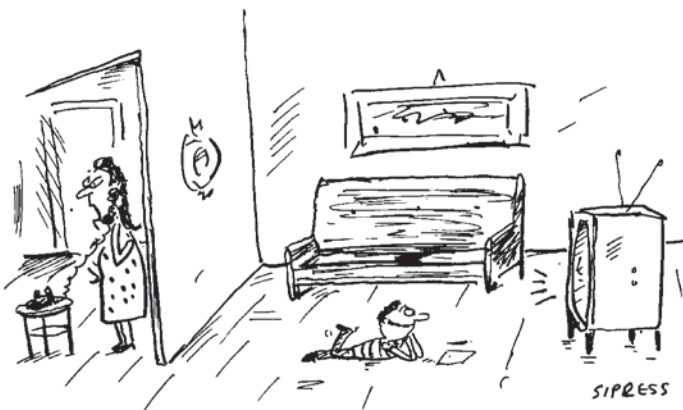




4

Get Involved at School because You Want to, Not because You Have to

When parents take the time to meet their child's teachers, or when they volunteer for activities at school, they signal to their children that they value education. This chapter examines some of the ways busy parents can be involved in school activities and emphasises that parents and teachers should not wait to meet each other.



"Miss Rogers, Sally Green. Is it true my son's research project is 'the effect of too much television on a typical ten-year-old?'"



Parents can also be involved in their children's education by participating in activities at school, such as meeting with teachers or school principals or volunteering at school. Research has shown that this type of parental involvement, which is often well-structured, is associated with greater student engagement in school. That's because these types of activities show students that their parents value learning and education; and it shows schools that these parents care about their children's education – which, in turn, might prompt teachers to devote more attention to these children.

The PISA questionnaire asked parents whether, during the previous academic year, they had discussed their child's behaviour with a teacher, at either the parent's or a teacher's initiative, whether the parent had volunteered to participate in extracurricular activities or in the library, or whether the parent assisted a teacher in the school, appeared as a guest speaker or participated in local school government.

PISA results show that students whose parents are involved in activities at school tend not to perform as well in reading as students whose parents are less actively engaged in school activities. In 11 countries and economies, children whose parents discussed their behaviour or progress with a teacher, either at the teacher's or the parents' initiative, did not perform as well in reading as children whose parents did not have such discussions. This means, most likely, that schools wait until students begin to struggle to meet with their parents; and parents wait until they see their children struggling with homework before playing an active role in their schooling.

Similarly, in seven countries and economies, children whose parents volunteered in extracurricular activities are more likely to have lower reading scores than students whose parents did not volunteer.

Box 4.1 Ireland's legal recognition of parents as partners

The Education Act of 1998 emphasises that education in Ireland involves a partnership among many stakeholders, including parents. The Act specifies that parents have the right to be consulted and informed of all aspects of their child's education, and schools are required to involve parents in school planning. Schools are also required to have parents as members of the management board. The Act specifies parents' responsibilities as: "to nurture a learning environment, co-operate with and support the school and other individual partners, and fulfill their special role in the development of the child".

Irish legislation acknowledged and promoted the role of parents in the education system prior to the 1998 Act, as well. The Irish Constitution of 1937 recognises parents as a child's primary educator. The 1975 change in the administrative structure of national schools included the indication that at least two parents of the children enrolled in a primary school serve on the school's board of management; and the *Parents as Partners in Education* circular of 1991 requires all post-primary schools to ensure that a parents' association is formed in the school and encourages this association to join the national network.

Nearly every primary and post-primary school in Ireland now has parent representatives on its board of management.

