Parent Engagement in Education

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The NIE Working Paper Series is intended as a means of regular communication between the mutually dependent spheres of theory and practice in education. Forward- and outward-looking, the Papers are conceptualized with a local issue at hand, and will survey international and local state of thought to assemble a principled response appropriate for our context. The intended audience for this publication are policymakers, school leaders and practitioners with an interest in how theoretical and empirical perspectives inform practice. The Working Papers are published in a highly readable style, and appended with an expanded exposition and comprehensive reference for readers who want to know more.


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Abstract
Parent engagement in children’s upbringing and education is crucial for a child’s holistic development. Awareness of the importance of parent engagement in Singapore is high but research is limited. This working paper aims to lay the foundation for a policy conversation about the role of parent engagement in education. It provides a synopsis of international and local literature on parent engagement: its nature, rationales, global trends, benefits and dilemmas. It reviews some influential conceptual models that have influenced both academic work and policies worldwide. It also presents examples of successful parent engagement practices internationally, which may provide inspiration for Singapore’s own initiatives and policies, while cautioning against the uncritical and wholesale transfer of foreign practices. The paper concludes by suggesting future directions for public policy and educational research. It highlights the directions of a system-wide research that we are undertaking in order to support an evidence-based, context-sensitive policy framework on parent engagement in Singapore.

Introduction
Children’s education begins from birth, with parents as their first teachers and role models. Parents play a critical role in providing a learning bridge between school and the home, while instilling in their children positive attitudes and values towards learning and life. Parent engagement in their children’s upbringing and education is thus crucial for a child’s holistic development.

Awareness of the importance of parent engagement in Singapore is high but research is limited. This working paper aims to lay the foundation for a policy conversation about the role of parent engagement in education. It provides a synopsis of both international and local literature on parent engagement in education: its nature, rationales, histories and current trends, benefits and dilemmas. It
reviews some influential conceptual models that have influenced both academic work and policies worldwide. It also presents international examples of successful parent engagement practices which may provide inspiration for Singapore’s own initiatives and policies, while cautioning against the uncritical and wholesale transfer of foreign practices. The paper concludes by suggesting future directions for public policy and educational research. It highlights the directions of a system-wide research that we are undertaking in order to support an evidence-based, context-sensitive policy framework on parent engagement in Singapore.

The Working Paper is structured as follows:

• Section 1 provides a conceptual framework for studying parent engagement and describes some influential analytical models.
• Section 2 identifies global trends of parent engagement practices and examines research on the benefits of parent engagement and its weaknesses.
• Section 3 provides an overview of current policy and practices of parent engagement in Singapore, as well as available research on the issue.
• Section 4 concludes with some recommendations for policy-making and research based on the specificities of the Singapore context.

Section 1: Conceptual Framework for Parent Engagement Research

What is Parent Engagement?
Parent engagement and parent involvement are often used interchangeably and when they are distinguished, the definitions are not always consistent. From a semantics standpoint, parent involvement tends to imply what schools are “doing to” parents (i.e., telling parents how they can contribute), while parent engagement refers to “doing with” parents and gaining their partnership in supporting children’s education and overall development (Ferlazzo, 2009, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Table 1 summarizes key differences between parent engagement and parent involvement.
Parent involvement and engagement are not mutually exclusive, and schools tend to pursue both (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004; Ferlazzo, 2009, 2011). The literature tends to use the term "parent involvement" more. It employs other terms including "home-school co-operation" and "home-school partnerships" to denote this dual relationship, as well as "family and community involvement or engagement", and "school, family and community partnerships" (Epstein, 2013). Singapore uses the terms "parent engagement" and "school-home partnerships". It is unclear whether the semantic nuances among these terms are explicitly and consistently acknowledged by users. This makes it difficult to identify which studies authentically “engage” parents and thus determine whether parent engagement definitively and universally improves students’ lives and learning outcomes.

**Concept of Parent Engagement**

In view of what we have discussed, by parent engagement we refer to the beliefs, attitudes, and activities of parents to support their children’s learning from birth to adulthood, occurring across home, school, and community contexts, as a shared and co-constructed responsibility with the school and based on a trusting relationship between the school and parents (adapted from Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatnam-Nelson, 2010, pp. xix–xx). This definition has the following dimensions:

- **What**: beliefs, attitudes, activities and trusting relationships
- **Who**: parents, students, teachers, school leaders
- **How**: co-constructed and shared responsibility
- **Where**: across home, school, and community contexts
- **When**: from birth to adulthood
- **What for**: to support children’s learning and holistic development

A further conceptual distinction can be made between the *relationship* dimension and the *task* dimension in parent engagement (Bull, Brooking & Campbell, 2008). Establishing a trusting relationship between parents and schools is a first step. The task dimension involves activities such as school-home two-way communication, volunteering in schools, etc.
### Table 1. Parent Involvement and Parent Engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiated and driven by</th>
<th>Parent Involvement</th>
<th>Parent Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas and energy come from schools.</td>
<td>Ideas are elicited from parents by school staff. Parent energy drives the efforts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools lead with their institutional self-interest and wants.</td>
<td>Schools lead bearing parents’ interests in mind and develop trusting relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of Invitation</strong></td>
<td>Parents are encouraged to do something about what the school perceives as important.</td>
<td>Parents are challenged to do something about what they feel is important to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ role</strong></td>
<td>Parents volunteer for school-directed tasks.</td>
<td>Multiple and varied forms of engagement at home and in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents are seen as clients who receive services and information from teachers who are the professionals.</td>
<td>Parents as potential leaders are encouraged to contribute their own vision and goals, and to help reach them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers' role</strong></td>
<td>Professionals who tell parents what they should do with their child.</td>
<td>Elicits ideas from parents about how to better help their child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School leaders’ role</strong></td>
<td>Develops the vision and delegates tasks to the Parent Support Group (PSG).</td>
<td>Encourages parents and staff to help develop a joint vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sets the tone and expectations for partnerships and builds capacity among school staff and parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from Ferlazzo & Hammond (2009, pp. 4–9); also Weiss et al. (2010, pp. xx–xxviii) on “Family Engagement”.

### Rationales for Parent Engagement

Most countries in Europe, North America and the Asia Pacific had begun to legislate for parental participation since the 1970s (Delhaxhe,
In the US, parent engagement became a major educational issue in the 1980s, stimulated by the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) which identified family factors as powerful determinants of student achievement. A review of different policy initiatives across the world reveals diverse rationales for promoting and pursuing parent engagement in education.

Governments, parents and schools seek a range of objectives which may not always be aligned with each other. As shown in Table 2, governments may be motivated by democratization reforms and their related thrusts of accountability and consumer choice. Improving public image is also a rationale of governments' reaching out to parents. To some extent, mainstream schools reflect the government’s macro- and meso-level aims. Schools may seek parents’ help to solve equity issues. Meanwhile, parents seek to satisfy more micro-level needs, such as greater communication and support from the school on their children’s progress. However, parents may also be driven by the so-called “educational arms race” (Gee, 2012), referring to the excessive competition for best places in elite schools, with children from well-resourced families receiving more learning opportunities than their less fortunate counterparts, and thereby producing inequitable situations.

