the state. Schools that expressed interest in designing community schools received \$50,000 in the first year to develop a proposal alongside families. Schools then applied for a three-year renewable implementation grant of \$150,000 annually, which included technical assistance and supervision from the state and community schools coalition (K. Sandoval, personal communication, June 23, 2021). One example of a school funded through this scheme is Eagle Nest School in Cimarron, New Mexico, which received support to design a community school centered around local economies and traditions such as fishing and farming (Cimarron Municipal Schools, 2021).

Prior to the approval of the grant in 2019, roughly 90 schools in the state self-identified as community schools. Since formal collaboration began at the state level, that number has increased to over 150 (K. Sandoval, personal communication, June 23, 2021). To further grow this movement, the community schools program is working to create a permanent funding and support mechanism for incubation. This would systematize a school development process, including a best practice rubric, site visits, and eventual community school certification, and guarantee the school dedicate funding to hire community coordinators and other staff dedicated to family-school engagement. This decades long statewide effort continues to expand the community school model, seeking to ensure all families feel included in their child's educational journey.

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Nord Anglia Education

ORGANIZATION: [NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION] [PRIVATE SECTOR]

LOCATION: [INTERNATIONAL]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

OVERVIEW

[Nord Anglia Education](#) is a network of 69 international private schools in 31 countries, serving over 67,000 students between 2 to 18 years old. Nord Anglia Education's teaching extends beyond traditional education, embracing innovative approaches to help children thrive as students and as global citizens. Nord Anglia day and boarding schools recognize the value of each student as an individual and personalize the curriculum to each child's strengths. Additionally, students are given the chance to explore unique global opportunities through academics, service, and extra-curricular activities (Nord Anglia Education, n.d.).

Strategies

💡 PARENT-SCHOOL COFFEE MORNINGS

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The Nord Anglia Education school network, holds regular morning chats with parents over coffee to create more casual and consistent interactions between families and staff (Kirkham, 2018). Schools hold these “coffee mornings” with whatever frequency fits best for each school. Parents are invited to drop in to a designated room for casual conversation with each other, their child's teachers, school administrators, and any other school staff who are free at the time. For example, a school might decide to hold monthly coffee mornings in an unused classroom from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

The program requires few resources: just an available classroom and some coffee. Some schools have built on the coffee morning model by adding a series of virtual and face-to-face speakers. These speakers discuss key issues in parents' lives, such as supporting their child's mental health. In independent focus groups conducted by Brookings Institution, parents consistently praised coffee mornings as a practice that made them feel comfortable and welcome in their child's school. This level of comfort helps smooth the way for other forms of parent engagement.

REMOTE LEARNING RESOURCES

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

STUDENT AGE: **EARLY CHILDHOOD** **PRIMARY** **LOWER SECONDARY** **UPPER SECONDARY**

TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** PLACE: **HOME**

FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

In response to school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nord Anglia Education developed a virtual school experience parent engagement toolkit to help families provide a beneficial home learning environment for students. Included in the toolkit are layman's guidance on teaching practices, advice on health and well-being, and technical support for parents. Created by teachers, the toolkits are meant to provide parents with a roadmap to collaborate with their child's school to support remote learning. Toolkit content is customized for each of the three phases of Nord Anglia Education schools (E. Ecoff, personal communication, April 12, 2021). Checklist posters customized to each age group—[early childhood](#), [primary](#), and [secondary](#)—walk parents and students through a series of tasks to ensure a successful virtual school day. Steps include establishing a quiet workspace and designating time to take work breaks and socialize with peers (Nord Anglia Education, 2021). Parents with a child enrolled in early childhood education, for whom remote learning can pose special difficulties, receive additional resources and instructional support to facilitate remote learning away from a screen. Through communicating clear expectations to parents regarding their role in supporting their child's remote learning and providing actionable knowledge about how best to fulfill this role alongside teachers, the toolkit aligns parents and teachers in encouraging high-quality student remote learning.

Resources

- 🌐 [Virtual school experience guide](#)
- 🌐 [Nord Anglia podcast episode on remote learning](#)
- 🌐 [Blog post about coffee mornings from Nord Anglia](#)

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Parent Champions

PARENT ENGAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

ORGANIZATION: **[DONCASTER COUNCIL]** [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: **[DONCASTER]** [ENGLAND] [UNITED KINGDOM]

GOAL: **[IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]** **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[PRIMARY]** **[LOWER SECONDARY]** **[UPPER SECONDARY]** TECH LEVEL: **[NO TECH]**

LEVER: **[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]** **[SHIFTING MINDSETS]** PLACE: **[SCHOOL]** FAMILY ROLE: **[SUPPORTING]**

OVERVIEW

The local government in Doncaster, England, uses the Parent Champions program to recruit teams of motivated parents to connect with their peers (R. Precious, personal communication, April 10, 2021). Champions spend a few hours every week talking to less engaged parents about education and schooling, with topics ranging from school events to the benefits of being more involved. Champions might reach out to other parents on the playground to talk about their thoughts on the school or help explain the new curriculum. Champions act as intermediaries between schools and families and build trust by removing psychological barriers to engaging with teachers, such as parents' discomfort with authority figures. The only resource this strategy requires is a cohort of parents willing to volunteer and a staff that can train them. The program, which has the potential to reach all parents with low engagement, works as an unconventional way of interacting with parents who may feel uncomfortable speaking with school staff. Regardless of their attitudes toward school officials, parents trust other parents and are more likely to listen to those who understand their position and are on their side.

Parent Support Helplines

SUPPORT HELPLINES FOR PARENTS

ORGANIZATION: [JAMAICAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND INFORMATION] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [JAMAICA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

The National Parenting Support Commission is an agency of the Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information dedicated to supporting parents and increasing their involvement in schools. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NPSC responded to reports of heightened stress and responsibility among parents by establishing a network of parent helplines in collaboration with the Victoria Mutual Foundation, UNICEF, and Fight for Peace (UNICEF, 2020). These helplines are staffed by men and women trained in psychosocial first aid. They work to help parents through the psychological and practical challenges posed by school closures and remote learning. Helpline operators listen to the issues parents are facing, provide emotional support and guidance, and direct parents who call in toward resources on everything from learning continuity to food insecurity.

In all, 36 helplines were established across the country, typically two per parish (Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, n.d.). These parent helplines were established because the National Parenting Support Commission believes that student learning is intrinsically tied to parents' capacity to support students. In order to provide this support, the commission understands that parents must be mentally and emotionally healthy. The parent helplines provide psychological aid and practical support for parents during a critically difficult period, allowing parents to be there for their children in turn.

Testimonials

“This is not a figment of our imagination, persons are feeling pressured from all sides, and parents, being (mostly) non-technical people, are just trying to do the best job (they can). They also need avenues where they can filter through and try to understand what is happening, how they are feeling, how they are coping and how they are processing the information that they are now bombarded with.” – Kaysia Kerr, chief executive officer of the National Parenting Support Commission (Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, n.d.)

“Trying to work from home, and trying to protect us from COVID-19, it has been a lot, so I am really grateful to the Parenting Commission for opening these helplines, because anything at this time can be good for us parents.” – Shantel Williams, single mother from Westmoreland, Jamaica (Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, n.d.)

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Parent'R'Us

💡 TWO-WAY PARENT-TEACHER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGANIZATION: [CONSORTIUM OF PARTNERS INCLUDING PARENTS INTERNATIONAL]

[NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [HUNGARY] [PORTUGAL] [ROMANIA] [SPAIN] [NETHERLANDS]

GOAL: [IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION] [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

PLACE: [SCHOOL] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

In 2018 a group of eight organizations from countries across Europe came together with the goal of supporting educational access and learning for children of low-income, minority, and immigrant families. Each organization had homed in on parent engagement as a principal barrier to student achievement. Additionally, each organization had already enjoyed some level of success in working with parents through mentoring schemes, which proved a powerful tool to transform families into learning champions. These partners, which ranged from international nongovernmental organizations to local schools, noted that a relational approach to family-school engagement captured and empowered parents in diverse contexts, from Roma communities to recently arrived refugees. The consortium of organizations entered a joint bid for the EU's Erasmus+ grant, pledging to distill best practices from their local mentorship experiences and codify an adaptable international model (E. Salamon, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

Parent'R'Us is the culmination of this consortium's efforts. The program aims to support family-school engagement in education by shifting family, teacher, and school leader mindsets around the value and role of parents (Parent'R'Us, n.d.). It specifically targets entrenched negative assumptions about disadvantaged parents, such as the belief that these parents are unable or unwilling to support their children's development. The program operates in four different countries: It supports Roma communities in Hungary and Romania while working with migrant families in Portugal and Spain (E.

Salamon, personal communication, June 23, 2021). It works by training and convening a team of school-based mentor managers, mentors, and mentees.

Mentor managers contribute to the program's effectiveness. They are mostly school staff members, often teachers, who already deeply know the local community. Mentor managers undergo a process of reflection and training that encourages them to identify their misunderstandings about parents. Core discussions include discourse around how schools often prioritize learning and life goals that devalue community knowledge, precluding parents from sharing their diverse talents, such as carpentry or cooking. Other topics of discussion include how teachers systematically perceive parents of color as more aggressive than their white peers. Mentor managers then identify and train a group of mentors who are parents from disadvantaged backgrounds with local knowledge and confidence navigating the schooling experience. Mentor managers use their community ties to match mentors with a group of one to three mentees. These parents are also from disadvantaged backgrounds but have more difficulty engaging with their children's education (Green, Warren, & García-Millán, 2021); E. Salamon, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

Mentors and mentees take charge of their own experience. They collaboratively decide when to meet and what to discuss. Mentorship sessions often address emergent issues, such as a parent's discomfort responding to a note home about poor student behavior. More fundamentally, however, this relationship is a process of mindset shift. It seeks to empower parents as confident, assertive partners in their children's learning. For example, mentors will dispel notions that parents are incapable teachers by asking, "Who taught your child to walk and talk?" Additionally, mentors coach teachers on core parent-teacher challenges. For example, they might guide teachers in putting themselves in the shoes of parents without formal education who have been asked to support their child's homework without structured support.

Parent'R'Us leaders believe that peer mentorship requires local knowledge and autonomy. Rather than prescribe a global curriculum, program leaders

continuously learn from experiences and work to develop adaptable best practice toolkits. These resources currently include a systemic review of parent mentorship models and self-assessment tools for mentors and mentor managers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program shifted to react to local needs. Initially, the program was designed to occur in neutral, safe spaces, such as community centers, offering free coffee and drinks. Lockdowns as a result of the pandemic led mentors to reimagine meetings in accordance with local requirements. Mentoring conversations sprang up in homes, parks, or as a last resort, online. Emergent issues of remote learning shifted mentorship to help parents assert their right to be a cocurricular ally rather than their child's curricular teacher at home.

Parent'R'Us has measured impact through surveys, observed behavior change, and group discussions with mentees' children. According to internal self-reports, the organization found an increase in active collaboration between parents and their schools (E. Salamon, personal communication, June 23, 2021). Managers noted that parents grew increasingly assertive and confident in school communication. Parent'R'Us also saw more enthusiastic engagement, higher levels of school-reported well-being, and higher grades among target students. Students also noted they felt more accepted in the school community as a result of the program. Finally, the project led to mindset shifts among the education staff toward minority families as greater understanding led to more productive interactions. During its first two years of operation, Parent'R'Us served families across 50 schools (E. Salamon, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

After receiving training from Parent'R'Us staff, mentor managers select and train mentors from the pool of engaged, confident parents from disadvantaged backgrounds at their school. Managers match each mentor with one to three mentees based on shared cultural background. Mentors then typically host one roughly one-hour session each week at a time and place convenient for the mentee. Meetings focus on both mindset shift and counseling. Mentors begin with general conversations about education, asking parents to reflect on what they want their children to know and what role they should play in their child's development. They ask parents to reflect

on the skills they have already taught their children, such as singing, gardening, or speaking another language. The aim is to show parents that they are valuable educational partners with a wealth of personal knowledge and skills. Equally, these conversations aim to show that parents should have a voice in schooling and help them to identify where and what they can contribute. Parents should feel comfortable, for example, sharing their cooking skills but allowing teachers to lead on homework support. Mentees often schedule meetings in response to specific school challenges as well. For example, a mentee family might have difficulty meeting dress code requirements or face challenges with teachers using complicated vocabulary during family meetings. In both instances, mentors can act as mediators, understanding the root of the problem through lived experience and bridging misunderstandings between the school and the family. Mentors and mentor managers also work together to change the mindsets of the school staff, challenging prior assumptions about the capacity of disadvantaged parents to support their child's education.

