

# *A framework for family engagement: Going beyond the Epstein Framework*

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## ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a new framework for schools to use in evaluating and supporting their work around parental engagement. The paper begins by briefly examining the concept of parental engagement and moves on to an examination of the Epstein framework, which is the most widely used framework. This framework was first proposed in the last century, and the paper notes the advances in our understanding of parental engagement since that time. The paper concludes by offering a new framework to replace the one currently most often used. An appendix gives a practitioner's version of the framework to enable planning and evaluation.

## PRACTICAL ABSTRACT

Epstein's framework is widely used by schools in evaluating their practices around parental engagement. This article suggests a way to bring this framework up to date, using current literature in the field. The article offers a new framework for looking at parental engagement in learning in schools, and also offers a practitioner's version, to allow staff to plan and evaluate their work in this area.

**Keywords:** parental engagement, learning, relationships, school leadership

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*One of the most intriguing realities of parental involvement research is that the theories of parental involvement that emerged in the 1980s, especially, and also during the 1990s, preceded the most sophisticated research that was done on the topic. (Jeynes 2011, 13)*

### *Background*

For all that it is nearly a quarter of a century old, Epstein's model of parental<sup>2</sup> involvement is still often cited as the most used framework for involving parents (Kroeger and Lash 2011, Hamlin and Flessa 2018, Lechuga-Peña, Becerra et al. 2019), and has had an ongoing impact on policy (Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013). While not without criticism (Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013, Johnson 2015) the framework still holds an appeal for practitioners and researchers alike. Epstein's framework is of course only one of many which are available to practitioners and researchers (For a discussion of other frameworks, see: Goodall 2017); but as noted, this framework still holds a great deal of currency (See, for example, Borup, Walters et al. 2019, Akbari 2022, Bates, Finlay et al. 2022), for reasons which will be discussed below.

This article will present a discussion of Epstein's framework and based on the wide research since the framework's first publication, present an alternative. This article problematises the Epstein framework not as it was originally presented, but rather in view of its continued use today. As noted in the quotation at the outset of this article, our understanding of the value and realities of parental engagement with learning have grown and changed significantly since the model first appeared.

### *Importance of Parental Engagement*

There is little need here to rehearse the importance of parental engagement with children's learning; the literature is well known and widespread (Fan and Chen 2001, Jeynes 2005, Jeynes 2007, Fan and Williams 2010, Jeynes 2012). Parents' engagement with their children's learning can lead to increases in young peoples' motivation, rates of homework return, self-confidence (Boonk, Gijsselaers et al. 2018, Curry and Holter 2019) mastery orientations, and academic achievement (Kim and Hill 2015). These effects continue as children age and are still present during the secondary phase of education (Jeynes 2014), even though parental engagement often drops off at this stage of education (Deslandes and Bertrand 2005, Hill and Tyson

2009). Partnerships with parents have been signposted as essential elements of programmes to narrow the achievement gap between children from different backgrounds (Day 2015).

What is less clear for many, however, is what parental engagement with children's learning entails. While the literature is clear that what makes a difference is parents' engagement with learning (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2008, Jeynes 2012, Goodall and Montgomery 2014, Huat See and Gorard 2015), many school staff still concentrate on parents' relationship with the school, and on parents showing support for the school (Warren, Hong et al. 2009, Hornby and Lafaele 2011).<sup>3</sup> This may be characterised as parental involvement with the school, rather than parental engagement with learning (Goodall and Montgomery 2014), yet it is the latter which will most fully support students' outcomes. Parental engagement with children's learning may be defined as 'parents' engagement in the broad sphere of their children's learning' (Goodall 2017, 92); it should be noted that this definition concentrates on the family rather than the school.

This sort of engagement often overlaps with and is often confused with, what Goodall and Montgomery characterise as parental involvement with school/schooling (Goodall and Montgomery 2014). In this sort of activity, the agency tends to reside with the school, which also generally provides the physical location of the activity (Fantuzzo, Tighe et al. 2000).