Table 2. Rationales for Parent Engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government perspectives</th>
<th>School perspectives</th>
<th>Parent perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy / consumer choice</td>
<td>Competition for best places</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability/ decentralization</td>
<td>Support holistic education</td>
<td>Improve child’s achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise standards</td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence on values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource mobilization</td>
<td>Resource mobilization</td>
<td>Financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity / social problems</td>
<td>Equity / social problems</td>
<td>Support from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image communication</td>
<td>Image communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Manzon (2004, p. 15).
Models of Parent Engagement

This section presents four models of parent engagement. These models have been selected as they have influenced government policy internationally. They are reviewed here to understand the different dimensions and elements of parent engagement and how they relate to student outcomes.


Model 1: The Parent Engagement Process

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995; 1997; 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010) model takes the psychological perspective in explaining the process of parent engagement. It illustrates the dynamics of why parents become engaged in their children’s education and how it influences student achievement. It consists of five sequential levels (see Figure 1).

Level 1 illustrates three factors that influence the type and frequency of parent engagement: personal, parents’ perceptions of school openness and life context variables. Level 1.5 shows four different forms of engagement that parents partake in, namely, expectations, home-based activities, home-school communication and involvement in school activities. Level 2 demonstrates how parents contribute to their children’s learning through encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction. Level 3 expresses how children perceive their parents’ actions. These perceptions need to be in line with their parents’ intentions in order for their beliefs and behaviours to be felt and internalized. Thus, children need to reciprocate their parents’ actions and intentions for the positive impacts of engagement to be achieved.
In Level 4, children successfully acquire attributes that may lead them towards student achievement objectives at Level 5.

While providing a clear explanatory framework of the psychological processes at work in parent engagement, this model has some limitations. It is linear and unidirectional. It is also limited in its concept of parent engagement as occurring in the home and school contexts alone. Moreover, it lacks the explicit recognition of key elements of engagement such as mutual trust and a partnership philosophy. Finally, it remains to be tested in an Asian context.

Model 2: Effective Parent Engagement
Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) identify two distinct types of parent engagement: spontaneous initiatives by motivated parents, and organized interventions by professionals to enhance spontaneous parent engagement. They designed a model that illustrates the dynamic process of effective spontaneous parent engagement and its interaction with school initiatives (see Figure 2). Resembling some aspects of Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler’s (2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) framework, this model illustrates the dynamic interactions among parents, students and school in a feedback loop rather than as a linear, unidirectional process. However, it does not explicitly recognize the importance of a trusting relationship between parents and schools.

Model 3: A Typology of Parent Engagement
Epstein’s (2001) typology of parent engagement illustrates six forms. These are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. They are not listed in a hierarchical order and are designated as types, not levels.

- Type 1: Parenting – helping families establish home environments which support children’s academic achievement
- Type 2: Communicating – designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication
- Type 3: Volunteering – recruiting parents to help
- Type 4: Learning at home – providing information and ideas to families on how to help children with homework
- Type 5: Decision making – involving parents in school decisions
- Type 6: Collaborating with the community – integrating services and resources from the community to strengthen schools, families and children’s learning
A detailed schema of this typology is given in Appendix 1. It helps to understand the diverse practices that fall under each type, their challenges and expected results for parents, students and teachers. One shortcoming of this model is its emphasis on the task dimension of parent engagement: what types of actions need to be taken. It fails to explicitly recognize the important underlying relationship dimension which makes these different tasks cohere. This model

Figure 2. A Research-based Model of Effective Parent Engagement in Schooling. Adapted from Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p. 50.
also fails to acknowledge under Type 4, the prevalent practice of private supplementary tutoring or “shadow education” (see Bray & Lykins, 2012). The types practiced should also be sensitive to parents’ genders, children’s ages, and cultural and national contexts. Some of these weaknesses are addressed by Bronfenbrenner’s model.

Model 4: An Ecological Systems Model of Parent Engagement
Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) socio-ecological model of development recognizes multidimensional and multilevel influences on human development and their interconnections (see Figure 3). Every level is interconnected as in an ecological system – represented visually as a set of concentric circles surrounding the child – and there is reciprocal influence across levels and systems.

The *microsystem* refers to a child’s relationship with his/her immediate social environment, which includes settings such as day care, home and school. The *mesosystem* involves interactions between and among individuals (e.g., parents and teachers) and settings (e.g., afterschool programs, and/or schools) that comprise the microsystem. The mesosystem captures the connections and interlinks across a child’s microsystems. The *exosystem* represents the contexts that influence the child’s development indirectly (e.g., parents’ workplace demands which reduce the time of parent-child interaction). At the broadest level of influence is the *macrosystem* comprised of the institutional patterns of culture, economy, political and social policy and dominant beliefs. Finally, the *chronosystem* captures the element of time both in the child’s life trajectory and the influence of changes and continuities in the broader contexts surrounding the child. This model suggests that the child’s well-being is the responsibility of not just families or schools, but also of the entire community. Weiss et al. (2010) present case studies of parent engagement occurring in each of these systems. The specific roles at each level of the system are described in Appendix 2.

Recapitulation: Features of a New Model of Parent Engagement
Based on what we have discussed, the following main features could be incorporated in designing a more comprehensive model of parent engagement for the Singapore context:
WHO are to be engaged: parents (gender-sensitive), culture-sensitive, extended family
WHY parents seek to be engaged: personal motivators, parents’ perceptions of invitations, life contexts
WHERE engagement occurs: home, school, community, nationwide, social media
WHEN engagement occurs: child-age sensitive
HOW engagement is manifested: beliefs, attitudes, trusting relationships, and tasks/activities of both parents and schools. More specific forms of engagement are identified in Model 3.
WHAT the impact of engagement on student outcomes is: Models 1 and 2 explain the process of how parent engagement translates to student outcomes, of which student perceptions plays an important mediating role.

Figure 3. Bronfenbrenner’s Socio-Ecological Model of Development. Adapted from Brofenbrenner (1986).
The above models have explained the factors—personal, school and socio-cultural—which influence parents’ decision and quality of engagement, and how these correlate with the student’s achievement and adjustment in school. They have also described the types of parent engagement possible. Ho and Kwong (2013) have proposed a more nuanced conceptual framework which captures the interplay of principals, teachers and parents in shaping diverse forms of school-home partnerships, and their overall impact on student achievement and engagement in the Hong Kong context. These schemas are helpful in mapping the international and local practices of parent engagement, which is the subject of the following two sections.

Section 2: Global Trends in Parent Engagement
This section reviews recent global trends in parent engagement practices. It also examines international research on the benefits of parent engagement and its weaknesses.

International Practices of Parent Engagement
Governments worldwide have been implementing policies to encourage parents to be more involved in their children’s education in the home, school and community contexts. The rationales for engaging parents vary across governments, as do their approaches. Parent engagement is promoted at various levels in the education system, with the policy trend encouraging engagement from early childhood.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, n.d.), in its document focusing on engaging families to raise the quality of early childhood education, cited some strategies that have been employed internationally. Most of these strategies are applicable to other levels of education. They include:

- Making parent engagement a policy priority, an obligation or right
- Providing public financial resources to engaged parents
- Engaging parents in setting the curriculum
- Supporting and training staff to engage parents
- Engaging parents in an advisory or management body

Effective practices from various countries and regions are presented in Appendix 3. They focus on strategies that governments have employed
to promote parent engagement and its institutionalized forms at the school, national and international levels. They are taken from countries or societies which are highly developed, may be high-performing educational systems and/or may share some contextual similarities with Singapore. They include examples from Europe, North America, Australia and Asia.