Roles

Staff

- Parent'R'Us staff members identify and train mentor managers.
- Parent'R'Us staff members collect insights from participants and use it to create toolkits on parent mentorship best practices.
- Mentor managers match mentors with mentees and train mentors in engagement and mentorship best practices.
- Mentor managers work with mentors to shift mindsets among the school staff about disadvantaged parents.

Family

- Parent mentors engage regularly with their assigned mentees.
- Parent mentees reach out to mentors for ongoing support.

Resources required

People

- Staff members to provide trainings and ongoing support for mentor managers
- 12 mentor managers per locality
- 5-10 mentors per mentor manager
- 1-3 mentees per mentor

Place

- School or community space for trainings and mentorship

Financial

- Managers, mentors, and mentees participate voluntarily.

Technology

- Optional smartphones and computers for virtual meetings

How do they do it?

The key to the success of the Parent'R'Us model lies in leveraging the human resources that already exist within a community. Partners search for mentor managers with pedagogical expertise and strong ties to schools. These traits enable managers to both facilitate mentorship practices and knowledgeably connect mentors and mentees with traits in common. The organization encourages these mentor managers to view their role not as trying to change parents but as creating an authentic reciprocal relationship that leads to mutual understanding and growth. The idea is to break down self-confidence barriers by explicitly framing everyone involved as learners as well as teachers. Mentors are chosen from among the most engaged parents from disadvantaged backgrounds; they serve as living examples and trusted role models who demonstrate that school engagement is possible no matter one's background. They help peers navigate often-bewildering school policies and structures, which they have successfully overcome. Through the program and their training, they forge an even stronger relationship with their schools. Mentors leverage their status as their mentees' peers to create a unique bond and promote school engagement.

The program uses an assets-based, reflective approach to working with parents. Participants and volunteers regularly complete exercises to identify areas of strength and growth, opening the door to additional self-development opportunities. For example, mentor managers complete ongoing self-assessments focusing on core competencies such as communication, conflict management, system awareness, and emotional intelligence. Based on their responses, staff members with a particular skill set facilitate continuous learning opportunities for those still growing in that area. As an overarching focus, Parent'R'Us works to foster parental self-confidence. Through mentorship and trainings, it reassures parents that they are doing a good job and are capable of making changes at their school. Additionally, the program encourages schools to eschew focusing on traditional measures of parent involvement like helping with homework or attending parent-teacher conferences. Instead, staff members embrace more expansive

understandings of engagement. This ranges from encouraging parents to speak up at assemblies to requesting resource support from the school staff when they are in need.

Of course these behaviors also require openness from the school staff. Therefore, Parent'R'Us dedicates significant energy to overcoming beliefs about disadvantaged parents not having the capacity to contribute meaningfully to their child's education. Mentors and managers work with staff to more deeply understand parents' experience and unique assets—for example, by sharing the results of self-assessments. Parent'R'Us focuses on ensuring heads of schools understand the need for change. Managers and mentors use empathy-building exercises to show how typical modes of interaction can close the school off from families that do not have economically or culturally advantaged backgrounds. Examples include expecting parents to help with homework outside of their native language or hearing teachers tell kids to dream to do more than their family's working-class jobs. The program reports that once heads of school verbally value parents' diverse skills and competencies, from language to art, the rest of the school follows. The program ultimately seeks to build an equal partnership between parents and school staff—one that is both responsive and supportive.

Resources

- 🌐 [Systemic evidence review on parent mentoring models](#)
- 🌐 [Self-assessment tool for mentor managers](#)
- 🌐 [Self-assessment tool for mentors](#)

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Parentkind

💡 PARENT-LED ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS FOR POLICY CHANGE

ORGANIZATION: **[PARENTKIND]** [PARENT ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [ENGLAND] [WALES] [NORTHERN IRELAND] [UNITED KINGDOM]

GOAL: **[IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION]** **[IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]**

STUDENT AGE: **[EARLY CHILDHOOD]** **[PRIMARY]** **[LOWER SECONDARY]** **[UPPER SECONDARY]**

TECH LEVEL: **[HIGH-TECH]** LEVER: **[PROVIDING INFORMATION]** **[SHIFTING MINDSETS]**

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: **[SCHOOL SYSTEM]** FAMILY ROLE: **[SUPPORTING]**

OVERVIEW

Founded in 1956 by a group of parents, Parentkind is the largest network of PTA fundraisers in the U.K., with around 13,000 members (Parentkind, n.d.a). The network works to better understand the mindset of parents and how they interact with schools. It also pushes for consideration of parents as important stakeholders in the education process through advocacy work. To better understand parents and their views around education, Parentkind conducts in-depth research through a large annual survey of around 1,500 parents as well as focus group polling. Topics include barriers that prevent parent engagement, what kind of curricula parents value for their children, and how engaged by schools parents feel overall. Parentkind then takes this research to the media, policymakers, and education leaders. The network communicates the opinions of parents through publications and direct lobbying to push for parent voices to be incorporated at the systems level. The organization also works to provide resources to make parent engagement easier for schools and education leaders. For example, Parentkind published the “Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools,” which lays out the benefits of high parent engagement in schools and provides a road map to implementing steps to accomplish this (Parentkind, n.d.b).

Parentkind takes an evidence-led approach. Instead of assuming parents’ opinions on topics, it uses surveys and other research tools to find proof of parents’ beliefs. Parentkind reaches out to parents in a variety of ways, from publishing a survey and promoting it on social media to working with field

agencies to speak with parents directly. The organization's work also relies on relationship building with education stakeholders. Parentkind holds regular meetings with policymakers and is part of an All-Party Parliamentary Group, an informal cross-party group in Parliament that is focused on parental participation in education (Parentkind, 2020).

Parentkind's advocacy work has yielded significant policy changes. The 2019 annual survey, for example, showed that school uniforms were a substantial cause of financial concern for parents (Parentkind, 2021). Parentkind took this finding to legislators in England and Wales, who then passed legislation to reduce the financial burden of school uniforms (Parentkind, 2021). Parentkind has also worked to include parent voices in education policies throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. After a survey showed that parents were worried about the fairness of scheduled exams for students during the COVID-19 pandemic and that parents preferred assessments to be based on teacher evaluations, Parentkind advocated for this change. This ultimately resulted in the Department for Education cancelling the scheduled exams in favor of parents' preferred mode of assessment (Parentkind, personal communication, April 14, 2021).

Resources and testimonials

"Whenever there's a policy issue affecting parents, where we believe parents should have a say, we will submit a response." – Kerry-Jane Packman, executive director of programmes, membership and charitable services (Parentkind, personal communication, April 14, 2021)

 [Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#)

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Rocket Learning

💡 DIGITAL PARENT LEARNING COMMUNITIES

ORGANIZATION: [ROCKET LEARNING] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [INDIA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING SKILLS] [PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

Rocket Learning was established in 2020 in response to a perceived gap in the school readiness of young low-income Indian children. The organization uses technology to create virtual learning communities among parents, with the ultimate goal of eradicating learning inequalities for low-income children (Rocket Learning, n.d.). These communities use the power of peer motivation to encourage parents to promote learning at home during their child's early years. The project works primarily with parents of young children aged 3-8. Since its inception, Rocket Learning has partnered with around 10,000 government schools across three Indian states to reach more than 100,000 people (HundrED, 2021).

Rocket Learning's model is simple: It uses existing platforms like WhatsApp to create classroom groups comprising a teacher and 10-15 parents. The organization automatically sends the WhatsApp groups daily messages containing at-home play-based learning activities, practice worksheets, and homework assignments. The content is provided in the group's regional language and delivered primarily through images and videos. All of the content is designed to promote early learning in young children. Parents are asked to respond every day with videos or pictures of themselves undertaking these activities with their children. They are also asked to share with the group their child's progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Parents are incentivized to actively participate in the group through e-report cards, digital certificates, and medals sent by the government. Rocket

Learning also uses leaderboards and personalized video collages to further encourage engagement with group activities.

Rocket Learning focuses primarily on using behavioral nudges to make parents more involved in their child's education. It works to meet parents where they are, providing content designed to be easily understood and consumed quickly through commonly used and accessible technology. Ultimately, Rocket Learning relies on the power of community and information exchange, bringing parents together with their peers and providing them with the resources and encouragement they need to effectively facilitate their child's learning at home.

Resources

- 🌐 [Rocket Learning website](#)
- 🌐 [Interview with Rocket Learning founders](#)

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Young love

💡 WEEKLY TEXT MESSAGES AND CALLS TO STRENGTHEN LEARNING AT HOME

ORGANIZATION: [YOUNG LOVE] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [BOTSWANA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [SKILL-BUILDING]

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread school closures, the leaders of Botswana-based nonprofit Young love wanted to find a low-tech solution to minimize student learning loss (Winthrop et al., 2020). Resource constraints abounded, and paper learning packets proved challenging to deliver. The team quickly realized that nearly all families already had a multiuse learning device at home: a cellphone (Rosenberg, 2020). Young love developed and piloted a text- and call-based mathematics learning program that would not only support student learning but also increase family-school engagement (Angrist, Bergman, Evans, et al., 2020). During this time of crisis, it relied on families as key capacity builders, scaffolding parent involvement in children’s mathematics learning by providing structured problem-solving details and live facilitation.

The first step was to conduct operation prepilots following the Young love strategy (Angrist, Bergman, Evans, et al., 2020). This included iterating on instructional content and determining the contact person for every student in their database they intended to reach. This contact person could be any adult in the student’s life with a cellphone and availability—often a parent but sometimes a grandparent, distant family member, or community member (Young love, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Young love then conducted sensitization phone calls with the contact person, around 20 minutes in length, to explain the organization’s work, the strategy’s purpose, and the limited resources required.

The low-tech remote learning strategy ultimately involved weekly text message challenges, which provided a mathematics task and problem-solving strategies (Angrist, Bergman, Brewster, et al., 2020). Trained facilitators followed up with short phone calls, during which parents and students sat together to review the problem. The strategy gave parents the tools and resources to engage in the child's learning. At the end of the 11-week intervention, which served nearly 500 families, a randomized control trial showed that weekly text messages paired with short phone calls to parents reduced innumeracy by up to 31 percent (Angrist, Bergman, Brewster, et al., 2020). Additionally, the program increased the time families spent on education by up to 18 percent and improved parents' ability to correctly perceive their child's learning level by 23-35 percent. Reflecting the success of engaging family members, 99 percent of families expressed interest in continuing the intervention after schools reopened (Angrist, Bergman, Brewster, et al., 2020).

Young 10ve sent students weekly 310-character text messages containing simple numeric and word math problems covering the four basic operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The text message, divided into two messages, included a welcome message, a content problem, a guiding tip for parents to help their children, and a challenge problem. Welcome messages reminded participants who was contacting them and why. Content problems alternated between word and numeric problems, allowing for participants to practice different skill sets. For example, an addition problem might ask, " $62 + 18 = ?$ " This would then be followed by a word problem: "66 men and 25 women are dancing. How many are dancing altogether?" (Young 10ve, personal communication, April 9, 2021). These two questions test for numeracy and literacy. Another example of a simple word problem is "Sunshine has 23 sweets. She goes to the shops to buy 2 more. How many does she have altogether?" The texts provided guiding tips on problem-solving methods, such as reading the problem out loud or translating words (for example, "altogether" in mathematical operations means "plus"). Messages were one-way, and students were not required to respond. Instead, remote facilitators encouraged parents to work with their child to find an answer.

