

Category: School - Family - Community

Parental Involvement



Toolkit
**Successful Learning
Practices for
All Children to Thrive**



POLICIES AND PRACTICES BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FOR REDUCING UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPE



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Introduction

This toolkit, “Successful Learning Practices for All Children to Thrive,” is a practical resource that shows how to create successful learning environments in classrooms, schools, and communities. It helps teachers and school leaders build effective learning spaces that improve basic skills, support struggling students, and develop children’s social and emotional skills. The toolkit is based on 20 case studies from 9 European countries, offering practical strategies that have worked in real schools.

These case studies come from primary and secondary schools across Europe that have successfully helped underachieving students and prevented early school leaving. The research was conducted in diverse schools across Portugal, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Malta. From these schools, we gathered concrete practices that improve both academic learning and social-emotional development.

The toolkit is organised around five key areas of successful learning environments:

Pedagogies

Teacher and Student Interaction

Peer Collaboration

School – Family – Community
Collaboration

Wellbeing and Support

While each tool is placed in one of these areas, many tools work across multiple areas. For instance, “Interactive Groups” not only helps students work together but also connects with the community, supports wellbeing, and improves academic results.

It’s important to understand that the most successful schools use multiple tools together. While each tool can help on its own, the best results come from working on all five areas across the whole school. We recommend looking at your school’s current strengths and areas for improvement to help you choose the most useful tools for your situation.

This toolkit is available as an online platform in seven languages: Spanish, Portuguese, English, Finnish, Maltese, Greek, and Italian. All the tools have been carefully tested and developed through dialogic co-creation with nearly 1,000 participants in the SCIREARLY project, including school staff, students, families, and community members.

Our aim is to give educators and communities the tools they need to help every child succeed in school. By sharing successful practices from different learning environments in an accessible way, we’re working to create schools where all children can thrive, regardless of their background.





Glossary

A glossary section is essential in this toolkit to provide clear definitions of key terms and concepts, ensuring that all users, including teachers, school leaders, education experts, policymakers, and community members, can fully understand and effectively implement the successful teaching and learning practices. This section helps bridge any gaps in terminology and ensures consistent understanding, making it easier to apply the evidence-based strategies and improve educational outcomes for students.

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Dialogic teaching and learning emphasises dialogue and quality interactions as the primary means of achieving understanding, learning and development. A dialogic approach to teaching and learning aims at creating an environment where all students, teachers and other members of the community actively engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue. Here are some of the key premises:

Ensuring that everybody's voice is valued equally, and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. This encourages diverse perspectives and ensures that all voices are heard.

Recognising and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students and teachers. This helps to create a more inclusive and understanding learning environment.

Dialogic interactions among students, teacher-student and within the community are oriented towards transforming the sociocultural context and create optimal conditions for learning and development.

Co-constructing meaning and understanding through dialogues between students and teachers. This collaborative process helps deepen comprehension and retention of information.



Building a sense of community and mutual support among students and teachers. This principle fosters collaboration and collective responsibility for learning.

Respecting and valuing differences among students and teachers. Dialogue should celebrate diversity and use it as a resource for learning. Encouraging critical thinking and challenging everyone to think deeply and question assumptions.

Emotional Dimension

Recognising the importance of quality relationships in learning. Successful practices create a supportive environment where students and teachers feel safe, supported and confident to express their emotions and experiences.

Authentic Learning

Ensuring that the dialogue and learning are relevant to the students' and teachers' real-life experiences and contexts. This makes the learning more meaningful and applicable.

Translanguaging

When one person speaks in one language while another person responds in another.

Reception Classes

Classes where children with another mother tongue are in specialised classes where translanguaging is used to help children learn the host country language - with the intention that the children enter mainstream education as they gain language proficiency.

Parental Involvement



Overview:

The case study is set in a state primary school located in Malta's Inner Harbour area, a region marked by rapid urban regeneration and low socio-economic realities despite its significance as a financial and business hub. The school serves a population characterised by a historic decline in residents and a shift in socio-economic demographics, with a notable percentage of the community living in social housing and receiving social benefits. With a population of about 150 students, predominantly Maltese, the school is nestled in a community where education is impacted by the area's socio-economic challenges, such as higher illiteracy and unemployment rates compared to national averages. Despite these hurdles, the school has seen improvement in academic achievement in recent years.

