



HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS / OVERVIEW

## What the research says



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## Summary

*Home-school partnerships are widely promoted for the positive impact they can have on students' motivation, engagement, behaviour, and academic and social outcomes. Partnership is a much more complex endeavour than merely involvement or participation: it is mutually determined and has benefits for all partners – students, whanau and teachers. The sphere of influence is two-way: schools can recognise and celebrate each child's individuality and welcome all families, while helping families to recognise their children as students and to reinforce the importance of homework and activities that build students' thinking and skills. This guide will examine what the research says about home-school partnerships and their contribution to learning and achievement.*

## What are home-school partnerships?

Home-school partnerships involve collaborative working relationships between families and schools. They can support students in more productive and consistent work and behaviour, which in turn can improve students' interest, motivation and engagement in learning both at home and at school. In effective partnerships, families and schools recognise their shared interest in and responsibility for children and collaborate to create shared goals, share information, and enhance opportunities for children's learning. They create constructive connections between home and school settings that promote positive educational and social outcomes.

While family engagement and involvement are key to developing strong home-school partnerships, they are not equivalent to partnership. Family members may dedicate their time and effort towards their children's education by, for example, participating in activities within the school setting such as parent-teacher conferences, volunteer work or attending school functions or field trips, or by supporting their child's learning by practising key concepts within everyday activities such as laundry and shopping. But it is important to note that these activities are solely focused on family support for the school. A home-school partnership, by contrast, involves genuine collaboration and coordination between families and schools on key issues relevant to both the school's and the family's goals for their children's education, and involves two-way systems of support that cross both home and school settings. Home-school partnerships involve:

- teachers finding opportunities for students and/or families to share knowledge and skills gained through home and family experiences
- teachers using students' home experiences to devise meaningful and relevant learning activities
- schools providing resources such as books that are identified as important by particular groups of families
- schools supporting parents to engage with their children's learning

Within a partnership model, families can participate in self-defined ways in the educational experiences of their children, and teachers can build upon these in school. Many activities across home and school settings are recognised as conducive to children's development. Beliefs about the best way to support children's learning are negotiated, rather than school beliefs being imposed upon families and home contexts.

Partnership activities focus on engaging, guiding, motivating, and energising each student to produce their own success. Schools and whānau develop personal and unique ways to interact, which draw on and activate their multiple experiences and resources. This participation is not limited to parents, as members of the extended family also support children's education and development.

## Why are home-school partnerships important?

Research has found that parental or family involvement in school-based learning activities is correlated with improved student outcomes. A comprehensive meta-analysis comparing a wide range of educational interventions found that parent involvement had a larger effect on student academic achievement than most other interventions. Other longitudinal studies suggest parental involvement is more strongly connected to achievement and attainment than the family's socioeconomic background, ethnicity or family structure. Parental involvement is associated with better psychosocial adjustment and higher achievement at age 7 and at age 11, although the findings on the impact on adolescents' learning is mixed. However, the benefits of parent involvement in one school subject or area are also found to be confined to that area, that is, parent involvement in reading improves students' reading attainment but not their attainment in mathematics.

The research base correlates parental involvement in school activities with:

- Improved student outcomes /achievement, in some cases
- Higher homework completion rates, more time spent on homework, and more effective learning through homework
- Students' self-regulation, social skills, better behaviour and discipline
- Lower drop-out rates and better attendance

- Students' positive engagement with peers and adults, and enhanced relationships between parents, teachers and students
- Increased feelings of competence or capability, positive engagement with learning and motivation to learn, persistence, and mastery goal orientations in which students seek challenging tasks and persist with academic challenges
- High student aspirations with regard to education, and a greater likelihood of enrolling in higher education
- Family members' increased involvement in adult education opportunities

Positive outcomes are evident across different groups of students and families, across disciplines and across different approaches to working with families.

Teachers, parents and communities also benefit from partnership activities. Some research projects demonstrate that home-school partnerships can stimulate self-growth among parents and contribute to the building of social capital in the community. Parents can gain greater confidence and satisfaction in parenting, and often increased interest in their own education and career, as well as benefit from improved adult and family literacy, while teachers benefit from feeling supported and appreciated and from improved parent-teacher relationships, which lead to higher teacher morale and a more positive school climate.

## How reliable is the research on home-school partnerships?

While research has found correlation between parental involvement in school activities and improved outcomes for students, it is unable to establish a clear causative relationship, primarily because both school and home contexts are complex and there are a myriad of factors involved that impact on student achievement. It is also important to acknowledge that parental involvement and home-school partnerships are not conceptually the same, because parental involvement does not imply either participation in or partnership with schools. For example, activities such as parents' attendance at scheduled meetings and events, parental support with homework or home reading, or discussion of school reports with teachers may involve one-way communication only, with parents playing a passive role. The research base tends to focus on parental or family involvement rather than home-school partnership.

Understandings of parental involvement also vary across research studies and tend to focus on activities parents do, without paying attention to the kinds and qualities of relationships between parents and teachers, and between parents and children. Even then there is a lack of clarity: helping children with homework may mean providing general oversight and monitoring homework completion, praising or rewarding homework efforts, helping, modelling, demonstrating or problem-solving, or teaching useful strategies and processes, which are all quite different forms of involvement with different impacts on students' learning. A final limitation of the research is that parental involvement is usually measured through self-report. For example, teachers may not have accurate knowledge of families' home-based activities, while families may over-estimate their involvement.

There is, therefore, very little robust evidence that links home-school partnerships directly to improved student outcomes. Some New Zealand schools are able to provide data showing improvements in both attendance and achievement during the promotion of home-school partnerships, but these home-school partnership initiatives were accompanied by many other initiatives, making it difficult to attribute these improvements to the home-school partnership exclusively.

What the research can confirm is that home-school partnership efforts lead to better understanding of key messages on the part of parents, and improvements to the student's learning situation concerning motivation, self-regulation, and a positive attitude to school and education. These may have long term effects for improving students' learning but not provide data directly related to improved achievement. Subjective evaluations, however, do paint a consistent, coherent picture. Schools and families report anecdotally that they find building partnerships to be positive, and note a positive impact on children's opportunity to learn as well as their engagement, confidence, attitudes and achievement. Despite the complexity of research findings, it appears the development of a home-school partnership can have considerable benefits for schools and families as well as having positive effects that persist into the student's adult life.

## Further Reading

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