After students and parents had attempted to solve these problems, Young Iove conducted 15-to-20-minute follow-up calls to assess the level of parent and student understanding. These calls would include an introduction and confirmation that the parent had received the text message. The facilitator would then ask the parent to put the phone on speaker with the child in the room so that they could discuss the text message problem together. If necessary, the facilitator would provide guidance about how to solve the problem. To end each call, the facilitator would deliver a simple math question as a “problem of the day” to assess the child’s understanding of the topic discussed during the call. Based on the child’s response, the facilitator would tailor the instructional content for the following week’s phone call to the child’s level of progress and understanding. These calls served to engage both parents and children in the learning process and in doing so built parents’ confidence in supporting their child’s learning from home.

According to UNICEF, 25 percent of rural and young people under 25 years old have internet access, compared to 41 percent of their urban peers (UNICEF, 2020). Low-tech interventions like this one could help to reduce the technology gap by allowing teachers and parents to supplement the traditional education system, especially in rural areas, where internet access may be challenging and costly.

Roles

Staff

- Facilitators send a weekly text message with mathematics problems to the family contact person.
- Facilitators call the contact person once a week for 15-20 minutes to walk through the mathematics problems provided by text message and support the student in solving the assignment. However, when accounting for missed calls and rescheduling, it takes one hour total for facilitators to complete a phone engagement with each household.

- Teachers provide input on student numeracy levels to target questions to students according to principles from Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), which adapts the difficulty of questions to the student's level.
- Schools send out letters about the intervention to raise awareness among families.
- Officials assist with gathering phone numbers and figuring out who the contact person should be.

Families

- Parents help their child engage with the weekly text message math problems and follow-up phone calls from instructors.

Resources required

People

- 64 facilitators send text messages and make phone calls. Each manages around 24 households. To reach all households, each facilitator spends around six hours a day on the phone. Although phone calls generally last 15-20 minutes, when accounting for missed calls and rescheduling, it takes one hour total to complete a phone engagement with each household.

Financial

- \$19 per child for sending text messages and making phone calls (Angrist, Bergman, Brewster, et al., 2020)

Technology

- WhatsApp access for facilitator training and communication

- DT One mobile network to provide calling airtime for facilitators
- Newline Technology to manage text messages in order to reach recipients at scale
- A data collection tool such as SurveyCTO, which automatically imports demographic information and learning variables from students
- Simple and easy-to-use text message content with easily comprehensible [instructions](#)

How do they do it?

Issues around trust and capacity proved to be the primary barriers that Young 10ve had to overcome to carry out the low-tech remote learning strategy. Many parents believed the initial calls were scams, or they were hesitant to give consent or were skeptical that math could be taught over the phone (Rosenberg, 2020). Parents' perception of the program requirements and resource demands proved a barrier to entry. Parents initially assumed they would be required to have mathematics training in order to work with their children or that they would need to give up their cellphones for hours at a time.

Through trial and error, Young 10ve came to discover certain best practices when it came to execution (Young 10ve, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Establishing a comprehensive and streamlined sensitization call to clearly outline expectations helped to assuage these fears. Young 10ve leaders further discovered that the messenger matters: The first contact set the stage for all future interactions. It proved challenging to develop rapport, particularly with phone calls obscuring culturally important body language. As a result, the organization focused on training facilitators to use a friendly tone and accessible language. This sensitization did not end with the initial outreach. As children moved, phone numbers changed, or family life

became busier, Young 10ve learned to invest resources in providing ongoing contact to maintain family interest in the program.

Capacity was also a significant hurdle. Calls to Young 10ve's 10,000 contacts were extremely time intensive and often futile, as nearly 3,000 had incorrect phone numbers (Young 10ve, personal communication, April 9, 2021). Although facilitators anticipated each call would require only 20 minutes, they soon discovered that facilitators needed to commit at least one hour to scheduling, rescheduling, and preparing for each call. Additionally, data input and text tracking, along with facilitators' ongoing study of remote learning best practices, required substantial time. This meant that the initial plan for each facilitator to tackle 30 family calls each week would be impossible. To overcome these hurdles, the Young 10ve team developed a set of protocols to manage the time facilitators spent making calls each week. For example, facilitators were advised to make five phone call attempts per household on at least three different days. Additionally, the Young 10ve team optimized the facilitator-to-household ratio to ensure facilitators had enough time to deliver instructions to the households they were assigned to call. Despite these hurdles, the program proved a simple, effective, low-tech, low-cost solution with the potential to scale and to mitigate learning loss during times of school closure and beyond.

Resources and testimonials

- 🌐 [Low tech interventions video](#)

- Phone call materials

- 🌐 [Sample phone call 1](#)

- 🌐 [Sample phone call 2](#)

- 🌐 [Sample calling guidelines](#)

- 🌐 [Phone call protocols](#)

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Strategies that primarily redefine the purpose of school for students

Escola Integradora

💡 PARENT-FOCUSED SCHOOL POLICY

ORGANIZATION: [ESCOLA INTEGRADORA] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [JUAZEIRO DO NORTE] [BRAZIL]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH]

LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] [DESIGNING] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

Escola Integradora (“integrative school”) was a districtwide schooling policy that placed parents at the core of the educational experience. It worked across 33 schools in the northeastern Brazilian state of Ceará to shift mindsets toward recognizing parental knowledge and influence (Prefeitura Municipal de Juazeiro do Norte, 2018). Through the Integradora policy, schools became not only a place to deliver education but also a collaborative learning community. Staff learned how to effectively engage with parents, parents participated in school goal setting, and both groups enjoyed quality interactions that promoted stakeholder alignment, such as roundtable discussions.

Escola Integradora launched in 2017 under the helm of the municipal secretary of education in the city of Juazeiro do Norte (Rodrigues, 2021). As a

leader, the municipal secretary of education fundamentally believed in the value of family-school engagement and called for a cultural shift toward an asset-based mindset where parents were an integral dimension of child development. At the time, Juazeiro do Norte had an education ranking of 182 out of 184 cities in the state. After only one year of implementing changes to foster family-school engagement, Juazeiro do Norte's education ranking rose to 151 (Itaú Social, 2018).

At the heart of Integradora was a mindset of collective engagement with an emphasis on shared responsibility. The district believed in a system where all education stakeholders needed to uphold and advance family-school partnerships. School leaders promoted a positive school climate where parents were welcomed into the school and known by name. Conversation circles invited randomized groups of parents and community members to discuss and provide input on their children's education during weekly hourlong meetings, which were set at times convenient for parents. Asset-based training on family-school engagement for school employees prepared staff to respond and cater to the needs of students and families. For example, a doorman was trained to identify students who had arrived at the school but did not enter. This initiated a chain of communication in which school management was advised and contacted families about student absences (E. Correa, personal communication, April 12, 2021). Teachers and school staff were also challenged to confront their own biases, such as those pertaining to race, class, or gender, and to stop blaming families for students' struggles. The municipal department of education provided direct support to participating schools through monthly visits, whereby education liaisons observed and offered suggestions for improvements in engagement and learning. Participating schools also had opportunities to engage in peer learning by sharing with one another their experiences and lessons learned from strategy implementation (Rodrigues, 2021).

Escola Integradora aimed to ensure parents felt recognized, supported, and motivated to play an active role in their child's education. The schools scheduled meetings at times convenient for parents and used roundtable discussions to promote stakeholder alignment. Support from the district

education system was essential to Escola Integradora's success, as it facilitated buy-in from school leadership. When schools knew they would be measured and supported on holistic goals, they were eager to move toward a vision of whole-family learning.

Following a change in regime during local elections, Escola Integradora was discontinued. Much as district support proved invaluable for implementing this model, local ownership across all locations may not have run deep enough to sustain the model without vocal leadership. It is possible, though, that some schools are continuing to implement engagement strategies on their own. The Integradora team has noted that it would be beneficial in the future to invest in developing a coalition of education stakeholders at multiple political and organizational levels. The Integradora team also emphasized the value of securing formal partnerships with diverse social and political groups, from parent associations to teacher unions. Having each of these groups sign memoranda and take charge of individual program components would help such transformative learning persist even through changing political environments (P. Mota Guedes, personal communication, June 3, 2021).

Resources

- 🌐 [Itaú Social report on family-school engagement in Brazil](#) (Portuguese)

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Remake Learning Days Across America

💡 PUBLIC LEARNING FESTIVALS

ORGANIZATION: [REMAKE LEARNING] [NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION]

LOCATION: [EASTERN KENTUCKY] [RALEIGH-DURHAM-CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA]
 [BADGERLAND, WISCONSIN] [SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA] [KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI]
 [KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE] [CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE] [SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA] [CENTRAL
 PENNSYLVANIA] [SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA] [WEST VIRGINIA] [OREGON] [DC-MARYLAND-
 VIRGINIA] [CHICAGO, NORTHEAST OHIO] [GREATER CINCINNATI, OHIO] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] [BUILDING SKILLS]

PLACE: [COMMUNITY] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

OVERVIEW

[Remake Learning Days Across America](#) are regional celebrations of innovative educational practices. At community-hosted events, young people and their families experience science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) learning. In the process, they discover new approaches to learning that develop creativity, perseverance, and curiosity.

The first weeklong festival, established in 2016 by the [Remake Learning](#) network with support from the [Grable Foundation](#), consisted of more than 250 hands-on learning activities and events for more than 30,000 families in Pittsburgh (Remake Learning, n.d.). Since then, the program has evolved into a festival of more than 1,150 activities and events held in April and May in 17 regions across the United States. In 2019 more than 500 local organizations supported Remake Learning Days, which several national partners also supported, including PBS Kids, Digital Promise, Common Sense Media, Learning Heroes, and Noggin. Remake Learning Days give families a new appreciation for the places they already know, such as schools, museums, libraries, early child care centers, universities, media centers, parks, after-school community hubs, and more. Events are typically free and provide engaging learning experiences for students of all ages, as well as their

families, teachers, and community members (Remake Learning Days, n.d.c). Events are organized into six learning themes: arts, maker, outdoor learning, science, technology, and youth voice (Remake Learning Days, n.d.b).

At a Remake Learning Days event hosted by a science museum in San Diego County, for example, students and their parents participate side by side in a hands-on problem-solving activity to take apart a toy and put it back together. These opportunities provide fun bonding experiences for parents and their children. Importantly, they also show families what innovative learning experiences feel like in practice. The aim is for this deeper understanding of diverse pedagogies to unleash families' ability to dream of and demand different educational approaches.

In 2019 the Global Family Research Project, in partnership with the Grable Foundation, shared its [findings about Remake Learning Days](#). The report showed that, over time, families who participated in Remake Learning Days steadily indicated an increase in their familiarity with the concept of STEAM and their understanding of new ways of learning. Additionally, findings indicated the events were equitably attended and did not leave families out due to racial, cultural, linguistic, or economic status. The report further demonstrated that family participation in Remake Learning Days increased the likelihood that children would enjoy the experience and seek additional STEAM learning opportunities. The report concluded that Remake Learning Days are a prime example of how to build family-school engagement for a more equitable STEAM learning ecology and ensure all children learn the necessary skills for success (Remake Learning Days, n.d.a).