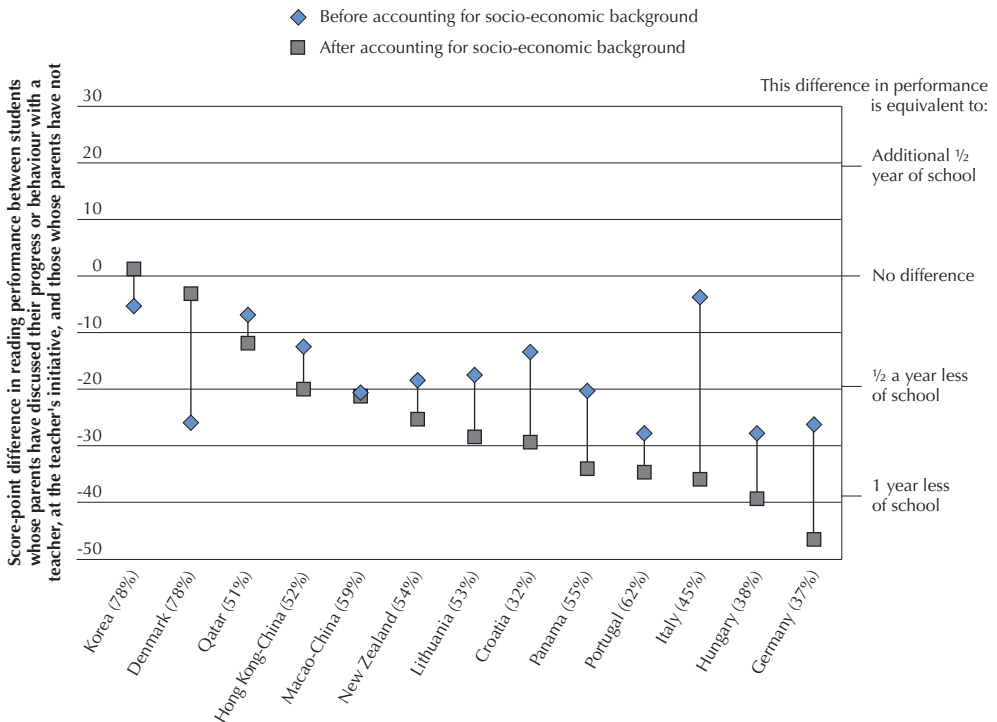


While these results seem to indicate a negative relationship between parental involvement and student performance, in all likelihood, these students' reading scores might have been even lower if their parents had not become actively involved in school activities.

These forms of involvement tend to be reactive: parents get involved only after they have determined – or have been alerted by the school – that there is a need to get involved. Because of this, parents of struggling students are more likely to attend meetings with teachers, volunteer in extracurricular activities, and help children with homework. As a result, in many countries and economies, socio-economically disadvantaged parents and parents of boys are more likely to be involved in these activities since poor reading proficiency tends to be associated with low socio-economic status and with boys. While these activities are beneficial for their children – unless the struggling students are stigmatised by their parents' involvement at school – parental involvement would be even more beneficial if it began well before it was considered to be necessary.

■ Figure 4.1 ■

Discussing your child's progress at school shows that you value education



Note: The percentage of parents who have discussed their child's behaviour or progress with a teacher, at the teacher's initiative, is shown in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in reading performance after accounting for socio-economic background.

