

**ACE Aotearoa submission to:
Select Committee Education and Science
Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children**

Submission

General Statement

We support the intent of the inquiry because of the compelling evidence that children whose parents/whānau are engaged in their education are more successful and achieve better educational outcomes.¹

In addition, there is much evidence to show that not all children and young persons are achieving to their educational potential. The long-term impacts on the individuals as well as to the country (economically and socially) will be devastating if this underachievement is not addressed.

Effectively engaging parents/ caregivers and family/ whanau in the education of their children and young people will be beneficial to the children and the young people; as well as to the parents/ whānau, community and to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Overview of ACE Aotearoa and consultation undertaken

Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa is the lead body for adult and community educators and a voice for adult learners. It actively promotes and supports the diversity of lifelong learning in Aotearoa New Zealand and fosters collaboration and cooperation to the advantage of adult learners, educators and providers. ACE Aotearoa is a membership organisation which represents both its members and the wider ACE sector. It provides advice and direction for policy development and its implementation.

In putting this submission together ACE Aotearoa consulted with its members, as well as widely across the ACE sector and those involved in community education.

Specific Comments:

Core Elements of an Effective Strategy

ACE Aotearoa supports the Select Committee's inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children and submits that in order to develop an effective strategic approach to engaging parents, whānau and community it must consider:

- That learning and education begins in the family/whānau and community and is a lifelong process
- Not all parents/ caregivers have the skills, knowledge, confidence (e.g. negative self-efficacy² or belief in their own competence, previous bad experience at school), physical ability (e.g. deaf or disabled) to engage in the education of their children
- External influences impacting on families (housing, unemployment, social and financial insufficiency) can affect parental engagement in their children's learning
- Any strategy must be developed alongside, parent, communities, families and whānau
- Any strategy must have clear outcomes, be measurable and show gains for children across the population

Critical Consideration in Developing an Effective Strategy

¹ Alton-Lee A, (2003). "Quality Teaching for Diverse Learners" – Best Evidence Synthesis: Wellington, Ministry of Education.

Mitchell L, Wylie C & Carr M (2008) Outcomes of Early Childhood Education: A Literature Review: Wellington, Ministry of Education.

² Bandura, A (1997) Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control, USA W H Freeman

Engaging vulnerable (currently disengaged) parents/whānau, and communities must be of primary importance in the development of an effective strategy.

Encouragement of/ focus on Intergenerational Learning is key to an Effective Strategy

Though this inquiry is primarily focused on children who are in education institutions (ECE, Schools, Secondary Schooling) ACE sees that enhancing the role of parents/ caregivers/ grandparents and whānau/ aiga in the education of their children is vital and can be effectively addressed within the context of whānau/intergenerational learning and acknowledges that much of the onus is on the education system to resolve the issue.

Many parents/ caregivers in New Zealand are actively involved in the education of their children. Many of these parents/ carers and children will have experienced success in their educational journey and hold high expectations of further success. There are also a large number of children who are not experiencing success in the education system whose parents/ caregivers may also have not experienced success and who need support to become engaged in their children's education.

Making ALL parents welcome to engage during their child's early years

Learning happens all the time, in formal and informal settings, through everyday activities, in classrooms, at work and at play.

A key element for an effective strategy to engage parents/ carers early in their children's education is to reconceptualise our understanding that education *begins* in the family/whānau and community not in the classroom and *continues* throughout a person's life. Education is not confined to institutions.

There is overwhelming evidence to show that children whose parents/whānau are engaged in their education from the early years (0-5 years) will be more successful (achieve better education results).³ If parents/whānau are not engaged in the early years it becomes increasingly difficult for them to engage as their child grows older.

ACE Aotearoa strongly submits that parents, caregivers and whānau need support and ready access to good education information and learning opportunities during these early years. Encouraging parents to teach their children at home using day-to-day activities, games, singing and reading are all important aspects of encouraging early engagement of parent's in their children's education.

Inviting whānau into early childhood education centres to learn alongside children encourages intergenerational learning, a common practice in Māori and Pasifika culture.

Critical to have “partnership” connections and shared commitment

An effective strategy for engagement acknowledges the diversity of its target populations (parents, caregivers, families, whānau, aiga communities) and the limitations of the education system (ECE's, schools, secondary schools).

Effective engagement (between the education system, parents, caregivers, families, whānau and communities) requires that all parties create a 'partnership' where the end goal is the improved achievement of all children. It requires the education system to know the expectations of its community and vice versa. Ideally, there should be shared expectations between the community, its members and the education system.

“The purpose of school-home involvement is to connect in-school and out-of-school learning in ways that will support valued outcomes for students. If effective connections are to be developed, teachers need to value the educational cultures of

³ Biddulph F, Biddulph J, & Biddulph C (2003). “The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children's Achievement in New Zealand” Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration, Wellington Ministry of Education

*their students' families and communities and parents need to learn about and value the educational culture of the school. The principle of ako – reciprocal learning and teaching – is therefore fundamental to developing connections that work.*⁴

Above all there must be a shared belief that it is essential for parents/ caregivers and community to be engaged in children's education.

Education institutions who achieve high rates of parental and community engagement also have high levels of student achievement (Kura Kaupapa Māori, Māori Immersion). These institutions have a strong leadership that values parental engagement in their children's learning, supports staff professional development and invests in making the institution feel like an extension of that community.