Testimonials

"I really enjoyed the event and spending the time to learn with my daughter" – Parent from West Virginia (Remake Learning Days, 2019)

"We loved the remake project—making a vehicle out of recycled materials and plastic screws and tools. It was fun to see my 10-year-old open up his imagination and creativity!" – Parent from Central Pennsylvania (Remake Learning Days, personal communication, July 7, 2021)

"We had a lot of fun! It was interesting to see the children teach their parents. Maybe a little frustrating also. We still had some good laughs though. I had zero experience with Scratch [computer coding software] and now I understand it a little bit. Most importantly, my child said he really liked it!" – Parent from Southwestern Pennsylvania (Remake Learning Days, personal communication, July 7, 2021)

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School District 48: Sea to Sky

ORGANIZATION: [SEA TO SKY SCHOOL DISTRICT 48] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [BRITISH COLUMBIA] [CANADA]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]

OVERVIEW

Sea to Sky School District 48 is a small but richly diverse school district located about 45 minutes from Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada. The district is home to 5,000 students and serves six Indigenous communities, the Squamish (Skwxwu7mesh), Statlium (St'at'y'emc), Lil'wat, Metis, Inuit, and Off-Reserve Nations. Indigenous students make up approximately 12 percent of the total school district enrollment in Squamish, Whistler, and Pemberton (Sea to Sky School District 48, n.d.).

In 2010, the district began reckoning with the multigenerational marginalization of Indigenous students in the community, due to harmful historical policies such as residential schools. The legacy of these policies was evident in the district's graduation and enrollment rates, which showed that only 35 percent of Indigenous students in 2006 graduated high school within six years of beginning eighth grade, compared to 86 percent of non-Indigenous students (P. Lorette, personal communication, April 21, 2021). District leaders knew that to provide equitable education for all students, it was crucial to gain the Indigenous community's insights about education to help shape the new education plan. Thus began the Sea to Sky School District's educational codesign strategy, a collaborative education plan to improve enrollment and graduation rates among historically marginalized students through a partnership with the local Indigenous community.

The strategy began with an extended effort to engage the public in a comprehensive strategic plan process. This process brought together parents, teachers, trustees, students and members of the local Indigenous communities. Surveys were used to gather overall community input regarding a futuristic vision of student learning. The new strategic plan "Pathways to Learning" was completed over a five-day process.

Beyond the strategic plan, the school district continued to work closely with the Indigenous community over multiple years to develop an “Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement.” This process included community visits and convened round-tables with Indigenous Elders to lay the groundwork for deeper conversations about educational purpose and Indigenous student success. This relationship-building also included reaching out to families who typically did not engage with their child’s schools through family surveys around educational needs and values. Other initiatives included inviting families to open-house forums on district goal setting and forming community working groups to debate and codify educational purpose. (P. Lorette, personal communication, April 21, 2021).

Following the initial redesign, community members continue to have a role in district strategy development. The district conducts parent surveys every three years, fosters parent action groups, and provides regular updates on district thinking through community newsletters and videos. In fact, these ongoing co-creative efforts were enshrined in the [Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement](#) for 2014-19, which formally structured collaborative leadership between the local and Indigenous communities and the school district to enhance Indigenous education programming (Sea to Sky School District 48, 2014).

This ongoing strategy has reached over 5,000 students in early childhood, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school since 2010. In the 2019-20 school year, according to government monitoring statistics, the graduation rate of Indigenous students increased to 92 percent, while the graduation rate for non-Indigenous students also rose to 96 percent (Graduation Rates, 2019). According to district leaders, the culture of education has shifted alongside the improvements in graduation rates. Competencies such as critical thinking, collaborating, creating, and innovating are now a household language; schools are more transparent with parent organizations, and there has been a transition from traditional rote learning to student-focused classrooms (P. Lorette, personal communication, April 21, 2021).

Strategies

💡 PARENT PARTICIPATION IN DISTRICT EDUCATION PLAN DESIGN

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]
 STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]
 TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [DESIGNING]
 PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

Digital surveys about the district education plan are distributed to parents and community members every five years. The survey is disseminated through the Thought Stream platform. Questions are posed through a backward design model, which asks community members to identify their beliefs about the purpose of education and then answer additional questions on topics ranging from curricular content to vacation days. The district uses survey results to directly shape the agenda for the community working group that leads the district education plan. Ongoing digital surveys play a role in a range of other district decisionmaking activities. For example, Sea to Sky School District used Thought Stream to conduct a three-phase survey on community member beliefs about the second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

💡 COMMUNITY WORKING GROUPS FOR EDUCATION PLANNING

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]
 STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]
 TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [DESIGNING] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM]
 FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

The district regularly convenes working groups with diverse community members to build its educational plans. Its first community working group consisted of roughly 50 individuals, including principals, Indigenous Elders, and parents, who hosted various roundtables to identify the community's core educational purpose beliefs. The protocol agreement between Sea to Sky School District and the Squamish Nation guides collaboration with Indigenous communities. The agreement mandates that teachers and First Nations

collaborate to support the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of Indigenous youths.

💡 REGULAR COMMUNICATION ON DISTRICT ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

The district frequently communicates with families via newsletters, meetings, and the district website to increase awareness of district events and opportunities for parent participation. For example, Sea to Sky School District sends out regular communication about Indigenous Education Enhancement activities occurring at school. These include activities such as a 24-hour drum event to promote Indigenous Cultural activities, creating posters of local Indigenous role models, and inviting parents to make [welcome videos for Indigenous students](#). District leaders further spread awareness by hosting presentations at local schools on the purpose and process of their new education plan. Town halls and question-and-answer sessions allow parents to engage directly with their district leaders on everything from graduation logistics to survey usage.

💡 COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL INDIGENOUS PARENT ACTION COMMITTEES

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS]

STUDENT AGE: [EARLY CHILDHOOD] [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY]

TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [DESIGNING] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [SHIFTING MINDSETS]

[PROVIDING INFORMATION] PLACE: [SCHOOL SYSTEM] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

The district engages with local parent action committees to share information and insights about the education plan and to build trust among committees and the district. District leaders understand there might be resistance among parents to unconventional learning practices, such as doing away with letter grades or creating multiage classrooms. As a result, leaders also share

education research that supports how these practices prioritize students' socio-emotional needs. To begin development of a second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, for example, the parent-led Aboriginal Education Committee created research questions for the community and education partners. The committee facilitated community research projects to gather input on educational needs from the Indigenous parent population, Indigenous workers, and youths. With support from the Sea to Sky Teachers' Association, Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 779, and Sea to Sky Principals and Vice Principals Association, the Aboriginal Education Committee then organized the common themes into a [medicine wheel format](#), approved by the Indigenous community and still used by the district today. The committee also assigned a subgroup to write the enhancement agreement. By respecting the traditions and opinions of the Indigenous population, the district more effectively and collaboratively implemented innovative practices that improve the learning and development of all students.

EDUCATION ON CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT** **REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** **LOWER SECONDARY** **UPPER SECONDARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH**

LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** **PROVIDING RESOURCES** PLACE: **SCHOOL SYSTEM**

FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

The district builds relationships with civil society members and local alumni to help parents understand employer demands for skills and postgraduation opportunities for students. During the rewriting of the district's education plan, parents identified increased postgraduation employment rates as a key success metric. Partnerships with local businesses, universities, and public agencies give parents the knowledge they need to build informed opinions about the district's educational goals. The district links families, working groups, and parent action committees with these resources throughout the year and invites partners to participate in a variety of community events.

Roles

Staff

- District leaders distribute a detailed initial survey asking for insights around education to Indigenous family members and Elders via Thought Stream.
- District leaders distribute surveys to district parents every three years covering a range of topics from ongoing education development to logistical matters such as school breaks.
- District leaders assemble a group of 40-50 individuals comprising principals, Indigenous Elders, and parents to develop the new education plan.
- District leaders present the education plan to parent organizations at all participating schools prior to implementation.
- District leaders establish a detailed communication plan for regular high-level information sharing to parents through videos and newsletters.
- Schools conduct professional learning workshops with teachers at participating schools to train them on aspects of the new education plan.
- District leaders and schools establish and expand upon relationships with civil society members to determine what skills are desirable for future employees.

Families

- Parents respond to surveys the district regularly sends to share their insights about the education plan to help shape their child's education.

- Parents join working groups about the cocreation of the district education strategy.
- Parents engage in parent action committees along with principals and Indigenous Elders.
- Parents attend district-led presentations outlining the education plan at their child's school.
- Parents consume media such as newsletters and informational videos.
- Parents take part in various school-related activities, such as welcome videos featuring members of the Indigenous community, intended to demonstrate hospitality toward incoming Indigenous students.

Resources required

People

- Partnerships with business and civil society leaders to identify skills students need to be successful in finding gainful employment
- A roughly 50-person committee comprising principals, Indigenous Elders, and parents
- Staffing from eight district advisory groups: Indigenous Education Council, Indigenous Education Committee, Canadian Union of Public Employees 779, Sea to Sky Teachers' Association, District Parent Advisory Council, District Student Leadership Council, Communities That Care, and Sea to Sky Principals and Vice Principals Association

Space

- 15 schools in the district
- Workshops and working group meetings taking place on existing school sites

Technology

- Surveys require the Thought Stream platform and internet accessibility.

How do they do it?

Long-standing systemic inequities brought on by historically racist policies and attitudes are an incredibly high barrier to overcome. The district found challenges in simply speaking about these inequities; racism is not an easy topic to discuss. Progress could be made only through partnership with Indigenous Elders and community members to understand their mindsets and desires related to their children's education. Partnerships were created through working groups, surveys, and sustained high-level communication via newsletters and informational videos. For example, the working groups showed that the Indigenous community valued 21st-century skills and competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork over traditional knowledge-based assessments. Based on this feedback, the district made 21st-century skills a central goal of the new education plan. Design strategies then flowed from this goal, such as cultivating partnerships with business and civil society organizations to identify discrete 21st-century skill needs for the world of work. Leaders not only worked with community groups but also sought to learn from each community member as an individual. The district's small size facilitated this direct and individualized outreach. District staff members remembered the names of individual parents, and families could have one-on-one meetings with the superintendent.

Parents questioned many of the aspects of the new education plan. Controversial features included having multigrade classrooms and not using letter grades on assessments. District leaders realized that they needed to deeply discuss why they were making the changes. They began using presentations and newsletters to give parents tangible research behind the methods in order to avoid resistance to these unfamiliar pedagogical approaches. They shared, for example, data on how multiage classrooms support individualized learning and lead to student achievement gains.

Familiar elements of Indigenous culture were also included within the structure of the education plan to increase buy-in among community members by showing respect for the community's traditions. One such example was incorporating a traditional Indigenous medicine wheel structure to outline the education plan, with the approval of the community. Some Indigenous communities use a medicine wheel as a metaphor for various spiritual concepts. The wheel contains a center "stone" and four spokes of supporting elements, representing the cardinal directions. The Sea to Sky medicine wheel places the goal of "Learn" in the middle of the wheel, with the principles "Create and Innovate," "Contribute," "Collaborate," and "Think Critically" representing the cardinal directions (Sea to Sky School District 48, 2019).

The community knows that the district's education plan is iterative, continually evolving based on feedback. Sea to Sky School District regularly demonstrates that families have a voice in educational design through surveys, superintendent office hours, and policy refreshes. Parents' perception of the district's responsiveness in planning mitigates resistance, as families trust the district will take time to consider their input. In 2019, for example, the plan was refreshed after bringing together a representative group to assess areas that were not working. The working group determined that the district should better recognize diversity and begin designing with brain-based learning approaches, strategies, and curricula based on scientific research on how the brain works. The Sea to Sky School District hopes to address these existing issues through further inclusive planning processes and the shared desire of Indigenous individuals, education leaders, and all

other community members to equip children with the skills and competencies they need to succeed.

