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# PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION: DO SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS HAVE A ROLE?

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## EDUExchange E-DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Date of Discussion: June 21 - 24, 2011

Dr. Grace-Camille Munroe and Mrs. Janet Brown were the moderators for the recent Jamaica Partners for Educational Progress Community of Practice (CoP) EduExchange held April 21-24, 2011. Members were invited to consider whether parents need to be involved in a child's education, the role of school and parents in the education of children, and to identify strategies to improve parental involvement in education in Jamaica. The full discussion is available on the [Jamaica Partners for Educational Progress website](#).

**July 22, 2011**

This publication was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Carol Watson-Williams and Alesia Riddell of the QED Group, LLC; and Katherine Curtis of IRG.

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## PARTICIPANTS

We received thirty-six comments during the discussion, for which we thank the following persons:

- Pauline Bain
- Courtney Brown
- Christopher Clarke
- Opal Euter-Wilson
- Bridget Fong – Yee
- Kristin Fox
- Collin Greenland
- David Kabita
- Yvonne Iles
- Ken Matthews
- Grace McLean
- Joy Moncrieffe
- Rosalee Ramdon
- Rebecca Tortello
- Carol Watson Williams
- Cecille Young

Contributors belonged to the following organisations:

- Caribbean Child Development Centre
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of National Security
- Jamaica College Parent Teachers Association
- Rock River Primary School
- Shortwood Teachers' College
- University of the West Indies
- USAID/ Jamaica Mission

### ***Authors' Acknowledgments...***

*Thank you to our moderators who made the EduExchange a success: Dr. Grace-Camille Munroe and Mrs. Janet Brown. Thank you also to everyone who contributed to the richness of the discussion by posting comments, and sharing experiences and resources.*

## FACTORS IMPEDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In almost every debate on improving the quality of education in Jamaica, a concern is expressed about the low level of parental involvement in education. Many believe- a position which is supported by ample research- that when parents are active in their children's education, both children and schools do better. In fact, research indicates that parental involvement is a better predictor of student outcomes than socio-economic status. Despite this, parental involvement in education continues to be a problem that the education community has sought to address.

The discussants highlighted two significant considerations, namely:

1. The distinction between parental involvement in education and parental involvement in school
2. The barriers that impede parental involvement

The first point relates to the acknowledgement that parental involvement in education is not limited to parent school engagement. In fact, as one member pointed out, measuring parental involvement in education based on participation in Parent Teachers Associations may be "proxy measures for something more fundamental such as parental resources both physical, emotional and intellectual" (Kristin Fox, June 21, 2011). As discussants pointed out, many parents want to be involved and are already involved in their child's education the way they know how to be.

The second point acknowledges that social and school based barriers may prevent parents from becoming involved in their child's education. Therefore, while there are those who do not wish to become involved, there are also persons with limitations who may "appear to dump the students on the schools hoping that their parental inadequacies will be magically offset by miraculous interventions by their schools" (Colin Greenland, June 22, 2011).

### Barriers based on parents' circumstances

- Illiteracy may inhibit parents' ability to help their children or erode their confidence in their ability to do so
- Parents' past negative school experiences
- Real/ perceived financial burden associated with being a member of PTA
- Young parents who are unprepared for parenting
- Work obligations may prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's education
- Parent(s) may be unsure of how to effectively be involved in

The home impacts greatly on school. A child who is coming from a home where education is valued will see learning in a positive light. Hence, parents need to see themselves as a necessary link in the chain of their children's education. Parents need to get their children mentally prepared for school and be consistent in their support. They need to meet their children's teacher, principal, friends and be actively involved in school events. No one aspect of a child's life is more important than another. Therefore, parents need to be more involved in their children's education to ensure that total immersion in education takes place. There are parents who genuinely want to be more involved in their children's education but are bombarded by the daily business of providing for their children or some are just not sure how they can be effectively involved. I believe this is where the home school connection programme comes in. Parents will be kept abreast of their children's progress and activities they can engage their children in to reinforce concepts.

