

Strategic Framework for:

Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home

Section 2

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- 2. Historical overview
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2. Historical overview

'No institution or one actor can reinvent the education system by themselves. So you need to spend the time to develop an answer to the question: What is it that we want for our children in this community? Only once we agree on where we're trying to go, can we then work in co-ordination and know what our respective roles are. Developing this shared vision is what good leaders do'

(Winthrop et al, 2021, p13).

Involving and engaging parents in their child's and their own learning has been an evolving journey in Scotland's education systems over many decades. By way of a short historical overview, the Education (Scotland) Act 1946 established a framework for the development of public education in the post-war period. Education was made compulsory from ages 5-15. Parents were given a duty under the 1946 Act to provide education for their children.

Since then, there have been a number of developments in terms of parental rights and parental choices. Scotland's education system was reorganised during the 1960s and 1970s along comprehensive lines. Family Learning as an effective approach to engaging parents and families was redefined in Scottish education during this period. A suite of educational reforms has been enacted since the 1980s. For example, the 1981 Education (Scotland) Act gave parents the statutory right to request places in schools outwith their designated area.

Timeline of key legislative and strategic frameworks

While there are too many developments to mention, some of the key legislative and strategic framework changes include:

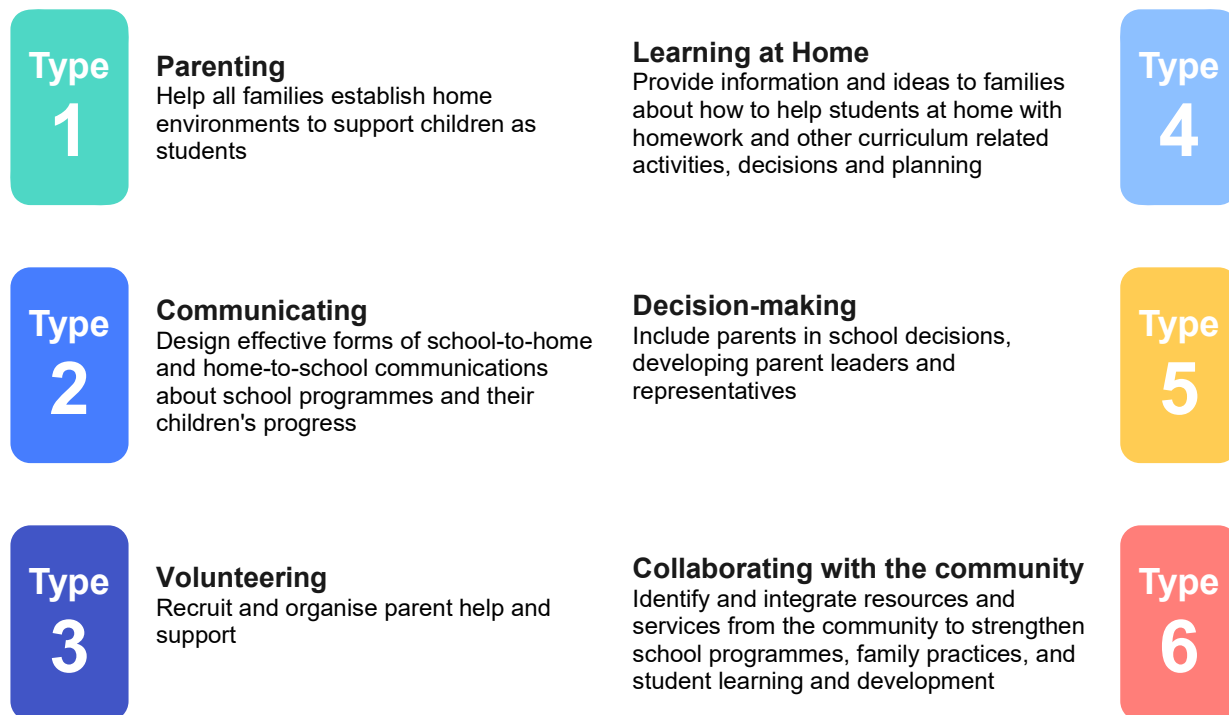
- [Regulation of Care \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2001)
- [Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act](#) 2000 (asp 6)
- [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act](#) (2006)
- Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments (Scotland) [Regulations](#) (2007)
- [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2010)
- School Handbook [guidance](#) (2010)
- National Parenting [Strategy](#) (2012)
- [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) (2015)
- National Improvement [Framework](#) (2015)
- Learning Together National [Action Plan](#) (2018)
- [National Standards for Early Learning and Childcare](#) (2018)
- An Empowered [System](#) (2019)
- A [Blueprint](#) for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland; [Quality Action Plan](#)
- [Realising the Ambition](#) (2021)
- [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) (2022-26)

Further information on the development of public education and parental choice in Scotland since the 1940s is available in ['The Origins and Impact of the Parents Charter'](#).

Throughout the years that have elapsed since the 1940s, influential frameworks such as that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and Joyce Epstein and colleagues' six types of involvement for action (1990s) has emerged. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was first introduced in his paper 'A theory of motivation'. This was later refined in 1954 with his book 'Motivation and Personality'. Maslow's theory has, and continues, to influence Scottish policy and education. Epstein et al's book 'School, Family and Community

Partnerships: Your handbook for Action' (2009) (Fourth Edition), is based on 30 years of research and fieldwork. It contains a 'theory and framework of six types of involvement for action'. These are: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision-making; and collaborating with the community. Further information on Epstein's framework is provided in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (2010)



2.1 Research

In addition to the legislative developments and influential frameworks, several research papers and projects have been undertaken which review the effectiveness of involving and engaging parents in the wider life and work of the school and their children's learning. However, reasons to involve parents extend beyond legislative and statutory requirements. Findings from the 'Early Learning and Child Wellbeing' study show that 'What parents do is pivotal for their children's development. The day-to-day activities that parents undertake are highly correlated with children's learning and development. Regardless of socio-economic background, the study found children did better when their parents' were engaged ([OECD, 2020](#)).