Source: Table A4.1.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606549>



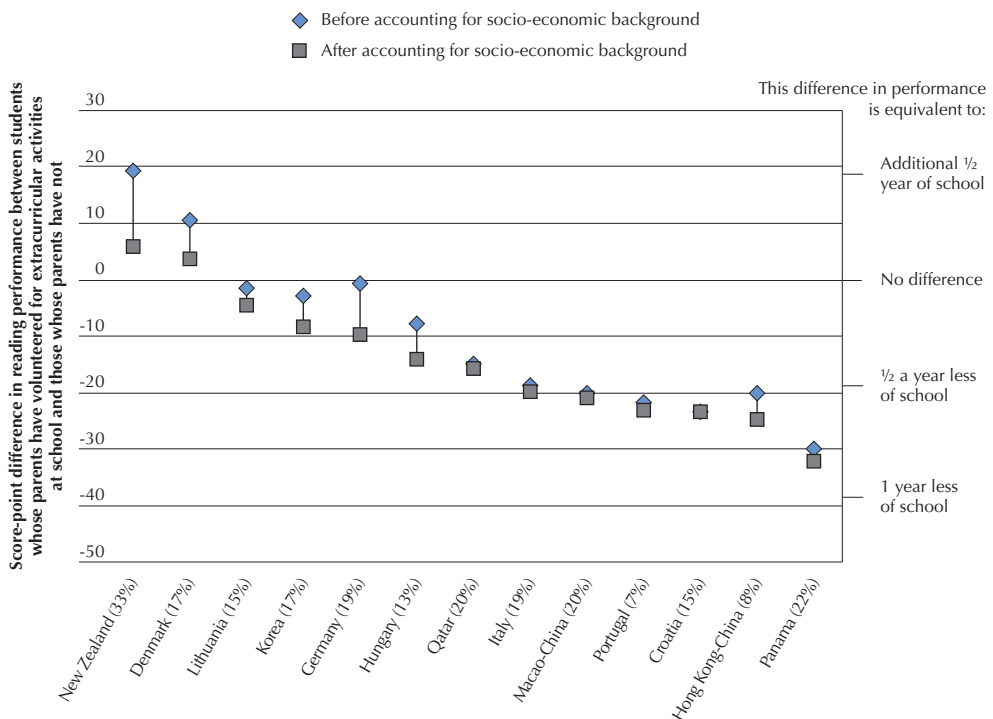
The most striking feature of parental involvement in school activities is the relative lack of it, as well as the fact that it mostly occurs only when it is absolutely necessary, for example because students are struggling. PISA results highlight how in most schools, parents and teachers generally meet only when students are having difficulties. Few parents were engaged in activities at school that were not directly related to helping their children, activities such as appearing as a guest speaker, assisting a teacher or volunteering for sports or other extracurricular activities.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Parents' involvement at school depends on the school's own attitudes and initiatives towards inviting parents to participate in school-based activities (see what schools can do below). But assuming that schools welcome such involvement, parents can do much more than discuss their child's academic progress with teachers. They can arrange with the school to visit a class or classes to better understand

■ Figure 4.2 ■

Volunteering for extracurricular activities in your child's school is only weakly associated with better student performance



Note: The percentage of parents who have volunteered for extracurricular activities at school is shown in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in reading performance after accounting for socio-economic background.

Source: Table A4.2.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606568>



Box 4.2 United States: Harlem Children Zone

Harlem Children Zone (HCZ) is a non-profit organisation that bases its work on the idea of redesigning **schools as community centres**. The programme, begun in the early 1990s in an attempt to address the many problems facing disadvantaged families within a single New York City block in Harlem, offers schooling, after-school programmes, health and social services and community-building programmes. It also runs an array of programmes that target parents and children, from birth to young adulthood. The Baby College, for example, provides training to expectant parents and parents of children up to 3 years old. It emphasises the importance of reading to children and of using verbal discipline over corporal punishment. The Three Years Old Journey helps parents to build language and parenting skills to support their child's development. Academic Case Management is an approach to youth development, used for middle school, high school and college-aged students, that encourages collaboration between parents and school staff to support student performance.

The programme, offered free of charge and funded by donations and a government grant, has been replicated in 20 other US cities. In 2009, the organisation served more than 10 000 children and 10 000 adults in Harlem alone.

www.hcz.org

Box 4.3 United States: The National Network of Partnership Schools

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), established in 1996 at Johns Hopkins University, aims to support families and communities in the United States to become involved in their children's education. The NNPS has developed various tools to this end, including a "partnership process" called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework. Through TIPS, the student is given a homework assignment, based on a topic discussed in class, that requires interaction with someone at home. In this way, **both teachers and parents are involved in the student's work**.