Within Asia, societies influenced by Confucian values have a long tradition of parent and community engagement. These include China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. Li et al. (2011) recognized that parent engagement in these societies encompassed both institutional (i.e., school- and/or government-initiated) and cultural practices of parenting. Sinic parents tend to be more involved in cognitive-intellectual activities for their children and explicitly teaching them at home or engaging after-school tutoring programmes (see Bray & Lykins, 2012), than participating in school activities and school decision-making bodies (e.g., HKIER, 2011; Ng, 1999).

**International Research on Effective Parent Engagement**

Many longitudinal studies have demonstrated the positive influence parent engagement has on children’s outcomes (see Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg & Skinner, 2004; Catsambis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). Researchers have also sought to assess and identify types of actions and activities that are highly effective in a child’s emotional and intellectual development. These are most useful to help better design parent engagement programmes, and are most found in parenting, home-based activities, and helping students at risk.

**Parenting**

Parents are their children’s first role models. Thus, they influence much of their children’s attitudes and behavioural development. Because of this, parents also transmit their own attitudes towards education, including sense of efficacy, aspirations and expectations (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Holloway & Yamamoto, 2008), which eventually impact academic achievement (see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995 & 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1986 & 1995). Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis also
found that a combination of parental encouragement and high parental expectations are critical elements in parental support for student success (also Jeynes, 2011). Heavy financial investments in a child’s education by parents may not necessarily be realized without parents actually being personally involved in action (Lareau, 1989). In order to encourage their children to develop good attitudes towards learning, parents need to exhibit them and encourage family activities that encourage these attitudes (OECD, 2012a, 2012b). However, children also need to be cooperative and receptive and have positive beliefs in their own abilities and competencies if any of these efforts are to be felt (Green et al., 2007; Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellas, 2009).

Parenting styles affect children’s emotional and social characteristics, which may shape their attitudes towards education. The most commonly used model for understanding parenting styles and their effects on student academic achievement is Baumrind’s (1967) four parenting styles (see Figure 4). According to Baumrind, authoritative parenting produces the best results in children, while neglectful and authoritarian parenting have the most negative impacts.

*Figure 4. Parenting Styles. Adapted from Baumrind (1967).*
Home-based Activities

Parent engagement in the home ensures that a favourable learning environment extends beyond the school and children feel encouraged to continue learning even at home. Effective home-based activities include the following:

- Parental reading with children which helps encourage interest and inculcate reading habits. Jeynes’ (2011) meta-analysis indicates that this is a significant predictor of success in primary school students.
- Communication and open discussions between parent and child on academic and non-academic matters, as well as a clear display of parents’ interest in a child’s general and academic well-being (OECD, 2012b). Communication is crucial for parents to keep themselves updated with their children’s progress in school and align their actions accordingly.
- Involvement by parents from a child’s early schooling years. Many experts encourage parent engagement in the school to begin early and as a normalized and regular aspect of a child’s education (e.g. Barnard, 2004; Barnett, 1995; Cotton & Wikeland, 1989; Glass, 1999; Jeynes, 2007, 2012; OECD, 2012b). Encouraging parents to be actively and highly involved much earlier on may help in the early detection and resolution of a child’s disciplinary or academic problems. Moreover, the effects of parents’ engagement on children’s emotional and intellectual well-being and their self-efficacy and motivation to learn and succeed are life-long (Jeynes, 2012).

Helping “At-risk” Students

The term "at-risk" refers to children who have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. These children may experience circumstances (e.g., domestic abuse, homelessness, health problems, learning disabilities) that can highly and adversely affect their educational performance, attainment and aspirations.

Meta-analyses of research studies have found that the positive impacts of parent engagement on student academic achievement are prevalent across diverse backgrounds of culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc. (Green et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2011).
Because of this, greater engagement from parents from minority and disadvantaged groups may help narrow achievement gaps between children from lower and higher economic backgrounds (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Jeynes, 2007).

Interestingly, the impact of parent engagement among minority groups exhibits cross-cultural variations. Jeynes (2011) argues that “different cultures have different expectations about the extent and type of family involvement that is expected” (p. 102). In the multicultural context of the US, African-American students benefited more from parent engagement than Asian Americans. Jeynes conjectures that it may be traced to an Asian-American culture where there are enough educational incentives that help shape students’ extrinsic motivations to succeed academically (e.g., academic success reflects positively on a child’s parents, family and community, where more traditional Asian-American cultures tend to value more collective and communitarian perceptions of achievements) so that even without a large degree of parent engagement, students still do relatively well. Furthermore, Asian parents tend to have comparatively higher academic expectations of their children (Jeynes, 2003).

Another consideration is that Asian Americans usually come from intact family structures, in contrast to their African American and Latino counterparts. Thus the impact of parent engagement is greater as it makes up for the absence in those other minority groups (Jeynes, 2011, p. 85). This has implications for multicultural societies like Australia, Canada and Singapore because the types of programmes and activities need to cater to these diversities and avoid a "one-size-fits-all” approach that may marginalize minority cultural groups.

Criticisms about the Benefits of Parent Engagement
Despite the reported benefits of parent engagement highlighted in the previous section, some scholars have identified several weaknesses in the underlying research studies. Various studies refuted the apparent positive student outcomes of parent engagement (e.g., Crozier, 2001; De Carvalho, 2014; Dembo, 1992; Fine, 1993; Schader, 2008; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982). According to Robinson and Harris (2014), many forms of parent engagement, like observing a child’s class, contacting a school about a child’s behaviour, helping to decide a child’s high school
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courses, or helping a child with homework, do not improve student achievement. In some cases, they actually hinder it. Moreover, the conflation of “parent engagement” with “parental involvement”, “school-home partnerships”, and the like add to the confusion in the literature and may be compounded when used in meta-analyses.

However, a more fundamental critique is that parent engagement models sometimes assume working with upper-middle class and suburban families only, disregarding social class differences over material and cultural conditions and dispositions towards education (De Carvalho, 2014). Social groups in reality are more complex and diverse, and teachers and school officials with little information or training on how to deal with diverse parents may struggle to cope (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).

Thus the benefits of parent engagement need to be interpreted with caution. Reporting on findings should specify what form of parent engagement positively impacts on which student outcomes (academic or non-academic), grade level of the student and student’s racial and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic standing.

**Challenges to Parent Engagement**
This section discusses the obstacles to effective parent engagement. While the value of parent engagement appears widely accepted, participation by parents appears to be difficult to promote and maintain (LaRocque et al. 2011). The challenge to high-quality parent engagement is multidimensional (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 88). They can be categorized into parent-related barriers, school-related barriers and student-related barriers.

**Parent-related Barriers**
Less engaged parents tend to come from lower economic backgrounds, migrant and minority groups and are single parents. The most commonly cited barriers on the part of parents, especially for dual-income earners, are work commitments or other home-school scheduling conflicts, material and psychosocial deprivation suffered by either parent or child, and parents having inappropriate beliefs and values underlying a fatalistic view of education. Related to a lack of time would be the practice of leaving the child’s upbringing
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to grandparents, helpers, and tuition/day care centres. Some parents may also lack the knowledge or confidence about how to be appropriately involved (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parents from migrant groups may experience language difficulties when communicating with teachers and school officials (Chavkin, 1993; Lareau, 1989). Parents’ own negative experiences as students may also influence their attitudes towards their children’s academic learning and their teachers (Grolnick et al., 2009). A lack of trust in schools may give rise to unofficial channels of parent engagement using social media which run parallel with the official school-organized parent engagement activities.

