Towards Best Practice in Parent Involvement in Education: A literature review

Government of South Australia

**Towards Best Practice in Parent Involvement in Education:
A literature review**

A report prepared for the Office of Non-Government
Schools and Services, Government of South Australia

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Executive summary

Background

This report presents the results of a literature review prepared for the South Australian Government Office of Non-Government Schools and Services. The aim of the research was to identify the current key directions and issues relating to the involvement of parents in children's education. In particular, the objectives of the research were to:

1. Review features or models of effective parent support, engagement and representation practice indicated by the current social policy literature

2. Make suggestions for further research about the needs of parents and schools in relation to parent support organisations.

Throughout the report, the term 'parent' refers to both parents and carers who have responsibility for raising children.

The Office of Non-Government Schools and Services was established in 2011 to provide administrative support and high level policy advice to the Minister for Education and Child Development. Its remit includes non-government schools, ethnic schools, non-government education services and the Minister's five Advisory Committees, which are:

↘ The Advisory Committee on Non-Government Schools

↘ The Planning Committee for Non-Government Schools

↘ The Ethnic Schools Board

↘ The Advisory Committee on Students With Disabilities

↘ The Multicultural Education Committee.

The work of the Ministerial Advisory Committees takes into consideration particular needs and expectations of parents and children. This review was commissioned to assist the work of these committees.

Overview of the literature

The policy landscape has changed

The involvement of parents in children's education is not a new concept and has been well-researched over the past few decades. However, what has changed is the way in which parents are positioned within the educational system. In the early days of formal schooling, parents effectively became bystanders – relinquishing the control of their children's education to the 'professionals'. As civic participation in society increased, parents were invited to become more involved with schools as volunteers, helpers in classrooms and as members of school boards and committees. This model of parental involvement, albeit limited, was reflected in education policy for many decades. The policy agenda has now shifted, with parents and educators being asked to work more closely together. This has seen the emergence of terms such as 'partnership' and 'engagement' in the education vernacular; a trend that is not limited to the domain of education, but can be seen across a number of public policy areas.

Definitions of parental involvement

The literature review initially addresses the definition of parental involvement in children's education. While there is extensive research in this area, it has been somewhat fragmented over time in response to different settings, and the definition of what actually constitutes the involvement of parents in their children's education varies widely. Various terms are often used interchangeably, or rhetorically, and they can mean different things in different contexts. This tends to reflect the emergent nature of the policy focus and practice, particularly in recent years. It is important, however, to be clear about what we mean here when we refer to 'parental involvement'. We use it as the overall term for parent activity in relation to children's education and recognise, within its scope, that there are different types and forms of activity, each of which will impact differently on children and schools.

Parent at-home involvement matters the most

In recent decades, researchers have turned their attention to analysing what type of parental involvement is most effective – particularly for student achievement. The results are resounding: the greatest impact is brought about by parents' expectations and their efforts in the home, not in the classroom. 'At home good parenting' is considered to be of most benefit to children's educational attainment and combined with sound links between the home and the school, is considered to be most effective. Research suggests that parents do not need to invest a significant amount of time or attain specific knowledge to support their children's learning. Rather, improved educational outcomes can result from a genuine interest and active engagement from parents.

School-based involvement is still important

Although the type of parental involvement that makes the most impact in terms of educational attainment is between parents and their children in the home, school-based involvement is still considered important. There are other reasons for parents to be closely involved with the school that have more to do with the needs of schools and parents, than of the direct benefit for children. Involving parents in school activities can have an important community and social function. Furthermore, achievement in learning is more likely to be fostered when both parents and schools work together to facilitate a supportive learning environment in both the home and the school. Although many researchers suggest that parental involvement in the school is most likely to benefit younger children, parents' involvement in the school community can still help adolescents as they transition through their school lives. While adolescents may not embrace the appearance of their parents in the classroom, less visible activities such as involvement with school governance, continued support at home and, importantly, valuing the benefits of education have been seen to help teens from disengaging from the education system. The key to good in-school parental involvement is for schools to view parents as co-designers and partners in education.

Parents' reasons for being involved are diverse

Parental involvement is a complex array of behaviours, attitudes and activities that occur both within the school setting, but more importantly in the home. Understanding the factors that motivate parents to become involved in their children's education is useful as this will affect how schools implement the policy calls for greater parental engagement. Parents will decide how, and to what extent, to be involved with their children's education in a number of ways that are affected by their own view of their role as parents, how equipped they feel to provide support to their children, and in response to the opportunities for involvement that both schools and their children present to them. Some will find ways to be involved in their children's education, others will respond to requests from the school, their children, or other parents, while others will not have the confidence, the skills, or the cultural frame of reference to engage. Schools also need to ensure that they do not assume that those who are not engaged do so out of a lack of interest. Researchers have found that teachers tend to view parents who are not visible within the school, particularly those from lower socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, as being apathetic about their children's education when this is rarely the case.

Barriers to involvement

There are a number of barriers that prevent parents from becoming more involved in their children's education including poor literacy or language skills, lack of confidence, lack of time due to work commitments, other caring responsibilities, or negative educational experiences. Schools have a role to play in being open to the involvement of parents and to explore a variety of ways to engage with parents and the wider community. How teachers view the involvement of parents is an influential factor in parents' decisions to participate in their children's education. Where teachers actively welcome and facilitate parent collaboration, parents are more likely to take up the opportunities that are being offered. Parental involvement can be also be seen to be strongly gendered, with women traditionally having a far greater role in their children's education, either within the home or the school. While this is changing, fathers still face barriers to being involved in their children's schooling, with difficulties ranging from work commitments to the perception that they do not have a defined role.

Finally, there is an identified need for teachers to be better educated about how to foster family-school partnerships. Most teacher training programs do not contain content on effectively engaging with families, particularly with those who are from culturally different backgrounds.

There is an increasing call from academics and policy makers that to be truly effective, education needs to be a partnership between families, schools and the community. This partnership approach mirrors the increasing emphasis on parental engagement, a term that is making an appearance in the policy language. At the same time, many educators are shunning the traditional model of education and embracing more holistic methods of schooling that support young people in many aspects of their lives, including their physical, social and emotional needs as well as their academic achievements. Innovative programs are beginning to emerge, particularly in the US, such as community schools or full-service schools, that are fostering partnerships between a range of professionals and the wider community and where families are expected to be involved in a variety of ways. Similar initiatives are beginning to emerge in Australia, although often located at schools in disadvantaged locations or where support is focused on a particular group, such as teenage mothers. Frameworks and models of engagement are also being produced, such as the *Family-School Partnerships Framework* developed by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC). However, as yet, few initiatives have been evaluated to determine whether these have the desired effect of creating better partnerships between families, schools and communities, empowering parents and teachers and importantly, helping children to learn.

Not all stakeholders are equal

Not all stakeholders are equipped to work in this way and many parents, particularly those with low levels of educational attainment, from low-socio-economic backgrounds and/or from diverse ethnic backgrounds, face particular challenges to work successfully in equitable partnerships. So too, teachers and school administrators cannot be assumed to have the requisite skills to engage with their communities in the ways that are being expected. For partnerships in education to be truly successful, there needs to be a robust framework for implementation that takes into account the many different needs of every school community. Schools need to be given the opportunity to innovate, with the associated risk of failing, to identify partnerships practices that will work for their unique community. This is a challenge for all stakeholders, including policy-makers and funders.

Implications for policy

Take advantage of the maturing discourse about parental involvement to develop a common framework and terminology at systems' levels so as to be clear about:

↘ the different types of involvement

↘ their different needs for support

↘ planning for schools' accountability for parental involvement

↘ evaluation of outcomes.

Further research

This review indicated several areas for future investigation. Further research would help to inform future policy and practice around the engagement of parents' in their children's education and could also provide a good resource for schools looking to identify best practice initiatives, either locally or elsewhere.

Research on this topic is scarce in South Australia. Examination of the scope of parental involvement in schools across South Australia would assist improved policy and practice in the local context. Areas to explore might include:

↘ the types and extent of parental involvement both within the school and in the home

↘ how much time parents have to be involved either at school or at home and how much they would like to be involved

↘ how parents view their role in relation to their children's education and whether they believe they can impact on their children's educational attainment

↘ what information, education and/or resources do schools/parent organisations provide to help parents support their children's learning at home?

↘ whether parents are willing to undertake education or training about how they can help their children achieve at school?

↘ what types of school-community-family links do parents/schools/parent organisations or representative bodies think would be effective in enhancing children's education?

↘ what teacher education is needed to support parent involvement?

↘ examples of school-community-family partnerships in South Australia and models of best practice.

While there is a good body of research regarding parental involvement in school governance, such as through school boards or councils, or parent-teacher associations, very little literature was found regarding the effectiveness of traditional, funded parent organisations, such as state or national parent representative bodies. It would be beneficial to explore the role that such organisations play or can play in supporting parental involvement.

It may be useful to explore whether parental engagement practices differ between government and non-government schools and identify good practice models of engagement from both sectors.

Introduction

Ever since the introduction of modern compulsory schooling in Australia in the latter part of the 19th century, the issue of who is primarily responsible for the education of young people has been debated. While many argue strongly that the family has the most important role to play in ensuring sound educational outcomes for children, there are those who suggest the formalisation of education effectively cemented the state as the educational guardians of the nation's youth. In increasingly industrialised societies, education was seen as the means to ensure that citizens were equipped with the knowledge and skills to enhance the productivity of a nation. At a time when citizen involvement in government was far less common than today, the division between state and family tended to be absolute and families effectively relinquished control for the education of their children.

The rise of citizen participation in the post-war period marked a new phase in the relationship between schools and families. Parents (usually mothers) were involved in various activities within schools across most of the western world and became a common feature of the education system. Much of this changed as women entered the workforce and had less opportunity to participate in time-demanding activities during the working day. However, the model of parental engagement premised around physical involvement in school activities persisted.

More recently, both policy-makers and practitioners suggest that, for education to be truly successful, a partnership approach is needed between educators and families. The private school system in Australia, and elsewhere, has embraced this model for many years. In many non-government schools, the concept of the wider school community is embedded in their educational philosophies. Similarly, parents who exercise choice in where their children are educated often have a vested interest in ensuring they are receiving the best value for their investment. The public education system has been slower to act, however both State and Federal governments are now placing parental involvement as a pivotal element in their educational policies. The Australian Government's current education policy places parental and community engagement firmly at the heart of its plan for the management of schools (Liberal National Party, 2013). This presents both challenges and opportunities for all parties.

Defining the involvement of parents

One of the challenges of researching the involvement of parents in their children's education is in pinpointing exactly what we mean by 'involved parents'. The area has been well-researched and, as will be seen here, over the past few decades there has been a rich variety of work discussing various aspects of parental involvement in schooling. There has been a proliferation of interest in research about the involvement of families in children's education (Castelli and Pepe, 2008). They analysed the literature about parental and family involvement in education in academic databases from the mid-1960s, when research into this area first emerged. Their study found that the number of published papers has increased from the low 100s between 1966-1970 to over 4000 between 2001 and 2005, with much of that growth occurring in the preceding 15 years. Their study focused only on publications that contained the terms 'parental' or 'family' involvement and did not consider the many other terms relating to this topic used by researchers so we can safely assume there are considerably more records in circulation. The sheer volume of this material has made the task of distilling the information more challenging.