There is much research available to educational leaders to assist in making effective engagement with parents/ caregivers achievable.⁵

Engaging the “Dis-engaged” – (some) ACE learner/parents/ caregivers

The ACE sector regularly engages adult learners who:

- Are second-chance learners for whom the compulsory education system failed
- Are second-language learners of English and recent migrants
- Have disabilities (e.g deaf, physical disability) and face other barriers toward engagement in their children's education

For these ACE learners access and engagement with the system that educates their children can be difficult when the system they are trying to engage with either does not understand them or does not accept them or cannot interact respectfully and effectively with them as they are.

Parents/caregivers who are second-chance learners more often than not have had a negative experience in the education system. Many learnt while at school that they were 'dumb' and lack the confidence to engage with, or challenge, the education system on behalf of their children. Many also feel that there is little they can do to assist or encourage their children's educational development when they have not achieved themselves.

Parents/caregivers who are not fluent in English (ie are learning English as a second-language), new immigrants or refugees who may not be literate or educated in their own language, often undervalue their own prior knowledge and feel inadequate, unqualified or don't see how their engagement in the education of their children will benefit them. Some, even express the view that they might disadvantage their children by becoming involved in their learning. Similarly deaf parents or parents of deaf children and disabled parents often feel they are unable to engage in the education of their children without support to communicate and be understood.

Effective engagement empowers communities where parents/ caregivers (including Maori, Pasifika, disabled) keep their “unique identities” intact, enhance their own confidence and self belief and education institutions welcome and incorporate practices that allow children from diverse backgrounds and family/ personal situations to engage and flourish.

Best Practice Overview: Intergenerational learning

⁴ Robinson V, Hohepa M, Lloyd C, (2009) “School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why” Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration, Wellington: Ministry of Education, Chapter 7, pg169

⁵ Ibid above

Bishop R & Berryman M (2009) “The Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile. Set 2.” Wellington, New Zealand Council of Educational Research.

Education Review Office (2008) “Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities”. Wellington. Education Review Office.

Parental/caregiver engagement in children's education is inevitable where there is intergenerational learning (families learning together). Whānau/families benefit from learning together. The Playcentre movement (The Playcenter Association is a member of ACE Aotearoa) is an enduring example of intergenerational learning at its best.

ACE Aotearoa is aware of a large number of local good practice examples of parents and communities working together to encourage their children's learning. Some of these are provided below.

Best Practice: schools as community hubs

For example, more schools that are in tune with their communities are becoming "Community Hubs" where communities identify and cater for their local learning needs. Victory School and Riverslea Primary School are examples of best practice where communities and schools identify their educational, social and health needs (i.e. dealing with hunger as a barrier to children's learning, isolated single and migrant mothers needing engagement) and work together to develop programmes that include intergenerational learning. Victory School began a coffee/play group for local mothers at the school which developed into English language classes for migrant mothers. The school has become a 'campus of learners' hosting playgroups, ACE programmes and health and social services⁶. The positive affect of increased parental engagement in both schools is evidenced in their ERO reports.

ACE programmes provide learning opportunities for parents/ families of deaf children to learn sign, parents of Māori immersion children to learn te reo Māori⁷ and families together learning about Healthy Kai, computer skills, music and exercise workshops.

Intergenerational learning translates into community and social benefits (e.g. greater participation in community, civil society and productive work) and also student achievement.

Best Practice: Building on Community Strengths to create community hubs

An effective strategy for engaging parents/ caregivers in the education of their children provides levers (access to funding, resources, facilities) which can be used by community members to make a difference together.

For example, Strive Community Trust in Mangere, South Auckland is another form of community hub. It has a training academy - and also provides whānau engagement and support; they know that young people do much better if their families take an interest in their education. Strive also delivers ACE programmes including financial literacy, basic computing, cooking on a budget, learner licence, te reo Māori, Pacific culture and more.⁸

Best Practice: Local Libraries as Intergenerational Learning Centers

Furthermore, local libraries provide many learning opportunities for families. Christchurch and Manukau City Libraries run programmes designed to activate learning for pre-school aged children and babies alongside their parents. They run programmes that align with the school curriculum and run events (eg Matariki, Te wiki o te reo Māori) that schools then pick up on. Christchurch library runs Pasifika pre-schoolers and their teacher ipad sessions, a bi-annual event to promote reading for children aged 6-12 (Reading Crusade), the Family History project and more. Key to the success of these programmes is the promotion of parents and whānau involvement in these learning activities.

"When parents and children can access local community institutions (e.g. libraries, medical facilities) and social agencies (e.g. to receive income entitlements) children's

⁶ ACE Aotearoa "Adult and Community Education" Summer Newsletter 2010, pg2

⁷ Te Ataarangi is an ACE programme where adults learn te reo Māori. Programmes are open to all whānau members to participate.

⁸ ACE Aotearoa "Adult and Community Education" Summer Newsletter 2012, pg2

*achievement can be enhanced beyond the level which schools alone can accomplish*⁹

Involve Parents and Communities in the Local Implementation

An important element to achieve results from an effective strategy to engage parents and communities in their children's learning must be their inclusion in the development of the strategy- and most particularly how it will be implemented in *their* community.

Conclusion

Nelson Mandela stated that "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world".

ACE Aotearoa's vision is "transforming communities and whānau through Adult and Community Education."

Confident communities are able to assess and address their own local needs. Confident communities have good leadership, healthy relationships between diverse members of that community (schools, marae, clubs, business, volunteer groups and local council) and the ability to support each other when needed.

Implementing an effective strategy of intergenerational learning, genuinely involving parents/caregivers and family/whānau in their children and young people's learning through the Aotearoa Education System would provide the foundation for sustainable prosperity for all.

We thank the Select Committee for this opportunity to make a submission and look forward to discussing it further with you at your convenience.

⁹ Ibid at note 2, pg v