Parental involvement

Benefits and impacts of parental involvement on children's learning and attainment have strong foundations in literature as well as inspection findings and the National Parent Forum of Scotland's 10-year review of the impact of the Parental Involvement Act (2017). A key message from the 'Review of the impact of the Parental Involvement Act' in Scotland highlighted that 'parental involvement in a child's learning has positive outcomes for the child, their family and their school and helps raise attainment' (National Parent Forum of Scotland, 2017, p4). Furthermore, 'successive large-scale studies (Cooper et al 2010; Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Bradshaw et al 2012) show a strong association between parental involvement and school outcomes across all age ranges' (See and Gorard, 2013, p8).

Parental engagement

Parental engagement can often be unhelpfully intertwined with parental involvement (see Section 6 for definitions). In its broadest sense, parental engagement can be considered as consisting of 'partnerships between families, early learning and childcare settings, schools and communities' not only to raise awareness of the benefits of engaging in their child's education, but also to 'provide them with the skills to do so' (Emerson et al, 2012, p7).

Engaging parents in their child's learning is said to be 'a powerful lever for raising achievement' (Harris and Goodall, 2007, p5; Goodall, 2017). The impact of engaging parents is evident across attendance and behaviour as well as educational outcomes (Goodall 2017; See and Gorard 2013). Engaging parents is according to See and Gorard (2013) the 'only intervention around narrowing the gap in achievement between children from different backgrounds which had a strong enough evidence base to warrant further investment and work' (In: Goodall, 2017, p1).

Consistent reinforcement that 'what parents do matters' is an important message. Equally, it is also vital to ensure there is a common understanding between teachers, practitioners, parents, children and young people about what parental engagement actually means. For example, teachers and practitioners may consider parental engagement as a way to improve the behaviour of children and young people. Parents on the other hand, may consider the support they provide to their child as parental engagement whereas children may view it as moral support from their parents and them taking an interest in their learning journey (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

Endeavours by settings and schools to engage parents in their children's learning are, however, more effective when integrated into a planned whole setting or school approach to parental engagement, rather than a 'bolt-on' to mainstream activities (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). Time, dedicated resource and leadership are essential to ensure the success of any proposed parental engagement programmes or strategies at settings, school, cluster and local authority level. This should be in collaboration with parents and be pro-active rather than reactive.

Family Learning

A wide range of evidence shows family learning to be an effective way of promoting and facilitating increased parental participation and engagement with settings and schools (Mackenzie, 2010). Family learning has also been shown to improve attendance, reduce persistent absenteeism and improve attainment. Wider outcomes are shown through skills development, employability, progression into work, interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills. It is important, however, to understand the differences between family learning and parental involvement and parental engagement. Family learning programmes can be a conduit to increasing parental involvement and engagement in the life of the setting and school and in children's learning at home. Programmes can also be independent of settings and school activity. They can focus on wider family and community needs such as health and wellbeing, families where English is an additional or other language, parents and families of children with additional support needs, and community capacity building. A family learning approach is successful in influencing not just children, young people and families but those who can appear to be further away from being involved in any form of their own and their children's learning (Review of Family Learning, 2016).

Children in Scotland only spend around 15 per cent of their waking hours in school. The remaining 85 per cent of their time is spent at home or in their community and this presents a significant opportunity for learning (OECD, 2014). What parents do with their children at home is more important than their socio-economic status. A stimulating learning environment out with settings and schools such as outdoor learning in gardens and community spaces, and Government led initiatives (Bookbug; Read, Write, Count; Connecting Scotland) can therefore be fundamental to their attainment and achievement whilst also limiting costs to families. For many parents, their first experience of parental involvement and engagement can take place in a provision prior to starting formal school education. Early learning and childcare settings, childminders, schools and communities can also play a key part in recognising, developing and resourcing this. Sensitively supporting parents to 'improve the learning that goes on at

home will have a major impact on child outcomes' (Hunt et al, 2011). In addition to this, 'the interaction between parent and child at home can have a significant impact on a child's language and literacy development' as well as attainment and achievement (Scottish Book Trust, 2018).

A foundational belief of contemporary family learning programmes is the idea that 'parents need to be literate and that through the intergenerational transfer of skills and attitudes, the parents' education can influence the subsequent educational achievement of their children' (Sticht, 2010). Family learning programmes are based on a wealth model that respects the skills, knowledge and experiences that families already have and contextualises learning based on the needs identified by each individual within the family. This approach builds the capacity of families whilst simultaneously breaking socio-economic intergenerational cycles such as low attainment and poverty. Practitioners should continue to meaningfully engage and work together with parents and families, in partnership, to develop programmes to address identified needs in a way that takes account of any barriers to participation.

'Poverty shapes children's lives and what they go on to do in the future. Frank Field's 2010 review of poverty and life chances argues that education serves to 'prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty, with the aim that future generations of children will not have to experience such financial and material deprivation'' (Save the Children, 2013).

Closing the poverty related attainment gap through, amongst others, effective parental engagement cannot be viewed simply as increasing parental interest in their child's education and/or helping with homework. Although parents from all socio-economic backgrounds will arguably, routinely help their child with homework (See and Gorard, 2013), parental engagement in their child's learning extends much wider than this.

Further information is available in:

[Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners](#)

[Review of Family Learning](#)

[Review of Learning at Home](#)

[Realising the Ambition](#)