

Working with Parents & Carers.

Parent involvement has huge positive impact on overall learning of student.

Not much evidence about what type of involvement makes a difference.

Can mean many different things - e.g. parent participation in class (reading/writing) ...

(Not always about learning environment) but of the wider picture

- community engagement ^{PTA - eg.}
- school camp / trips etc.
- home-school partnerships (see ed / party) eg.
- community garden - NOUN.
- B.O.T.



PARENT
familiarity

Child
worth valued
etc etc

TEACHER / SCHOOL
support / true

Negatives

- Needs careful management to ensure maximum effectiveness
- over familiarity
- balancing support vs independence.
- discretion - parents must respect their children's confidentiality.

COMMUNICATION →

with learning as a focus -

- Parent / Teacher Interview -
- N. Standard Reporting -
- School Reports -

Success From Partnership

WWW: education.com.uk.gov.uk / publications / statistics /
28415 28416

Unequivocal - Parent Involvement makes a significant difference to educational achievement.

- ① Why? - Obvious? If parents care, likely to be involved.
- ② What can I do as a teacher?
 - ① Time + Commitment to establishing partnership
 - ② Right Attitude to partnership -
 - ③ Partnership has to eventually shift from single relationship to two orientated if achievement to be lifted.
 - ④ Start at home - if in school goes home can encourage - interactive homework / family work projects, study nights, etc.
 - ⑤ Two-way communication - ie Mr Owen - 'Close the Gap' - no govt or 1 requires a reply.

Main Barriers - Absence of 'Aware'!

+ Parents perceptions - (Culture)

Ase of students - Parent involvement drops off largely in secondary school.

Executive summary

This report describes the findings of a research project designed to improve understanding of the key elements of successful¹ home-school partnerships and how they operate in some different school settings. The project includes a review of evidence and an empirical research component.

The review of evidence draws on seven international case studies that have data linking home-school partnership initiatives to improvements in student achievement, and four recent evaluations of New Zealand home-school partnership initiatives. The empirical research component consists of seven New Zealand case studies (and one mini case study). These case studies cover a range of schools including primary and secondary, low and high decile, urban and rural, a special school and a kura kaupapa Māori. In each school, interviews were held with the principal and groups of teachers, parents, and where appropriate, students.

The research literature is unequivocal in showing that parental involvement makes a significant difference to educational achievement. Given this, it is not surprising that during the last decade or so there has been a high level of interest in interventions aimed at involving parents (especially "hard to reach" parents) more fully in the education of their children, as a means to raising educational achievement of children who are currently not performing to expectations in the education system. Research on interventions designed to promote parental involvement identifies a perceived need and increased demand; high levels of creativity and commitment by providers; and a range of approaches, and appreciation by families. However, as yet, there is little evidence as to what sort of involvement makes a difference to student achievement. The research literature does, however, suggest that successful home-school partnerships display many of the following features:

- Relationships in successful home-school partnerships are collaborative and mutually respectful. *of course*
- Successful partnerships are multi-dimensional, and responsive to community needs. *in what way?*
- Successful home-school partnerships are planned for; embedded within whole school development plans; well resourced and regularly reviewed. ✓
- Successful partnerships are goal oriented and focused on learning. ✓
- Effective parental engagement happens largely at home.
- There is timely two-way communication between school and parents in successful partnerships. ✓

These features are also evident in many of the New Zealand case studies. However several other key ideas emerged. Within the case studies, there are examples of initiatives designed to serve a range of different purposes. Sometimes the purpose is simply giving information to parents, sometimes it is about aligning home-school practices, and sometimes it is about the school and home working together to create something that neither partner

¹ In both the literature and in our case studies, we found little robust data linking home-school partnerships to improved outcomes for students. In this project, therefore, we extended the definition of "successful" home-school partnerships to include those where the partners had a commitment to education being a joint endeavour between school and family; a shared understanding of the purpose of the partnership and their respective roles; and, where the partners were positive about the perceived benefits of the partnership for children's learning.

could have produced on their own. Regardless of the purpose of the initiative, the development of positive relationships is an essential first step in developing successful home-school partnerships, and in some initiatives this is the whole focus.

Building successful home-school partnerships takes time and commitment. In nearly all the case study schools, teachers, parents, and sometimes children, though the principal was a key player in the establishment of successful partnerships. Teachers' attitudes also seem to be critical to the success of home-school partnerships. The manner in which power is shared is also an important influence on how partnerships develop.