Testimonials

- 🌐 [News video about increased graduation rates](#)
- 🌐 [First Nations teacher testimonial](#)
- 🌐 [Welcome back video by Indigenous community members](#)

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Strategies that primarily redefine the purpose of school for society

Escola Municipal Waldir Garcia

ORGANIZATION: [ESCOLA MUNICIPAL PROFESSOR WALDIR GARCIA] [GOVERNMENT]

LOCATION: [AMAZONAS] [BRAZIL]

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

OVERVIEW

The transformation of Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia began in 2010. For years, this primary school located in Amazonas, the capital of one of Brazil's poorest states, had some of the nation's highest dropout and failure rates. Many days, students did not reach the school gates, opting instead to work to support their family. The situation became even graver with the arrival of thousands of Haitian and Venezuelan refugees fleeing poverty and destruction. The school's climate was rigid and formal; each day began with a structured reading of the academic plan, and students were led between classes in absolute silence. Children were booted from classes for making noise or showing up late, while immigrant students were trapped in a cycle of failure, testing in a language they did not understand. Faced with a student passage rate below 70 percent, the school's principal took a decisive first step: The school would no longer fail any students or ask any students to repeat a grade. It was time to reimagine a welcoming, inclusive school that would meet every child and family as they were.

At the same time, a regional group of parents and teachers known as the Collective Family School of Amazonas announced it wanted to invest in

transforming local education. These families sought to develop innovative schools into which they might enroll their children (Professor Waldir Garcia Municipal School, n.d.). With ministerial support, they invited experts from as far as Portugal to share innovative ideas with the community. Here, Waldir's principal saw an opportunity: She brought these experts into conversation with her school community to build a new educational experience from the ground up. Over the course of just a few months, she convened parents, staff members, and students for weekly visioning sessions to rewrite the school's education plan. This produced four guiding developmental goals for the entire community: empathy, creativity, teamwork, and leadership. Grounding these is a crosscutting commitment to inclusion, a mission of community embeddedness, and a fundamental belief that everyone has potential (L. C. Santos, personal communication, June 14, 2021).

Today, the school is a welcoming, democratic, and flexible space serving the entire local community—with special focus on engaging families as partners. Everyone is valued as an educator and a learner. Parents come to share skills and knowledge, from Haitian baking secrets to the mathematics of construction. Each student and staff member has a dedicated mentor, often a parent or community member, with whom they meet at least monthly to reflect on their personal development. Instead of presenting a rigid timetable, the school opens in accord with parent and student needs. Children are welcomed in for early-morning self-study, for example, if their parents need to get to work. Equally, students can choose to complete their studies at home or in the garden, if they prefer. Parents are also always welcome, with many bringing their kids into school on weekends for movies or family learning activities.

This adaptability proved especially valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic as the school became a regional referral center for community support. The school remained open to provide food and shelter for community members and leveraged teacher familiarity with flexible learning to design and monitor students' remote learning. All of this has led to incredible growth on national assessments: The school's education index rose from 3.9 out of 10 before the reforms to over 7.5—a full two points higher than the state average. Waldir

serves roughly 250 students annually, one-fourth of whom are immigrants. Additionally, it trains schools across the state—and, in partnership with UNICEF, Ashoka, and other institutions across the globe—on community-centered, democratic, and inclusive education transformation (L. C. Santos, personal communication, June 14, 2021).

An in-depth look at the curriculum and school operations shows that Waldir operates on a full-time education model, a type of Brazilian schooling that extends and widens the curriculum of the traditional four-hour school day. Students flexibly attend classes from 7:10 a.m. to 4:10 p.m. The day includes interactive whole-class instruction provided in age-based classrooms with students grouped at circular tables of diverse ability levels. These classes engage in “territorial learning,” or educational activities that bring students out of the classroom and into the broader community. This includes everything from trips to study Indigenous farming practices to school cleanup activities.

For much of the day, students attend cross-disciplinary workshops or follow personalized study guides that focus on individual interests and allow them to flexibly participate in teachers’ whole-group lessons. Study guide development occurs in partnership with individual tutors who are members of the school or broader community. These tutors facilitate weekly sessions where students reflect on their life path, journalize about their personal development, and devise weekly projects to help them grow. But these tutorials are not limited to students. Each staff member works with a community tutor to reflect on their personal and professional development. In addition to serving as tutors, parents regularly share their skills and knowledge through in-class activities or new workshops. These respond to both students’ interests and parents’ talents. For example, if a student wants to learn about the rainforest, a call may go out to ask parents with Indigenous roots to share their experiences with forestry and conservation.

A diversity of programs complement individual and whole-class learning. Weekly assemblies in each classroom provide space for student reflection on classroom attitudes and behaviors, as well as broader challenges facing the

school. Students might discuss difficulties learning in a loud space, for example, and propose solutions that the broader community can vote on at a whole-school assembly. Additionally, during a daily open period, teachers host workshops covering eight themes: theater, dance, sports, philosophy, science, literature, English, and mathematics. Rather than following a prescribed curriculum, teachers dream up dynamic and cross-disciplinary approaches to each subject. For example, a natural science teacher excited about botany developed a school garden that also functions as an open-air laboratory. In partnership with the state university, she hosts virtual visits with researchers, who teach students about sustainable gardening practices.

Each year, the community builds a curricular mandala, displayed as a set of concentric circles. Circular layers display learning dimensions such as skills, knowledge, and pedagogical approaches—for example, self-assessment, oration, and cultural heritage. At the heart of the mandala is a human figure, showing that people are at the heart of schooling. The mandala guides students and staff in designing learning opportunities. The community can spin the wheels to show the various ways to nurture the school's five developmental domains: intellectual, cultural, emotional, social, and physical (L. C. Santos, personal communication, June 14, 2021).

Strategies

OPEN DOOR POLICY FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GOAL: **[REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]**

STUDENT AGE: **[PRIMARY]** TECH LEVEL: **[NO TECH]** LEVER: **[PROVIDING INFORMATION]**

[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] **[PROVIDING RESOURCES]** PLACE: **[SCHOOL]** FAMILY ROLE: **[SUPPORTING]**

Community members are welcome to visit Waldir at virtually any time of the day or night. In fact, the school doors are almost never locked. In addition to providing expanded access to resources and materials, from books to meals, this policy fosters a culture of communality and collective ownership. Parents can meet with their children over lunch, for example, or stop by to receive tips on helping their child with homework. But their regular presence also helps

parents proactively serve the school community, informally offering to lend a hand on their day off or jumping into a vacant role while a teacher is completing a professional development session. Alternatively, through constant contact with school staff and students, they might decide to create an entirely new role, such as offering weekend cooking classes to students interested in culinary science.

WEEKLY DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLIES AND DISCUSSION BOARD

GOAL: [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [DESIGNING] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [CREATING]

Every Thursday, the school hosts an assembly for parents, students, and staff to resolve community concerns. Throughout the week, community members write challenges or ideas on a discussion board in the school's entryway. This board structures the assembly agenda. To scaffold the conversation, students lead small prediscussions in their respective classrooms. They then help facilitate the assemblies, practicing democratic governance. Every community member is invited to share their opinions on each agenda item and then vote on solutions for that item. For example, if a parent notes that her work schedule prevents her from attending weekly assemblies, students would discuss solutions in their classrooms and then help parents and staff discuss and vote on a proposal to allow parents to participate via phone. The community would then decide on an assessment plan, such as surveys carried out by students and staff in tutorial groups, and a date to discuss whether the solution was successful.

DIGITAL PARENT-SCHOOL CHAT GROUPS

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [LOW-TECH] LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION]

[BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] PLACE: [HOME] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

Teachers and administrators establish digital parent-school communication channels, largely through WhatsApp and Facebook. These groups are divided

by theme or class to create opportunities for smaller, targeted conversations. Families and staff use these groups to share needs, disseminate information, and plan activities. A teacher might, for example, alert the class WhatsApp group that he needs a volunteer to cover his classroom while he attends a professional development seminar. Parents would then coordinate coverage.

💡 PARENTS AS COMMUNITY TEACHERS

GOAL: [IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT] [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING SKILLS] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS]

[PROVIDING RESOURCES] PLACE: [SCHOOL] FAMILY ROLE: [CREATING]

Waldir seeks to demonstrate that all knowledge is valuable by inviting families to teach and share their passions. This sharing may be structured or informal. Parents might offer specific ideas to individual classrooms, or staff might recruit parents based on running lists of family talents. For example, in the Flavors of Knowledge program, immigrant parents come to school multiple times each year to share a traditional recipe from their home country. A Haitian mother, for instance, told the story of Haitian independence while cooking “freedom soup.” Sharing opportunities allow parents to demonstrate the wealth of ways that one has knowledge. One mother who worked full time as a cook wanted to help in classrooms rather than kitchens, so she brainstormed with teachers to find a way to share her other passion: singing. She taught kids a new song and walked them through how she learned the complex lyrics.

💡 WEEKLY FEEDBACK ON INNOVATION IMPLEMENTATION

GOAL: [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] TECH LEVEL: [NO TECH] LEVER: [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] PLACE: [SCHOOL]

FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING]

When Waldir adopted its new educational vision, it committed to a one-year trial run during which it would not fundamentally alter its new approach. The school realized that its focus on flexibility could lead to internal inconsistencies. For example, changing a core educational pillar after only one discussion could leave teachers unsure what they were supposed to do in

class the next day. But Waldir leaders also wanted to keep track of community learning throughout the year. As such, the school hosted weekly discussion sessions for parents, staff, and students. The focus of these discussions was to share individual perceptions, reactions, challenges, and ideas surrounding the new curricular practices. These conversations allowed all stakeholders to feel heard, captured insights for an end-of-year community assessment, and gave the experiment enough time to show its potential.

ANNUAL COLLABORATIVE REVISION OF THE SCHOOL'S GUIDING DOCUMENT

GOAL: **REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** **DESIGNING**

PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **CREATING**

Throughout the year, community members are invited to post their questions, concerns, and ideas on a large board in the school meeting hall. Then, one day each year, the whole school pauses for discussion day, when members of the community convene to discuss and debate what is or is not working. This structured democratic process reassures parents, students, and staff that they will have space to express their frustrations. At the end of the day, the community votes on propositions, such as whether to extend the length of daily workshops, and codifies a guiding document for the year to come.

COMMUNITY MEMBER TUTORS

GOAL: **IMPROVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT** **REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **BUILDING SKILLS** **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

PLACE: **SCHOOL** FAMILY ROLE: **SUPPORTING**

Every student and staff member selects a personal tutor who acts as a long-term confidant and reflective partner. Tutors meet weekly with their tutees to discuss challenges, share dreams, and structure individual development plans for the coming weeks, months, and years. Tutees keep life plan diaries in which they reflect on their educational purpose and map out discrete learning goals, such as completing a small research project on photosynthesis to explore an interest in botany. By setting flexible tutorial

hours based on community schedules, the school encourages parents to serve as tutors and to participate as tutees themselves. In fact, the principal's personal tutor is a school mother.

COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOPS

GOAL: **REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY**

STUDENT AGE: **PRIMARY** TECH LEVEL: **NO TECH** LEVER: **PROVIDING INFORMATION** PLACE: **SCHOOL**

FAMILY ROLE: **CREATING**

When Waldir's transformation process began, the school convened Friday workshops to show how innovative learning might work in practice at Waldir. The community sponsored some teachers to go on a trip to visit innovative Brazilian schools, while other community members conducted online research into school reforms. Each week, the school met to showcase learnings. For example, a teacher hosted a visioning workshop by showing a video about an outdoor adventure school in the state of São Paulo. This process of concretely sharing and discussing real-world innovations embedded the idea that transformation was, indeed, possible.

Roles

School staff

- Teachers regularly communicate with families via flexible parent drop-in visits, WhatsApp groups, and community meetings.
- Administrators coordinate weekly assemblies for parents, students, and staff to discuss and resolve community challenges.

Families

- Parents flexibly decide when to participate in schoolwide activities and assemblies, which are offered multiple times each week.
- Parents identify and create opportunities for in-school volunteering.
- Students facilitate discussions between families and school staff at weekly meetings.

Resources required

People

- 16 full-time teachers
- 15 administrators and support staff

Spaces

- School equipped with library, computer lab, community garden, sports field, and 9 classrooms

Financial

- Regular support from government funding schemes

Technology

- Mobile phones for optional WhatsApp and Facebook group discussions

How do they do it?