This aligns to the distinction Reynolds makes between 'involvement' which relates to 'school-sanctioned, school authorised activities' in which parents participate, and engagement, which is understood as activities of parents 'structure for themselves' and which are 'self-directed' (Reynolds 2010, 144), mirroring the difference in agency between the two as seen in Goodall and Montgomery's work (2014). It is, however, important to note that Reynolds is using these terms in relation to parents' interaction with staff, rather than directly with young people's learning.

There is a good deal of literature which explores parents' relationships to this form of involvement (See, for example, Crozier, Dewey et al. 2000, La Placa and Corlyon 2016, Vincent 2017). The work of Borgonovi and Montt (2012) has shown that in many countries, including the UK, parents who possess social and cultural capital which aligns to that of the school, are more likely to engage directly with the school. Parental involvement with school, or school based partial involvement (Fantuzzo, Tighe et al. 2000, 317) can, then, further disenfranchise those parents least likely to come in to school. Borgonovi and Montt (2012) point out that programmes which support those parents most likely to come into school, to the

exclusion of other parents, may in fact widen, rather than narrow, the gap between the achievement of different groups of children. This effect defeats the object (at least the stated object) of many programmes to support parents, which is that 'All programs of school, family and community partnerships are about equity' (Epstein and Sheldon 2006).

### *Changed understandings of parental engagement*

Parental engagement, or rather conceptualisations and actualisations of parental engagement, have been problematised in the literature far more than they seem to have changed in practice (Dor and Rucker-Naidu 2012, Goodall, Ramadan et al. 2021), which argues for a change in the framework used to support this work in schools. Parents' support for learning still continues to be seen by many staff as in essence support for the school (de Oliveira Lima 2019), requiring direction and interventions from school staff.

Although the challenges to the current understandings and practices of parental engagement (or involvement) are widespread and well researched, they can be summarised as noted below. As Jeynes has aptly acknowledged, earlier research on parental involvement did not understand how complex this issue is (2011); any new framework will have to address these changed understandings. This then lays the foundation for a revised, re-envisioned framework to support the work of both school staff and parents, to support young people's learning.

One of the issues which arises in relation to staff work with parents is that of deficit views and understandings of parents and parenting (Jensen 2010, Hollingworth, Mansaray et al. 2011, Dahlstedt and Fejes 2014, Vincent 2017), including the ongoing belief in a lack of aspirations among some groups of parents (Treanor 2017). Research has shown that staff often underestimate or misunderstand the amount and types of engagement parents have with their children's learning (Bower and Griffin 2011, Curry and Holter 2019), particularly when staff come from backgrounds which are not similar to those of the parents in their schools (Barton, Drake et al. 2004). Parents and school staff may also assign different values to the actions parents take to support learning (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern et al. 2007, Mandarakas 2014, Daniels 2020). This can lead to judgemental attitudes toward parents, including labels such as 'hard to reach', 'disinterested' and 'bad parents'. 'Good parents' are often seen as those who engage in practices similar to those of staff and policy makers (Gillies 2005).

Much work around parental engagement ignores the issue of power relationships between families and school staff (Goodall 2017), assuming that parents should be done-unto rather than being participants in activities (Auerbach 2007, Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013). These elements of the deficit understanding of parents and families, have an impact on the way staff relate to parents (See, among others: Kim 2009, Mandarakas 2014)

It's also important to note that 'parental engagement' is not a unified, simple concept: what is effective changes as children age. Specifically, overt expressions of parental involvement are associated with higher academic outcomes among elementary school students but are no longer associated with these better results when students reach high school (Jeynes, 2005, 2007b). By the time students are in secondary school, virtually all the aspects of parental involvement that yield higher academic outcomes are subtle in nature (Jeynes 2014, 86; see also, Jeynes 2005, Jeynes 2007, Boonk, Gijsselaers et al. 2018).