Context affects the nature of partnerships and the way they develop. Home-school partnerships are perceived to be easier to establish in small schools, and in closely knit communities, and more difficult with secondary age students. "Outreach" workers can play an important role in establishing home-school partnerships in communities where the language and culture of the home is different from those of the teachers. The special character of special schools and the kura kaupapa Māori mean that the partnerships in those settings are qualitatively different from those in "mainstream" settings.

The case studies show that technologies such as mobile phones, the internet and DVDs are being used creatively to strengthen links between school and home. Several case study schools are also exploring ways of modifying current school practices such as parent-teacher interviews and homework as ways of facilitating genuine two-way communication between school and home.

One interesting finding was how little we really know about the effectiveness of home-school partnerships as strategies for reducing disparity and/or developing successful 21st century learners. The report concludes by raising some questions that we think are important to consider. Specifically it suggests that there is a need to find out more about exactly what sort of home-school partnerships are beneficial, how they are beneficial, and to whom.

interview, and, in both the New Zealand context and the research literature, there were examples of interactive homework projects that required input from families. We think, in terms of sustainability, there are advantages in attempting to embed home-school partnership ideas in current practice, rather than treating home-school partnerships as an “add on”.

With the recent introduction of the new New Zealand curriculum with its focus on 21st Century learning, and the key competencies in particular, we believe it is important to find ways to allow learning to occur across the boundary between school and homes. Schools are only one context where learning occurs and if the curriculum’s vision of developing “young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.7) is to be realised, we need to find ways of drawing together and validating student learning that occurs both in and outside school. (Perhaps kura kaupapa Māori and special schools could provide “food for thought” here.) If home-school partnerships are to support 21st Century learning, and to lift achievement they need to be thoughtfully developed to ensure clarity of the roles of the partners and the purpose of the partnership itself. This requires teachers in particular to have the opportunity to think and talk about the reasons behind partnerships, rather than becoming immediately concerned with the practicalities of implementing partnership initiatives.

The rest of this report discusses examples of successful home-school partnerships from both the research literature and our own New Zealand case studies and then draws these together to suggest areas for further thought, discussion and research.

Features of successful home-school partnerships

1. Relationships in home-school partnerships are collaborative and mutually respectful.

The case studies all showed that establishing positive relationships was an essential first step in establishing successful home-school partnerships. Many teachers interviewed felt that their attitudes towards parents were really critical in the establishment of successful home-school partnerships. This was supported by our interviews with parents in schools with successful home-school partnerships, who said that they felt valued by the school, and that the positive attitudes of the principal and teachers encouraged them to get involved in school activities and their children's education.

2. Successful home-school partnerships are multi-dimensional and responsive to community needs.

Like the successful home-school partnerships identified in the research literature, most of our case study schools had a range of different strategies in place to facilitate engagement with parents. A number of schools in this project had adapted and modified the original Ministry of Education home-school partnership model in response to the needs of their communities. By listening to feedback from parents, schools were able to provide activities (and adapt them as necessary) to more closely meet the needs of the parent community. We found that it is important that parents have input in determining what sorts of activities they want to be involved in, and that their feedback about the effectiveness of these initiatives is listened to. For example, in one particularly successful partnership, the parents themselves determined that the focus of the home-school partnership should move from the school giving them general information about teaching strategies, to a focus on the learning of their individual children. At the parents' request the school provided assessment data about student achievement and then, in response to feedback, experimented with ways of presenting data that were more meaningful for parents.

3. Successful home-school partnerships are embedded in school development plans; they are well resourced; and they are reviewed regularly. Tie in with ⑤

This project made it clear that there are some school types in New Zealand where home-school partnerships are absolutely fundamental to how the schools operate. The kura kaupapa Māori and special school case studies were examples of this. Neither of these schools could operate without home-school partnerships. In each of these schools there was a "seamlessness" between home and school, and a large area of overlap in responsibility for the education of the child between the school and the home. At the kura kaupapa Māori, school policies, practices and processes all assumed whānau participation. When whānau enrol their tamariki in the kura, they make a commitment to participating in the everyday life of the kura.

In "mainstream" schools with successful home-school partnerships, these partnerships were also embedded in the school's planning, and there was a whole school commitment to working in that particular way.

4. Successful home-school partnerships are goal oriented and focused on learning. Tie in with ⑤

Although building relationships is an important initial step in establishing home-school partnerships, if the purpose of the partnership is to lift achievement, it is important that once the relationship is established there is a shift to a more task-oriented approach. In the case study where there was the strongest emphasis on learning, teachers and parents were developing a "shared language of learning" that enabled them to talk about achievement, progress and assessment, and both partners were clear about their roles in supporting learning. At this school, "learning messages" were consistent between home and school, parents had the opportunity to talk

and think about how their own education was different from that of their children, and there was an emphasis on teachers learning from parents as well as parents learning from teachers.