Opal Euter - Wilson



their child's education

### **Barriers resulting from school practices**

- The use of the shame and blame approach to motivate parents to become involved
- School's negative perception of parental involvement in education
- The limited opportunities available to discuss the child's progress with his/ her teacher within the school year
- The lack of an enabling and inviting attitude of the school board, principal and staff

## **STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE MEANINGFUL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Discussants identified the following as the main avenues for parent school engagement are:

- Orientation meeting at the beginning of the school year
- 'Rushed 5 minute conferences' to discuss the child's performance
- Parent Teachers Associations
- Consultations with teachers resulting from child's behavior

These were considered inadequate for promoting meaningful parent school engagement. The main concern was that there are insufficient opportunities for parents to collaborate with teachers regarding the progress of their child. For discussants, meaningful parental school engagement requires the inclusion of parents in the education process in the following ways:

- Creating school climates in which parents can volunteer, drop in and observe, and help some children with their work
- Teachers and principals engaging parents in goal-setting and improvement plans for individual children as well as sharing methods for assisting children with homework
- Increasing teachers' accessibility to parents by having regular conference spaces and days/times when teachers are available
- Capacity building for PTAs to become true monitors of all aspects of school life, holding all stakeholders accountable and not simply a fund raising mechanism for the school
- Schools and parents goal-setting together (for children and schools) and developing strategies to achieve the goals

### **What can the school do to encourage parental involvement in education?**

The school can organize intensive parenting courses. One contributor said that parents should do these courses at each stage of their child's education (Pauline Bain, June 22, 2011). Another suggested that in the early years, when the child first begins school, it should be "made compulsory for parents to come for one hour, three mornings a week for two weeks". During this time, "the parent and the child learn about the value of learning through play and how and when to make learning interventions" (Yvonne Iles, June 23, 2011).

In addition, it was suggested that intensive parent engagement courses be organized for pre-service and in-service teachers. Another contributor noted that the Ministry of Education has already drafted a course for teachers to be offered through the Jamaica Teaching Council, which will become a part of the licensing requirements (Rebecca Tortello, June 27, 2011).

One classroom teacher shared that her school implemented a wave of parental involvement activities including parental seminars, which have a literacy focus, parent and child spelling competition, and parent and child workshops (Cecille Young, June 25, 2011).

Another suggestion was to implement Parent Corners, which would provide information to parents on a regular basis (Rebecca Tortello, June 27, 2011).

### **How can teachers engage parents in the educational process?**

Home visits were viewed as a positive way for teachers to show parents that they are interested in their welfare, and get to know the background and families of the children in their classrooms. One contributor noted "I got my students to do so much more. I made them accountable because they and their parents realised I was deeply interested in their welfare"(Christopher Clarke, June 22, 2011).

As part of getting to know their students, teachers were advised to listen to what parents have to tell them about their children, so they can learn how best to deal with each child's learning style. It is noted that parents often do not have the confidence to express what they know, but teachers can encourage them and learn. One discussant pointed out that parents can support teachers by informing them about "the individuality of their children", and thereby avoid creating a learning environment where "children are lumped as a package and their wonderful diversity is 'streamlined'" (Joy Moncrieffe, June 23, 2011).

### **What can parents do to improve their engagement?**

Parents were advised to become "a pest to the teacher" in order to find out what the teacher expects of the child (Yvonne Iles, June 21, 2011).

The discussion highlighted that there are opportunities to improve engagement by participating in PTA meetings. While there were those who pointed out dissatisfaction because of the perception that PTAs emphasize fundraising, and have insufficient focus on academic goals and action steps, they were identified as opportunities to consolidate ties to schools and support their goals. See the textbox on this page for further details.

Speaking of my own school, the PTA in collaboration with a supportive Board and inspirational Principal, have been able to tackle the issues you indicate are of interest to you, and we have been blessed with some successes. For example, in our monthly meetings Principal Ruel Reid passionately speak to the schools' academic goals, and routinely updates parents on the standards of subjects, grades, teacher related information and a plethora of other relevant matters. During our meetings also, he consistently expounds on "tools and methodologies parents can us to support their children with school work at home." In addition, during the term the school administration organizes multiple sessions for consultations with parents and these are well attended.