There is a further issue which is important in terms of supporting parental engagement through schools, although it is not inherent to the discourse around parental engagement per se, which is simply that many teachers have never been trained to do this. Research has shown that provision for supporting trainee teachers in this area is inadequate at best (Willemse, Thompson et al. 2018), and perhaps missing altogether in some instances; there is a dearth of information about provision in this area (Thompson, Willemse et al. 2018). Researchers have been calling for increases in continuing professional development for school staff for some time (Mandarakas 2014, Day 2015, Goodall, Ramadan et al. 2021).

The issues highlighted above provide both a backdrop and a lens for an examination of Epstein's framework, which is provided below.

### *Epstein's framework*

Epstein's framework consists of six types of parental involvement:

**Type 1:** *Parenting – helping all families understand child and adolescent development and establishing home environments that support children as students.*

**Type 2:** *Communicating – designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communications about school programs and children's progress.*

**Type 3:** *Volunteering – recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or in other locations to support the school and students' activities.*

**Type 4:** *Learning at home – providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities and decisions.*

**Type 5:** *Decision-making – having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees and, with their leadership, obtaining input from all parents on school decisions.*

**Type 6:** *Collaborating with the community – identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families, and organizing activities to benefit the community and increase students' learning opportunities. (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2010, 2)*

### *Discussion of the Epstein framework*

As can be seen, there are valuable elements to the Epstein framework, which have largely contributed to its lasting impact. In the first instance, it is easy to understand and to use: it breaks parental involvement down into easily recognisable categories and makes it easy for school staff to evaluate their performance against those elements.

More importantly, the Epstein framework highlights the importance of parental support for learning in the home (Types 1 and 4) (Bower and Griffin 2011). The model also suggests the importance of parents' involvement in school decision making processes (Type 5), which would be manifest in many schools in the UK particularly through the governing body and parent councils.

There is a further, more subtle, and more problematic which may account for some of the framework's appeal. Schools can easily align their practice to the framework, or, more problematically still, align the framework to their practice, by making superficial changes to their practice. Unfortunately, these changes, being superficial, are unlikely to address deep seated issues of power, of assumptions about parents, about schooling and learning highlighted above (Goodall 2019, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2019). Epstein notes that the elements of the framework itself 'do not ensure an effective program of partnerships' (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2010, 2), and this is all the more true, as we now understand so much more of what support for effective parental engagement looks like.

The schooling system currently in place in the UK (and US and other systems) is not yet able to provide a reasonable, equitable education which allows all children the same opportunities to succeed (Vincent and Warren 1998, Desimone 1999, Auerbach 2007, Fan and Williams 2010, Crozier,

Reay et al. 2011, Blau and Hameiri 2012, Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013, Goodall 2017, Treanor 2017, Goodall 2019, Harris and Jones 2019, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2019). Epstein's framework, by placing the emphasis on interactions with schools, privileges those parents who arguably already have the attitudes, dispositions, self-concepts and skills that are expected and rewarded by the system (Lareau and Weininger 2003, Day and Dotterer 2018), rewards which relate to both parents and their children (See also Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander et al. 2013).

Further, not all the elements of the framework have been shown to be of equal effect. For example, Henderson and Mapp suggest that parents communicating with school, performing volunteer work in school and coming into school for events, have little effect on achievement (2002); Jeynes has noted, on the basis of thorough examinations of the literature, that it is the more subtle aspects of parental engagement which are likely to have the most positive impact (Jeynes 2011), and may change with age, for example, parental help with homework is unlikely to be beneficial for children in secondary school (Jeynes 2014).

The framework is reactive: it shows, highlights what is already happening in a school, rather than suggesting a way forward. As mentioned above this may be one of the points about the framework which appeal to some schools – it allows them to show that they are 'doing' parental engagement to a greater or lesser degree. The framework also encourages a view that parental engagement is something that can be 'done', 'accomplished' (Jeynes 2014) and even finished, rather than seeing it as 'a social practice, sustained through active participation and dialogue in a social world' (Barton, Drake et al. 2004, 6); effective parental engagement is a long term process (Blau and Hameiri 2012), rather than a set of prescribed actions. Recent research has highlighted the importance of relationships in building and sustaining parents' engagement with their children's learning (Wood and Bauman 2017, Goodall 2018, Sylva, Jelley et al. 2018, Calvet, Cavero et al. 2019, Robinson 2019). These relationships take time and sustained effort to build and maintain (Barbour, Eisenstadt et al. 2018).