NNPS, which was initially funded with grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the US Department of Education, encourages member schools to try to finance the programme independently. In order to become a member, a school must dedicate a team to the initiative, define goals and allocate a budget. Schools pay a sign-up fee and an annual renewal fee, and are required to complete an annual survey that allows the NNPS to evaluate their work. More than 1 000 schools in 22 US states are now members. Each member receives the annual *Promising Partnership Practices*, a compendium of around 100 partnership activities that were implemented by NNPS members over the previous school year. The activities are organised and indexed according to student outcome, grade level, and type of involvement.

www.partnershipschools.org



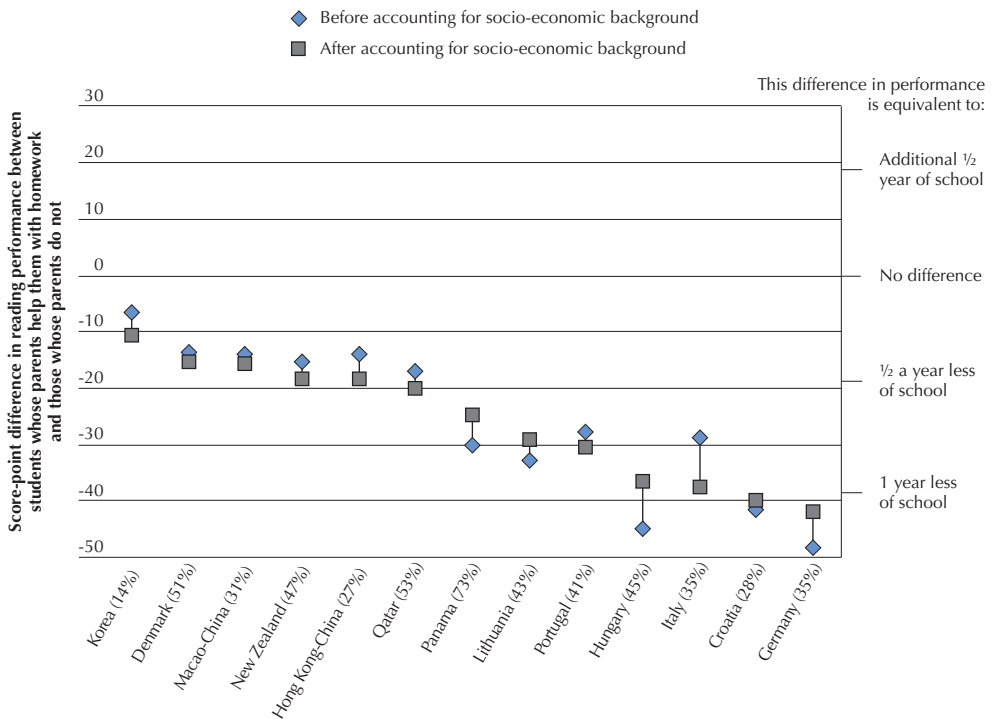
their children's day; they can volunteer to coach sports, to help run other extracurricular activities or clubs, or work in the school library; or they can volunteer their time to be a guest speaker at school, to share with students a special interest or achievement, or to give them an insider's view of a career or job.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Teachers can develop trusting relationships with parents to encourage parents to become more involved in their adolescent children's education. All too often, interactions between teachers and parents only occur when students have academic or behavioural problems. In addition, as students get older, they generally have more than one teacher, and this may make it difficult for parents and teachers to forge strong relationships. Some secondary schools promote teacher-tutors, who co-ordinate the exchange of information between all the teachers that a student works with and his or her parents. Some schools allocate a small number of students to each teacher who, in addition to his

■ Figure 4.3 ■

Parents are an important source of help for struggling students



Note: The percentage of parents who help their child with his/her homework is shown in parentheses after the country/economy name.

Countries/Economies are ranked in descending order of the difference in reading performance after accounting for socio-economic background.