School-related Barriers
The relationship between teachers and parents in parent engagement activities in schools may not always be reciprocal. Obstacles to participation may also arise from barriers set up by schools. Ho and Kwong (2013) demonstrated that the school principal’s ideology about parent engagement played a decisive factor in shaping the practices of parent engagement in Hong Kong schools. Misalignment of school and parents’ expectations of the type, extent, etc., of involvement may also occur (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Wlodkowski & Jaynes, 1990). A lack of mutual trust between parents and schools, with some parents being unconvinced about the usefulness of communicating with the school (e.g., CHSC, 1999), is another challenge to authentic engagement. Teachers’ heavy workload and their lack of training in dealing with parents, as well as parents’ lack of interest also pose challenges to high quality engagement.

Student-related Barriers
Children’s own beliefs and dispositions towards parent engagement also need to be considered. Even though studies have shown that students tend to view it more positively when parents and teachers communicate more often (Ames, 1995), others who want to be more autonomous may intentionally not respond to their parents’ and teachers’ efforts (Green et al., 2007; Grolnick et al., 2009).

Summary of Key Challenges
Understanding the workings of parent engagement activities from different stakeholders’ perspectives is important in order to move
forward and improve on current engagement models. Thus, how school leaders, teachers, parents as well as students perceive it is vital. The domains of school and home are two separate areas and those responsible for them may be rather territorial over them. They may prefer to keep their domains separate from each other and reject what can be negatively seen as interference (Epstein, 1986; Shirley, 2014), especially when both parties are interacting over a problem that a child is experiencing or has caused. As for parents who are interested in

Table 3. Factors which may hinder Parent Engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ heavy workload</td>
<td>Heavy workload</td>
<td>Excessive homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ fear their professional status is being encroached upon</td>
<td>Lack of confidence and knowledge about how to be involved</td>
<td>Teachers’ and parents’ pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misalignment of objectives and expectations of type and extent of involvement</td>
<td>Misalignment of objectives and expectations of type and extent of involvement</td>
<td>Own perceptions of learning and aptitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust in parents</td>
<td>Lack of trust in schools</td>
<td>Being left out/misunderstood by teachers and/or parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training in parent engagement</td>
<td>Language and cultural barriers of parents from migrant groups</td>
<td>Peer influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaders’ ideology about parent engagement</td>
<td>School banding and social stigmatization may deter parents of “weaker” students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Own negative experiences in schools and with teachers</td>
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collaborating with schools, they may face difficulties having their voices and perceptions translated into practice in the school.

**Possible Solutions**
The challenge of bridging communication and alignments of expectations between parents and teachers is key in designing successful parent engagement programmes (Patrikakou, 2008). Here, school culture plays a major part in welcoming the participation of parents (Green et al., 2007), because expectations of the kind and extent of involvement need to be clear between both parties. Parents’ unfamiliarity with their child’s education system, syllabus, etc., can be overcome by encouraging interactions and exposure to help increase their knowledge and hence, effectiveness of involvement at home (Hill & Tyson, 2009). At the same time, teachers may also require further skills and training to better cope with dealing with increased parent engagement. Likewise, support for parents in less advantageous economic conditions may come in the form of financial assistance for transportation and honorarium for volunteer work, as well as persuading employers to grant parents special leave to attend school involvement programmes (CHSC, 1999).

**Section 3: Parent Engagement in Singapore**
This section gives an overview of the institutional policy structures involved in overseeing efforts to engage parents in their children’s education and overall development. It also reviews the available research on parent engagement in Singapore.

**Singapore Policies and Initiatives on Parent Engagement**
Two government bodies are mainly responsible for policy-making and implementation on parent-related issues. The Ministry of Education (MOE) focuses on engagement with parents of children in the education system from primary to pre-university levels. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) focuses more, but not exclusively, on pre-school parent engagement and family life education.

**Ministry of Education (MOE) Policies and Initiatives**
The Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN) initiative in 1997 encouraged educational stakeholders to become more involved in collaborative efforts to enhance student learning. Parent engagement
in education is highlighted as part of the state’s aims to provide a more holistic form of education, and encouraging school-home collaboration to help maximize the development of children. A national advisory council, COMPASS (COMmunity and PArents in Support of Schools) was thus established in December 1998 to advise the MOE on home-school-community collaborations (MOE, 2014b).

In 2012, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat laid down the four key elements of a student-centric, values-driven education. The first is “every student, an engaged learner”. This is supported by “every school, a good school”, “every teacher, a caring educator” and “every parent, a supportive partner” (Heng, 2012). A Parents in Education (PiE) website was launched as a resource portal for parents to help them better support the education and development of their children. The website contains articles on parenting tips, educational news, information on the school curriculum and resources for parents to support their children’s learning at home (PiE, 2014b). To provide resources to enhance school-home partnerships, the MOE launched the Parent Support Group (PSG) Fund and the PiE Fund in 2012 (MOE, 2012).

The inaugural Parent Support Group conference at the MOE’s ExCEL Fest was held on 12 April 2014 (PiE, 2014a). Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat welcomed over 450 PSG representatives from schools across the country. The conference celebrated the good practices of PSGs, and also served as a platform for parents to learn and support one another for the benefit of their child’s education.

As part of its Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative, the Ministry of Education also launched the Allied Educator (Counselling) Scheme (AED), which works closely with school management bodies to plan and implement school-wide counselling systems and interventions for at-risk students. Case consultants, school personnel, parents and teachers also work together to help these children by delivering specialized group guidance programmes to help in their social and emotional development (MOE, 2014a).

Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) Initiatives
Parent engagement initiatives at the Singapore pre-school sector
mostly fall under the Parent Education in Pre-school (PEPS) initiative (PEPS, 2012), which not only facilitates the formation of parent support groups in the pre-schools but also parent education programmes. PEPS also provides thorough guidelines, resources, strategies and funding for pre-schools supporting the programme.

Beyond pre-school (i.e., primary to junior college/centralized institute level), schools involved in MSF’s School Family Education (SFE) programme are encouraged to organize family life education programmes to help enhance the quality of the family lives of their students and parents, and school staff (MSF, 2012). Both PEPS and SFE programmes offer a continuum of parenting and family life programmes from pre-schools to junior colleges to help parents throughout their parenthood journey. MSF’s Family Matters! initiative also partners with communities through schools and workplaces to provide further family and parenting education programmes and activities to empower communities with skills, knowledge and resources to build strong families. It also provides funding for family and parental education programmes in schools through FamilyMatters@School. FamilyMatters@School for Fathers (formerly known as Fathers@Schools) was started in November 2009 as a fathering movement by the Dads for Life! movement to encourage father-child bonding programmes (MSF, 2014).

**Research on Singapore Parent Engagement**

This section reviews the available research on parent engagement in Singapore. The main themes covered pertain to the nature and characteristics of parenting styles and engagement in response to changing societal and learning landscapes. There is also much focus on early childhood education, and addressing gaps in parent engagement amongst minority and at-risk students.