As noted above, the framework is likely to capture (if not encourage) involvement from the parents who need the least encouragement, those who are in fact already members of the PTA, or governing body, who attend every parents' evening and concert and faire, as it is centred in, on, around and by the school, both in terms of staff but also in terms of location. These are also precisely the parents who are already well able to

manipulate the schooling system to their children's advantage (Crozier, Reay et al. 2011). As mentioned above, such practices can actually increase the gap between the achievement children from different backgrounds, rather than narrowing it (Borgonovi and Montt 2012).

One of the concerns about, if not the Epstein model, then the way it has been used, is that it treats parental engagement with children's learning as context-free. At no point does the model require or even suggest that schools begin their work with the framework by examining the lives and contexts of their children and families; the dangers of this way of understanding parental engagement have been clearly highlighted in the literature (Johnson 2015, Fretwell 2020). Epstein's framework does not acknowledge differences among families from different backgrounds, but rather provides a generalised approach to the concept of parental engagement, one that is generally based on the experiences and understandings of school staff, who are likely to be white and middle class (Bower and Griffin 2011, Johnson 2015). This is not a failing of this particular framework alone; much of the work in this area treats parental engagement as though it were somehow removed from its context, as though parents, children and staff operate without reference to the rest of the areas of their lives (Barton, Drake et al. 2004, Goodall and Vorhaus 2011, Goodall 2018). Any new framework, then, must if not create, then allow for and indeed facilitate adaptation to the different circumstances faced by individual schools and communities.

Research has shown that school staff often underestimate or miss family work to support young people's learning, when those practices do not mirror those of the teachers themselves (Kohl, Lengua et al. 2000, Kim 2009, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011, Childers-McKee and Hytten 2015). Because the Epstein framework has no weighting, (e.g., activities either do or do not occur), it would seem to school staff using the framework that parents coming into school or contacting the school is of the same value as the home learning environment. As we have seen above, this is not the case, and this discrepancy becomes all the more important in relation to different groups of parents, as some groups of parents (particularly those from marginalised groups) may be providing a wealth of in-home support for learning but rarely contact the school (Bower and Griffin 2011), and different forms of parental engagement may be beneficial to different groups of students (Lechuga-Peña, Becerra et al. 2019). This means that the Epstein framework may not provide an adequate or full picture of the ways that families are supporting learning.

*Moving away from the school, toward learning*

The older framework suggests work which is almost entirely school focused (Johnson 2015) (Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013); actions emanate from the school, showing parents how to do things. While the framework does highlight the value of the home learning environment (type 1 and 4), type 4 in particular is still focused on the school-initiated elements of 'homework and curriculum related activities and decisions'. While some research has shown benefits for parental involvement in schools (Jeynes 2011), the gains were quite small; the greater value lies in parental interaction with learning (Jeynes 2005, Harris, Andrew-Power et al. 2009, Jeynes 2011).

Baquedano-López et al point out that such foregrounding of the school and the views of staff is particularly problematic when these goals most clearly align to White, middle class values, as we have noted above (Baquedano-López, Alexander et al. 2013).

Parenting is a highly contentious concept, as the literature has made clear (See, among many others: Vincent and Warren 1998, Gillies 2005, Jensen 2010, Vincent, Ball et al. 2010, Dahlstedt and Fejes 2014, Vincent 2017, Goodall 2019), yet the current framework, understandably based on older literature, takes no account of these discussions or differences in parenting. This level does at least suggest that there is more than one type of parenting which can be useful (c.f. the use of the plural, environments). However, in creating a new framework, parenting is not included as a separate item; rather the new framework concentrates on supporting engagement with learning.

