

# #6 COLLABORATING WITH PARENTS

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### # Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS:

- How can we support parents to stimulate their children's learning?
- How do we use the expertise of parents to stimulate the learning of our students?
- How do we have the right conversation with parents?

### Why is it important to collaborate with parents?

Research shows that family factors have the biggest impact on students' academic achievement. Parental engagement in their children's learning is far more predictive of students' academic success than the family's socioeconomic status. The quality of teachers is the second or third most crucial factor depending on the age of the child (over the age of 11 the other is the peer group). If parents (in this HEADstart we use the term to refer to all family members who function as caretakers of a child) and teachers collaborate, they can make a huge difference in students' learning.

First, schools should adjust to the linguistic register of all parents to make communication efficient and inclusive. Parents can also be supported e.g. by organizing workshops for them about non-school related learning at home, providing access to the library or funding for participating in sports.

Secondly, schools can support parents to get more engaged in their children's learning. If parents celebrate learning this supports the school career of their children. Research shows that the only activities that significantly increase school success are reading in the presence of or together with the children and having regular discussions on everyday topics e.g. during meals. Schools can also support parents by treating them as equals and making use of their expertise – after all, they know their child best.

### What is needed to collaborate with parents?

The key is that teachers and parents have good conversations, based on principles of mutual respect and trust acknowledging their different roles in the education of the child. You can help parents learn how to be supportive of their children's learning and make them feel that they can make a major contribution to the learning and well-being of their children. Teachers can collaborate with parents in formal and informal ways. As a school leader, you can support teachers in having the right conversations with parents. It is important for teachers to know the overall parent needs and most general characteristics of the parents in the school to be able to match up.

### Step 1) Discuss your vision on collaboration with the parents

Organize team meetings to clarify the vision on collaboration with parents. Discuss where you are, where you want to be and how to get there.

- What is already happening in the collaboration with parents?
- What does this collaboration yield?
- What are we proud of? Why are we proud of that?
- Do we reach all parents? What does it take to reach all parents?
- In what way does collaboration contribute to optimizing the learning processes of the students?
- How does collaboration contribute to mutual trust and a shared sense of responsibility for students' learning?
- What is going well in the collaboration and what do we want to develop further?

- What is not going well enough in the collaboration and what does it take to make it better?
- What does that require of the team?
- What can the school management do to support the team?

## **Step 2) Support your teachers to build relationships with parents**

Support conversations between your teachers and parents. This way teachers get to know the parents better and you gain insight into which parents would appreciate educational support and in which fields. Parents need to experience that they are respected members of the school as a community.

Meetings with parents should be organized by first contacting them about their availability and exploring which venues they feel safe in. If necessary, organize work meetings in which the team is informed about intercultural communication. Parents can coach teachers if necessary.

You can organize the parent meetings for example by

- Ten-minute-long conversations
- Information evenings
- Coffee moments
- Conversations at the door when parents take their child to school
- Walk-in hours
- Home visits
- Various venues
- Weekends
- Digital parent portal

Students should also be given the opportunity to be present at these meetings to promote the principle of “nothing about them without them”.

Make sure that the necessary information is provided before the meeting, so that face-to-face occasions are not spent on giving the information, but on discussing it.

Support the conduct of the conversations by drawing up a meeting agenda with the team. Engage the parents in drawing up the agenda that should include elements such as:

- Discussing mutual expectations about collaboration with the school – how do parents see their own role and that of the school? It is important to discuss this when the parents and the students come to school for the first time.

If necessary, it can be repeated in follow-up interviews.

- Discussing the home situation to get to know the child better (for example: what do you like doing with your child?). As a school leader you should also be well informed about difficult home situations. Don't make parents feel like they must tell the same thing repeatedly. However, disclosing information must be voluntary, and the boundaries between school and home as well as parental authority should be respected.
- Discussing parents' views on raising their children and developing a growth mindset. How parents think about their possible contribution is important when it comes to supporting their children, but they should be discouraged from contributing to homework. What does the school consider important? What activities can the parents and the school undertake? It is important to discuss this when the student comes to school for the first time. If necessary, it can be repeated in follow-up interviews.
- Discussing how to inform parents about their child's progress at school. It is important to inform parents about the learning processes of their children, the expectations and goals set for a period.

## **Step 3) Support your team in developing conversational skills**

Guide your teachers in further developing conversational skills. Are they able to really see and understand the parent? Are they able to use a linguistic register that parents understand? Do they contribute to developing a trusting relationship with the parents? Do they acknowledge what skills children had learnt from their parents? Do they use the expertise of the parents?

Set a good example yourself when you talk to teachers. Teachers and school leaders can set the tone – they are role models in enhancing parent-child communication in the home. They should demonstrate exemplary forms of communication with students as well as with parents. If parents realize that they do like educators who are not speaking down to them, they might more easily have fair and equal conversations with their children.