Parental and community involvement is vital in this context. Over the past five years, the school's continued and focused efforts to develop a culture of parental and community involvement has featured as a reliable and contributing factor to the school's success in catering adequately for the holistic needs of its students, including those who are vulnerable and come from a disadvantaged family background. These collective and sustained efforts initially attracted the participation of few parents – however, it then grew in a consistent manner to today's fuller participation of families where parents are now engaged in school activities and take an active role in working hand in hand with the school to ensure children's learning and wellbeing. The purpose of this case study is to explore the role of parental and community involvement in enhancing educational outcomes in a state primary school located in a low socio-economic area of Malta. Specifically, it aims to examine how the school fosters relationships with families and the community to improve student achievement despite socio-economic challenges

The intended outcomes of this case study include:

Improved Parental Engagement: Developing a stronger, more collaborative relationship between the school and families, leading to higher parental involvement in education.

Enhanced Student Achievement and Reducing Absenteeism: By fostering home-school links and involving the community, the school aims to improve academic outcomes for its students and to reduce rates of absenteeism for those families susceptible to not sending their children to school.

Strengthened Community Support: Building partnerships with local organizations and professionals to provide additional support services, such as after-school programmes and social services.

Inclusive School Environment: Creating a welcoming, inclusive school culture that respects the socio-economic realities of the community and actively involves parents in school initiatives.



Implementation Steps:

Preparation:

Successful implementation of parental and community involvement in schools requires careful preparation and intentional planning by school leaders. This begins with organising time and resources within the school to create a welcoming environment for parents, ensuring their concerns are addressed seriously. Building open and trusting communication channels between the school and parents is essential, requiring investment in resources and opportunities for meaningful dialogue. Existing structures that create barriers to parental and community involvement are analysed and adjusted at both the college and school levels. Proactive measures to address challenges such as absenteeism include personalised support, such as home visits, especially for families struggling due to low educational attainment or negative past experiences. Planning for capacity building is also key, with workshops aimed at empowering parents to better support their children's education.

Implementation:

The case study school ensures effective parental and community involvement through a variety of well-implemented strategies focused on building relationships, shared educational goals, and leveraging community resources. The school's leadership promotes an ethos of openness and compassion, recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the local community while allocating resources to strengthen home-school links. Community partnerships further support the school by offering tutoring, after-school programs, and social services. Additionally, workshops for parents, such as literacy and educational courses, help to involve families more deeply in their children's learning. The school also extends its efforts beyond the classroom, reaching vulnerable or disengaged families through home visits and personalised support to address absenteeism. Local community projects and initiatives that resonate with parents' interests, like special family days and collaborative events such as the "adopt a granny" programme, encourage more active parental involvement. Lastly, the school sets a positive example through strong relationship-building among teaching staff, engaging parents in defining common educational goals, and working collaboratively with professionals and experts to ensure successful outcomes.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

The strategies for parental and community involvement in the case study school are monitored and evaluated through a structured process that ensures their effectiveness and leads to improved family/parental participation and community engagement. This begins with establishing SMART goals, such as increasing parental attendance by 20% within the next scholastic year. A clear model is developed to link resource inputs (funding, staff, materials), activities (workshops, meetings, volunteer programmes), outputs (meeting attendance rates), outcomes (improved student attendance and performance), and long-term impacts like enhanced student well-being and academic achievement. Stakeholder engagement is central to this process, involving parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members through focus groups, surveys, and interviews to gather input and build consensus. Key indicators, such as participation rates, satisfaction levels, and student outcomes, are tracked, and data-driven decisions are made based on this information. The school also focuses on sustaining successful initiatives and exploring ways to scale these programmes to other schools, contributing to national educational improvement efforts, to continue it as well as making changes if necessary.





Examples and Case Studies:

In this case study, a small community school has successfully implemented a series of targeted initiatives to foster greater parental involvement and community engagement, resulting in positive impacts on student engagement and achievement. The driving force behind these efforts has been **strong leadership** from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), including the head of school and assistant heads, who have made parental and community involvement a core priority. Over the past five years, the school has developed a welcoming and inclusive environment by aligning activities with parents' interests and cultural backgrounds. This has proved to be instrumental in significantly increasing participation in meetings and events.

One key strategy has been the **use of accessible and open communication channels**, ensuring that both parents and teachers are on the same page regarding educational goals and decisions. Regular updates, newsletters, and parent-teacher meetings are used to foster trust, encouraging parents to engage more actively in their children's education. These efforts have been met with success, as one parent noted, "When I asked for help, everyone helped me. The fact that it is a small school helps a lot with these things." This sense of community, bolstered by effective relationship-building, has been instrumental in creating a supportive environment for families.