*A New Framework*

Parental engagement, therefore, is more than on object or an outcome. Engagement is a process involving a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which the that engagement takes place. The basic unit of analysis for understanding parental engagement cannot be the individual actions of parents taken alone, but parents interacting with their children, with other parents, teachers, and other school-and community-based people within particular spaces (Barton, Drake et al. 2004, 6)

Any proposed new framework must be based on current literature and practice around parental engagement with learning and be updated as understandings change. This new framework would be an endo, not an exoskeleton – because the change is about changes that are fundamental rather than external excrescence. Bower and Griffin point out that what is often needed is not superficial change but rather a reconsideration of basic beliefs, and a change from deficit to asset models, to lead to more effective parental engagement (Bower and Griffin 2011). The new framework supports school communities, staff, parents, students, and others, to continually re-examine these beliefs and supports practical work to support parents. These are not processes delineated in time, one before the other, but rather iterative: as beliefs change, practice will improve, and improved practice (leading to better results) will in turn impact on beliefs (Guskey 2002). The framework is presented in three headings, allowing school communities (staff and parents) to chart their progress from parental involvement the school, toward parental engagement with learning.

The aim of the framework is to support authentic, contextualised, appropriate engagement by families in the learning of their children and young people. It sees engagement as ‘a relational phenomenon’ (Barton, Drake et al. 2004, 3), including relationships between parents and children, parents and other parents, parents and children and school staff, and all of these with the wider community.

Based on the literature seen above, the new framework presented has the following characteristics.

*It aims to be family, rather than school centric*

The new framework should not be completed by school staff alone; parents and families must be considered as co-constructors and partners. For this reason, the sections in the previous framework, ‘Decision Making’ and ‘Collaborating with the Community’ have been removed, and elements from these sections have been incorporated throughout the new framework, as the partnership between school staff and parents (and the wider community) is not focused solely on decision making. It should be noted that this is a partnership, rather than a levelling: partners work together toward a shared goal (children’s learning), but do not necessarily all do the same sorts of work toward that end; a new framework must take into account parents’ views, understandings, values and desires (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011, Curry and Holter 2019).

The new framework aims at partnership between families and school staff, and practice toward this must be embedded in, and foster, the building of relationships between all stakeholders, including relationships and support between families themselves (Curry and Holter 2019). As Jeynes has pointed out, whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents (Mapp 2002, Sheldon 2002, Jeynes 2011, 10).

The new framework avoids a concentration on families coming into school, but rather be focused on the home learning environment. This will help to support those families and parents unlikely or unable to come onto the school premises. And while the framework supports work that will for the most part at least originate with the actions of school staff, it leads to a move away from a focus on the school, toward a concentration on learning.

*It focuses on relationships*

Building relationships between families and school staff is at the heart of supporting parental engagement in learning – and communication is at the heart of building relationships (Weise, Lopez et al. 2006, Bower and Griffin 2011, Ho, Hung et al. 2013). Parent-school communication can be defined as ‘a process that exchanges information to develop consensus, coordinate action, fulfil stakeholder needs and achieve effective learning goals’ (Ho, Hung et al. 2013, 106, See also: Lechuga-Peña, Becerra et al. 2019). This definition, however, seems overly instrumental, if what is at stake is the creation and support of relationships; Epstein and Sheldon point out that two way communication between home and school leads to increased achievement and better attendance (Sheldon and Epstein 2004). The new framework relies on a slightly enhanced definition, such that home-school communication is a ‘process that supports the exchange of information, ideas and understandings between school staff and families, in support of all aspects of learning’.

*It supports staff learning and practice*

Threaded throughout the discussion of support for parental engagement is the idea of staff involvement; when staff are properly trained and supported, the effects on parental engagement tend to be positive (Smith and Sheridan 2019). Yet the literature is clear that few staff are trained to

support parental engagement, either through their initial training (Mutton, Burn et al. 2018) or through ongoing professional development. Teacher perception of efficacy impacts on their relationships with parents (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern et al. 2007); initial and continuing professional development must ensure support for teachers in this work. The new framework includes an emphasis on initial and continuing development for school staff.