Democratic participation is at the heart of Waldir's successful transformation. The school counts on students, parents, and staff as designers and implementers. Children and parents come together to discuss and vote on educational change. Families regularly lead activities at school, which has bred a culture of collective responsibility and ownership. In this way, every member of the community is both invested in and accountable for the school's educational activities. When parents design their own workshops, for example, they have a direct stake in—and become champions of—the school's democratic mission. Participation also extends the school's capacity for transformative experiments by crowding in community members and their many talents. This is rooted in a central motto: "living and valuing plurality." Escola Municipal Professor Waldir Garcia succeeds by ensuring each member of the school community feels valued as a learner, teacher, and individual. Parents, who are explicitly told that their skills and knowledge are worth sharing, become increasingly motivated to contribute. Children, seeing their parents participate as teachers, become increasingly committed to growth and learning.

Of course, democratic dialogue did not always lead to smooth sailing. At the start of the reforms, the school experienced massive resistance. Parents saw the changes as creating an undisciplined, chaotic mess. In fact, one parent lodged a formal complaint with the municipal secretary. Long-held trust between parents and the administration helped bridge this divide. The principal, long involved in the wider community as an advocate for children's rights, was able to use her past successes as evidence to convince families that this experiment was worth trying. The school's culture of flexibility and message that it must mold itself to serve the community further assuaged families' fears. By showing willingness to open the school at different hours and to quickly tackle community-requested services such as weekend food service, Waldir secured trust for bigger projects.

Issues of planning and codification further hampered change efforts. Initially, Waldir shifted its curriculum without clearly spelling out its full pedagogical approach. This led to clear divisions in the school day, with traditional activities in the morning and dynamic approaches in the afternoon. Parents perceived this separation as demonstrating that innovative learning was less valuable than traditional pedagogies and began removing students before the afternoon. The school overcame this by consistently articulating and embedding its pedagogical rationale in all aspects of schooling. School leaders circulated a “political pedagogical project” document clarifying the values behind their approach, such as democratic participation and multidimensionality. They explained, for example, that a child has the power to decide if she wants to spend the entire day in the garden. Additionally, Waldir demonstrated evidence that its new approach worked. Beyond hosting meetings to discuss pedagogical theory and other model schools, they highlighted real-time student transformations. Parents, seeing their children growing and enjoying school, could not help but champion Waldir’s approach.

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Green Dot Public Schools

💡 PARENT-LED ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY

ORGANIZATION: [GREEN DOT PUBLIC SCHOOLS] [UNITED PARENTS AND STUDENTS]

[NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS]

LOCATION: [LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA] [BEAUMONT, TEXAS] [MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE]

[KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON] [SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO] [ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO] [UNITED STATES]

GOAL: [REDEFINE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL FOR SOCIETY]

STUDENT AGE: [PRIMARY] [LOWER SECONDARY] [UPPER SECONDARY] TECH LEVEL: [HIGH-TECH]

LEVER: [PROVIDING INFORMATION] [BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS] [SHIFTING MINDSETS] [BUILDING SKILLS]

[DESIGNING] PLACE: [SCHOOL] [COMMUNITY] FAMILY ROLE: [SUPPORTING] [CREATING]

OVERVIEW

Green Dot Public Schools, a nonprofit charter school organization, was founded in 1999 to create small, high-quality public schools for students in historically underserved and low-income areas of Los Angeles, California. Since its founding, 25 Green Dot schools have opened across Los Angeles, California; Beaumont, Texas; and Memphis, Tennessee. Collectively, they serve more than 14,000 middle and high school students. Green Dot schools from some of the most disadvantaged communities in Los Angeles have since been ranked among the best high schools in the nation by U.S. News & World Report (Green Dot Public Schools, 2021).

One contributing factor to Green Dot's success may be the way it has engaged families and communities in redefining the purpose of school for society. In 2011 Green Dot established a community engagement team in its Los Angeles schools with the primary goal of empowering parents to engage in their child's education. Green Dot leaders and teachers recognize that meaningful parent engagement goes beyond surface-level parent involvement in classrooms. They believe that parents have a right to be equipped with the skills needed to be their child's primary advocate. Through a range of programs, including job training and English as a second language, the community engagement team at Green Dot works to build in families a

balance of five capitals: human, social, political, intellectual, and financial (Green Dot Public Schools, 2013).

Green Dot recognizes that creating a school culture of effective family-school engagement does not happen overnight. The Green Dot “leadership ladder” is a model of family-school engagement that follows an intentional step-by-step process through which parents’ level of engagement deepens over time. Parents start as spectators and then work their way toward participation, involvement, engagement, and finally action (Green Dot Public Schools, 2013). In the first stage of this model, family members simply attend an event or workshop. Next, parents enroll in a series of classes or training programs. Finally, families progress from involvement to engagement by taking action, such as organizing fellow parents, identifying community issues, or developing school action plans.

Green Dot’s strong level of parent engagement paved the way for a new entity to address issues beyond the school level. United Parents and Students (UPAS) is an affiliate organization of Green Dot that focuses on organizing parents around social change beyond school walls (Fondation, 2017). Larry Fondation, the founder and executive director of UPAS, envisions schools in poor neighborhoods functioning as hubs of social capital, similar to country clubs or neighborhood associations in more affluent areas (L. Fondation, personal communication, July 14, 2021). UPAS believes that schools can strengthen themselves by strengthening the community around them. Central to this is giving parents access to the knowledge and resources they need to self-advocate for holistic community change. UPAS operates most visibly in Los Angeles and has expanded recently into Memphis, Tennessee; King County, Washington; and Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

UPAS has a strong record of successful parent-driven community advocacy campaigns on issues that parents feel will help them and their children have better lives and hence learn better and succeed in school. In 2015 UPAS members partnered with the office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor to testify at minimum wage hearings at the city and county levels (Green Dot Public Schools, 2016). The

Los Angeles City Council eventually approved a minimum wage increase from \$9 per hour to \$15 per hour by 2020 (Medina & Scheiber, 2015). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UPAS advocated for an emergency grocery voucher program to support low-income families, including those who were not being supported by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services. Building a coalition that included the Los Angeles Food Policy Council and American Heart Association, UPAS members submitted over [500 emails](#) to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, spoke at board meetings, and met with local legislators. UPAS's efforts contributed to the county implementing a \$20 million emergency grocery voucher program (Chief Executive Office, County of Los Angeles, n.d.).

Resources and testimonials

"Once a month we meet on Saturdays, where we are organizing and talking about different ideas that are important to us and how we can go about empowering our parents and making change" – Isela Castro, parent leader, Oscar De La Hoya Ánimo Charter High School (Green Dot Public Schools, 2015a)

"It feels like we have some type of power, especially when we have the support from the community, allies, as well as the police." – Felicia Stinson, parent leader, Alain LeRoy Locke College Prep Academy (Green Dot Public Schools, 2015a)

"In the last couple of years, students have been assaulted while walking from 41st to 27th. They stole their cellphones, their toys, etc. Because of this, we worked together to get the bus stop moved so they wouldn't be put in this danger." – Irma Huerta, parent, Ánimo Jefferson and Ánimo Ralph Bunche (Green Dot Public Schools, 2015b)

🌐 [Example UPAS advocacy email](#)

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A group of diverse people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are sitting in a circle on chairs. They are all smiling and appear to be engaged in a lively conversation. The setting looks like a classroom or a meeting room with lockers in the background. The image is overlaid with a blue gradient.

ANNEX III CONVERSATION STARTER TOOLS

BROOKINGS

September 2021



Conversation Starter Tools

These Conversation Starter tools are a part of [Collaborating to transform and improve education systems: A playbook for family-school engagement](#) by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings.¹ In addition to these tools, the playbook provides context on the goals of family-school engagement and its evolving nature, a map for understanding types of family-school engagement strategies, an interactive database of strategies from around the world that emerged both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and findings from CUE's survey research on parent and teacher beliefs about what makes a good-quality education. The Conversation Starter tools help you better understand how different stakeholder groups in your school, jurisdiction, or community envision quality education. The tools also help guide you on running a collective discussion with these different stakeholders on their views. CUE argues this is a first step toward developing family-school alignment on educational beliefs and values, and that this coherence is a powerful driver of education system transformation.

For more information on how to use the tools, [watch this short video](#).

¹ The suggested citation for this document is: Winthrop, R., Ziegler, L., & Ershadi, M. (2021). "Conversation Starter tools." The Brookings Institution. [Brookings.edu/familyengagement](https://www.brookings.edu/familyengagement)

The tools include:

- 1. A contextualization checklist of the steps for adapting the tools to a specific context and to other actors.**
- 2. A short parent survey that can also be adapted to other stakeholders, such as students.**
- 3. A short teacher survey that can also be adapted to other stakeholders, such as school administrators and employers.**
- 4. Conversation starter analysis and discussion guide**

The tools are for anyone who hopes to better understand the perspectives of one or more education stakeholder groups. Users of the tools may include school leaders, jurisdiction leaders, leaders of school networks, teacher organizations, parent organizations, and civil society organizations working with schools to support education change.

The tools can help you identify:

- ☑ the most important purpose of school for each stakeholder group;
- ☑ the aspects of a child's educational experience that each stakeholder group most relies on to assess what makes a "good school";
- ☑ the types of teaching and learning experiences each stakeholder group prefers;
- ☑ the actors that each stakeholder group relies on to inform their beliefs about education; and
- ☑ the level of trust and alignment felt between stakeholder groups.

The tools are prototypes developed through the dialogue with CUE's Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) members and drawn from surveys of close to 25,000 parents and more than 6,000 teachers around the world. We encourage you to try the tools and share feedback at leapfrogging@brookings.edu. Your input will help us further develop internationally validated tools for diagnosing alignment between communities and schools.

DEFINITIONS

Parent and family: The term “parent” is used as shorthand for any family member, caregiver, or guardian who cares for children and youth. CUE often uses the terms “parent” and “family” interchangeably. In your surveys, we encourage you to use the language that resonates best with your community.

Teacher: We use the term “teacher” instead of “educator” to distinguish between the education professional (whose vocation is to instruct and guide children in school) and parents (who are their child’s first educators, helping them develop and learn from birth on).

Involvement versus engagement: We find Ferlazzo’s distinction between family “involvement” and “engagement” helpful and use the terms accordingly. “A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute.” In contrast, “a school striving for parent engagement leads with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners” (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12).

Family-school engagement: We use the term “family-school engagement” instead of the more common “family engagement” not only to express the dual nature of the engagement but also to highlight the fact that either side can, and does, initiate the engagement process.

Alignment and the alignment gap: When families and schools share the same vision of the purpose of school, they are aligned in their beliefs and values, and this coherence is a powerful driver of education system transformation. An “alignment gap” exists when families and schools either do not share or perceive that they do not share the same views on the purpose of school and therefore what makes for a quality education for their children and communities.

✓ 1. CONTEXTUALIZATION CHECKLIST

Before using the survey tools, you need to make the key decisions outlined in the following checklist.

1. DETERMINE HOW YOU WILL USE THE SURVEY TOOLS.

Conducting these surveys should first and foremost serve your own internal purpose of diagnosing alignment. In addition, you may also be interested in learning how your school, jurisdiction, or community compares to others in CUE's study.

Why are you conducting this survey?

- For the internal purpose of diagnosing alignment
- To view my data in relation to the data of others
- Other

If you are interested in viewing your data in relation to other communities' data, and in sharing your de-identified survey data with CUE and with other communities for their own learning purposes, contact us at leapfrogging@brookings.edu. If you do decide to be a part of our study, we ask that you keep your survey changes to basic contextualization only so that results can be easily compared across schools, jurisdictions, and communities. CUE's FEEN members have often expressed the value of seeing how their data compares to the data of others.

2. CHOOSE THE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS YOU WILL INCLUDE.

The current survey tools include surveys for parents and teachers. However, you can adapt either tool for other stakeholder groups. Decide who you want to get perspectives from and engage in a dialogue.

