

Committee	Dated:
Education Board	24/09/2020
Subject: Parental Engagement in Learning	Public
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Discussion
Report author: Daniel McGrady, Lead Policy Officer (Education, Culture and Skills)	

Summary

The Education Strategy 2019-23 commits to enabling pupils in the Family of Schools to flourish and thrive which includes working with parents and families to support parental engagement in learning. Members are asked to consider the strategic and research context for parental engagement in learning¹ as well as examples of practice from City Corporation departments. Members are asked to discuss the points in Section 9 to inform the next steps for this area of work.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Consider the strategic and research context of parental engagement in learning
- Consider the projects and activities currently conducted by the City Corporation to encourage and facilitate parental engagement in learning
- Note that a review of policy and practice in this area across the Family of Schools will take place over the 2020/21 Academic Year to discover what activities are taking place and what works
- Discuss the discussion points in Section 11

Main Report

Strategic Context

1. The Education Strategy 2019-23 commits to ensuring that pupils in the Family of Schools receive exceptional education to enable them to flourish and thrive. A key aim for achieving this is to support the Family of Schools to “use effective communication and feedback to ensure pupils and their families are partners in children’s learning.”² The links between parental engagement and pupils’ learning is well established in research and practice and are key considerations for the Education Board in fulfilment of the goals in the Education Strategy. This report was requested by the Chair of Education Board to frame a discussion by Members on how it can continue to support parental engagement in learning across the City Corporation and its Family of Schools.

Research Context

¹ The term ‘parental engagement’ is inclusive of carers and other family members who live with or provide significant support to a child.

² City of London Corporation, *Education Strategy 2019-23*, 2019

<<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Services-DCCS/city-of-london-education-strategy-2019-23.pdf>>

2. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) defines 'parental engagement' as 'the involvement of parents in supporting their children's academic learning' which could include any (or all) of the following³:
 - Approaches and programmes which aim to develop parental skills such as literacy or IT skills;
 - General approaches which encourage parents to support their children, for example, with reading or homework;
 - The involvement of parents in their children's learning activities;
 - More intensive programmes for families in crisis.
3. EEF acknowledge that tracking the impact of parental engagement on pupils' outcomes is complex and challenging and the evidence for what schools can do to effectively engage parents in a way that improves children's learning outcomes is limited. However, they do conclude that "parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's learning, and levels of parental engagement are consistently associated with better academic outcomes." Some evidence has shown that effective parental engagement can lead to learning gains of +3 months over the course of a year.⁴
4. Effective parental engagement can be challenging for schools, parents and pupils. The research compendium which informed the development of the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework states the value of parental engagement and echoes the EEF in highlighting the challenges in employing the right approaches and engagement methods to actually have an impact on children's academic outcomes.⁵ Although the Inspection Framework does not outline what approaches schools should use, the effectiveness of parental engagement in a school's curriculum development is assessed as part of the Leadership and Management Judgement.
5. Considering the mixed evidence surrounding parental engagement methods, it is important not to assume that it is always a lack of parental motivation or interest which leads to projects being ineffective. Instead, the EEF advocate a system-wide approach which is tailored and responsive to individual school, pupil and parental circumstances.
6. The EEF have developed guidance for primary and secondary schools on some of the best ways for communicating with parents and supporting learning at home developed from meta-analysis of a range of programmes. In summary, the recommendations are:⁶
 - i. Critically review how you work with parents – EEF advises that schools need to continuously monitor and evaluate their work with parents and use different strategies for different age groups. EEF suggests schools should **"focus on the skills you want children to develop at different ages"** and work with parents to specifically develop those. For example, in the

³ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), *Parental Engagement - Teaching & Learning Toolkit*, April 2020
<<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>>

⁴ EEF, *Working with parents to support children's learning*, 2018
<<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/working-with-parents-to-support-childrens-learning/>>

⁵ Ofsted, *Education inspection framework: overview of research*, 2019
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/813228/Research_for EIF framework 100619_16_.pdf>

⁶ EEF, *Working with parents to support children's learning, guidance report*, 2019
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/ParentalEngagement/EEF_Parental_Engagement_Guidance_Report.pdf>

early years, parents could support activities that develop oral language and self-regulation at home; for primary, a focus on reading at home; for older pupils, activities which support independent learning. To be continuously effective, schools should cyclically **plan** their strategies based on parents' changing needs, **support** teachers with the right training and resources to continuously engage parents and regularly **monitor** the effectiveness of approaches and activities.