*It is aimed at fundamental, not superficial change*

The new framework aims to support parental engagement with children's learning, rather than parental involvement with the school (Fantuzzo, Tighe et al. 2000, Goodall and Montgomery 2013, Curry and Holter 2019).

The new framework needs to support participants to come to understand that just challenging external barriers to engagement is not enough, but must be willing to see how those barriers can be (and often are) 'sustained through the normative practices of schooling and of research' (Barton, Drake et al. 2004, 11), and then move on to consider eradicating the barriers at source. This can be very challenging and some schools may find that they cannot – or will not – engage entirely with the process or outcomes, as researchers found in a project looking at how poverty is enacted in schools (Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2016). For this reason, again, the new framework is presented in stages, which, while not delineated in time, allow school communities to understand that this work is ongoing. The new framework aims to support school staff to move away from a deficit model of parental engagement (Curry and Holter 2019), and to move to an understanding of working in partnership with parents.

*There is a focus on the home learning environment*

Epstein's original framework does highlight the importance of the home learning environment; it is useful to note that any new framework would be building on the work already done by previous schemas. However, a new framework must also highlight what is important in the home learning environment (HLE), which is parental support for learning, including 'academic socialisation' (expectations, valuing of learning, discussions, future plans) (Hill and Tyson 2009) rather than direct instruction of school content (Epstein 2008).

*Move from practice to process*

The new framework offers ease of use in recording practice but also supports ongoing work, acknowledging that supporting parental engagement is a process as well as a matter of practice.

The proposed framework, based loosely on the continuum by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) represents a move from school based parental involvement, requiring parental contact with, if not presence at, the school, through to parental engagement with learning. This is still often supported by school staff but tends to take place outside of school and is focused on learning. The framework also documents a shift in staff perceptions of parents, moving from 'helping teachers' or supporting the school, through to being active partners in the learning of their children.

*It supports effective evaluation and forward planning*

The importance of evaluation is highlighted in Epstein's later work, as is the fact that programmes must be continuous due to the ever changing nature of school communities (Epstein 2008). Any new framework supports effective, timely evaluation which then feeds into future practice.

*A new framework for parental engagement*

Taking all these elements into account, a new framework for parental engagement is given below, in two formats. The first shows the work that needs to be done, moving from Parental Involvement with School, through to Parental Engagement in learning, with an intermediate stage between the two.

The framework is designed to show ideas which are general enough to allow for customisation by individual schools and communities but are also clear enough to show the work that needs to be done. The framework presented in the text shows only the work to be done; the framework presented in the appendix is presented in a format which will allow school staff and parents, working together, to decide not only what is to be done, but also what evidence they will amass to show that something has been accomplished. As noted above, parental engagement is never 'done' or 'complete'; therefore, the practitioner's framework is presented with a final column, 'Going Forward', providing a space for school communities to plan future work.