On our part, the current Jamaica College PTA endeavour to be the "accountability framework" that you so perceptively demand, but we still use creative and innovative approaches to attract funds, but in ways that are not burdensome or invasive to parents. For example, we have been able to offer sponsors access to the parents of our 1800 students in exchange for financing our monthly meetings. We operate from a formal, documented strategic plan which ensures that as you suggest, "goals are set, specific actions are outlined to achieve these goals, monitoring and evaluation exercises are carried out checking progress against goals." We have also been able to send teachers to seminars, get monthly speakers on technical or other helpful topics, provide welfare assistance to needy parents / students, and provide other services

Collin Greenland,  
PTA President,  
Jamaica College

## The Ministry of Education's Parent Support Strategy

The National Parenting Policy (NPP) and Parenting Support Strategy, which uses a strengths-based approach, will be implemented by the multi-sectoral agency, National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC). Rebecca Tortello, Advisor to the Minister of Education, said that “the policy is also grounded in the intention of ensuring that our parents are:

- aware of and understand what their responsibilities are under the law
- supported as they seek to meet these responsibilities”

This would be achieved “by promoting and coordinating organizational efforts and resources throughout the country so that parents need to realise positive parenting practices.”(Rebecca Tortello, June 27, 2011).

NPSC will facilitate the establishment of Parents' Places across Jamaica by “drawing on existing community/ government and business places and resources”.

### Three Levels of Parents' Places

**Level 1** is an information centre and most easily achieved in partnership with the Jamaica Library Service network and the nation's schools.

**Level 2** Parents' Places include information as in Level 1 but also the provision of parenting workshops and family support activities. These are most easily achieved through non-governmental, faith- and community-based organizations, churches, schools with active PTAs, early childhood education centres and adolescent focused youth information centres.

**Level 3** adds specialized services for parents and children with higher levels of risk or vulnerability to what is offered in levels 1 and 2. These will likely be clinical care facilities such as health clinics. There are suggestions too for a virtual level 4 linked to all other levels to facilitate additional information and training.

### The NPP's vision is articulated through five goals:

1. All Jamaicans make wise choices about becoming parents and make parenting a priority.
2. All Jamaican children are loved, nurtured and protected instinctively and unconditionally by their parents.
3. Each parent understands and utilizes/applies positive practices in effective parenting
4. An enabling institutional framework exists to support parenting.
5. Ensuring that the principles and implications of effective parenting are communicated to the public in user friendly ways that enable comprehension of the material.

Parents Places will be launched later this year when “a wider call for institutions to join in and create Parents' Places out of their existing resources” will be made. Rebecca Tortello also noted that:

- all Parents' Places will receive Parent Support Kits with resource materials
- “training has already begun for existing GOJ/ NGO staff to enable them to support Parents' Places as they develop island-wide”

Through Parent Corners in schools, supported by NPSC, the Ministry of Education will seek to gather and share best practices in linking home and school.



## RELATED RESOURCES

Bitsko, S., Phipps, D., Roehrs, A. & Barnheiser, M. (2002). *Parental involvement: Strategies for Success*. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>

This handbook was developed by the Education System Change Project, which aimed to help schools "create opportunities for meaningful parental involvement in the education of all children". The strategies and examples presented in this document relates to parenting, home school communication, volunteering, decision making and collaborating with the community.

At the end of each chapter, the benefits for students, parents and teachers are presented and a school self-assessment checklist is available. The appendix includes the Inventory of Present Practices of School - Family - Community Partnerships.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). *The impact of parental involvement on children's education*. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>

This document draws together evidence on the impact of parental involvement on children's education, the stages at which it is known to have an impact on children, and the types of activities that are shown to be influential. Key findings include:

- Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.
- The quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children.
- Family learning can also provide a range of benefits for parents and children including improvements in reading, writing and numeracy as well as greater parental confidence in helping their child at home.
- The attitudes and aspirations of parents and of children themselves predict later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education.

Gianzero, G. (1999). *Promoting parental involvement, improving student outcomes*. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>

Gianzero (1999) presents a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the relationship between parental involvement and student performance, predictors of parental involvement, and types of parental involvement. Research indicates that strong family school linkages improve children's educational success regardless of socioeconomic status. It is noted that, for schools, the benefits of parental involvement include: (a) better reputation in the community (b) improved teacher morale (c) higher parental ratings of teacher performance, and (d) increased support from families.



This paper highlights research, which shows that in the US parental involvement begins to decline in middle school. This may be attributed to the fact that students work with different teachers, distance between schools and homes, and parents' perception that their children need more autonomy.