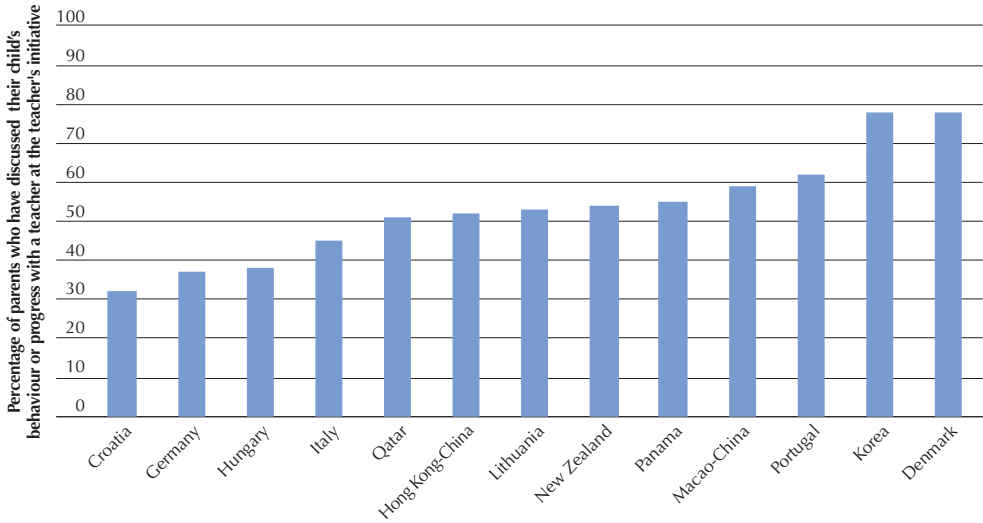
Source: Table A4.1.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606587>



Figure 4.4

Don't wait for academic or behaviour problems to get to know your child's teachers



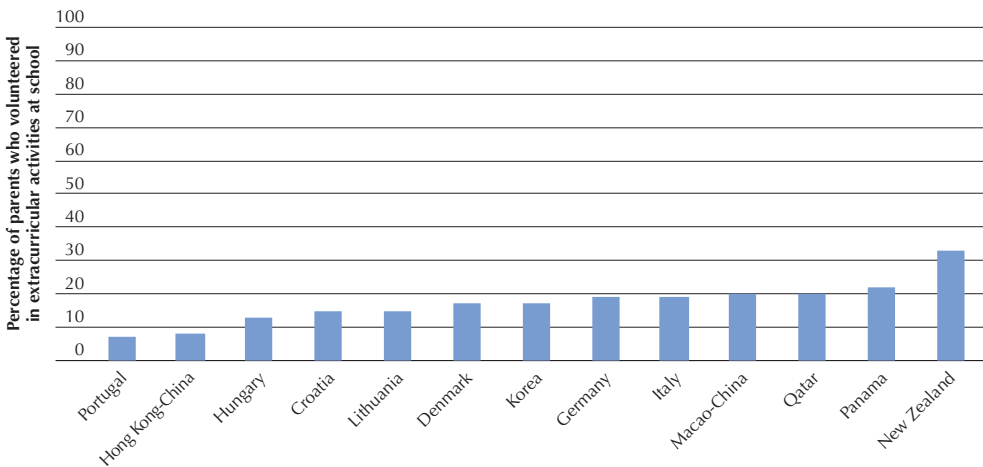
Countries/Economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of parents who discussed their child's progress or behaviour with a teacher at the teacher's initiative.

Source: Table A4.1.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606606>

Figure 4.5

Make the effort and get involved: Volunteer!



Countries/Economies are ranked in ascending order of the percentage of parents who volunteered in extracurricular activities.

Source: Table A4.2.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932606625>



or her normal teaching load, is also the tutor figure for these students. Other schools have dedicated tutors whose role is not to teach, but to co-ordinate relationships between teachers – and the school, in general – and parents.