This review has identified a number of terms and meanings that are used to describe the involvement of parents, and there is much discussion about parents' impact on their children's educational outcomes. The terms 'parental engagement', 'parental involvement', 'parental advocacy' and 'parental representation' are some of the most commonly used expressions, however researchers are often divided on what each of these actually mean. To add to the complexity, these terms are often used interchangeably and they can mean different things in different contexts. The various definitions used means that it is difficult to find a definition of parental involvement that is universally accepted and unambiguous (Emerson et al, 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to attempt an understanding of what these terms mean and how they are referred to in the literature.

It was found that there are, broadly, four ways in which parents participate in the education of their children:

i.   Participation in educational activities (such as homework support) or activities within the school such as a classroom assistant, attending school events and meeting with teachers

ii.   More active connection with their children's education such as nurturing their learning at home, reinforcing the school curriculum, and also developing strong relationships with teachers and the wider school community

iii. Being *advocates* for children to help them navigate the school system – such as for children with special needs, children with disabilities or gifted children

iv.   Becoming a *representative* on behalf of other parents – usually within the school governance system or other management group, either as a participant or as an influencer through school forums.

Parental participation in education activities

Berthelsen and Walker use Reynolds' and Clements' (2005) broad definition of parental involvement which is "parental behaviour with, or on behalf of children, at home or at school, as well as the expectations that parents hold for children's future education" (Berthelsen and Walker, 2008, p 35). Jeynes' definition of parental involvement is also all-encompassing, stating that it refers to "parental participation in the educational process and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2005, p 245, in Hornby & Witte, 2010a, p 59). Many researchers traditionally viewed parental involvement as "purposeful actions by parents to engage with their child's school, or school related activities" (Clinton and Hattie, 2013, p 324). However they suggest that, more recently, parental involvement is seen as the 'tacit' aspects of parenting, such as expectations of children's academic performance, communication and parenting styles.

Closer parental connection with children's education

Emerson et al (2012) make a distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement. They suggest that the term 'parental involvement' is generally used to refer only to those activities that take place in the school, such as volunteering, meeting with teachers, attending school events and parent-teacher conferences. They prefer to use the term 'parental engagement' and adopt Muller's (2009) definition of the term as "partnerships between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness about the benefits of becoming engaged in their children's education, and providing them with the skills to do so" (Emerson et al, 2012, p 26).

Although the terms parent involvement and parent engagement are often used interchangeably, researchers and practitioners make important distinctions between the two and use them intentionally (Cronin, 2008). She also observes that definitions of 'parent involvement' tend to be focused on programs or activities that are initiated and directed by schools to try and involve parents in school activities or to teach parents skills for reinforcing school tasks at home. Cronin suggests that the term 'parent engagement' is increasingly being adopted by practitioners. She cites Pushor (2007) as describing engagement as a distinct and more meaningful type of relationship or interaction. In this context

> "engagement implies enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial"

(Pushor, 2007, p 3, in Cronin, 2008, p 48).

Parent advocacy

Parent advocacy is a specific type of parental involvement, whereby parents become strong supporters of their children in the education system – either to address specific problems, or to challenge teachers or a school around issues relating to inclusion or the specific requirements of a child. Much of the literature around parent advocacy focuses on gifted children or children with special needs. Baker (1997) notes that when a parent becomes an advocate, it is usually because they feel it is their role to champion on behalf of their child within the school system and if they did not address the issue, no-one else would. In these instances, Baker suggests that while parents may not have expertise in the teaching arena, they did feel that, as the parent, they had the right and an obligation to question the school on behalf of their child. Kidder stresses the importance of differentiating between parent advocacy and parental engagement. She notes that advocacy is generated by three main motivations: a desire to fix something for their own children (often related to special education); anger about the imposition of a new policy; or a collective drive to create a new service or program. She says that "the greatest motivator of a parent advocacy is always a 'problem'" (Kidder, 2011, n.p). She suggests that it is those with the greatest social capital who have the most power to play an advocacy role. "Doors open to those with the social capital to open them" (Kidder, 2011, n.p.). This is echoed by Vincent (2001) who notes that parental participation in educational decision-making (such as that occurring in the context of school forums) is heavily structured by social class. She describes it as 'parent agency' and suggests that "opportunities for exercising agency are sought and taken up mostly by the professional middle-classes, secure in a sense of entitlement" (Vincent, 2001, p 347).

Kidder notes that while special education is often the driver of individual advocacy, there are issues that may lead to some form of collective advocacy. She uses the example of a French language program in Canada that the government planned to abolish in New Brunswick. The outcry from parents in support of the program led to them taking the province to court and having the decision reversed. Kidder highlights this as a good example of the strength that parent advocates can have – "particularly those who are identified as a group that votes and that has access to the media. It is also an example of how difficult it can be to balance the needs of the whole system against the needs or desires of individual groups" (Kidder, 2011, n.p). It can therefore be seen that powerful lobby groups, with the financial and social capital to exert influence, can apply pressure that can result in changes to educational systems that benefit a relatively small proportion of people.

Parent representation

While parent advocacy takes the form of individual or collective action, parent representation is usually found within the realm of school governance. This is often seen as a 'legitimate' way for the parents to be active, albeit exercised within often strict confines of school policies and guidelines. Bauch and Goldring use the terms 'parent participation' and 'parent empowerment' to explore parental involvement in the context of school governance. They define parent participation as "the involvement of parents in providing input or being consulted about school affairs or their children's progress without exercising influence" (1998, p 20). On the other hand, parent empowerment "refers to the parents' role in exercising influence within a school, typically through decision-making forums" (Bauch and Goldring, 1998, p 20).

Vincent and Martin, in their study of parent forums in secondary schools in the United Kingdom, explored the factors that affect the formation and expression of parental 'voice' in schools. They use 'voice' as an inclusive term to mean a variety of "reactions and interventions by parents to a range of educational issues" (Vincent and Martin, 2002, p 109). They suggest that parents' voices can be expressed in a number of ways and developed a typology to describe the various elements of parental agency:

"silence (inaction, 'waiting and seeing'); *conversation* (dialogue, engaging with the system); *storming* (direct protest, anger); *by-pass* (making private arrangements, eg employing tutors); (and) *exit* (moving the child from the school)" (Vincent and Martin, 2002, p 114).

These four definitions represent the key types of participation of parents in their children's education. While they may be referred to by alternative names, it is important to be mindful of the context in which each of these terms are used.

History and context

Parental involvement in the education of children is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. The introduction of compulsory education, around the latter part of the 19th century in most western nations, marked the significant shift of responsibility for the education of young people from the family to the state. Prior to this, families (often with the backing of religious institutions) had the primary responsibility for ensuring children were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to become productive citizens. As society modernised, government educational systems were established to provide a more unified approach to education. Over time, school systems became more complex, teaching became a skilled profession and the role of the family in schooling assumed a more auxiliary role.

Epstein (2010), one of the foremost academics writing on parental engagement, outlines the important changes that have occurred in the patterns of connections between the home and the school in the United States over time. She notes that in the early 19th century, schools were predominantly controlled by parents and the community with the home, the church and the school all supporting the same learning goals. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the division between the home and schools began to increase with teachers starting to teach subjects that parents were not familiar with. At that time, parents were expected to instil in their children good behaviour and attitudes to prepare them for school. More recently, family-school relations have shifted again in response to societal changes demanding more accountability by schools, and parents wanting better education for their children as well as greater involvement with schooling.

Lareau (1987) highlights three stages of family-school interaction over the previous century in the United States, from a time when family life and children's education were intertwined (with parents having no involvement in the cognitive development of their children) to a period when mass schooling became the norm and parents were involved in supporting and maintaining schools (yet still remaining uninvolved in their children's cognitive development). The third, and current, period, Lareau asserts, has seen an increase in parents' efforts to reinforce the curriculum and support their children's cognitive development at home, as well as become actively involved in the classroom.

Brien and Stelmach (2009), examining the Canadian context, highlight how the state has become more involved in family matters over the years. They cite Magsino (1995) who suggests that, as laws were introduced requiring parents to maintain, protect and educate their children, the power of the state in relation to child rearing has become an established fact. Brien and Stelmach state that this is a common development across the modern world as "society as a whole has an interest in, and benefits from, a successful public school system" (Brien and Stelmach, 2009, p 2). Muller (2009) notes that research undertaken by Saulwick and Muller (1998) identified that, not only did parents relinquish responsibility for teaching their children work-related skills and academic knowledge, but they also came to expect that schools would instil values and behavioural norms as well. As such, the traditional boundaries between the role of the family and of the school became blurred.

While the involvement of parents in the education of their children has always been an important feature of the education system in most developed countries, their status has altered considerably over time. The emergence of modern school systems has changed the dynamic between parents and schools and with these shifts in the parental role, education policy has also moved to shape and define parental involvement. Brook and Hancock (2000) point to the publication of the Plowden report in 1967 (which made suggestions for significant reform of the primary school system in England) as the turning point for parent-school relations. Plowden's research made a correlation between children's achievement and the number of parental school visits, and they recommended improving home-school links. Bakker and Denessen (2007) trace the origin of the concept of parental involvement to the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Europe. At that time, language programs were developed aimed at preventing 'educational delays' of children from low socio-economic and minority ethnic backgrounds. Targeted at their parents, these programs were premised on creating attitudes and behaviours that were considered 'spontaneous' in middle-class families. Since that time, parental involvement has become an established feature of education policies across the developed world.

Policy shifts

The transition of parents from the sidelines of their children's schooling to being central players in their children's education over the past few decades has coincided with considerable changes in the way citizens engage in public policy more generally. Vincent and Martin (2002) note that the changing relationship between parents and schools over the past 50 years has broadly reflected the way that the public has been involved in the state. As Lareau notes, "as in other social relationships, family-school interactions carry the imprint of the larger social context: Acceptance of a particular type of family-school relationship emerges as the result of social processes" (Lareau, 1987, p 74).

Blackmore and Hutchinson (2010) point to the policy shifts in the education system in the State of Victoria over the past few decades as being typical of what happened across Australia. They note that, during the 1970s, parental and teacher involvement was based on social democratic notions of local representation to improve schooling. This changed in the 1980s when parents became viewed as active participants in and agents of school reform. This period also marked the inclusion of parent and teacher organisations in state policy making processes to support participation by parents and students. In the 1990s, the authors note, education was restructured to service the economy and parents had greater choice – resulting in competition between the public and private school sectors. More recently, they observe that parents have a multitude of ways to be involved, as both choosers and consumers and as partners in their children's learning.

Robinson and Ward (2005) point to similar policy strands that have shaped the educational reforms in New Zealand. The first was the democratic-populist strand which viewed parental participation in school governance as a form of participatory democracy. The second was the managerialist strand which viewed local governance as a way of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of school management while retaining state control. The third, market-oriented, strand was intended to promote competition between schools by giving parents and students greater choice, continuing the neo-liberal perspective that was driving the restructuring of the New Zealand public sector at the time.