According to Gianzero (1999), research indicates "the care with which strategies are planned and implemented is more significant than the specific form the involvement takes" and cautions that "a school climate that does not make families feel welcomed, respected, needed and valued risks alienating parents" (Gianzero, p. 8 - 9).

**Hill, N.E. and Taylor, L.C. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement : Pragmatics and issues. *Current Direction in Psychological Science*, 13 (4), p. 161 – 164. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

According to Hill and Taylor (2004), parental school involvement promotes achievement by increasing social capital and social control. As a result of increasing social capital, "parental school involvement increases parents' skills and information, which makes them better equipped to assist their children in their school-related activities" (p.162). By establishing relationships with school personnel, parents learn: (1) important information about the school's expectations for behaviour and homework; (2) how to help with homework and (3) how to augment children's learning at home. On the other hand, the Social Control "occurs when families and schools work together to build a consensus about appropriate behavior that can be effectively communicated to children at both home and school" (McNeal, 1999, cited in Hill and Taylor, 2004, p. 162). The factors that influence parental involvement are also explored including parents' own experiences as students.

**Hoover – Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J.M. & Sandler, H.M. (2006). Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

This paper presents a model for parental involvement. Issues related to parental role construction for involvement, parental sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school and parental perception of invitation for involvement are discussed. In addition, recommendations for school action are identified.

**Improving the PTA Principal partnership .(n.d.). Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

This document highlights the view that "good working relationships between those with leadership responsibilities in the PTA and in the school must be established and maintained if the purposes of the PTA are to be realized " (Improving the PTA Principal partnership', p. 1). The role of the school president and PTA president, factors that obstruct good relations and how develop mutual understanding and confidence are identified.

**Lightfoot, D. (2004). "Some parents just don't care" : Decoding the meanings of parental involvement in urban schools. *Urban Education*, 39 (1), 91 – 107. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

This article looks at the way language subtly shapes and constrains the way we perceive reality. It examines one term—parental involvement. This apparently simple and democratic term serves as a portfolio of meanings that separate and divide. It illustrates two of these meanings, which take the form of a conjoined metaphor of "full/empty," or "lacking/having."

**Munroe, G. (2009). *Parental involvement in education in Jamaica*. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

This study examines the factors that motivate or constrain the involvement parents' involvement in their child's education. Munroe employed qualitative and quantitative research methods including "(i) non-participant and participant observations of PTA meetings, parent-conferences, and classrooms; (ii) questionnaires administered to parents and teachers; (iii) focus-group discussions with parents and with teachers; and (iv) semi-structured interviews with other key informants" (Munroe, 2009, p. 11). The findings indicate that though parents want to be involved in their child's education, both at home and school, involvement varied from low to moderate. This has been attributed to: "(a) strong parental role construction; (b) weak perceived sense of parent efficacy; and (c) moderate perception of invitation from others which is attributed to frequent general invitation from the school and infrequent specific invitation from the teacher" (Munroe, 2009, p. 12). She also noted "the study found that an invitation from others, especially teachers, can positively influence parental involvement, provided that the invitation and opportunities for involvement are mindful of the life context of the parent and the learning needs of the child" (Munroe, 2009, p. 13). Munroe identified several types of interventions to raise parental involvement and put forward recommendations for policy makers, school administrators and teachers colleges to change the parenting involvement landscape and harness the real interests of parents in assisting their children to succeed.

**Watson - Williams, C. (n.d.). *Parental involvement and educational outcomes*. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

The field of study on parental involvement (PI) in the education of their children has grown significantly since the 1980's and has evolved into an expanding area of interest by policy makers, researchers and educational practitioners. Nonetheless, this area is a "very immature field of study" compared to other aspects of education. The data amassed in this area, thus far, indicates, overwhelmingly, that when schools and families work together, a partnership for support of children is created and education becomes a shared venture, with all parties benefiting. Schools that encourage parental involvement are more likely to have children who are open to learning and this will be reflected in improved overall academic performance for the school.

**Yap, K. O. & Enoki, D.Y. (2003). *In search of the elusive magic bullet: Parental involvement and student outcomes*. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/library>**

Yap, Kim and Enoki, Donald: Originally published in the School Community Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall/Winter 1995

Parental involvement in education has been the focus of much research attention. While it is generally accepted that parental involvement in education is desirable, there is little agreement on how it may best be implemented. Evidently, it is seldom implemented in a way that is satisfactory to all stakeholder groups.