5. Effective parental engagement happens largely at home.

Many of the case study schools had strategies in place to help parents support their children's learning at home. These included "study hints" in the school newsletter, the provision of specific questions for parents to ask children about their learning, interactive homework requiring input from the family, and sharing learning goals with families so they can reinforce their children's out-of-school learning.

6. There is timely two-way communication between school and parents in successful home-school partnerships.

The parents we interviewed in the empirical research component of this project were clear that if they are to be able to support their children's learning, they need to have good communication with the school, accurate information about their children's progress and information about school programmes in general. It seems there are some current practices such as homework and parent-teacher interviews that could, with slight modifications, give the parents this information while at the same time allowing teachers to draw on the expert knowledge parents have about their own children. Where home-school partnerships seemed to be working well, teachers were aware of the extent to which they could learn from parents and there was genuine two-way communication.

7. Building successful home-school partnerships takes time and commitment.

In several of our case studies, principals reported that involving parents in the education of their children became easier as time went on. If early strategies for enhancing parental engagement were seen by parents as worthwhile, parents were more likely to take a more active role in subsequent initiatives. In many schools with successful home-school partnerships, the principal was identified by teachers, parents, and sometimes students, as a key player in the development of the partnerships. The commitment of staff was also critical to the success of home-school partnerships though, and some principals were specifically recruiting staff with a commitment to the idea.

What are the barriers and enablers to successful home-school partnerships?

In the case studies we identified a range of features that either encouraged or inhibited the development of successful home-school partnerships. At a high level, teachers' beliefs about education, the purpose of schools and their role as teachers are critical in determining the sorts of partnerships that develop. The research literature also suggests that parents' perception of teachers' attitudes, how parents see their role in the education of their children, and their own experience of schooling are important influences on whether or not they become involved in their children's education.

At another level, there are important specific local or demographic factors that should be taken into account when implementing home-school partnership initiatives. These include differences in school size, community make-up and type of school. Finally, we identified some practices at the school level in the case studies that seemed to be effective in promoting and strengthening partnerships. These could serve as models for other schools.

These features are described below in relation to our case studies.

Barriers and enablers

1. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about education

Where teachers are committed to working closely with parents, and see this partnership as being beneficial to their own teaching as well as to student learning, the time and effort needed to establish such relationships is not seen by teachers as being a burden. For these teachers, home-school partnerships are not an optional 'extra' but rather they are integral and essential to their core work of teaching.

2. Engaging parents through their children

The involvement of students as active partners in home-school partnerships seems to be particularly powerful. In the case studies there were many examples of schools replacing traditional parent-teacher interviews with three-way learning conferences involving teacher, parent and student. In one school, children were taking an active role in running parent evenings designed to inform parents about school programmes, and at another, teachers were encouraging students to use the school mobile phones to ring home with "good news" stories about their achievements in class. It seems parents are interested in what their own children are doing at school and these activities can provide the motivation for parents to become more actively involved in their children's education.

3. Size of the school

At many of the case study schools, participants in this study felt that in small schools it is much easier to establish and maintain successful home-school partnerships.

4. Clearly defined sense of community

Schools that serve clearly defined communities seem to find it is easier to establish successful home-school partnerships. In areas where parents know each other well (and sometimes the teachers) they reported that it is easier to get involved in the school. In one of our case studies all the schools in an area were working together to build home-school partnerships and develop this same sense of "belonging".

5. Outreach workers

In communities where the cultural practices and the languages spoken in many homes are different from those of the teachers, successful home-school partnerships seem largely dependent on the effective participation of "outreach workers". These are people with expertise or status in the community who can act as intermediaries between school and the home.

6. Age of students

Many of the parents interviewed in this study, said that they were more confident about being **involved** in their children's education **when their children were younger**. Several parents also said their older children did not want them to be involved in their school lives. **This perhaps signals a need for the development of explicit strategies to encourage the participation of parents of secondary age students.**

7. Use of technology

Many schools are making use of technology to try and reach more parents and to involve parents who may not be able to come into the school in their children's school life. Examples of this were the use of text messaging and emails, school newsletters and class notices on-line, and making DVDs to show what children were doing at school.