More recently, government policy has begun to increase the emphasis on the importance of parental involvement in education. The Australian trend towards a reduction in bureaucratic involvement in school management and greater autonomy in school decision making reflects policy shifts in other countries that have embarked on programs to transform education. Hornby and Witte (2010b) note that there has been a proliferation of the concept of parent involvement in education policy across the world in recent years. They state that the 'Children's Plan' in the UK, the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation in the US and the 'Schooling Strategy' in New Zealand are all initiatives that target parental involvement as a key variable in educational improvement. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) note that the Schools White Paper released in 2010, which outlines the current UK Government's strategy for school improvement, means that schools will be accountable to parents for the progress and achievement of pupils. This strategy, together with the *Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances,* reinforces the role of parents in education and in creating a good home learning environment. While in Canada there is no federal department of education, Brien and Stelmach (2009) note that many individual provinces have developed policies that entrench parental involvement in education. Robinson and Ward (2005) note that the major educational reforms in New Zealand during the early 1990s saw the highly centralised and regulated systems of administration for New Zealand schools replaced by a model of single-school lay governance. This resulted in each school being governed by a board of trustees comprising the principal, a staff representative and elected parent representatives. The New Zealand Education Act devolves the responsibility for managing all aspects of a school to the school's board, including the hiring and appraisal of the principal. The Australian Government, in its recent educational policy, has placed parent and community engagement at the heart of school management and is calling for principals, teachers and parents to have a greater say in what happens in their school (Liberal National Party, 2013).

Brien and Stelmach note that, globally, there is a move towards the "the legal entrenchment of parent involvement though bodies such as school councils" (2009, p 2). They examine the legal context of public education in Canada and note that teacher-parent interactions occur within a complex set of legal frameworks and cultural factors, including international conventions on children's rights and statutory rights and responsibilities ascribed to parents and teachers. They point out that this situation is complicated further by "a matrix of socioeconomic conditions, ethnic backgrounds, and a time-honoured division of labour between parents and professionals" (Brien and Stelmach, 2009, p 2).

Challenges

It is at the grass-roots where the impact of the policy shift is most keenly felt and often these transitions are not without their challenges. Bauch and Goldring (1998) writing about the school restructuring program in the United States at the time, observe that the shift in the United States towards school-based management, teacher participation in school decision making, parental choice and the establishment of local school governing bodies presented opportunities for both teachers and parents to become more empowered through participation. They point out that the underlying assumption of reform is to create partnerships between teachers and parents aimed at enhancing schooling for children. However, they suggest that these reforms also involved a redefinition of roles and relationships in schools and a redistribution of power which may present a challenge to teachers' professional autonomy, resulting in them resisting greater parental participation. They note that moves by many countries to increase parental involvement and raise the professionalism and power of educators, potentially introduces conflict into the interaction between teachers and parents.

Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) have a similar view and argue that policies about parental involvement both control and empower parents and teachers. They observe that parents have moved to the centre of education reform to be positioned as 'key stakeholders', 'partners', 'consumers' and 'decision makers' in local school communities. They cite Biddulph, Biddulph, and Biddulph (2003) as suggesting that policies that advocate parental involvement "ignore the complexity of relations between schools and family, teachers and parents" (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010, p 502). Soliman (1991), examining government proposals for educational reform in New South Wales during the late 1980s, notes the language that was being used to describe the involvement of parents in education presented limited opportunities for real participation in decision making. Instead, the author suggests that the NSW government, by referring to parental 'involvement' rather than 'participation', implied that parent and community input into school improvement is not required. Soliman believed that the rhetoric of government policy about parental involvement could come into conflict with the community expectations it created with parents or community members wanting a greater role in school decision making.

The impact of parental involvement

Does parental involvement in schools have an impact on education?

As we have seen, the general shifts in the way that citizens increasingly engage with government have impacted on the relationships between parents and schools. This has been accompanied by policy makers drawing conclusions from some research about parent effect on student outcomes. The view of some, that parental involvement equates to greater success at school, is perhaps best characterised as early research with very broad findings that are now being subjected to much deeper analysis. New research is increasingly being produced that highlights the many and complex variables that lead to school achievement by children.

As Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) note, early researchers tended to draw links between parental involvement in schools and student outcomes, which led to the conclusion that in-school involvement by parents was the cause. However, they point out that the design of many of the early studies did not examine the complex variables that impact on student achievement, in particular socio-economic variables. They therefore state that "without this control, conclusions about the effect of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment were premature" (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p 15). They point to several examples: one being the research findings of Okpala et al (2001) who examined the relationship between parental involvement (in terms of hours spent volunteering in schools), school spend per child, parental socio-economic status and school achievement in North Carolina. This study showed that neither dollars spent nor parental hours spent in the school were related to student achievement. In fact, the only factor that could be associated with attainment was family social class. Desforges and Abouchaar suggest that this, and other similar studies, demonstrate that parental involvement within the actual school setting were not related to pupil achievement.

Clinton and Hattie (2013) also note that recent researchers are disputing the link between parental involvement in school settings and successful educational outcomes. They cite Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) as suggesting that there is little robust evidence to support the impact of family intervention on academic and learning related outcomes. Clinton and Hattie reviewed several meta-analyses that examined the influence of parental involvement on student achievement. They point to a number of researchers, such as Jeynes (2005), Fan and Chen (2001), Rosenzweig (2000), Hong and Ho (2005) and Fan and Williams (2010) who have all concluded that parental expectations are a more significant predictor of academic achievement than parental involvement within the school. The study by Fan and Williams analysed a representative cohort of over 15000 high school students and found that high parental aspirations for their child's secondary education were positively predictive of student's self-efficacy, engagement and motivation in both mathematics and English. Fan and Williams suggest that this may be due to students' internalisation of parental values. Clinton and Hattie note that the key messages are that parental influences are a multiple set of influences, not one single influence. Also that parent expectations and their discussions with their children about learning were the most critical success factors in children's school achievement.

Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) are critical of this and state that education policies in Australia and other countries have been predominantly based on largely unresearched assumptions that link student outcomes to parental involvement *in schools*. They use the term 'institutionalising parent involvement' to describe the way in which policy makers are increasingly placing parental involvement in education at the centre of education policy. They suggest that recent policies have been influenced by a number of elements: research that links family literacy and learning; policies that promote parental choice; and research that indicates the impact of family background on student academic outcomes. Brien and Stelmach (2009) also note that researchers have mixed views about whether parents' involvement in their children's school impacts positively on student performance. However, they suggest that this has not prevented governments from initiating policies and practices that position parents as key stakeholders in children's education. Baker (1997) writing from the US perspective, points out that parents have not had a great deal of opportunity to have their say in the debate on parental involvement in education. Instead, policies, programs and practices tend to be developed based on what other people think parents want and how they can be effective partners in their children's education.

Does parental involvement at home have an impact on education?

However, as the meaning of what constitutes parental involvement has broadened, the research being undertaken to examine its impact has become more probing. In particular, researchers have been looking closely at the effect of parental engagement in both the school setting and the home. There is little doubt that this is a much-debated field and not all researchers are convinced of the link between academic attainment and parental involvement. However, as will be seen, this view tends to depend on the model of parental involvement that is being examined.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) in their earlier, seminal, review of the research around parental involvement suggest that the term is a catch-all phrase for a number of different activities, including at home parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers and attending school functions, through to participating in school governance. They suggest that, while it is easy to describe what parents do in the name of involvement, it is much more difficult to determine whether this activity influences school outcomes, bearing in mind the number of factors that influence them. Their detailed analysis of a number of studies on parental involvement across the European Union, the United States, Australia and New Zealand explored the link between student achievement and parental involvement and found that the most influential factor in children's educational achievement is 'at home good parenting'. They conclude that "parental involvement in the form of interest in the child and (which) manifests in the home as parent-child discussions can have a significant positive effect on children's behaviour and achievement even when the influence of background factors such as social class or family size have been factored out" (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p 28).

Emerson et al (2012) agree, noting that the role of parents in the school environment is very different to their role in the home, thus the effect that parental involvement in school has on a child's academic achievement is difficult to determine. They point to reports dating back to the 1960s in both the United Kingdom and the United States which insist that schools make little difference to student outcomes. They note that, since then, "many studies have confirmed that family background and other non-school factors are more influential than schools in determining academic outcomes" (Emerson et al, 2012, p 7). They suggest that it is difficult to quantify the relative influence of parental involvement due to "the difference in parental engagement across studies; lack of standardisation of parental engagement approaches (thereby making it impossible to 'tease apart' or isolate the relative impact of home and school); and lack of agreed measures of parental engagement" (Emerson et al, 2012, p 8). Despite this, they state that there is broad consensus that positive parental engagement significantly influences student academic attainment. Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008) also support Desforges and Abouchaar's findings and state that recent research suggests that parent involvement may be most beneficial in contributing to student achievement by parents' influence on student beliefs and behaviours that lead to achievement.

Hornby and Witte (2010a) point to research undertaken in New Zealand that also supports the view that parental involvement is most effective outside of the school environment. They state that a review conducted of parental involvement by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research found little empirical evidence to support the benefits of home-school partnerships. In contrast, the review stated, there was extensive literature that supported the beneficial effects of "naturally occurring or spontaneous parental involvement in education" (Bull et al 2008, p 57, in Hornby and Witte, 2010a, p 61). Hornby and Witte suggest that this is supported by Hattie's (2009) synthesis of research on educational interventions in New Zealand schools, which found that 'home school-programs' had a much smaller mean effect size (0.16) than 'parental involvement' which had a mean effect size of 0.51.

Emerson et al (2012) note that while there are difficulties in quantifying the influence of parental involvement, there is still broad consensus that parental involvement of particular kinds significantly influences student academic attainment. Clinton and Hattie (2013) point to a study by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) that found that the most powerful interventions were those that supported parents to assist their children's learning at home while also supporting the teacher's in-class delivery. Muller (2009), too, points to a significant body of research that indicates that parental involvement impacts positively on student learning outcomes. He notes that much of this research concludes that "the most accurate predictor of student achievement is the extent to which the family is involved in the student's education", and that the "family's contribution remains critical from the earliest years of childhood to the end of secondary schooling" (Muller, 2009, p 13). Emerson et al (2012) point out that there is an important distinction between involving parents in schooling and engaging parents in learning. They note that it is the latter that has the greatest influence over academic achievement. The authors state that "while involving parents in school activities may have an important community and social function, it is the engagement of parents in learning in the home that brings about positive changes in children's academic attainment" (Emerson et al, 2012, p 26). They suggest that parental engagement promotes shared responsibility for education between both parents and teachers and enables the learning process to move beyond the school environment. Therefore, parental support and a good home environment can motivate students to achieve and learn. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) note that enabling parents to work within schools, while not necessarily resulting in improved academic attainment, can still have potential benefits for parents as well as for schools by helping them forge better links with the community and by contributing to the openness and accountability of the school.