Teachers can engage families in many ways. For example, here is a sequence of family-outreach efforts in increasing order of complexity – and effectiveness:¹

- **Phase 1** – Teachers make little or no effort to get to know families or to communicate with them throughout the year. If they do have contact with families, it is because they have a problem with or concern about the child. Families do not know how to get in touch with the teacher.
- **Phase 2** – Teachers make some effort to get to know families throughout the year. They share their contact information with families, as well as information on classroom rules and expectations. They contact families throughout the year when problems arise and/or to remind them to attend school events and meetings.
- **Phase 3** – Teachers reach out to families at the beginning of the year to share information and to learn basic information about the family, including their contact information and their expectations for their children. They contact families throughout the year when problems arise and to report positive news.
- **Phase 4** – Teachers reach out to families throughout the year to share information, including what is going on in the classroom, as well as to learn families' hopes and dreams for their child and their communication preferences. Families and the teacher contact each other regularly when problems arise and to share positive news.

Teachers can also organise “just drop in” sessions, establish an open-door policy in their classrooms, create a class website with a dedicated space for questions and answers from parents, and organise home visits. They should invest the most effort in forging relationships with those families that are reluctant to do so, rather than with families that are already open and engaged with schools and teachers. Outreach

Box 4.4 Japan: Homeroom teachers

Teachers are a crucial feature of the success of the Japanese education system. When the Meiji Restoration began and the state modernised its education system, most of the teachers were members of Japan's upper classes; some were even Samurai. In the Confucian tradition, great honour accrued to teachers. Teachers in Japan are, by law, among the better paid of Japan's civil servants, but they work long hours, especially because in addition to the time they spend on preparing classes and teaching, they are expected to **visit their students' homes** regularly and be in **continuous contact** with their students' families.

In Japan's education system, homeroom teachers follow students as they progress through grades and are involved in their students' lives outside of school. They are accountable to parents in a unique way: for example, if a student violates the law, the law enforcement authorities call that student's homeroom teacher, and all faculty members apologise for the student's behaviour.



programmes should be universal, so that they do not signal poor student performance or poor family environment, which, in turn, can stigmatise both students and parents. Those families that need extra support and guidance can be targeted with personalised follow-up activities.

Once teachers have developed a relationship with their students' families, they can devise projects and activities that require direct parental involvement. By doing so, they will not only help their students directly, but indirectly, as well, by supporting their students' parents.

Many parents have very little direct knowledge of what happens in school every day. Indeed, in most countries parents rarely – if ever – enter school buildings to observe the normal school routine. But schools can change that: they could organise small group visits, so as not to disrupt classes; a few countries open their classrooms to parents on a regular basis.

Just as parents have little knowledge of their children's daily lives, teenagers may know very little about what their parents actually do all day. Schools can help here, too, by opening their doors to parents and inviting them to share their life and work experiences, such as introducing students to certain careers and jobs, discussing their main struggles and rewards at work, etc. Such talks could be a valuable learning opportunity for these older students as they will soon have to make decisions about whether to continue in education or enter the labour market, and about in which field they want to study and work. Several schools in the same area, with students from diverse socio-economic

Box 4.5 **New Zealand: Working with Māori extended families**

About one in five students in New Zealand's education system is identified as Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. The Parents, Families and *Whānau* (extended family, in Māori, PFW) team was established to work with *whānau*, which includes parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents, in target communities to help them become actively engaged in their children's education.

Working with other government and non-government agencies, the PFW team provides *whānau* with information about: the benefits of early childhood education; the roles and responsibilities of *whānau* and teachers concerning the National Standards (the expected outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics after eight years in compulsory education); how to support literacy and numeracy development at home; what is required to earn the National Certificate of Educational Attainment, the main secondary-school qualification; and the opportunities available through the Youth Guarantee, an initiative to increase the educational achievement of targeted 16- and 17-year-olds by making the education system more responsive to their needs.

The Ministry of Education also promotes the Reading Together programme among *whānau*. Through this programme, *whānau* learn the reading strategies that teachers use to teach children how to read and are introduced to literacy resources available in their community. By improving the extended family's understanding of how children learn to read, they will be in a better position to work in a learning partnership with both their children and their children's teachers and schools.



backgrounds, could pool their roster of parent speakers to get a good mix of careers and jobs to be presented, and to reduce possible awkwardness among both students and parents.

