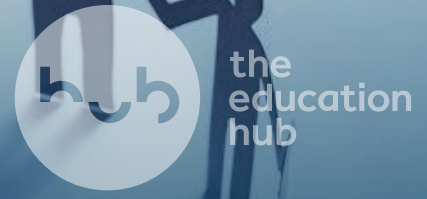


What families and whānau can do to support home-school partnerships



School resources

Family involvement at school and at home is linked to higher achievement of the child. Although the research is not clear about the precise mechanisms behind this effect, it suggests that students become more motivated to achieve when they see their parents becoming engaged. They see proof that their parents are invested in their academic performance and that they are making an effort to support them. As a result, students are more likely to persevere through difficulties and develop greater enjoyment of school, greater social competence, better self-regulation skills, and fewer behavioural issues.

Family involvement at home

The kinds of parent engagement that have the most research evidence for being highly effective all happen within the home, either in the form of home learning opportunities (such as reading at home in early childhood and homework support for older children), or in the form of general support (for example, having high expectations of children, talking to them about school, encouraging them, and engaging in positive parenting behaviours).

Providing home learning opportunities: When whānau provide home learning opportunities focused on specific goals or subjects, research reports greater motivation and engagement, higher student achievement in mathematics and literacy, and improved communication, perseverance, and fine motor skills. These students feel more capable of mastering academic work at school, take more responsibility for their learning, and have improved self-efficacy. In particular, research indicates that:

- Parents offering extra educational resources and creating positive learning environments at home has a dramatic and positive effect on achievement. For example, they can include learning opportunities into family activities, provide books, writing or maths problems, and encourage their children to set and work on goals.
- Parents getting involved with homework supports students' attention, effort, and concentration. This is especially helpful when parents encourage, support, and praise their children's efforts.
- Playing board and counting games helps with maths skills.

General support for children's academic and career dreams: More general support for children's academic and career dreams also strongly predicts higher achievement and a positive orientation to school. This includes using varied language in the home, encouraging warm interactions with extended whānau, problem-solving together, talking about the value of learning, showing how learning connects to interests and current events, and discussing students' adult-life plans with them. In fact, this kind of general support may be more effective than providing home learning opportunities. With younger children, general support also includes reading to and with them, singing songs and rhymes, participating in creative activities, and going on trips and play dates. These activities can lower anxiety, increase confidence, cooperation, conformity, and sociability, and improve achievement scores.

Family involvement at school

Out of all school-based activities, communication with teachers has been identified as one of the most impactful factors. Regular, positive communication with schools and teachers enables more consistency

between the messages students receive from home and from school. When students hear the same messages from teachers and whānau, they can remember them better. As a result, their social, emotional, and academic learning improves, with better reading performance and better overall achievement.

In addition, parents and whānau may:

- visit the classroom
- volunteer and participate in school activities
- attend teacher-parent conferences and parent evenings
- attend school functions or concerts
- be part of the PTA or a school trustee.

However, the research is less clear on these types of involvement. An analysis of 75 different involvement studies found both negative and positive correlations with academic achievement for most of the above activities¹.

Unhelpful parent involvement

Not all parental involvement is supportive. For example, while having high expectations of and aspirations for children has a positive effect on their achievement, putting them under pressure has a negative effect. Similarly, while homework support is beneficial, homework help or control is not. Students whose parents provide a great deal of help with completing homework are less likely to achieve academic success than their peers. This is because parents may lack the necessary understanding to properly assist children with homework, give incorrect strategies or information, or even give answers rather than help their children to learn to work them out. Teachers report that students whose parents are very controlling of homework show less initiative, persistence, or autonomy in school work.

Similarly, while encouragement and praise of effort can increase student motivation, other seemingly supportive actions can lower motivation and lead to less persistence and satisfaction in completing school work. This includes praise of intelligence (rather than effort), or giving rewards for students' achievement. Finally, the amount of warmth the parent shows the child during learning activities matters. Where there is low warmth towards the child, normally helpful parental involvement activities can actually lower reading and mathematics achievement. This finding suggests that the most important form of family influence on learning and achievement is the parent's relationship with the child.

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Endnotes

- 1 Boonk, L., Gijssels, H. J. M., Ritzen, H., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2018). A review of the relationship between parental involvement indicators and academic achievement. *Educational Research Review*, 24:10-30.



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