Academic socialisation

Berthelsen and Walker (2008) point out that much of the literature suggests that children have higher educational achievement when schools and families work together. Berthelsen and Walker also note that, while there is extensive research on the links between parenting and children's academic achievement, there is less known about how parents socialise their children in terms of school-related behaviours. They refer to 'academic socialisation' as defined by Taylor, Clayton and Rowley, 2004, as "the variety of parental beliefs and behaviours that influence children's school-related development" (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, p 35). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) have examined this in detail and suggest three theories that characterise how parents influence children's educational outcomes – modelling, reinforcement and direct instruction. Modelling school-related behaviours and attitudes involves demonstrating to children that school-related activities are important and worthy of adult time and interest. This might include asking children about their school day, talking with a teacher after school, reviewing homework, attending school events or volunteering. Modelling theory says that children will take note of those behaviours of adults held in high regard and emulate them. Educational outcomes are also influenced by parents reinforcing aspects of school-related learning such as showing interest, providing praise and rewarding achievement. Reinforcement theory says that children will engage in more of the rewarded behaviour, thus doing well at school. Direct instruction, by way of parents engaging in direct, open-ended questions and requests is likely to promote greater cognitive ability and factual knowledge in children. The authors acknowledge that parental involvement is just one of several variables that influence educational outcomes in children. Other variables include the child's abilities and development level, teacher and school effectiveness and broader socio-cultural attitudes.

Emerson et al (2012) note that the common principles for effective parental involvement in learning are academic socialisation (parental behaviours that positively influence learning), the parental role construction (parents seeing themselves as important players in their children's education) and parenting styles that support the child and encourage conversations during the school years. They also note that data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) "indicates that parents do not need to invest a significant amount of time or acquire specialised knowledge in order to assist their children in learning. Instead, improved educational outcomes result from a genuine interest and active engagement from parents" (OECD 2011, in Emerson et al, 2012).

Other benefits of parental involvement

Muller (2009) suggests that student outcomes are not the only effects of parental involvement that should be measured. He notes that research has demonstrated that outcomes such as skills, both cognitive and non-cognitive, are important for later learning and for success in the labour market. Muller examined the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) survey, which measured the effect of social capital on the creation of human capital, and thus the impact on earnings of non-cognitive skills. He points to the finding that personality traits are an important contributor to people's capacity to earn. He therefore argues that inclusion in a family-school partnership, being a form of social network, can help children acquire social attributes, which may assist them in later life. "Thus partnerships work in two ways: towards the individual by enhancing the acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and towards the wider society by contributing to the development of social capital" (Muller, 2009, p 16).

Studies, such as those undertaken by Baker (1997) have found that parents believe their participation within the school setting is beneficial for children, as well as for the school. Asking focus groups of parents in New York about their involvement in their children's schooling, she found that the most common way was for them to be physically present in the classroom as volunteers or in supporting school outings. Those who were involved in this way did so as they believed their involvement would make an important contribution to the school, thus indirectly improving the quality of education that their child would receive. Hornby and Witte (2010a) point to studies that show the benefits of parental involvement are multiple for children, parents and teachers. For children, the benefits reportedly include improvements in attitudes, behaviour and school attendance; for parents, benefits are said to include increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in their own education; while for teachers, parental involvement is reported to improve parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and the school climate. Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008), in addition to the benefits of parental influence on children's success, suggest that parents benefit by involvement in their child's schooling by helping them to develop stronger beliefs in their ability to help their children succeed. They suggest that effective parent involvement strategies may also lead to benefits for teachers by making them feel more positive about their teaching ability, as well as helping to facilitate improved parent-teacher relationships. Hoover-Dempsey et al (2002) note that when teachers offer advice on how to help their children learn, parents appreciate the support given. Also, teachers who invite parent involvement are generally viewed as better teachers by parents.

Borgonovi and Montt (2012) reported on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This study undertook a cross-national comparison of parental involvement across 14 countries and found that parents have a significant influence on the cognitive and non-cognitive development of their children by participating in a range of activities in the home. They define parental involvement "as parents' active commitment to spend time to assist in the academic and general development of their children" (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012 p 13). They state that children of involved parents develop cognitive skills (such as language and phonetic awareness) as well as metacognitive skills (such as planning, monitoring and regulating the learning process). They suggest this occurs as children of involved parents have access to relevant information, their parents have better understanding of their abilities, they have more opportunities to practice and because teachers pay more attention to children whose parents are involved. They state that "parents are key to fostering positive attitudes towards school and academic activities, not only through active involvement, but also by what they do and what they value – their own reading habits and engagement" (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012 p 14).

Parental involvement matters

The types and forms of parental involvement vary considerably and range from the day to day support and influence that parents give their children about education, through to active support within schools. Although, as we have seen, the type of parental involvement that makes the most impact in terms of educational attainment is that between parents and their children in the home, school-based involvement is still important. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) suggest that while research shows that parental involvement in the school has little impact on pupil achievement, the relationship is not a linear one. Therefore, parental involvement in the school can benefit in other ways, such as communicating ways in which parents can support children and, thus, be an enabler of at-home involvement. They also note that there may be other reasons for parents working in schools that have more to do with the needs of schools or of parents, than of the benefit to children. Clinton and Hattie (2013) suggest that how important parental involvement is viewed depends on who you ask. They point to a British study by Harris and Goodall (2008) which found that parents, teachers and students had different views on the value of parental involvement. Parents saw their most important involvement as being offering 'support to students' (and least about helping with improved behaviour), students saw it more about offering 'moral support' (and least about behaviour), while teachers saw it more about being a way to improve behaviour and support for the school.

Baker (1997) in her examination of school districts in New York City found that common types of involvement within the school were as a classroom volunteer, a 'room mother', going on field trips or assisting in the office. Another common means of involvement was being involved with the Parents and Teachers Association and undertaking a range of social, fundraising and planning activities. Parents also had contact with the school through parent-teacher meetings, attending school events such as concerts and, to a lesser extent, being involved in decision-making processes, such as committees. Parents were also involved with supervising homework. Although Baker's study had a relatively small sample size and was contained within a specific geographic area, it reveals some of the most traditional forms of parental involvement, which occur either within the school or at home. Berthelsen and Walker (2008) (citing Dimock, O'Donoghue and Robb, 1996) note that parental involvement covers a range of dimensions that includes school choice, involvement in school governance, involvement in teaching and learning within the school and the home, discussions with teachers, homework support and communication between the school and the home.

Parental involvement at different stages of children's education

School-based parental activities are more likely to have a positive influence in the early years when children need additional support to adjust to a new learning environment (Emerson et al, 2012). They suggest gains in learning are more likely when parents and schools work together to facilitate a supportive learning environment in both the home and the school. Crimm (1992) found that the greatest effects of in-school parental involvement were seen in junior primary (kindergarten to Grade 3) and that they decreased with the age of the child, being least effective in high school (in Clinton and Hattie, 2013). The literature also suggests that the type of parental involvement changes as children grow older with parents becoming less involved directly with schools, but more involved at home (Hornby and Witte, 2010a). Primary-aged children are likely to be more willing to see their parents involved in schooling than adolescents, who are wanting more independence (Walker and Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). There are studies that show the positive effects of parental participation in the early years on children's behaviour at home, school readiness and adaptation to elementary school (Lamb-Parker et al, 2001). However, many researchers insist that parental engagement is just as important to children in the middle years of school, it just may not be as visible. Hornby and Witte (2010a) note that parental involvement is especially important during the time that children are making the transition to adolescence. They point to researchers such as Elias et al (2007) who emphasise that good parent-school-community partnerships are important at this stage in children's lives to help with successful school and teen transitions. They also cite other researchers, such as Hayes and Chodkiewicz (2006), who examined school-community relationships in Australia and who believe that school-community links are important in the middle years because of the increased incidence of pupil disengagement during this time. Hornby and Witte state that Epstein and Dauber's (1991) study in the United States found that parental engagement programs tended to lessen after primary school. Thus "parents were receiving less information and guidance on how to be involved with their children's education at the very time that they were trying to cope with the changing type and complexity of (parental involvement) with their middle school age children" (Hornby and Witte, 2010a, p 60).

Involvement on the school's terms

Brien and Stelmach (2009) suggest that many of the practices that have become accepted as parent involvement are 'school-centric' practices which are prescribed by teachers. They suggest that activities such as volunteering at school, monitoring children's report cards, attending parent-teacher conferences and participating in school committees are conventional determinants of what an 'involved' parent looks like. They suggest that it has been argued that these practices "assume a homogenous parent population who willingly accept and comply with hetero-normative expectations" (Brien and Stelmach, 2009, p 4). Muller (2009) also suggests that teachers often only want contact with parents on their own terms. He notes that there is a difference between *'school-centric'* engagement with parents and *'school-initiated'* engagement. He notes that Bastiani (2000) describes the former as the school engaging parents 'on its own terms' which effectively reduces the role of the parent to a subsidiary one. However, *'school-initiated'* engagement sees parents as 'co-equals' in education and supports parents to understand their role as the first educators of their children. Mills and Gale (2004) also suggest that in the 'school-centred' model of school-community relations parents and teachers do not necessarily have an equal share of decision-making. They suggest that those who are not involved in schooling face marginalisation, while the 'dominant', who possess the cultural capital, are able to "mobilise class advantage and lobby for their own agenda" (Mills and Gale, 2004, p 278).

Societal changes

Epstein (2010) describes four recent trends that explain why changes are needed in theories of family-school relations: 1) more mothers with higher education, 2) the growth of baby and child care, 3) greater government regulation and focus on parent involvement, and 4) changing family structures including the increase of single parent families and mothers working outside the home. She suggests that, as families have changed, schools have had to adapt to accommodate different types of families. Some schools have made the adjustment, however others have not. Epstein has undertaken considerable work in the field of parental engagement over the past 20 years and says that research shows that partnership is a better approach to education as educators, families and community members work together to support students. She places students as being central to successful partnerships as they are active learners in all three contexts – in the home, at school and within the community. She also says that educators need to understand the other contexts of student's lives, rather than working in isolation. "Without partnerships, educators segment students into the school child and the home child, ignoring the whole child. This parcelling reduces or eliminates guidance, support, and encouragement for children's learning from parents, relatives, neighbors, peers, business partners, religious leaders, and other adults in the community" (Epstein, 2010, p 5).

Epstein's 'model of overlapping spheres' assumes that families and schools have mutual interests and influences that can be facilitated by individuals in both. She suggests that, while there are differences between the two environments, there are still similarities, overlap in goals, responsibilities and mutual influence in both that affect children's learning and development. She uses the term 'school-like' families and 'family-like' schools to describe these overlapping and interrelated environments. The factors that create 'school-like' families are parents' "knowledge of how to help their children at home, their belief that teachers want them to assist their children at home, and the degree of information and guidance from their children's teachers in how to help their children at home" (2010 p 38). The factors that create 'family-like' schools are teachers' "ability to put principles of child and adolescent development and organizational effectiveness into practice in instruction and classroom management, their ability to communicate with students as individuals, their beliefs about the importance of parents' involvement and parents' receptivity to guidance from the school, and their ability to communicate with parents as partners in the children's education" (2010 p 39).