**Figure 1**

Supporting Parental involvement with school	Intermediate	Supporting Parental engagement with learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the school</li> <li>• Focus on parental interactions with the school</li> <li>• School website is accessible (including on a mobile phone)</li> <li>• Parents understand homework tasks</li> <li>• School decisions clearly communicated to parents</li> <li>• School regularly communicates with parents</li> <li>• School audit of communication with parents</li> <li>• Staff receive training about nature and value of parental engagement</li> <li>• Parents are aware of the role of the governors, including parent governors</li> <li>• School actively solicits feedback from parents</li> <li>• Investigation of school policies – where do families and parents fit in?</li> <li>• Staff inform parents of learning tasks</li> <li>• School offers clear induction/ transition information for families</li> <li>• School maintains records of work with parents</li> <li>• Parent teacher evenings/events focused on reporting (reactive focus)</li> <li>• Parents seen as helping teachers, supporting the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School website is regularly updated, checked for accuracy, by staff working with parents</li> <li>• Homework tasks become interactive, with planned support from parents</li> <li>• Parents consulted about a range of school decisions</li> <li>• School keeps and evaluates records of communication with parents</li> <li>• Discussions with parents about means of two way communication</li> <li>• School evaluates work with parents</li> <li>• All parent governor posts are filled</li> <li>• School acts on parental feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on learning</li> <li>• Focus on parental interactions with their children</li> <li>• School website and general information created in conversation with parents</li> <li>• Parents are engaged in designing a range of homework tasks</li> <li>• Parents understand how homework tasks/suggested activities support learning</li> <li>• Parents involved in wide range school decisions</li> <li>• School ensures that all parents receive positive communication in relation to their child's learning</li> <li>• Communication between school staff and parents is mostly two way and focused on learning</li> <li>• Evaluation of previous work with parents feeds into planning for the future</li> <li>• Parent governors are representative of all parental communities</li> <li>• School closes feedback loop so parents are aware of action taken on the basis of their feedback</li> <li>• Parents/families involved in redrafting appropriate policies</li> <li>• Staff actively engage with parents to support learning</li> <li>• Parents co create and participate in induction and transition activities</li> <li>• School effectively evaluates work with parents, and uses this to inform future work</li> <li>• Parent teacher events focused on supporting learning (proactive focus)</li> <li>• Parents seen as partners in supporting learning</li> </ul>

*Concluding comments*

This framework is presented as a suggestion on which to build, rather than as a static tool. The framework should be seen as a *part of* work to improve parental engagement with learning, rather than a stand-alone tool; it must be embedded in ongoing development and discussion among the entire school community. Each school is unique, as are the families within each school community. The framework is presented as an outline of issues and ideas to be addressed, with the understanding that parental engagement is not an event to be accomplished but rather a process to be lived.

**Figure 2**

Supporting Parental involvement with school	Evidence	Intermediate	Evidence	Supporting parental engagement with learning	Evidence	Going forward...
Focus on the school				Focus on learning		
Focus on parental interactions with the school				Focus on parental interactions with their children		
School website is accessible (including on a mobile phone)		School website is regularly updated, checked for accuracy, by staff working with parents		School website and general information created in conversation with parents		
Parents understand homework tasks		Homework tasks become interactive, with planned support from parents		Parents are engaged in designing a range of homework tasks		
				Parents understand how homework tasks/suggested activities support learning		
School decisions clearly communicated to parents		Parents consulted about a range of school decisions		Parents involved in wide range school decisions		
School regularly communicates with parents		School keeps and evaluates records of communication with parents		School ensures that all parents receive positive communication in relation to their child's learning		
School audit of communication with parents		Discussions with parents about means of two way communication		Communication between school staff and parents is mostly two way and focused on learning		
Staff receive training about nature and value of parental engagement		School evaluates work with parents		Evaluation of previous work with parents feeds into planning for the future		
Parents are aware of the role of the governors, including parent governors		All parent governor posts are filled		Parent governors are representative of all parental communities		
School actively solicits feedback from parents		School acts on parental feedback		School closes feedback loop so parents are aware of action taken on the basis of their feedback		

Figure 2 (Continued)

Investigation of school policies - where do families and parents fit in?				Parents/families involved in redrafting appropriate policies		
Staff inform parents of learning tasks				Staff actively engage with parents to support learning		
School offers clear induction/ transition information for families				Parents co create and participate in induction and transition activities		
School maintains records of work with parents				School effectively evaluates work with parents, and uses this to inform future work		
Parent teacher evenings/events focused on reporting (reactive focus)				Parent teacher events focused on supporting learning (proactive focus)		
Parents seen as helping teachers, supporting the school				Parents seen as partners in supporting learning		

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#### Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank Dr Suzanne Sarjeant for her helpful comments on the framework presented here.
- 2 ‘Parent’ throughout this paper should be read as encompassing all adults with a caring responsibility for students.
- 3 Even though later work by the same authors presents a more hopeful scenario, the types of parental involvement mentioned most commonly by the schools in the study were still school based. Hornby, G. and I. Blackwell (2018). ‘Barriers to parental involvement in education: an update.’ *Educational Review*, 70(1), 109–19.