Schools can also open themselves to local businesses so that students can join their parents in “*Take your child to work*” initiatives.² These activities have been introduced in many countries, but schools are rarely involved. While co-ordinating between schools and local businesses will no doubt make these initiatives more complex to run, such partnerships can provide a great opportunity for students to get to know the local business environment, develop informed expectations and aspirations for their futures, and learn more about their parents (and talking about parents’ work can spark parent-child discussions about a wealth of other related, and un-related, topics). These types of programmes can be part of businesses’ work-life balance schemes; they can also offer business leaders a chance to meet potential new employees.

WHAT CAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS DO?

In most schools, initiatives to encourage family engagement depend on the good will of individual teachers or on the leadership and vision of individual school principals.³ Working directly with parents as partners is not usually covered in teachers’ formal professional training and development. As a result, most teachers either do not feel that it is their role to foster family engagement or they feel ill-equipped to do so.⁴

Box 4.6 Korea: School support for parental involvement

Korea has a comprehensive system in place to include parents in their children’s education. Parents are invited to visit schools to see how education policies are implemented and to comment on implementation. In 2011, the country’s Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) selected 500 offline monitors and 3 200 online monitors – around 30 people for each of the 16 provincial and municipal offices of education – through a public recruitment process. They are to monitor the implementation of the government’s education policies and report their findings to MEST. The monitors will be notified if MEST proposed any follow-up action as a result of their reports.

Municipal and provincial education offices and schools also run programmes for parents on education policies. The minister and vice minister of MEST have participated in these “Education Policies Presentation for Parents”, which have been held in more than 20 locations since November 2011. In addition, parent-support centres and educational institutions in each region offer various programmes to help parents improve their parenting skills in such areas as communication and career guidance.

The National Parent Support Center (NPSC), under the auspices of the National Institute for Lifelong Education, was established in October 2010 to provide information on education, disseminate best practices of parent involvement in schools, establish a network of municipal and provincial parent-support centres and support counseling services for parents.

www.parents.go.kr



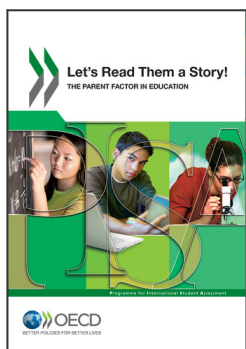
Education systems can help teachers and other education professional develop family-outreach programmes by:

- identifying milestones and expected outcomes that teachers/school administrators/other education professionals should aim for with respect to engaging families;
- providing training, both initial and development, in how to build strong partnerships with families;
- assessing what resources are needed to meet objectives on family engagement and allocating adequate resources to meet those objectives;
- developing partnerships, or granting individual schools autonomy to develop partnerships, with non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, and non-profit organisations to increase the capacity and diversity of available staff; and
- evaluating teachers and schools on the basis of their skills and competencies in working with families.



Notes

1. The Flamboyant Foundation in the United States developed a rubric targeted at teachers, <http://flamboyantfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Classroom-Family-Engagement-Rubric-7-29-2011.pdf>.
2. Many companies have “Take your child to work” initiatives. The Working Families organisation in the United Kingdom is one of the many non-profit organisations that have developed a set of tips and guidelines so that employers, employees and children make the most of such initiatives. Available at www.workingfamilies.org.uk/articles/employers/national-work-life-week/take-your-child-to-work-day.
3. Graue, E. and C.P. Brown (2003), “Preservice teachers’ notions of families and schooling”, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 19, pp. 719-735. Denessen, E., et al. (2009), “Teacher-parent partnerships: Preservice teacher competences and attitudes during teacher training in the Netherlands”, *International Journal about Parents in Education*, Vol. 3(1), pp. 29-36.
4. According to the 2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, teachers find family engagement to be their biggest challenge. Markow, D. and S. Martin (2005), *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2004–2005: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships*, MetLife, Inc., New York. Available at www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED488837.pdf.



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