Reasons that parents become involved

It can therefore be seen that 'parent engagement' is a complex array of behaviours, attitudes and activities that occur both within the school setting, but more importantly in the home. An apt analogy may be the iceberg; while 20 per cent of parent engagement may be visible, it is the hidden 80 per cent that has the greatest impact. If so much of parental engagement is unseen, then it is important that we understand the factors that motivate parents to become involved in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) have researched this extensively. They suggest that there are three main reasons that parents become involved 1) their personal construct of the parental role, 2) their personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed at school, and 3) how they respond to the 'opportunities and demand characteristics' presented by both their children and their children's schools. When parents construe their parental role as including personal involvement in their children's education, they undertake educationally related activities with their children. Parents' personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school means that they believe they have the skills and knowledge to help their children with their schooling. These, together with the opportunities and demands for involvement that come from their children or their children's school, will influence parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education. The authors note that "in most circumstances, parent involvement is most accurately characterised as a powerful enabling and enhancing variable in children's educational success, rather than … a necessary or a sufficient condition … for that success" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, p 319). As Lamb-Parker et al (2001) point out parents who have a lower sense of efficacy may feel that their involvement would not have an impact on their children's success at school, thus resulting in minimal involvement.

Berthelsen and Walker (2008) note that a later work undertaken by Hoover-Dempsey et al (2005) suggests that parents who believe they are primarily responsible for their children's education are likely to find opportunities to participate. However, those who lack the confidence to support their children's learning may require greater encouragement from schools and teachers, as well as opportunities, to become involved. They point to Dutch studies by Vogels (2002) which identified that the most involved parents are likely to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds, while those who are least involved were primarily from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Berthelsen and Walker also note that the way parents feel about schools and their own emotional connection to school, whether positive or negative, are likely to impact on their levels of engagement. Parents who have negative feelings about school may be less likely to engage with their children's schools than those who have positive school experiences. Mills and Gale (2004) state that it is presumptuous to assume that parents have the skills to participate in their children's schooling and suggest that some parents may need to be educated in the 'skills of participation'. They note that this is particularly important in situations where "the cultural context of the specific community and of schooling in general are so disparate" (Mills and Gale, 2004, p 278). Hornby and Witte (2010a) in their study of parental involvement in New Zealand schools, state that the education of parents in how to support their child's education is an important element for schools. However, this element is often missing in schools' parental engagement strategies.

Teacher attitudes

Many of the factors that are likely to influence parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education are driven by the school. Berthelsen and Walker (2008) note that critical factors that influence parental involvement include teachers' perceptions about the role of parents in the classroom, whether they provide opportunities for parents to be involved and their understanding of how to involve parents. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggest that parents' responses to invitations from schools as well as parents' initiation of involvement activities will be influenced by a number of variables. These include the parent's views of their own skills and knowledge, their employment and other family demands and specific invitations, demands and opportunities presented by the child and the child's school. Bauch and Goldring (1998) point out that teachers have an important role to play in allowing parent collaboration. They note that research undertaken by Coleman and Tabin (1992) in Canada suggests that parent involvement can be achieved when teachers appreciate that collaboration depends on teacher invitation and that they legitimise and facilitate parent collaboration. Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008) state that parents are more likely to be involved when they feel that their involvement is welcome, needed and invited by teachers and children. However, they note that while parents may not be involved at the school, they may well be greatly involved in supporting their children's learning at home. They suggest ways that teachers can facilitate greater parent involvement in schools. These include creating a school climate that welcomes involvement and developing activities that encourage parent participation; providing education to teachers about the importance of parent involvement and providing them with the tools to create opportunities; and advocating for resources in the school, such as a parent resource centre. Baker (1997) notes that enablers to involvement include parents feeling welcome in the school, schools offering programs for parents or allowing parents to use schools resources, such as IT facilities. She suggests that these elements can help make parents feel more comfortable about being on the school grounds, as well as enable them to find out about other opportunities for being involved. She also notes that an important facilitator of parental involvement within the school is the parent's belief that their child wanted them to be around.

Barriers to involvement

Many researchers have explored the barriers that parents may face in participating in their children's education. Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) point to research that suggests that there are two key perspectives that inform policy about parental involvement. According to Lopez and Scribner (1999) where certain groups of parents are not visible in schools (usually those from lower socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds) they are viewed as being somehow failing to be 'good parents' as it is assumed they do not support their children's education. They refer to this as the 'deficit discourse'. On the other hand 'good parenting', which is characterised by parents' active involvement in various elements of schools, is linked to student outcomes. They refer to this as the 'agentic discourse'. They go on to suggest that, according to Lareau (2003), "these deficit and agentic discourses have converged to link parental involvement and notions of disadvantage and advantage respectively to student learning outcomes" (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010, p 500). Blackmore and Hutchison undertook a study of parental involvement at a Melbourne school which highlighted some of the reasons that parents were not involved in the classroom. They note that these include low levels of parent literacy, a high proportion of non-English speaking parents and mothers with younger children. Also, teachers felt that many parents saw the school environment as intimidating and that the presence of some parents in the classroom may actually add to their workload, rather than assist with schooling. Their study found that "it is middle-class parents with social and economic resources and flexible work practices who respond to policies advocating parental involvement. Parents from low socio-economic communities who have had negative experiences of schooling themselves are either absent or require significant support (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010, p 511)." They therefore suggest that policies and partnership initiatives that are mandated may actually work against the development of inclusive relationships between families and schools.

A study undertaken in regional Australia found that the perceptions of teachers and engaged parents towards non-engaged parents was that they 'didn't really care'. The non-participation of parents was seen as a lack of interest and "a reflection of the lower value that these working-class families supposedly attribute to education compared with middle-class families" (Mills and Gale, 2004, p 268). However, Mills and Gale point out that by assuming that non-engaged parents have little interest in their children's schooling does not recognise that they may like to become involved or that the school could do more to encourage the participation of these parents. "What appear as opportunities to participate are those most often constructed from within the school, not by parents themselves, and therefore are constrained. For those parents who share the school's agenda, this may be acceptable, but others are left without a voice (Crozier, 1998, in Mills and Gale, 2004, p 271)".

Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008) point to several barriers that impact on parents, such as family based barriers, practical difficulties, psychological barriers and cultural barriers. Family-based barriers include those that relate to socio-economic status and limited educational attainments, resulting in parents feeling ill-prepared to effectively support their children's learning or to interact with schools. Practical difficulties, such as other caring responsibilities, access to transport or inflexible working arrangements can also limit parents' availability for school-based involvement. Psychological barriers relate to parents' own experience of schooling, which may include having poor educational achievement, poor treatment at school as well as physical or mental health issues. These can result in parents feeling intimidated by the school environment and being unable to participate effectively. Cultural barriers may occur as a result of ethnic and language differences and a misunderstanding of the value of schools by families, as well as limited understanding of families' values and practices by schools. Mills and Gale (2004) note that lack of time can restrain parents' involvement in a number of ways. They suggest that those on lower incomes may not have the means to support their children at school due to other family demands, such as caring for younger children. On the other hand, they state that middle-class families are more likely to have the means to find additional support, such as child care and transportation, to enable them to participate in school-based activities. They also note that parents' negative experiences of school can inhibit involvement as they may feel intimidated in a school setting, and research suggests that this is more likely to be the case for parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Mills and Gale (2004) also state that parents who have low levels of education are also likely to be less involved in schooling and more likely to defer to the knowledge of teachers for the education of their children as they do not feel that they have the level of skill required. However, middle-class parents often have professional qualifications that are equal or higher than teachers and see education as 'a partnership between equals'.

Does family background matter?

Lareau (2003) describes how middle-class families actively encourage their children's development and foster their cognitive and social skills, while working-class families focus is on providing food, shelter and other basic support. She suggests that these different philosophies and approaches to child rearing between middle-class and working-class parents leads to the transmission of 'differential advantages' to children. Middle-class children learn 'the rules of the game', while poorer children are often unable to make the rules work to their advantage. This translates to schools, where middle-class parents tend to teach their children to question people in positions of power. In contrast, Lareau asserts that working-class parents tend to expect teachers to take a leadership role. While she says that working-class parents are just as likely as middle-class parents to want their children to succeed in school, they are likely to take a different approach to helping them achieve that goal than middle-class parents. Hornby (2011) summarises the issues facing working-class parents by stating that "minorities are less involved, less represented and less informed, and are less likely to have access to resources, as well as more likely to have problems associated with language, transport, communication, and child care" (Hornby, 2011, p 15). He notes that Reay (1998) states that home-school relations are about separateness for working-class families, while for middle-class families they are about interconnectedness and this shapes their attitudes towards parental involvement.

Corter and Pelletier (2004) suggest that, to reach disengaged parents, schools and educators should consider using parents and other community members to connect. They also recommend engaging with other agencies that work with children and families to increase points of contact. They note that in multicultural communities, basing other organisations at the school can increase the number of professionals working with specific groups. Brook and Hancock (2004) also note that schools that used ethnic minority parents as a 'bridge' to other families had less problems engaging parents from ethnic backgrounds. As Hornby and Witte (2010a) point out, schools need to reach out to parents from diverse backgrounds to help them appreciate the benefits of parental involvement for their children's education. Epstein (1995) suggests that schools and teachers in disadvantaged communities need to actively work to develop positive partnerships with students' families. In addition, in deprived communities, schools tend to make more contact with families about the problems and difficulties that students are having, unless teachers work hard at balancing contact regarding the positive accomplishments of students.

Gender

Barriers to involvement are not just related to physical, psychological, cultural or class factors. Gender, too, can play a part in discouraging the involvement of all parents, particularly fathers. Blackmore and Hutchison argue that recent education policies in Australia and elsewhere that link student outcomes and parental engagement "exemplify particularly gendered and class-based notions of parent involvement and parenting" (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010, p 500). Their research confirmed that the majority of people who are involved in their children's schooling, whether at school or within the home, are women. They also note that it is usually middle class mothers "who have autonomy over working hours and possess the economic, social and cultural capital necessary for confident participation in school activities" (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010, p 507). Brook and Hancock (2000) point to some of the difficulties that fathers faced to engage with schools, because of the 'gendered dimension of parent-teacher relations'. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) point to a report by Bayley et al (2009) in which fathers list a number of barriers to their involvement in services including work commitments, the perception that services were aimed at women and a lack of awareness that the services existed. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2011) also note the difficulties of engaging with fathers in child and family support services.

As part of the evaluation of the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, Berlyn, Wise and Soriano (2008) examined fathers' engagement and found that their level of participation was much lower than that of mothers "and there were a number of socio-cultural, service and other factors that acted as barriers to fathers' access to services" (in DEECD, 2011, p 8). This flows on to all aspects of family life, including education. The DEECD report outlines factors that are likely to increase the involvement of fathers being scheduling activities outside of business hours, father specific content and services, positive images of fatherhood within programs and the use of male workers and volunteers. Epstein (1995) notes that schools need to foster greater engagement with single parents, parents who are employed, those who live far from the school, and fathers, by creating opportunities to volunteer at the school at various times, and in various places.

Educating the teachers

Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2008) note that while teachers may recognise the importance of parental involvement, they may feel uncertain about how to engage with families who differ from them in terms of culture, values and language. They note that few teachers receive training in involvement practices, despite the requirement of United States legislation such as the *No Child Left Behind* Act to involve parents in their children's schooling. Epstein (2010) points out that schools face challenges in developing effective partnerships with families. She notes that educators are not often trained to understand how they can develop and maintain partnership programs that inform and involve all families. She also notes that teachers are often not equipped to work with organisations in the wider community and, without these connections, students are often "disconnected from opportunities that enrich their schoolwork and prepare them for the future" (Epstein, 2010, p 5). This is echoed by Hornby and Witte (2010a) who found that, in New Zealand, there is a lack of training for teachers around how to work with parents. They suggest that this should be part of teacher education and professional development programs.