**Changing Societal and Learning Landscapes**

Dual-income families are highly common in Singapore, and because of this, much parenting responsibilities are delegated to childcare facilities, domestic helpers, grandparents, etc. Most prominently is the delegation of learning at home to private tutors (Cheo & Quah, 2005; Khong, 2008; Khong & Ng, 2005). Higher income families are more likely to have
stay-at-home mothers who can afford to allocate more time, or full time, for parenting.

Singapore has also seen an influx of migrants, thereby changing Singapore’s already multicultural and multilingual learning environment into an increasingly diverse one. Thus, certain parents’ lack of engagement may not necessarily reflect lack of interest, but other socio-economic factors that may serve as hindrances (e.g., time constraints, language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, etc.).

More recent years have witnessed the rise of social media and its pervasive influence on social networking and communication as well as learning. Parents are becoming more demanding, vocal and competition-driven in seeking the best opportunities for their children. As Our Singapore Conversation highlighted, a major concern of parents is school-parent-community relationships and communication (REACH, 2013).

**Parent Engagement in Singapore since 1998**
Traditionally, parents rarely got involved in schools with the exception of school-initiated events and “last-resort” measures to handle problematic students. Parents also saw no need to “intrude” in school spaces during lesson times, especially when uninitiated by schools and teachers. While more established mission or government-aided schools already had school-initiated alumni and parent associations, mainstream schools lacked the formal structures to involve parents and the community (Khong, 2005). This began to change in 1998, with the setting up of COMPASS by the Ministry of Education, in a move to encourage greater communication, cooperation and partnerships between schools, parents and communities (Khong & Ng, 2005). With this, Singapore’s learning environment became increasingly more democratic and cooperative with previous boundaries between schools and home, and teachers and parents becoming increasingly more open.

An MOE survey conducted in 2001 found that there has been a steady rise in the establishment of Parent–Teacher Associations (PTA) and Parent Support Groups (PSG). Ninety-four per cent of local schools
reported that they have PSGs (COMPASS, 2001, as cited in Khong & Ng, 2005). Highly-concerned, well-educate, and affluent parents are also becoming a strong, vocal source of criticism of schools today (Khong, 2008).

One of the reasons why parents are becoming increasingly involved in school is because the education system in Singapore is widely regarded as being very competitive (REACH, 2013). Education-driven anxiety has caused parents to invest heavily in ensuring their children survive the intense competition present in Singapore schools (Khong, 2005, 2008). In order to enrol their children into what they perceive as “top” or “elite” schools, many parents even go to the extent of moving into expensive homes in the vicinity of these schools and volunteering there to secure their child’s enrolment (Khong & Ng, 2005).

Another reason for parents’ heavy input into children’s education (e.g., purchase of assessment material, educational aids and software and enrichment materials and programmes, etc.) is because educational success is seen as the most effective vehicle for social and economic mobility (Gee, 2012). Because of this, private tuition has become a thriving “shadow education system” as parents fuel the market for it (Khong & Ng, 2005). Meanwhile, teachers in Singapore are generally hard-pressed for time and have heavy workloads. While teachers are aware of the pressures of Singapore’s high-stakes examination system, parents place additional pressure on them.

**Impact of Parenting Styles**

A number of studies conducted at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore have explored the influence of parenting styles on student achievement and behaviour. Drawing on Baumrind’s parenting styles framework (see Figure 4), they suggested that authoritative parenting is least likely to produce delinquent children (Huan, 1998). It also has positive effects on academic achievement and school adjustment for primary school students (Sze, 2005), leads to greater academic and behavioural resilience for polytechnic students (Leong, 2010) and correlates positively with emotional intelligence (Chan, 2011). Aye and colleagues studied 39 primary schools in Singapore and also concluded that students with warm, firm and democratic parents
tended to have better school performance and stronger engagement in school (Aye, Lau, & Nie, 2008). Similarly, parents who scored lower on monitoring behaviour but provided conducive learning environments at home (e.g., tuition, study resources) produced higher performing students than parents with higher monitoring behaviour (Kee, 2006).

Research among Singaporean adolescents has also distinguished between the benefits of paternal and maternal engagement. A mother’s parenting shows strong correlation with her child’s school engagement (school engagement encompasses a child’s attendance, sense of attachment to his/her school and achievement goals) and self-concept, while a father’s parenting is more correlated with academic achievement (Devi, 2000; Ong, 1999).

Parent Engagement in Early Childhood
In 2011, the Centre for Research and Best Practices of Singapore’s SEED Institute studied a Singapore pre-school facility with successful parent engagement programmes (Teo, 2011). They found that its most successful strategy to encourage school-home partnerships is having a parents’ resource area within the school. This space shows in tangible form that parents are included as part of the learning landscape of the school. The school also frequently communicates with parents on family involvement via various platforms like postcards and newsletters, to better engage them. Parents’ workshops are also held where both parents and children participate, followed by take-home kits and resources to continue parent-child engagement and learning at home.

Parent education workshops complemented by school-initiated communication with parents have proven to be effective in significantly raising pre-primary children’s mathematics scores (Ho, 2007). The Singapore study also indicated that parent education workshops have positive effects on parents’ self-efficacy.

Clarke (2001) documented the effectiveness of attending parent training sessions for parents of kindergarten students, especially for parents who were less likely to participate in school activities or who might find it more difficult to assist their children in homework due to time
constraints and/or English not being their first language. This resulted in significant improvements in language and cognitive skills among the students. It also increased the time spent by parents completing educational activities with their children. Moreover, parents’ self-efficacy increased too.

In an independent research study organized by Lien Foundation on improving the early childhood sector in Singapore (Ang, 2012), the researchers, drawing upon Bronfenbrenner’s (1986; 1995) concept of ecology, suggested parent-school partnerships as part of a holistic ‘family-community’ conceptual framework, with families as the first schools that children learn from, followed by parental support as they move on to formal schooling. One model of creating an ecology of support is to create a Team around the Child (TAC), with the child situated within a close network of relationships and connections with professionals, the family, and the wider community.

**Parent Engagement for Disadvantaged Groups**

There is increasing awareness of the struggles and perceptions of parents with children with weaker learning or learning disabilities. Poon and colleagues found that parents tend to prioritize achievements and goals more related to character development and emotional achievements (e.g., “safe from harm” and “happy and satisfied”) over more academic and material pursuits (Poon, Koh, & Magiati, 2013, pp. 386–387). Parents tend to acknowledge that the limitations that their children struggle with may hold back their capabilities for much achievement. Thus, parental expectations tend to be reduced to adapt to these perceived realities of their possibilities later in life. Furthermore, social stigma, discrimination and lack of awareness in society, also serve as significant social barriers, depriving these children from many opportunities, irrespective of their functional abilities. These social barriers also shape their parents’ perceptions of their opportunities. The authors suggest that the state can do more by intervening, and providing these parents with more information and resources to cope. Furthermore, this information may not need to be directed to parents alone, but also to the general public in a bid to better the opportunities of these individuals (Poon, 2013; Poon, Koh, & Magiati, 2013).
Three research projects conducted by NIE in the area of at-risk students are also pertinent. One ongoing project focuses on school-parent partnerships as a means to support low-achieving students (OER 30/12 LK: Schools Taking the Lead in Engaging Parents in Partnership: Supporting Lower-Achieving Students in Singapore Schools). A second project, also ongoing, examines the indirect role of the parent factor in predicting academic resilience of at-risk students (OER 42/12 ISC: Turning Achievement Around: Predictors of Academic Resilience of Academically At-Risk Students in Singapore). Finally, a third project (completed in 2014), investigated the correlation between parenting practices on student motivation and emotions (OER 13/12 LWS: Assessing Students’ Academic Motivation, Emotion and Strategies) among a sample of Secondary 3 students in Singapore. It concluded that parent engagement in learning was associated with an adaptive learning profile and high academic achievement, whereas parental control predicted a maladaptive coping orientation and low achievement (Luo, Aye, Hogan, Kaur, & Chan, 2013).