To address challenges like low attendance at educational talks and workshops, the school has diversified its offerings to include **culturally relevant activities, flexible meeting times, and community-centric events**, such as the popular tombola. As a teacher observed, "Here if you organise a tombola, they come, but if you hold a talk for parents, few attend, maybe a dozen from the whole school." This insight led to the organisation of events that resonate more with parents' interests while still creating opportunities for engagement in school life. The school has also hosted family-friendly programs like literacy workshops and "adopt a granny" days, which allow parents and children to collaborate in fun and meaningful ways, further strengthening the home-school connection.

Despite challenges such as occasional disinterest from parents or preconceived notions about the value of education, the school has continued to make progress by addressing these attitudes head-on. **Open communication and personalised support** have been key in overcoming barriers. For example, home visits and one-on-one conversations have been used to reach families who may feel disconnected from the school, helping them understand how their involvement directly benefits their children's learning and future aspirations. Parents are now more willing to attend important school events and meetings, leading to improved attendance and engagement from both students and their families.

Another challenge has been the complaints about excessive homework and unbalanced workloads, which have caused stress for students and concern among parents. The school has responded by adopting more individualised approaches to workload, focusing on students' holistic educational journeys and reducing homework to encourage positive family interactions. Moreover, the presence of newly recruited or underqualified teachers has led to doubts about competence, affecting parental confidence. To address this challenge, the school promotes open communication, transparency, and uses mentoring and reflective practices to support staff development, ensuring alignment with the school's ethos and teaching standards.

The leadership team's commitment to fostering **a culture of collaboration and mutual support** among staff also plays a crucial role in the school's success. Teachers feel supported and recognized by the SLT, which motivates them to work collectively toward shared educational goals. As one teacher stated, "As a small community, we see teachers working well together, and this sets an example for the children. If we work well together, they will also work well together." This collaborative ethos extends to the parents, reinforcing the importance of working together for the benefit of the students.

The school's focus on providing tailored programmes and addressing systemic challenges like teacher shortages has also been essential in ensuring long-term success. Parents expressed satisfaction with the management's efforts to offer inclusive and accessible programs, which cater to a broader range of interests and needs. This approach, combined with continuous evaluation and feedback from parents, ensures that the initiatives remain relevant and effective.





Benefits:

Enhanced Student Well-being and Learning:

The school's holistic approach highlights the strong connection between student well-being and academic success. Students feel safe, supported, and cared for by their teachers, creating an environment conducive to learning. A sense of security and happiness at school is fundamental to their ability to focus on academic tasks. One teacher emphasized this impact, noting that "if we work well together, they will also work well together," pointing to the positive example set by educators for students.

Strong Communication and Trust with Parents:

Effective school-parent communication has been a central factor in fostering trust and collaboration, leading to improved engagement and parental participation. The school's leadership has worked hard to create meaningful interactions with parents, helping them understand the importance of their involvement in their children's education. A parent expressed their satisfaction, saying, "When I asked for help, everyone helped me. The fact that it is a small school helps a lot with these things."

Synergy Between School, Parents, and Students:

A strong partnership between the school, parents, and students has been integral to student success. The leadership team works closely with parents to build trust and maintain open lines of communication. This ongoing collaboration is essential as communities change, and new students and families join the school. As one assistant head noted, "more frequent and meaningful interactions would support better educational outcomes," demonstrating the importance of maintaining this synergy for continuous improvement.

Addressing Ongoing Challenges:

Despite the progress made, the school recognizes that challenges persist, such as teacher short-ages, bullying, and limited resources for students with additional needs. The leadership is committed to addressing these issues, understanding that continued effort is necessary to ensure all students reach their full potential. Parents appreciate the school's transparency and dedication to problem-solving, even as they express concerns about areas needing improvement.



Tips for Success:

Engage Parents Early and Often: Involve parents in school activities from the start of the school year. Hold workshops or orientation sessions to explain the school's goals, expectations, and how parents can participate in their children's learning.

Encourage Parent-Teacher Collaboration: Create opportunities for collaboration through goal-setting meetings where both teachers and parents agree on educational objectives for the students. Promote joint problem-solving when challenges arise, ensuring a unified approach.

Organise Culturally Relevant Events: Plan school activities and events that resonate with the community's culture and values. For example, host local celebrations, cultural appreciation days, or family-focused activities that draw more parents into the school environment.

Additional Resources:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>

Conclusion:

This case study demonstrates that fostering parental involvement is crucial to enhancing child participation, student achievement and well-being. Through open communication, culturally relevant events, individualised support, and strong collaboration between parents, teachers, and school leaders, schools can create an inclusive and supportive environment where students thrive. By focusing on the well-being of both students and educators, continuously improving practices through data, and leveraging community resources, schools can build lasting relationships with families. Adopting these strategies not only strengthens the educational experience but also creates a more cohesive, engaged school community where every child can reach and move beyond their potential.



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