Current trends and good practice

It is clear from the literature, and from government policy, that parental involvement is entering a new phase. As research in the area deepens, and greater understanding is reached about the factors that impact on student attainment, new models of parental involvement are emerging. In particular, there is an increasing call from academics and policy makers that, to be truly effective, education needs to be a partnership between families, schools and the community. Emerson et al (2012) note that parental involvement strategies have the most impact when they link the behaviour of families, teachers and students to learning outcomes; when both teachers and parents have a clear understanding of their respective roles in learning; when family behaviours support a learning environment; and when there are consistent, positive relations between the school and parents. Corter and Pelletier (2004) note that there are many benefits of increased parent and community involvement in schools that extends beyond student achievement and learning. They suggest that it can lead to the flow of greater public support and community resources to schools as well as the increase in public trust resulting from accountability and communication with parents and the community. In addition, partnerships can result in greater community cohesion as relationships between the school and the community improve and parents become more confident in engaging with schools. Epstein (1995) notes that in the United States, the evidence that partnerships work has led to the development of federal, state and local policies that support the establishment of partnerships across school systems. She highlights the benefits of partnerships by stating:

> *"They can improve school programs and the school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life."*

(Epstein, 1995, p 701)

Holistic education

As Harris and Wilkes (2013) point out, many educators are moving away from the traditional model of public education that focuses primarily on academic outcomes towards a model that supports young people in many aspects of their lives. This includes their physical, social and emotional needs as well as their academic achievement. They report on work being undertaken by the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) and refer to 'partnerships for learning' which aim to support children's development and reduce barriers to their overall success. The community school, or full-service school, brings together "a range of services to support learning, including families, school administrators, community-based organisations, health care providers, governmental agencies other institutions" (Harris and Wilkes, 2013, p 2). Cronin (2008) describes this as the 'village' approach to educating and caring for children. It is underpinned by the belief that the community, as well as the school, shares responsibility for the academic and non-academic success of students. She describes HFRPs concept of 'complementary learning' – a variation on the full-service school concept. The beliefs underpinning complementary learning are centred around the premise that, for children and youth to be successful from birth through to adolescence, there must be a range of learning supports available to them.

Epstein (1995) has developed a model of family and school relationships that supports children's learning by recognising the relationships between all of the areas of a student's life. Her 'overlapping spheres of influence' proposes that there are three spheres of influence that affect student learning – schools, families and communities. "With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school" (Epstein 1995, p 702). She suggests that the model reflects that parent involvement is a variable that is influenced by the practices of teachers, administrators, parents and students – therefore it can be increased or decreased. Epstein also identifies six types of parental involvement in the education of children:

> *Type 1: Parenting*—*helping all families understand child and adolescent development and establishing home environments that support children as students*
>
> *Type 2: Communicating*—*designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communications about school programs and children's progress*
>
> *Type 3: Volunteering*—*recruiting and organising help and support at school, home, or in other locations to support the school and students' activities*
>
> *Type 4: Learning at Home*—*providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities and decisions*
>
> *Type 5: Decision Making*—*having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees and obtaining input from all parents on school decisions*
>
> *Type 6: Collaborating with the Community*— *identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support (p47) schools, students, and their families, and organising activities to benefit the community and increase students' learning opportunities.*
>
> (Epstein, 2010, p 46-47)

Epstein highlights that each of these types of involvement is dependent on two-way communication between schools and families to exchange ideas and information and to reinforce their shared responsibilities for children's education.

Harris and Wilkes (2013) suggest that there are seven elements required to establish successful and sustainable partnerships:

1. *Shared vision of learning: partners share a common understanding of the goals and resources needed to support children's learning.*

2. *Shared leadership and governance: partners have an equal say in leading efforts to support children and families.*

3. *Complementary partnerships: partners share complementary skills and areas of expertise to create a seamless and comprehensive set of learning supports for children.*

4. *Effective communication: partners communicate effectively and frequently to ensure they are aligning their activities and are working in harmony with one another.*

5. *Regular and consistent sharing of information about youth progress: partners have access to crucial data that help them better understand the youth they serve.*

6. *Family engagement: families serve as key partners to help address the complex conditions and varied environments where children learn and grow.*

7. *Collaborative staffing models: schools and community organisations create staffing structures that intentionally blend roles across partners, so that staff work in multiple settings to provide adult support spanning school and non-school hours.*

(Harris and Wilkes, 2013 p 4).

In Australia, a number of local initiatives have emerged to help develop partnerships between schools and parents (see Appendix A). Most recently, the Family-School Partnerships Framework has been developed by the national parent bodies in Australia - the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) – in conjunction with the Australian Government and other key stakeholders. The aim of the Framework is to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families, and students (DEEWR, 2008). The Framework notes that partnerships should:

↘ view each partner as making equally valuable contributions, while respecting different contributions

↘ respect student needs and preferences

↘ address barriers to involvement in schools by families, in particular Indigenous families, and actively help previously uninvolved families to become involved

↘ create better programs, opportunities and learning for students

↘ give families appropriate opportunities to contribute to school decision-making and governance

↘ contribute to professional satisfaction for principals and teachers.

(Family School Partnerships Bureau, 2014, website).

Policy implications and further research

Implications for policy

Take advantage of the maturing discourse about parental involvement to develop a common framework and terminology at system level so as to be clear about:

↘ the different types of involvement

↘ their different needs for support

↘ planning for schools' accountability for parental involvement

↘ evaluation of outcomes.

Further research

This review indicated several areas for future investigation. Further research would help to inform future policy and practice around the engagement of parents in their children's education and could also provide a good resource for schools looking to identify best practice initiatives, either locally or elsewhere.

Research on this topic is scarce in South Australia. Examination of the scope of parental involvement in schools across South Australia would assist improved policy and practice in the local context. Areas to explore might include:

↘ the types and extent of parental involvement both within the school and in the home

↘ how much time parents have to be involved either at school or at home and how much they would like to be involved

↘ how parents view their role in relation to their children's education and whether they believe they can impact on their children's educational attainment

↘ what information, education and/or resources do schools/parent organisations provide to help parents support their children's learning at home?

↘ whether parents are willing to undertake education or training about how they can help their children achieve at school?

↘ what types of school-community-family links do parents/schools/parent organisations or representative bodies think would be effective in enhancing children's education?

↘ what teacher education is needed to support parent involvement?

↘ examples of school-community-family partnerships in South Australia and models of best practice.

While there is a good body of research regarding parental involvement in school governance, such as through school boards or councils, or parent-teacher associations, very little literature was found regarding the effectiveness of traditional, funded parent organisations, such as state or national parent representative bodies. It would be beneficial to explore the role that such organisations play or can play in supporting parental involvement.

It may also be useful to explore whether parental engagement practices differ between government and non-government schools and identify good practice models of engagement from both sectors.

Finally, the link between the education level of parents and educational outcomes for children is strong. Finding ways to foster an appreciation of the value of education should therefore be an important feature of any parental engagement strategy. One way of addressing this may be to examine how schools have engaged parents from disadvantaged backgrounds and develop a sound evidential basis for further programs that aim to improve the education levels of parents.

Conclusion

The discussion about the involvement of parents in their children's education is much researched and discussed. While the terms used to discuss the topic vary widely, parental involvement can be seen to refer to the actions and behaviours that parents undertake with the purpose of supporting their children's schooling. It is important, however, to understand that there are a variety of different ways in which parents can participate in the education of their children. Some types will impact on children's educational attainment; others will be of value to the school; and, in some instances, the parent themselves will gain a benefit. In a way, the literature suggests that whatever the variety of parental involvement employed, someone stands to benefit. However, in most policy frameworks, distinctions are rarely made about what type of parental involvement is being focused upon. Parental involvement is not homogenous. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and the impact of greater parental involvement in education needs to be placed in the correct context. Therefore, we need to exercise caution when assumptions are made that suggest that all parental involvement will produce better academic results for all children. What is clear is that parental aspiration and expectations, combined with behaviour that reinforces efforts made by schools and teachers places children in the best position to be successful at school.

This paper has identified the policy shifts around parental interaction with their children's schooling and finds that, as the way in which citizens engage with government has changed, so too has the relationship between parents and schools. This new focus appears to be based on assumptions drawn from, first, research that shows that parents are critical to their children's early childhood development and education and, second, the view that parental expectations affect children's academic performance. Some caution is needed here in reaching policy conclusions. The extrapolation of the parental factors affecting early year's development, to the middle and adolescent years of schooling, has, as yet, no evidence base. Indeed, there are indications from social research that suggest different forms of parental involvement are needed in the later years. New research is increasingly being produced that highlights the many and complex variables that lead to school achievement by children. What is not contested is that parents have a significant, fundamental role in supporting the education of their children.

The rise of the concept of educational partnership, with schools encouraged to reach out to parents from all sections of their community to help them engage as true partners, seems to be latest trend in the relationship between educators and families. However, this may not be a realistic attainment for all parents or caregivers. While socio-economic background or culture can act as a barrier, these do not necessarily have to be an impediment to parental participation in learning. Schools and the wider school community have an important role to play in recognising these barriers exist and to work to minimise them. In addition, teachers and school administrators are being asked to embrace a skill set for which they may not be equipped or trained. Research offers some encouragement that partnerships can work, providing there is an appropriate framework in place and support for all parties to participate equally. Without this, parental involvement risks being reduced to rhetoric, rather than an educational approach that places both the family and the school at the heart of the solution to better academic outcomes. As schools become increasingly measured for the academic achievement of their pupils, it is pertinent to ask whether they can truly be held accountable for educational attainment if the family and its attitude towards education play such an important role in a child's likelihood for school success. For partnerships in education to be truly successful, there needs to be a robust framework for implementation that takes into account the many different needs of every school community. Schools need to be given the opportunity to innovate, with the potential risk of failing, to identify partnerships practices that will work for their unique constituency. This is a challenge for all stakeholders, especially policy-makers and funders, but will be necessary if real change is to occur.

Appendix A:
Parental engagement in action

The literature review identified a number of projects and initiatives that have been developed to help engage parents in their children's education. This is by no means an exhaustive list; rather a snapshot of programs that are operating in Australia and overseas.

Australia

National

The Family-School Partnerships Framework

**http://www.familyschool.org.au/files/3013/8451/8364/
Family-school_partnerships_framework.pdf**

The Family-School Partnerships Framework has been prepared by the national parent bodies in Australia – the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Parents Council (APC) – the Australian Government, and other key stakeholders, including state and territory government and non-government school authorities, and school principals' associations.

The Framework contains:

↘ a vision for improved partnerships between Australian families and schools

↘ a set of principles to guide families and schools in developing partnerships

↘ seven key dimensions of effective family-school partnerships

↘ a set of strategies providing practical guidance to school communities and school systems in implementing and fostering family-school partnerships.

The Framework is based on existing good practice and provides an agreed national approach to guide schools and families working on these issues.