Summary of Singapore Research on Parent Engagement
The above discussion has shown that the research literature on Singapore is growing, yet its coverage is patchy. In terms of forms of parent engagement, parenting practices have been most studied in relation to student learning outcomes, albeit for a limited sample. As for levels of education, focus has been given to parent engagement at the pre-school level. Finally, with respect to types of students, more emphasis has been given to at-risk students and how parent engagement can make a difference. However, no attempt has yet been made to conduct a comprehensive, baseline study of parent engagement in the Singapore context. This is crucial in order to determine what forms of parent engagement work for whom in Singapore, why and for what student outcomes.

Section 4: Implications for Policy and Future Research
With the MOE looking towards a student-centric, values-driven education, school-home partnerships play an important supportive role. Teachers and parents in Singapore are increasingly aware that both academic and character developments occur in school and at home.
The process of breaking down traditional barriers between home and school and building trusting relationships with parents and the larger community, however, takes time. This section will suggest future directions for public policy and educational research.

**Implications for Public Policy in Singapore**

In order to achieve a systemic and integrated approach to parent engagement in education, some aspects of policy and administrative structures may need to be enhanced. Context-sensitive approaches in engaging parents will also be suggested.

**Policy-making and Administrative Structures**

Currently, two ministries are responsible for engaging parents in Singapore: the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Ministry of Education. Taking a student- or child-centric approach, these policy-making bodies and their corresponding administrative structures which support school-home partnerships may need to be streamlined in order to provide improved, seamless and sustained forms of parent engagement across the developmental stages of the student. Research suggests that in order to achieve longer lasting benefits, interventions by the state and its affiliates need to be fully comprehensive in both education and social support services and lasting for several years, with follow-through support for children and their families for at least 2 years since entry into primary school (Clarke, 2001; Zigler & Styfco, 1994).

**School Leadership Vision and Values**

School leaders and teachers play a key role in fostering parent engagement and establishing enduring school-home partnerships based on trust (Khong, 2012). In order to align the divergent agendas and interests of stakeholders, training of teachers, school leaders and parents – both fathers and mothers – in effective parent engagement practices attuned to the local context is necessary. Consideration may also be given to enhancing administrative measures – incentives and accountability – to recognize and reward responsible and innovative parent engagement. Trained teachers also need to be given time and space for focusing on parent engagement activities.
Outreach to Under-served Parents
While the use of technology and social media may help, reaching out to under-served parents may need to be cognizant of communication barriers such as language, time and cultural beliefs about involvement. While Singapore may not have communities that are extremely difficult to access, it has new immigrants, permanent residents and new citizens, and families looking after children with disabilities.

Public Education
A public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to the strategic plan (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999) may be appropriate. Four guiding principles suggested by research may be helpful (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 89). They are:

• Collaboration should be pro-active rather than reactive.
• The engagement of all parents should be worked for.
• Collaboration involves sensitivity to the wide-ranging circumstances of all families.
• Collaboration recognizes and values the contributions parents have to make to the educational process.

Implications for Future Research
In order to achieve an evidence-based, context-sensitive policy thrust in parent engagement, a more focused research agenda for Singapore is a priority. Research in other contexts has shown that parent engagement models in international literature tend to project the behaviour of a dominant class or type of parents. These considerations open a potential area for local research.

Building on previous research conducted in NIE, we have commenced a system-wide baseline study of parent engagement in Singapore. It aims to investigate the current state of parent engagement from the different perspectives of school stakeholders. It will explore the forms of parent engagement practiced in schools and whether these have any influence on student engagement and school experiences as well as trust building between parents and schools. It will highlight best practices of parent engagement as well as key challenges. The study employs a combination of qualitative and
quantitative research methods on a nationally representative sample in order to provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding of parent engagement in Singapore.

There will be a focus on translation of the findings of the study to support MOE in policy and strategy design for improving parent engagement. Our research team will work closely with MOE’s Communications and Engagement Group to develop a localized model and framework of parent engagement. We will also help MOE translate relevant results into applications for capacity building of schools and of teacher education.

Conclusion
Parent engagement is highly recommended by experts to complement the learning that children receive in school. This paper started with a working definition of parent engagement and examined some analytical models in understanding its multidimensional nature. It then presented global trends in parent engagement and research evidence on its benefits and weaknesses. The Singapore context was examined in terms of policy, practices and available research on parent engagement, based on which some implications for policy making and future research were offered in the final section.

The paper suggests that a context-sensitive framework of parent engagement needs to be developed based on a comprehensive and systemic understanding of Singapore stakeholders’ practices and the beliefs that influence them. Research-informed policy can then be formulated and the administrative support as well as capacity building of all stakeholders be framed accordingly. Successful parent engagement programmes need a strong framework and effective implementation from the government, but it also needs support, understanding and ownership by all stakeholders to succeed.

Notes
1. “Home-school co-operation” is used to denominate Hong Kong’s Home-School Co-operation Committee, a government advisory body that promotes initiatives in this area.
2. Australia uses the term “family-school partnerships” in its national
framework (DET, 2014b) and New Zealand uses “home-school partnerships” (Bull et al., 2008).

3. The authors entitled their model as the “parent involvement process” but we used “parent engagement”.

4. Epstein used the term “parent involvement” in the model but it may be expanded to “parent engagement” as she conceives of involvement in the context of partnerships.

5. This may include grandparents (e.g., Gubhaju & Lai, 2011).

6. Various studies have demonstrated how Confucian cultural values on education shape the way parents positively motivate their children to academically succeed (e.g., Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lam, Ho & Wong, 2002; Lee, 1996).

7. Parental monitoring behaviour refers to expectations parents have for their children’s behaviour, their actions to keep track of their behavioural and academic progress and how they respond when their children disappoint their expectations.

8. Some useful recommendations are forthcoming in 2015 from a nearly completed NIE research by Dr Lana Khong on Schools Taking the Lead in Engaging Parents in Partnership: Supporting Lower-achieving Students in Singapore Schools (OER 30/12 LK).

9. The research, commissioned by MOE’s Communications and Engagement Group (CEG), is entitled Engaging Parents as Partners: A Baseline Study of Practices in Singapore Schools (OER 1/15, MEM). The research team comprises Dr Maria Manzon, Dr Lana Khong, Ms Helen Hong, Ms Wartik Bte Hassan and Ms Rifhan Miller. The project will run from April 2015 to July 2017.

References


Parent Engagement in Education


Manzon, Miller, Hong & Khong


Parent Engagement in Education


Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.