Which stakeholder groups do you want to survey?

- Parents
- Teachers
- Students
- Administrators
- Community leaders
- Employers
- Other

3. DETERMINE THE LANGUAGE(S) YOU WILL OFFER THE SURVEY IN.

The language(s) you will offer the survey in should be based on the context of your community. CUE has translations of the parent and teacher survey tools available in several languages that we can share with you. If your language is not listed here, consider looking for a professional translator in your community who does back-translation to test the accuracy of the wording. For any translation, make sure to ask several people who speak the chosen language to take the survey to ensure it is clearly worded.

CUE has the parent survey available in:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Afrikaans | <input type="radio"/> French | <input type="radio"/> Spanish |
| <input type="radio"/> American English | <input type="radio"/> Haitian Creole | <input type="radio"/> Swahili |
| <input type="radio"/> Arabic | <input type="radio"/> Hindi | <input type="radio"/> Vietnamese |
| <input type="radio"/> British English | <input type="radio"/> Mandarin | <input type="radio"/> Xhosa |
| <input type="radio"/> Farsi | <input type="radio"/> Marathi | <input type="radio"/> Portuguese |

CUE has the teacher survey available in:

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> American English | <input type="radio"/> Marathi | <input type="radio"/> Arabic |
| <input type="radio"/> British English | <input type="radio"/> Spanish | |
| <input type="radio"/> Hindi | <input type="radio"/> Portuguese | |

4. DECIDE HOW YOU WILL ADMINISTER THE SURVEY. Based on your context, consider which channels and methods of communication will let you best reach your stakeholder group(s). You may also wish to encourage participation by offering a small monetary incentive such as a phone credit top up or gift card. Studies have shown that incentives, especially ones that are prepaid, cash, and larger (versus smaller) payments, help increase survey engagement and response rates (Church, 1993; Signer et al., 1999). You could offer a smaller incentive to all participants or a single larger incentive that will be given away via a random lottery. Take your budget into consideration regarding not only the incentives themselves but also the distribution process for any incentives once the survey is complete.

How will you administer the survey?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Online only | <input type="radio"/> Phone call only |
| <input type="radio"/> SMS only | <input type="radio"/> Other |

Will you offer an incentive for completing the survey?

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|

If yes, who will receive an incentive?

- Every survey respondent Lottery winner(s)

5. ADAPT THE TOOLS TO YOUR COMMUNITY.

The survey questions should be adapted to suit your context. Steps for adapting the tools:

- ✍ Read the survey tools thoroughly.
- ✍ Fill in the blanks in the introduction's suggested text.
- ✍ Decide if you will change the reason why you are asking people to take the survey in the introductory text.
- ✍ Adapt the wording of questions and responses to ensure your stakeholder groups will understand what you are asking. You may need to adjust the terms used to refer to grade levels to the terms most commonly used in your context. Adding clarifying examples in parentheses to the response choices may be helpful. Note where we indicate on the survey tools that edits are welcome versus where we discourage edits for rigor or survey design reasons.
- ✍ Update wording on your survey to reflect how you will distribute it (e.g., online, via SMS, or via phone). The survey tools provided below are in an online format.
- ✍ Ensure any material changes take into consideration how you plan to analyze the data. For example, regarding questions related to the purpose of education, the current wording asks respondents to select their top choice only. If you are interested in analyzing respondents' second, third, and fourth choices, you may wish to make this a ranking question instead.

6. DETERMINE IF RESPONSES WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL OR NOT. Schools and jurisdictions that regularly survey parents or teachers may be used to asking for parents' or teachers' names and information. However, parents and teachers will be more likely to answer openly and honestly if the survey is confidential. Though confidentiality adds a layer of complexity, it can be well worth it.

If you choose to keep the surveys confidential, you will need to define a plan to secure respondents' data. Protecting the identities and data collected from research respondents who have been promised confidentiality is of utmost importance. To follow ethical standards and to protect respondents' confidentiality, all respondents must consent to participating in the research by manually or virtually signing a consent form before beginning the survey. All data must be secured in password-protected files, and only staff directly involved in the study should have access to the data. All data should also be

de-identified, which means that any identifying information (e.g., respondents' names or contact information) should be removed from the dataset.

If you wish to participate in CUE's study and to view results of other jurisdictions, please contact us so we can discuss data-protection requirements and necessary language to add to the introduction on confidentiality of responses.

7. TEST YOUR SURVEY BEFORE SHARING IT. Before sharing your survey with your stakeholder group(s), conduct a small pilot. In other words, test your survey on a few people with diverse backgrounds from your target stakeholder group(s). For example, to test the parent survey, seek out parents with children of different ages, with different socio-economic backgrounds, and with different cultural backgrounds to get a cross section. Ask your pilot participants not to share the survey with others. Through this process, you can collect feedback on any confusing wording and on how long it should take to complete the survey. Make any final edits that are needed before sending the tool out.

Generally, a pilot sample should be about 10 percent of the size of the total survey sample you plan on recruiting; for example, if your final survey sample will include 100 people, your pilot sample would ideally include 10 people (Hertzog, 2008). However, if it is not possible to recruit a sufficiently large pilot sample, ask as many parents as possible to take the survey so you get some feedback. Include your pilot data in your final survey data only if you do not make any changes to your survey after the pilot; if your pilot survey text differs from your final survey, do not include pilot data in your final survey data.

Steps for piloting your survey:

- 1.** Find diverse respondents from your stakeholder group(s) to complete the survey pilot.
- 2.** Determine how many days you will give respondents to complete the survey pilot (we recommend 7-10 days).
- 3.** Make final edits to the survey based on pilot feedback.

✓ 2. PARENT SURVEY

Online survey for parents in American English

[Edit the following sample survey as needed. Note that the Parent Survey could be easily adapted for students. If you plan to participate in our study, please contact us at leapfrogging@brookings.edu so we can discuss the necessary language to add to the introduction on confidentiality of responses.]

Conversation starter survey: What are your beliefs about education?

Introduction

We are interested in learning about your beliefs about education. We are asking parents to complete this survey to help us develop better family–school communication and collaboration.

This survey will take approximately ___ minutes to complete. Please submit your completed survey by _____.

This survey should be completed by the child’s primary caregiver (i.e., the adult who assumes the most responsibility in caring for the health and well-being of the child). Please complete this survey by focusing on your oldest child enrolled in school (preschool to grade 12). If you have more than one child, we welcome you to complete this survey again for each additional child.

We will share the collective responses with you once the survey has been completed.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,

[Insert name of school or leader sending out the survey.]

[Note that is important to ask parents to focus on one child per survey as their perspective may be different depending on the child.]

Please answer the following questions by focusing on your oldest child enrolled in school (preschool to grade 12).

 **Q1. In which grade is your oldest child who is enrolled in school (preschool to grade 12)?**

- Preschool (typically 4-5 years old)
- Kindergarten (typically 5-6 years old)
- Grade 1 (typically 6-7 years old)
- Grade 2 (typically 7-8 years old)
- Grade 3 (typically 8-9 years old)
- Grade 4 (typically 9-10 years old)
- Grade 5 (typically 10-11 years old)
- Grade 6 (typically 11-12 years old)
- Grade 7 (typically 12-13 years old)
- Grade 8 (typically 13-14 years old)
- Grade 9 (typically 14-15 years old)
- Grade 10 (typically 15-16 years old)
- Grade 11 (typically 16-17 years old)
- Grade 12 (typically 17-18 years old)

[For Questions 2 and 4, if you are interested in analyzing respondents' second, third, and fourth choices, you may wish to make these ranking questions instead.]

 **Q2. I believe that the most important purpose of school is:**

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):

✍ Q3. I am satisfied with my child's education when my child is:

Please rank from 1 for most satisfied to 6 for least satisfied.


- Getting good scores on state/national standardized tests
- Achieving at or above grade level
- Being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university)
- Developing friendships and social skills
- Being given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities aligned to their interests
- Enjoying school

✍ Q4. I believe that my child's teachers believe that the most important purpose of school is:

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):


✍ Q5. I believe that my child's school administrators (e.g. school leaders, government or organization education leaders) believe that the most important purpose of school is:

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):

 **Q6. I believe that my child's teachers are satisfied with their students' education when their students are:**

Please rank from 1 for most satisfied to 6 for least satisfied.

- Getting good scores on state/national standardized tests
- Achieving at or above grade level
- Being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university)
- Developing friendships and social skills
- Being given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities aligned to their interests
- Enjoying school

 **Q7. I believe that my child's school administrators (e.g. school leaders, government or organization education leaders) are satisfied with their students' education when their students are:**

Please rank from 1 for most satisfied to 6 for least satisfied.

- Getting good scores on state/national standardized tests
- Achieving at or above grade level
- Being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university)
- Developing friendships and social skills
- Being given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities aligned to their interests
- Enjoying school

 **Q8. My child's teachers are receptive to my input and suggestions.**

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

0


1

2

3

4

5

 **Q9.** You are helping a friend choose a school for her 10-year-old child. She can send her child to one of two schools and you go with her to visit both schools.

In one school you see:

Children are sitting in a classroom in rows of desks facing the front of the class and taking notes while listening to the teacher who is standing at the front of the room reviewing course material.

In the other school you see:

Children are in a classroom sitting in small groups facing each other and working together on a class project. The teacher is walking around the room answering questions the children have.

Which school would you suggest that your friend chooses to send her child to?

- First School - Children are sitting in a classroom in rows of desks facing the front of the class and taking notes while listening to the teacher who is standing at the front of the room reviewing course material.
- Second School - Children are in a classroom sitting in small groups facing each other and working together on a class project. The teacher is walking around the room answering questions the children have.

 **Q10.** My child's teachers share my beliefs about what makes a good education.

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

0

1

2

3

4

5

 **Q11. What influences your perspective about what makes for a good quality education for your child?**

Please rank from 1 for most influential to 9 for least influential.

- The criteria required for admission into college/university
- The opinions of other parents
- The media
- Scientific findings from fields such as psychology, the learning sciences, sociology, etc.
- The opinions of my elected officials
- The opinions of my child
- The opinions of my education community leaders (e.g., school administrators, district directors, policymakers)
- The opinions of my child's educators (e.g., teachers and paraprofessional educators)
- The opinions of my civil society leaders (e.g., faith-based community leaders, nongovernmental organizations, grassroots community groups)

 **Q12. What is your highest level of education attained?**

- Less than a high school diploma
- High school diploma or equivalency
- Some college, no degree
- Vocational training/2-year college degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Post-graduate (e.g., Master's degree, professional degree)
- I prefer not to respond
- Other (please specify):

 **Q13. What gender do you identify with?**

- Female
- Male
- Other (please specify):
- I prefer not to respond

✓ 3. TEACHER SURVEY

Online survey for teachers in American English

[Edit the following sample survey as needed. Note that the Teacher Survey could be easily adapted for school administrators or employers. If you plan to participate in our study, please contact us at leapfrogging@brookings.edu so we can discuss the necessary language to add to the introduction on confidentiality of responses.]

Conversation starter survey: What are your beliefs about education?

Introduction

We are interested in learning about your beliefs about education. We are asking teachers to complete this survey to help us develop better family–school communication and collaboration.

This survey will take approximately ____ minutes to complete. Please submit the completed survey by _____.

Please only complete this survey if you are currently working as a preschool through grade 12 teacher. If you teach multiple grades, please focus only on your experience with the oldest students you currently teach.

We will share the collective responses with you once the survey has been completed.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,

[Insert name of school or leader sending out the survey]

[Note that is important to ask teachers to focus on their oldest students (if they teach more than one grade) as their perspective may be different depending on the age of their students.]

✍ Q1. In which grade are the oldest students you currently teach?