The Family-School Partnerships Bureau

http://www.familyschool.org.au/index.php/about/bureau/

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau is an organisation dedicated to greater parental engagement and community involvement in schools. It conducts research, disseminates best practice and provides practical support and advice to parents, principals, teachers and others about how to build and sustain partnerships.

The Bureau, which has been funded by the Australian Government, was created, and is governed, by the two peak parent bodies from both government and non-government school sectors – the Australian Council of State School Organisations [ACCSO] and the Australian Parents Council [APC]. Both Councils have long been involved with, and have frequently collaborated in, the promotion of parent and community engagement with schools.

Family-school partnerships are collaborative relationships and activities involving school staff, parents and other family members of students at a school. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect, and shared responsibility for the education of the children and young people at the school.

The aim of the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau is to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families, and students. These partnerships should:

↘ view each partner as making equally valuable contributions, while respecting different contributions

↘ respect student needs and preferences

↘ address barriers to involvement in schools by families, in particular Indigenous families, and actively help previously uninvolved families to become involved

↘ create better programs, opportunities and learning for students

↘ give families appropriate opportunities to contribute to school decision-making and governance

↘ contribute to professional satisfaction for principals and teachers.

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

https://www.aracy.org.au/projects/parental-engagement/parental-engagement

ARACY aims to progress and promote evidence-based programs and strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and youth. By collaborating with researchers, policymakers and practitioners, ARACY turns 'what works' into practical, preventative action. In 2012, the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau commissioned ARACY to identify evidence on the benefits of positive parental engagement and what works to promote positive parental engagement. The report from this research (by Emerson et al, 2012) provides a useful summary of parental engagement.

Partners 4 Learning

http://www.partners4learning.edu.au/

Partners4Learning (P4L) provides a portal through which teachers, school administrators and parents can gain access to research, case studies, advice, a bank of practical resources and professional development to support enhanced parent, family and community partnerships within and between school communities.

The P4L resource has been designed to complement the Australian Government's National Family School Partnership Framework. It is a web-based *Centre of Excellence in Parent and Community Engagement* funded through the Australian Government's Smarter Schools Teacher Quality National Partnership.

Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) Program

http://www.education.gov.au/parental-and-community-engagement-programme-pace

The Parental and Community Engagement Program (PaCE) supports initiatives that assist families and communities to 'reach-in' to schools and other educational settings to engage in their children's education. Targeted at young people aged 0–19 years, PaCE funds programs that enhance the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to:

↘ engage with schools and education providers in order to support improved educational outcomes for their children

↘ build strong leadership that supports high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes

↘ support the establishment, implementation and/or ongoing progress of school-community partnership agreements

↘ support and reinforce children's learning at home.

The PaCE program was recently transferred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in line with the Australian Government aim to coordinate all programs relating to Indigenous affairs under the one department.

South Australia

Parent Initiatives in Education (PIE)

**http://www.sa.gov.au/topics/education-skills-and-learning/
financial-help-scholarships-and-grants/pie-grant**

Each year the South Australian Government Minister for Education and Child Development makes funds available for government schools and pre-schools to promote partnerships between parents and schools, especially those that engage parents not currently involved in the school community. In 2014, individual grants were awarded up to $2500.

Raising Parental Engagement with Literacy

**http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/
sa+health+internet/health+reform/health+in+all+policies/
health+lens+analysis+projects/current+health+lens+analysis+projects/
parental+engagement+in+literacy+rich+home+environments**

The Raising Parental Engagement with Literacy health lens is a collaborative project between the Health in All Policies Unit, SA Health, and the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). The aim of the project is to investigate how to engage families from disadvantaged backgrounds to create a literacy rich environment for children at home and school.

To date, the project has involved a comprehensive review of the best available evidence and social research including parent/care-giver focus groups and discussions with teachers/principals to identify best practice in school-parent partnerships to support parental engagement.

This Health Lens Analysis is being carried out in four schools in the Western Adelaide Region. The schools are working to develop and implement parent engagement strategies in line with the research findings to create literacy rich environments in learners' homes. This includes building stronger family-school partnerships and building capacity in parents and caregivers to support the learner at home.

A preliminary report has been prepared (Newman, 2011) and the final report of the Parental Engagement in Literacy Rich Home Environments Health Lens project was expected to be produced in 2014.

Australian Capital Territory

Preschool Matters Program

http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/preschool-matters-program

As a part of the ACT Government's commitment to early education, the Education and Training Directorate has developed a website to support parental engagement in preschool education. The website contains information for parents and carers about various education and support services on offer in the ACT for preschool aged children and highlights the importance of parental involvement in preschool education.

Parent Participation in College

The Education and Training Directorate website contains a page with information for parents to support children in college (senior secondary schools for students in Years 11 and 12).

New South Wales

Department of Education and Communities

http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-the-department/our-reforms/local-schools-local-decisions/reform-agenda/working-locally/family-and-community-engagement

The department has developed a guide to support the Smarter Schools initiative which identifies a number of different strategies that schools can utilise to enhance family and community engagement. The guide is available on the department's website.

Canterbury-Bankstown Parental Engagement Strategy

http://transitions.youth.gov.au/sites/transitions/successstories/partnershipbrokers/pages/parental-engagement-strategy

Through the Partnership Broker's stakeholder consultation processes, it was identified that parental engagement in the Canterbury-Bankstown region was limited and difficult to maintain, particularly within the Arabic community.

A number of stakeholders decided to work together in partnership to focus on the development and implementation of strategies that improve the engagement of Arabic parents and families in their child's education.

Partnership Members:

↘ Bankstown City Council

↘ Canterbury City Council

↘ Centrelink – Bankstown

↘ Department of Education and Communities

↘ South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE

↘ Youth Connections (MTC Work Solutions).

Northern Territory

Department of Education

http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community

The Department of Education website contains some resources for parents, such as guidance for parents on how to introduce reading to children aged up to eight years.

Families as First Teachers, NT (FaFT) – Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program

http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community/early-childhood-services/families-as-first-teachers-program

The Department of Education operates the Families as First Teachers programs which are delivered in remote communities across the Northern Territory to support the healthy development and early learning of young Indigenous children. The program builds family knowledge of early learning through active engagement in quality early childhood education programs.

Queensland

Parent and Community Engagement Framework

http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/parent-community-engagement-framework/resources/pdf/parent-community-engagement-framework.pdf

Education Queensland has developed the Parent and Community Engagement Framework to help schools, parents and the community to work together to maximise student learning. Support materials have been designed to help schools, parents and the community focus effectively on the key outcome of student learning. There is a dedicated page on the department's website that contains links to the framework document, case studies and links to other related guidelines and resources.

Tasmania

Department of Education

**http://www.education.tas.gov.au/Community-and-Providers/Pages/
School-Associations.aspx**

Under changes to the *Tasmanian Education Act 1994*, that were ratified in 2003, each state
school must establish a School Association, with a constitution approved by the Minister for
Education. School Associations are made up of parents, students, staff and members of the
broader community.

The role of the Association is:

a. to participate in the formulation and development of

    ↘   a set of beliefs, values and priorities for the school

    ↘   the school policies and code of conduct

b. to provide advice and recommendations to the principal in relation to the general operations
    and management of the school

c. to participate on the selection panel in respect of any advertised permanent vacancy for the
    position of principal

d. to foster cooperation among teachers, students, members of the school association, parents
    and the community

e. to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary on any matter relating to policy

f. to approve the school budget.

Advice for Parents

**http://www.education.tas.gov.au/Community-and-Providers/Pages/
How-You-Can-Be-Involved.aspx**

The Department of Education's website has a page dedicated to how parents can become
involved in their school community and lists several things that parents can do to engage
their children in learning.

Launching into Learning (LiL)

**http://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents_carers/early_years/Programs-and-Initiatives/
Pages/Launching-into-Learning.aspx**

LiL is a Department of Education program that provides resources to schools to develop and
lead initiatives with families and their community to support children's early learning prior to
kindergarten. Schools focus on the needs of their community and make connections with other
groups, services and agencies in the area. The program is being monitored through an ongoing
longitudinal study due to be completed in 2014.

Victoria

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)

http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/partnerships/Pages/default.aspx

The DEECD website contains a page dedicated to partnerships with a number of links to initiatives and programs that support partnerships in various aspects of education. This is a useful resource for individuals or organisations wanting to learn more about partnerships within Victoria, as well as to access case studies, research and best practice nationally and internationally.

Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network

http://www.centralrangesllen.org.au/partnerships-networks/parents/

The Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network works with schools and community organisations to improve the capacity of parents and families to support their children who are students in Year 6 and Years 7-10, with a focus on parents in identified risk areas.

The *Central Ranges LLEN Strategic Plan 2010-2013* outlines its parents and families strategies as:

↘ identifying, expanding and promoting parent support programs that support parents' engagement with their children's pathways and transitions, by facilitating partnerships between primary and secondary schools, community organisations and local government

↘ focusing on strategies to assist parents in identified risk areas by facilitating partnerships with specialised professionals, schools and community organisations

↘ the Central Ranges LLEN works to engage with education and community organisations to help parents to support local young people in their education.

Initiatives that have been implemented include:

↘ Parent workshops: Parents have attended free workshops to get more information about their child's educational pathways in a number of schools and communities for the last five years.

↘ Surveys – understanding current programs and future opportunities: Two surveys were conducted of primary and secondary schools and community organisations to find out more about current and potential parent engagement programs across the shires of Murrindindi, Mitchell and Macedon Ranges.

↘ Parent engagement committees: As a result of the survey, two parental engagement committees have been formed, comprising of education and community stakeholder representatives. They aim to explore strategic partnerships with local networks and add value to parental engagement activities to increase young people's engagement with education.

Catholic Education Office – Archdiocese of Melbourne

http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/learning-teaching/parents-as-partners/fsp/

The Catholic Education Office Melbourne has developed a guide and toolkit to help school leaders and teachers to examine their parental involvement practices. The *Parental Engagement in Action* resources are designed to help the parish and school community develop a better understanding of parent engagement.

Western Australia

Department of Education

**http://det.wa.edu.au/schoolsandyou/detcms/navigation/getting-involved-in-school/
help-your-children-learn/?oid=Category-id-12767143**

The department's website contains a range of resources for parental involvement, including the
'Helping your children learn' section.

Much of the Department's resources on parental engagement tend to focus on Aboriginal
education. The following initiatives support the engagement of parents and the community in the
education of Aboriginal students:

Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO)

**http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/
teaching-and-learning/aieo-guidelines/aieo-program-aieos/
working-with-parents-and-community/**

In the 1970s, the WA Department of Education established the role of Aboriginal and Islander
Education Officer. One of the functions of the role is to build partnerships between parents
and the community and to support parents to become involved in their children's education.

School and Community Partnership Agreement

**http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/community/
school-and-community-partnerships/?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.
ArticleSection-id-14840658**

A school and community partnership agreement is a formal commitment based on shared
responsibility for the education of Aboriginal students at the school. An agreement is negotiated
between the school, the parents and the local community or communities and is a commitment
to work together as partners. The department has developed a resource kit, which provides
planning tools, strategies, templates and guidelines to developing partnership agreements.