## Appendix 1

**Appendix 1. Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement in Schools, Family and Community Partnerships: Examples of Related Activities and Expected Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Examples of related practices</th>
<th>Expected challenges</th>
<th>Expected results for students</th>
<th>Expected results for parents</th>
<th>Expected results for teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Parenting</td>
<td>Helping families establish home environments which support children’s academic achievement</td>
<td>Provide information to all families beyond those actively participating in programmes</td>
<td>Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents</td>
<td>Understanding of and confidence about parenting, their children’s development, and changes in home conditions for learning</td>
<td>Understanding families’ background, cultures, concerns, goals, needs and views of their children</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Enable families to share more information to schools on their children</td>
<td>Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs and values, as taught by family</td>
<td>Good or improved attendance</td>
<td>Respect for families’ strengths and efforts</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable and linked to children’s success in school</td>
<td>Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of importance of school</td>
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<td>2. Communicating</td>
<td>Designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication</td>
<td>Review the readability, clarity, form and frequency of all memos, notices and other print and non-print communications</td>
<td>Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades</td>
<td>Understanding school programmes and policies</td>
<td>Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly.</td>
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<td>Consider parents who do not speak or read English well</td>
<td>Understanding of school policies on behaviour, attendance and other areas of student conduct</td>
<td>Monitoring and awareness of child’s progress</td>
<td>Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review the quality of major communications</td>
<td>Informed decisions about courses and programmes</td>
<td>Responding effectively to students’ problems.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Establish clear two-way channels for communications between home and school</td>
<td>Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator</td>
<td>Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers</td>
<td>Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children’s programmes and progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Types</td>
<td>Examples of related practices</td>
<td>Expected challenges</td>
<td>Expected results for students</td>
<td>Expected results for parents</td>
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<td>3. Volunteering</td>
<td>Recruiting parents to help</td>
<td>Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that they are welcome</td>
<td>Skill in communicating with adults</td>
<td>Understanding teacher’s job, increased comfort in school and carry-over of school activities at home</td>
<td>Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies and events to enable working parents to participate</td>
<td>Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers</td>
<td>Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education</td>
<td>Awareness of parents’ talents and interests in school and children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive</td>
<td>Awareness of the many skills, talents, occupations and contributions of parent and other volunteers</td>
<td>Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school</td>
<td>Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers</td>
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<td>Gains in specific skills of volunteer work</td>
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<td>4. Learning at home</td>
<td>Providing information and ideas to families regarding how to help children with homework</td>
<td>Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework and help families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork</td>
<td>Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork</td>
<td>Know how to support, encourage and help student at home each year</td>
<td>Better design of homework assignments</td>
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<td>Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework and help families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork</td>
<td>Homework completion</td>
<td>Discussions of school, classwork and homework</td>
<td>Respect for family time</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Coordinate family linked homework activities, if students have several teachers</td>
<td>Positive attitude toward schoolwork</td>
<td>Understanding of instructional programme each year and of what child is learning in each subject</td>
<td>Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions</td>
<td>View of parents as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school</td>
<td>Appreciation of teaching skills</td>
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<td>Self-concept of ability as learner</td>
<td>Awareness of child as a learner</td>
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<td>5. Decision making</td>
<td>Involving parents in school decisions</td>
<td>Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups</td>
<td>Awareness of representation of families in school decisions</td>
<td>Input into policies that affect child’s education</td>
<td>Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Offer training to enable leaders to represent other families, with input from and return of information to all parents</td>
<td>Understanding that student rights are protected</td>
<td>Feeling of ownership of school</td>
<td>View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups</td>
<td>Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students</td>
<td>Awareness of parents’ voices in school decisions</td>
<td>Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of school, district and state policies</td>
<td>Shared experiences and connections with other families</td>
<td>Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students</td>
<td>Shared experiences and connections with other families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Collaborating with the community</td>
<td>Integrate services and resources from the community to strengthen schools, families, and children’s learning.</td>
<td>Responsibilities, funds, staff and locations for collaborative activities</td>
<td>Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences</td>
<td>Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services</td>
<td>Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Inform families of community programmes for students, such as mentoring, tutoring and business partnerships</td>
<td>Awareness of careers and options for future education and work</td>
<td>Interactions with other families in community activities.</td>
<td>Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programmes or to obtain services</td>
<td>Specific benefits linked to programmes, services, resources and opportunities that connect students with community</td>
<td>Awareness of school’s role in the community and of community’s contributions to the school</td>
<td>Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services</td>
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<td>Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education</td>
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*Source: Adapted from Epstein (2001) and UNICEF (2014).*

**Microsystem Supports**
- Children learn how expectations and rules of behaviour change across different Microsystems (e.g., home, classroom, youth group).
- Children learn the language and routines associated with different Microsystems.
- Children learn new life skills by participating in different Microsystems.
- Children observe how individuals interact and treat each other across different Microsystems.
- Children learn to apply basic human values, such as honesty and respect, across different Microsystems.
- Children learn how to get along with their peers by participating in group activities across different Microsystems.

**Mesosystem Supports**
- Parents and teachers collaborate in sending children consistent messages about their behaviour.
- Parents and teachers collaborate in reinforcing similar learning experiences in the classroom and at home.
- Parents, teacher, and other school personnel collaborate in assessing the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of children.
- Schools collaborate with community agencies to provide children’s physical cognitive and social-emotional needs.
- Teachers enrich children’s education and provide cultural learning experiences by using interactive technologies to cooperate with other teachers within and outside the country.

**Exosystem Supports**
- School administrators, as well as teacher and parent groups, work together to plan and implement policies that ensure all children receive a quality education.
- School boards develop educational budgets and policies that
take into account the lives of diverse families.

- Communities support the well-being of children and families through social, health, sanitation, recreational and protective services. They also offer ongoing cultural and artistic events that enrich human lives and reinforce a sense of community identity.

- Local, state and federal governments pass legislation that takes into account the diversity of community life.

**Macrosystem Supports**

- Children receive consistent and positive messages about "national values" and customs through the media, community events and classroom lessons.

- Children learn to respect the values and customs of all cultures within and outside the classroom and home.

- Children are taught democratic principles through the social studies curriculum, use of respectful behaviour, management practices, and daily routines such as the morning pledge of allegiance.

- Children are taught about the value of healthy self-expression through literature, dance, art and music.

*Source: Adapted from Coleman (2013, p.49).*

*East Asian countries have been grouped together in Part I, and other countries in Part II.*

**Part I. East Asia**

**Hong Kong**
A territory-wide baseline study was conducted in 1993 (Shen, Pang, Tsoi, Yung, & Yip, 1994), which revealed that parent engagement was scarce and mainly focused on communication. The establishment of the Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC) in 1993 and subsequent policy initiatives which fostered parent engagement in school decision-making bodies have led to parents becoming more involved in diverse roles at home and in school. The CHSC was tasked to promote home-school co-operation by conducting surveys, allocating project grants to schools, publicizing better home-school relations and encouraging the establishment of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). It advises the Education Bureau and related government institutions as well as teacher education institutions on ways to promote parent engagement in the education process (CHSC, 2014a; Manzon, 2004). To further deepen home-school co-operation in the territory, 18 self-initiated district-based Federations of PTAs (FPTA) were formed. They play an advisory role on issues of education and home-school co-operation (CHSC, 2014b). The CHSC started with much success, having achieved nearly 100% coverage of PTAs in 2010. However, it needs to find a new vision and mission especially in a changed context where Hong Kong education reforms are significantly under challenge.