- Preschool (typically 4-5 years old)
- Kindergarten (typically 5-6 years old)
- Grade 1 (typically 6-7 years old)
- Grade 2 (typically 7-8 years old)
- Grade 3 (typically 8-9 years old)
- Grade 4 (typically 9-10 years old)
- Grade 5 (typically 10-11 years old)
- Grade 6 (typically 11-12 years old)
- Grade 7 (typically 12-13 years old)
- Grade 8 (typically 13-14 years old)
- Grade 9 (typically 14-15 years old)
- Grade 10 (typically 15-16 years old)
- Grade 11 (typically 16-17 years old)
- Grade 12 (typically 17-18 years old)

[For Questions 2 and 4, if you are interested in analyzing respondents' second, third, and fourth choices, you may wish to make these ranking questions instead.]

✍ Q2. I believe that the most important purpose of school is:

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):


✍ Q3. I am satisfied with my students' education when my students are:

Please rank from 1 for most satisfied to 6 for least satisfied.


- Getting good scores on provincial/national standardized tests
- Achieving at or above grade level
- Being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university)
- Developing friendships and social skills
- Being given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities aligned to their interests
- Enjoying school

 **Q4. I believe that my students' parents believe that the most important purpose of school is:**

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):

 **Q5. I believe that my child's school administrators (e.g. school leaders, government or organization education leaders) believe that the most important purpose of school is:**

- To prepare students for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university) through rigorous content knowledge across all academic subjects.
- To prepare students with the skills and competencies needed for the workforce.
- To prepare students to be good citizens who are prepared to lead their political and civic lives.
- To help students gain self-knowledge, find their personal sense of purpose, and better understand their values.
- Other (please specify):

 **Q6. I believe that my students' parents are satisfied with their children's education when their children are:**

Please rank from 1 for most satisfied to 6 for least satisfied.

- Getting good scores on provincial/national standardized tests
- Achieving at or above grade level
- Being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e. college or university)
- Developing friendships and social skills
- Being given opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities aligned to their interests
- Enjoying school

 **Q10. What influences your perspective about what makes for a good quality education for your students?**

Please rank from 1 for most influential to 11 for least influential.

- The assigned curriculum and/or learning benchmarks
- The criteria required for students to gain admission into college / university
- The opinions of other teachers
- The media
- Scientific findings from fields such as psychology, the learning sciences, sociology, etc.
- The opinions of my elected officials
- The opinions of my education community leaders (e.g., school administrators, district directors, policymakers)
- The opinions of my students' parents
- The opinions of my students
- The opinions of my civil society leaders (e.g., faith-based community leaders, nongovernmental organizations, grassroots community groups)
- Professional developmental seminars

 **Q11. What is your highest level of education attained?**

- Less than a high school diploma
- High school diploma or equivalency
- Some college, no degree
- Vocational training/2-year college degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Post-graduate (e.g., Master's degree, professional degree)
- I prefer not to respond
- Other (please specify):

 **Q12. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Other (please specify):
- I prefer not to respond

✓ 4. CONVERSATION STARTER ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

We recommend the following steps to analyze your survey results. These steps will help you to understand the degree of alignment or misalignment among stakeholders. Any question numbers mentioned below refer to the questions in the Parent Survey tool.

- 1. Calculate the percent of responses for each question.** This percentage is the number of responses per answer choice divided by the total number of responses for a given question. For example, if 60 out of 150 parents selected answer choice A, the percentage for that answer choice would be 40%. If 50 out of 150 parents selected answer choice B, the percentage would be 33%. If you conducted your survey through an online platform, these calculations may be automatically done for you.
- 2. Look at the ranges.** The ranges are the minimum and maximum values for each response. For example, consider Q8: "My child's teachers are receptive to my input and suggestions." Answer choices for this question range from 0 to 5. How many parents responded at the bottom of the range, at 0 or 1? How many responded at the top of the range, at 4 or 5? The range, especially when you have sorted your data in ascending order, can indicate where the majority of parents fall on a spectrum.
- 3. Look at the distributions.** Whereas range focuses on the most extreme responses, distribution concerns all selected responses. Distribution is especially important for questions about child's age (Q1) and parent's education level (Q12). These two questions should have a wide distribution to ensure that your survey respondents are generally representative of your population of interest. For example, have parents from all education levels responded to your survey, or do your respondents include only parents with higher education levels? If the latter, does this distribution correspond to the characteristics of all the parents in your community? If not, you have captured responses only from the most advantaged parents and you will not have gathered all perspectives.
- 4. Start to engage with the responses on a qualitative level.** After reviewing percentages, ranges, and distributions, you can start to group response options in order to understand trends in your data.

For example, consider Q11: "What influences your perspective about what makes for a good quality education for your child?" You will notice there are

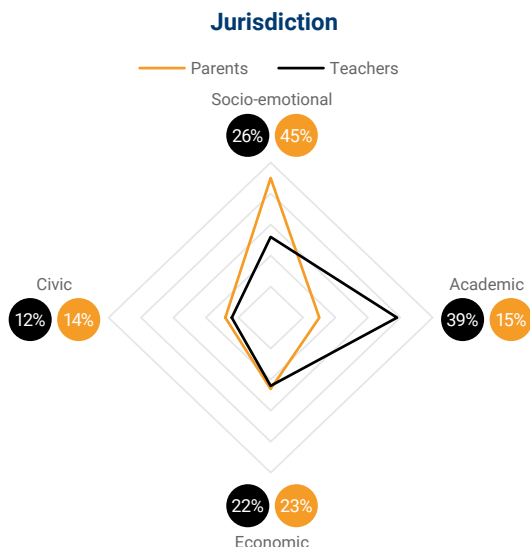
nine answer choices. However, you can group these according to your interests. Looking at the sources' proximity to parents may be helpful. "Close" sources to a parent would be the opinions of other parents; the opinions of the child; the opinions of the child's educators; the opinions of education community leaders (e.g., school administrators, district directors, policymakers); and the opinions of civil society leaders. "Far" sources would be the criteria required for admission into college/university; the media; scientific findings from fields such as psychology, the learning sciences, sociology, etc.; and the opinions of elected officials. Another possibility would be to break the answer choices into academic and non-academic sources.

Take Q3 as another example: "I am satisfied with my students' education when my students are: [...]" The responses in this case could be divided into academic versus well-being indicators. Academic indicators are earning good scores on provincial/national standardized tests; achieving at or above grade level; and being prepared for post-secondary education (i.e., college or university). Wellbeing indicators are developing friendships and social skills; being given opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities aligned to their interests; and enjoying school.

- 5. Visualize the data.** One way to visualize data is to create simple bar graphs. In the example of Q11 above, creating a bar graph could reveal how many respondents selected "close" versus "far" sources as main influencers.

However, another meaningful way to visualize data is to create radar charts, or what CUE calls 'belief maps.' This type of graphic can depict how stakeholders view the purpose of education and their perceptions of others' beliefs about the purpose of education. Tutorials are freely available online for how to make a radar chart in Excel.

The example radar chart below depicts parents' responses to CUE's survey in a FEEN jurisdiction. The radar chart shows that while most parents feel the primary purpose of education is socio-emotional (orange diamond skewed toward the top), most parents simultaneously perceive that teachers believe the primary purpose of education is academic (black diamond skewed toward the right). The radar chart clearly reveals the misalignment between parents' own beliefs and their perceptions of teachers' beliefs. Conducting the survey among teachers and producing a second radar chart could offer invaluable insight into the teachers' beliefs and their perceptions of parents' beliefs. We have often found through surveys that parents and teachers perceive each other's beliefs to be more different than they really are.



A note about the radar chart: The response to *help students gain self-knowledge* pertains to a socio-emotional purpose of education; to *prepare students for post-secondary education* pertains to an academic purpose; to *ensure students can succeed in the workforce* pertains to an economic purpose; and to *guide students toward becoming good citizens* pertains to a civic purpose.

For additional ways to analyze your survey data, see the [background paper](#) that discussed CUE's parent and teacher surveys in several of the FEEN jurisdictions as well as our [Know Your Parents report](#). The former will be particularly useful if you have access to statistical data analysis tools like SPSS or R.

- 6. Discussion of results.** Once you have analyzed the data, we recommend sharing your results with the survey respondents. Perhaps one of the best approaches to sharing results is to conduct an open meeting with the stakeholder groups who took the survey. In this case, that would mean gathering parents and teachers together to discuss the results and the reasons behind alignment or alignment gaps. Surveys will give you quantitative information about your population and some insights into trends—surveys answer what is going on. However, conversations with stakeholders can reveal much more about why respondents selected certain answers. These survey tools are designed to start conversations in your school community about different stakeholder groups' vision of a quality education for children.

Survey results can also be used for internal reflection by school leaders and staff. For example, when we analyzed the data in one of our FEEN jurisdictions, we noticed that less educated parents were more likely to have higher levels of trust

in their child's teachers, whereas more educated parents were more likely to have lower levels of trust. Through discussion, we learned that the jurisdiction had created several programs to make newcomer and immigrant families, who often have lower education levels, feel welcome, such as by delivering welcome packets and translating materials into families' native languages. The discussion was eye opening for the jurisdiction, who received indication that their efforts to engage these families were likely working but that higher income parents were feeling left behind.

The following sample discussion questions could help start the conversation on your survey findings, regardless of whether the results are only for internal reflection or also for broader community dialogue. These questions are framed largely in response to the Parent Survey, but some discussion questions are included assuming teachers were also surveyed. You can and should adjust these questions for all of your stakeholder groups.

Discussion questions:

- 1.** Is there anything about the survey responses that surprised you?
- 2.** How do you determine what you want from education?
- 3.** Are you surprised by the belief maps of teachers and administrators on the most important purpose of school?
- 4.** Why do you think parents and teachers have [similar/different] beliefs about the most important purpose of school?
- 5.** Why do you think parents and teachers have [similar/different] perceptions of each other's beliefs about the most important purpose of school?
- 6.** Why do you think most parents in our community report [academic/well-being] aspects of education as their main indicators of quality?
- 7.** Why do you think most parents in our community support [innovative/traditional] types of pedagogy?
- 8.** Why do you feel parents report that they [are/are not] aligned with teachers' beliefs around the purpose of education?
- 9.** Why do you feel parents report that their children's teachers [are/are not] receptive to their inputs?
- 10.** Findings from CUE's FEEN jurisdiction parent survey data show that when parents feel heard (i.e., when teachers are in fact receptive to parents' input and suggestions), parents also tend to have positive perceptions. Namely, parents report believing that their children are performing well academically, that their children are happier with their education, that they themselves have greater satisfaction with their

children's education overall, and that teachers share their beliefs about schooling. Do the findings from your jurisdiction map onto CUE's findings? Or are there aspects of the responses in your jurisdiction that are dissimilar to what CUE found?

- 11.** Findings from CUE's FEEN jurisdiction parent and teacher survey data show that in many jurisdictions, parents and teachers share similar beliefs about the most important purpose of school and indicators of quality. However, neither stakeholder group perceives this to be true; that is, each group believes the other group has different goals for education and indicators of quality. Do the findings from your jurisdiction map onto CUE's findings, or are there aspects from the responses given from parents in your jurisdiction that are dissimilar to what CUE found?

Once the survey data has been thoroughly discussed, you and your stakeholder groups can decide what steps you might want to take next. These steps may include creating an action plan to close alignment gaps, such as by committing to regular discussions about the purpose of education with all stakeholder groups and adjusting jurisdiction education plans accordingly. For ideas on family engagement in education strategies that address alignment, you can consult the Strategy Finder, including the strategies that are primarily aimed at redefining the purpose of education for students.

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The “Conversation Starter tools” were co-authored by Rebecca Winthrop, Lauren Ziegler, and Mahsa Ershadi as an appendix to the “Collaborating to transform and improve education systems: A playbook for family-school engagement;” you can access that here: brookings.edu/familyengagement. The playbook is a living document that Brookings plans to add to over time. If you have questions about the material or would like to see additional topics or information, please let us know at leapfrogging@brookings.edu.

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