Walk Right In

**http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/community/
walk-right-in/?oid=com.arsdigita.cms.contenttypes.ArticleSection-id-14722017**

Walk Right In is a manual that aims to increase parent involvement in their children's education and
the school. The package is designed to motivate, inspire and empower school staff to support
parents' active involvement in education and school decision making. The package includes
leadership strategies for principals and teachers to assist them to engage Aboriginal parents in
their children's education, some sample presentations, an audio-visual section,
web links and a comprehensive guide to relevant resources.

International

New Zealand

Policy background

In New Zealand, the *Education Act 1989* describes the structure and format of the education system. Under the Act, the management of state schools are devolved to boards of trustees who have "complete discretion to control the management of the school as it thinks fit" (NZ Govt, 1989). The school board is comprised of the principal of the school and elected parent, staff and student representatives, who must reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the local community wherever possible. The Act also establishes the requirement for all schools to have a school charter to ensure that "the school is (a) managed, organised, conducted, and administered for the purposes set out in the school charter; and (b) the school, and its students and community, achieve the aims and objectives set out in the school charter" (NZ Govt 1989).

Partnership Schools

http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/PartnershipSchools.aspx

Partnership Schools/Kura Hourua are new types of schools in the New Zealand education system which bring together education, the business sector and community groups to provide new opportunities for students to achieve education success. These schools will have greater freedom and flexibility to innovate and engage with their students in return for stronger accountability for improving educational outcomes. These schools will focus on the government's priority groups: Māori, Pasifika, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and learners with special education needs. The NZ Government is establishing a small number of Partnership Schools, the first of which will open in 2014. Partnership Schools will be governed by 'sponsors' who can be from a range of backgrounds including businesses, philanthropists, kiwi, community organisations, faith-based groups, private schools and culture-based educational organisations. They can be not-for-profit or for-profit. Sponsors can also operate multiple schools. Under the *Education Act 1989*, tertiary education institutions and boards of trustees of state schools cannot be sponsors.

Partnership Schools are fully-funded schools outside the state system, accountable to the Crown for raising student achievement through a contract to deliver a range of specified school-level targets. Partnership Schools will have a fixed-term contract with the Minister of Education and targets include:

↘ student achievement indicators (eg National Standards, NCEA)

↘ student engagement indicators (eg student attendance).

The sponsors of Partnership Schools have greater flexibility to decide how they operate and use funding than state schools. This enables sponsors to use new and different approaches to teaching and learning, property and school organisation.

Partnership Schools are able to:

↘ negotiate the number of registered teachers they employ

↘ negotiate salary levels and employment conditions with employees

↘ employ a chief executive, responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, who is not a registered teacher

↘ set their own length of school day and year

↘ set their own curriculum providing it uses the vision, principles, values and key competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum or equivalent statements in Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

(Source: NZ Ministry of Education, website).

Iterative Best Synthesis Programme (BES)

https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/bes/best-evidence-synthesis-tools

The Iterative Best Synthesis Programme (BES) is run by the Ministry of Education and aims to strengthen the evidence base that informs education policy and practice in New Zealand. The principle that drives the BES approach is that fit-for-purpose approaches are needed in the development and use of trustworthy knowledge for improvement. The BES programs brings together research-based evidence, from New Zealand and elsewhere, to explain what works and why in education and what makes a bigger difference for diverse learners.

BES resources are aimed at educators and leaders, policy workers, researchers and trustees – anyone who has an interest in evidence-based educational outcomes. The BES has undertaken synthesis of research on parental engagement in engagement and evaluated government policy relating to New Zealand's school reforms.

United States

Policy Background

http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

In the US, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) was introduced in 2001. The Act's purpose was "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (US Senate, 2001). A key element of NCLB is involving parents, guardians and families as full partners in the education of their children (Cronin, 2008). The Act contains very specific requirements in relation to the involvement of parents in education, particularly where local education agencies receive funding under 'Title 1'. The purpose of Title I of the Act is 'improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged'. This part of the Act highlights the financial support provided to states each year and contains specific deadlines that states needed to meet under the funding arrangements. Title 1 also contains a section that discusses parental involvement which details the measures that local education agencies and schools must comply with to receive funding. For example, those in receipt of Title I funding must implement parental involvement programs in consultation with parents and children and they must also have a written parental involvement policy.

In 2010, the Obama administration released its blueprint for revising the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*. These reforms build on the NCLB legislation by placing greater emphasis on providing support for teachers. Further support is also proposed to help families and communities (US Department for Education, website).

Parental Information and Resource Centres

http://www.nationalpirc.org/pircs/PIRC-Quick-Facts.pdf

Parental Information and Resource Centres (PIRCs) are state organisations that provide training, information and support to parents, State Education Authorities, local authorities and other organisations that carry out parental education and family involvement programs (Cronin, 2008). Established under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Parental Information and Resource Centres were funded by the US Department of Education from 2006 – 2011. Although now no longer in receipt of US Federal Government funding, many states still maintain their PIRCs to help parents and schools and other interested groups to implement parental involvement policies, programs, and activities.

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/

Joyce Epstein is the founder of one of the longest-running school-family partnership schemes in the United States, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). Established at Johns Hopkins University in 1996, NNPS uses research-based approaches to coordinate programs of family and community involvement that will increase student success in school. NNPS provides its partners with tools and guidance using an 'action team' approach across all levels of schooling to increase involvement and improve student learning and development (NNPS website). The program is monitored by researchers and facilitators at the center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships located at John Hopkins University who use research to disseminate information on partnership initiatives, improve policy and practice and provide professional development for participants. The model of partnership works at several levels – school, district, state and organisational – with different programs for each. Researchers at the university also developed a program called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework. This resource helps teachers to develop homework assignments that assists parents to be involved in their children's learning.

Community Schools

http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalised curriculum that emphasises real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centres of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Partners work to achieve these results: children are ready to enter school; students attend school consistently; students are actively involved in learning and their community; families are increasingly involved with their children's education; schools are engaged with families and communities; students succeed academically; students are healthy - physically, socially, and emotionally; students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment, and communities are desirable places to live.

Canada

Policy background

Canada does not have a federal department of education, nor a nationally integrated system of education. However, Canada's constitution gives each of the provinces and territories the power to make their own laws in relation to education. In each of Canada's 13 jurisdictions (10 provinces and three territories) departments or ministries of education "are responsible for the organisation, delivery, and assessment of education" (CMEC website, 2014). Many provinces have established policies and guidelines that support parental involvement in education. For example, in Ontario the Minister for Education released a parental involvement policy for schools in 2010. This sets out a number of strategies to support the involvement of parents in education:

> *Strategy 1: School Climate* – *foster and sustain a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parent perspectives are encouraged, valued, and heard.*
>
> *Strategy 2: Eliminating Barriers* – *identify and remove barriers to parental engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning and to reflect the diversity of our students and communities.*
>
> *Strategy 3: Supports for Parents* – *provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to support student learning at home and at school.*
>
> *Strategy 4: Parent Outreach* – *review and expand communication and outreach strategies such as local workshops, presentations, tools, and resource, to share information and strategies related to supporting learning at home and parent engagement in schools.*
>
> (Ontario Ministry for Education, 2010)

The policy also outlines a series of actions that schools, boards and the ministry need to undertake in order to implement the policy. Other initiatives that the ministry has established include a Parent Engagement Office; the regulatory requirement that every school board in the province have a Parental Involvement Committee; grants programs; and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, to support the involvement of parents in the education system (Ontario Ministry for Education, 2010).

Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC).

http://www.cmec.ca

This is a central website with links to all ministries/departments of education in each Canadian province and territory.

United Kingdom

Policy background

The Schools White Paper (Department for Education 2010) sets out how the UK Government will improve the outcomes and life chances of all children. Schools will be increasingly accountable to parents for the progress and achievement of pupils. The White Paper presents the government's strategy for raising achievement levels, improving pupils' behaviour and lowering the attainment gap. The *Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances* (Field 2010) identifies a central role for parents in meeting each of these goals, particularly in the early years. The White Paper and the Field Review reinforce the need to involve parents in education and to create a good home learning environment.

In recent years, schools have increasingly recognised the importance of involving parents in their children's learning. This has been supported by developments such as the emergence of online technology and Parent Support Advisors. Since September 2009 Ofsted has been considering how effectively schools engage with parents. The focus has been on building positive relationships with parents, the quality of communications, reporting to parents on progress, and the mechanisms for helping parents to support their children's learning. Evidence from Ofsted suggests that a critical dimension of effective teaching and learning is the relationship between the teacher, their pupils and their parents. Just as the quality of teaching and leadership in schools is the key determinant of educational attainment, so the degree and quality of engagement that parents have with their child's learning is a crucial factor outside the school environment. (Source: Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011).

The current UK Government has determined that it wants to increase the diversity of the school system and, in 2013, released a policy to increase the number of Free Schools and Academies. The aim of this policy is to encourage the establishment of "a more autonomous and diverse school system that offers parents choice and concentrates on improving standards" (Department for Education, website).

UK education evidence portal

http://www.eep.ac.uk/dnn2/ResourceArea/Carewelfareandbehaviour/ Parentalengagement/tabid/287/Default.aspx

The educational evidence portal is run by a consortium of partners in collaboration with the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Centre at the Institute of Education, London as part of its development of the wider European Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education in Europe (EIPPEE) portal. The site has a range of information about parental engagement in the UK, including best practice guides, research, policy documents and other resources.

Academies

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process

In the UK, most government schools are operated by local authorities and are required to follow the national curriculum. Academies, however, are publicly-funded independent schools that have more autonomy and are not required to follow the national curriculum.

Other freedoms that academies have include:

↘ being independent from local authority control

↘ the ability to set pay and conditions for their staff

↘ deciding how to deliver the curriculum

↘ the ability to change the length of terms.

Academies receive their funding directly from the government and obtain the same level of funding per pupil from the local authority as they would receive as a maintained school. They also receive funding to cover the services that are no longer provided to them by the local authority. However, academies have greater control over how they use their budgets to benefit their students.

The principles of governance are the same in academies as in maintained schools but the governing body has greater autonomy. Academies are required to have at least two parent governors.

Some academies have sponsors, such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith or volunteer groups. Schools that have been underperforming and have converted to an academy will usually have a sponsor who becomes responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

Academies are legislated for in Part 6 of the *Education Act 2011* as well as the *Academies Act 2010*. (Source: Department for Education, website)

Free Schools

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school

Free schools are non-profit-making, independent, state-funded schools. They are set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education for children in their community. Groups running free schools cannot make a profit and the schools are subject to the same Ofsted inspections as all maintained schools. Free schools are expected to be open to pupils of all abilities from the area and cannot be academically selective. They are academies by law and so are not under the control of their local authority (Department for Education, website).

Under the *2010 Academy Act*, free schools can be set up by groups of parents, community organisations, charities and religious and business organisations. However, the free schools policy only applies in England – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have no provision for free schools. Like academies, free schools are administered outside the local authority, receive their funds directly from government, do not have to follow the national curriculum, can set their own admissions guidelines and are not bound by national union agreements (Hatcher, 2011).

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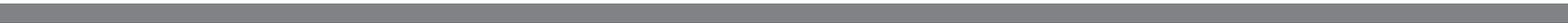
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