**Japan**
Parent engagement is a major component of Japan’s education system. Students often have “homeroom” teachers who establish relationships with their students’ parents and offer guidance to students. Teachers and parents are constantly communicating throughout a child’s schooling years, with teachers sending a notebook, detailing students’ progress and any concerns for parents to read. This way, both parties
have a clear sense of how the child is doing and may intervene early if the child seems to be going off track (NCEE, 2014b).

The phenomenon of “monster parents” is receiving much attention by Japanese scholars and media. These refer to over-bearing mothers who persistently challenge school staff. Many of them tend to be college-educated, are confident in their child-rearing abilities, and often intervene in their children’s schooling to monitor them better and make constructive suggestions on better teaching practices around the schools. While, their “meddlesome” actions may be negatively perceived by the school, Holloway and colleagues (Holloway, Suzuki, & Yamamoto, 2010) feel that these mothers may have good intentions, and could have a positive effect if school officials and parents are able to form better partnerships and channels of communications between them. Thus, school administrators, teachers and parents, need to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue and clear boundaries need to be drawn for mutual benefit.

**South Korea**

In South Korea, the government endorsed parent engagement in 1995 and provided two channels: the School Governing Committee and the Parents Association. The School Governing Committee is a legal consultative body comprising parents, community leaders and teachers. Its aim is to democratize schools and balance the absolute power of the principal. It decides on financial matters, extra-curricular activities, field trips, etc. Members are elected by vote. By contrast, Parents Association is based on voluntary participation. It is organized at the class- and school-levels. However, these institutionalized forms of participation do not offer channels of two-way communication with teachers and their influence is limited to issues outside the classroom.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has promoted initiatives to increase parent engagement even more, such as school monitoring programmes, parents’ training programmes and support centres. These are specifically designed to encourage parents to keep up on their children’s progress in school, be aware of their school resources and be better involved through volunteering or joining a parents’ group (NCEE, 2014c).
Korea has parent engagement and family and community co-operation courses for pre- and in-service teachers, including information on parent engagement programmes, parent counselling, and theory and practice of parent-teacher communication for teacher trainees (OECD, 2012b). Starting from 2012, kindergartens are legally obliged to have a management committee consisting of five to nine representatives of parents and teachers (UNESCO, 2012).

**Taiwan**
The Taiwanese government mandated parent engagement in primary and secondary schools in 2006, for purposes of democratization and liberalization of education. They employ the notion of school-parent partnership. The law requires representatives of parents’ associations to be ex-officio members on the education review boards at all levels and in school management. In 2007, the Taiwan Ministry of Education also launched a pilot project called the “Individual Family Guidance Project”, which offers a family support network of trained volunteers, social workers, teachers and administrators to assist socially disadvantaged families (MOE, 2007).

**Part II. Other International Examples**

**Australia**
While the central government has many policies in place to instil the culture of parent engagement in its schools across the country (DET, 2013), each individual state has relative autonomy to implement its own initiatives. Australia serves as an interesting case study through the strong community and state level initiatives that are practiced and launched from ground up, as well as its many successful public and private community and parent engagement organizations that cater to different communities, needs and expectations of its people. Some examples are:

1. The Australian Parents Council (APC, 2014) is the national organization of parents of children in non-government schools. There are also other parent group organizations that are affiliates of the APC for specific “types” of non-government schools. One example is the Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia
(PFFWA), which represents parents of children in non-government Catholic schools.

2. School councils are a body corporate with an approved constitution, whose members are made up of the school community. Its responsibilities are specified under the Education Act (DET, 2013). The school council is responsible for advising the principal about the educational needs of the community, building links between stakeholders, assessing and advising on the physical needs of the school, determining community use of school facilities, managing the school's annual financial budget, overseeing work on buildings and grounds being carried out at the school and the employment of school council staff (DET, 2014a).

3. The Federation of Parents & Friends Associations of Catholic Schools is the state-wide body representing all parents of all students enrolled in Catholic schools. The Federation is officially recognized by the Church and Catholic Education authorities. It is strong across a few states (e.g., Queensland, South Australia), with relative autonomy within them (PFA, 2014).

Canada

During the 1990s, departments of education in all the Canadian provinces introduced legislation requiring all publicly funded schools to form parent advisory councils and it aimed to ensure that every school would have one by 2000. The intention of this legislation is to provide parents with the opportunity and training to participate in school decisions (McKenna & Willms, 1998). In 2010, the Canadian government published its parent engagement policy in Ontario schools (MOE Canada, 2010). The provincial ministry of Ontario requires all school boards to establish a Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and outlines its composition, function and mandate (EDU, 2010). It supports PICs with small grants called Parent Reaching Out Grants (PROs) (NCEE, 2014a). The government also provides boards with $5,000 annual base funding and 17 cents per student to fund its PIC, as well as an additional $500 per school council to support parent engagement activities (EDU, 2014). Similarly, in 1995, the province of Manitoba introduced legislation for Advisory Councils for School Leadership in 1995 giving parents a say in curriculum, fundraising, discipline, policies, etc., even if only in an advisory capacity (Duma, 2014).
European Union
Delhaxhe (1998) identified formal structures of parent engagement in countries of the European Union (EU) as on three levels: school, intermediate (province, municipality), and national or central. School-level parent associations are a generalized practice in the EU. Intermediate level bodies exist in France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, and Spain. At the national or central level, Francophone Belgium has a Parents Council for the Francophone community, and Ireland has a National Parents Council for primary and post-primary education, respectively. There is also a European Parents’ Association (EPA), comprising parents associations in Europe representing more than 150 million parents. EPA represents and gives to parents a powerful voice in the development of education policies and decisions at the European level. EPA aims to promote the active participation of parents and the recognition of their central place as the primary ones responsible of the education of their children (EPA, 2014).

Finland
Finland has legislative provisions for parent engagement starting from the pre-school level (FNBE, 2010a). Parents are also involved in the design of local curricula (Sliwka & Istance, 2006), as suggested in the Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (FNBE, 2010b). In addition, training opportunities for teaching staff on encouraging and improving communication with parents of children are also in place under the Finnish National Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2012b).

Scotland
In 2006, the Scottish Government passed the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act to get parents more involved in their children’s learning at home, in school-home partnerships (volunteering in the classroom and at school events), and parental representation in school-parent councils (Education Scotland, 2006a, 2006b; The Scottish Government, 2006). The Education and Lifelong Learning Parental Involvement Policy was enacted by the Scottish Borders Council (SBS) in 2008, and then refreshed in 2015 as the Parental Involvement in Schools policy (SBC, 2015) following wide consultations with parent councils, parents, head teachers, school staff and pupil
councils. The policy aims to reinforce parents’ right to be informed and to be welcomed and listened to in what refers to their child’s education and school.

All schools’ Parent Councils in Scotland belong to the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC, 2015). Within the city of Edinburgh, the Consultative Committee with Parents (CCwP) provides a forum for parents across the city the opportunity to discuss citywide and national issues. These parents are chosen at the meetings of the Neighbourhood Groups and Citywide Special Schools Group (CEC, 2013).