8. A wide range of school-initiated communication

Schools that make communicating with parents a priority are more likely to establish successful home-school partnerships. Although successful home-school partnerships rely on *two-way* communication, an important first step in opening the lines of communication is to regularly send information out to parents. The responsibility for providing information needs to lie with the school, rather than relying on parents to seek out the information they need. Successful communication strategies can be quite diverse. For example, they could involve the incidental face to face communication that occurs when parents drop off or pick up children from school, or the children themselves could be used to convey information to parents. More formally, a wide range of written communications, including newsletters translated into community languages, could be used. Some schools in the case studies were using other media, such as the local radio, to advertise school news.

Are the success factors unique to the context?

Although every school has its own unique context, some elements of successful home-school partnerships seem able to be generalised across schools. It seems that a critical step in developing successful home-school partnerships is establishing a shared understanding of the purpose of the partnership for staff as well as parents, regardless of the context of the school. Where the idea of partnership fits with beliefs about the purpose of schooling, initiatives are more likely to be sustained and schools are in a better position to tailor partnership initiatives to meet the needs of their particular communities.

Home-school partnerships appear most deeply embedded in schools where there is a clearly articulated philosophy that sees home-school partnerships as integral to the work of the school. The importance of this was highlighted by the kura kaupapa Māori and the special school in our case studies. The special character of these schools meant that the home-school partnerships that were developing there were qualitatively different from the partnerships being developed in the "mainstream" schools. In these schools, the partnerships were more than an "add on". They were fundamental to the operation of the schools.

Home-school partnerships were also strong in mainstream schools where staff had been recruited because of their beliefs about the importance of home-school partnerships, or where teachers had spent time thinking and talking about home-school partnerships and why they were important. In these schools in the case studies, teachers clearly saw home-school partnerships as beneficial to the development of their own teaching practice as well as to student learning. Principals were key players in the development of staff thinking about partnerships. Many of the principals in the case studies were relatively new to their school and were establishing home-school partnerships, along with other initiatives, as a way to improve the performance of the school.

What is the impact of successful home–school partnerships on student presence, engagement and achievement?

The most striking finding from the review of evidence component of this project was the lack of direct evidence of a relationship between home–school partnerships and improved student achievement. This is not to say that home–school partnerships do *not* contribute to improved learning outcomes for students, just that as yet we have very little hard evidence that they do. However, even if data were available it would be difficult to make causal claims, given the complexity of the school context and the myriad of initiatives and strategies operating at any particular time and possibly contributing to any measured improvement in achievement.

As for achievement, the research evidence connecting home–school partnerships with improvements in student presence and/or engagement was patchy. In our case studies, three schools had data showing improvements in attendance and achievement over the time the home–school partnerships (along with many other initiatives) had been operating. According to the ERO reports for two other schools in the study, students were “engaged and well motivated to learn”. The ERO report for another of our case-study schools explicitly linked the school’s involvement with its community with its development of a “positive learning environment”. Anecdotally (in our interviews), principals, teachers, parents and students reported that they felt parental engagement in learning was contributing to better outcomes for students. However, none of this is robust evidence of a causal connection.

Conclusion

In the review of the literature and the empirical research component of this study we found little evidence of direct links between home–school partnerships and improved student outcomes. However, this is not to say that there are not links. This is an area where there are, as yet, few longitudinal studies specifically designed to look for the impact of such initiatives.

Possibly because this is an emerging area of interest in NZ, there is a lack of clarity over the general purposes of home–school partnerships. In some of our case-study schools the home–school partnership’s purpose seemed to be to build relationships with parents, while in others the focus seemed to be to communicate with parents. This communication could be one-way or two-way, it could be about individual students, pedagogical issues, school organisation—or any combination of these things. In other schools the partnership’s purpose was to build better alignments between home and school. Here, the focus was either on trying to get families to do more “school-like” activities at home, or on finding out about home cultural practices in an attempt to develop more culturally appropriate teaching practices at school. Finally, some partnerships seemed to be based on the idea of the school and family working together, drawing on their respective areas of expertise to create learning opportunities that neither partner could produce on their own. We suggest that if those involved in home–school partnerships were clearer about what the purpose of the partnership was, and the intended outcomes, the strategies would be more focused, and it would be feasible to attempt to measure their impact.

In the New Zealand context, it seems that the Ministry of Education home–school partnership model has been successful in many schools as a catalyst for school communities to start thinking about the value of building better relationships with parents. Many schools have been able to adapt this model to suit the individual needs of their particular communities. There are however some current school practices, such as parent-teacher conferences and homework, that we think could easily be modified to encourage greater parent engagement. Many of the New Zealand case study schools were running three-way conferences, instead of the traditional parent-teacher