- ii. Provide practical strategies to support learning at home – EEF recommends that schools can provide parents with **practical activities which they can do with their children at home** to support learning. For younger children, these might include reading together or playing with letters and numbers and fostering elements of a positive home learning environment such as ensuring that there are learning resources in the home such as books, puzzles, and toys. For older pupils, parental encouragement and interest in children's learning are more important than direct involvement and so guidance could be provided to parents on how to support their child to plan and self-assess their learning and regulate their emotions as they learn.
- iii. Tailor school communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning – The EEF recommends that schools should pay attention to the methods and styles they use to communicate with parents and advises that '**school communications with parents are likely to be more effective if they are personalised, linked to learning, and framed positively** (for example, celebrating success).' For some parents, a weekly text message is a useful form of communication about their child, however for others, face-to-face or telephone contact might be more effective. Similarly, differences apply to different age groups of pupils. In the early years and primary school, there should be a greater focus on activities that parents and children can do together, whereas at secondary school, factual updates of academic progress and prompts for 'learning conversations' can be more effective. EEF recommends that schools should give careful thought to the frequency, timing, and targeting of messages, reviewing existing approaches as a starting point and personalising messages as far as possible.
- iv. Offer more sustained and intensive support where needed – Some families will need more targeted and intensive support to address children's learning gaps, attendance or behaviours. EEF recommends being sensitive about targeting to avoid blaming and stigmatising parents as well as planning the right programme of support and activities for parents with a focus on encouragement and positivity. Parents might have had their own negative experiences at school or might have barriers to engagement such as childcare or health appointments. All of these should be taken into consideration when using more intensive support packages for families who might benefit.

Parent Views and Parental Engagement during COVID-19

- 7. The charity Parentkind run annual surveys of parents to understand the state of education through the eyes of parents and gather insight into parental engagement and school-parent relationships. In the 2019 survey, the main reasons parents identified which prevent them from getting more involved in their

children's learning are 'not enough time', 'unsure what skills/knowledge they can offer' and 'not being asked'.⁷ Moreover, only one half of surveyed parents felt that their school listens to them, and just over a quarter felt that the multi-academy trust/local authority listens to them. These views are important considerations for school governance at all levels, including for the role of parental voice in decision-making, parent governors and transparency of decision-making at all levels.

8. Parentkind have monitored the views of parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent survey (July 2020) found that:

- 88% of parents feel engaged in their children's learning during school closures and more than half (53%) feel more engaged in their child's learning now compared to before lockdown.
- Despite this, a third of parents (33%) said that they felt their child was quite or very disengaged with their learning and more than half (57%) felt that their child was less engaged in their learning now compared to before lockdown.⁸

These views indicate that schools should reflect on how they can retain some of the methods and communications which have led to parents feeling more engaged in their children's learning during returning to a state of 'normal' which enables pupils to return and engage fully in school.

Examples of City Corporation Activities

9. There are a number of projects and activities delivered or supported by the City Corporation which seek to engage parents in children's learning. These are supplementary to the many and diverse ways in which the Family of Schools engage pupils' parents which are not mapped here. The Family of Schools have shown excellent practice in this area, for example, the community choir at Galleywall Primary School, the local area engagement at Redriff Primary School and parent liaison projects at City of London Primary Academy Islington. The individual work of schools in this area will be mapped in detail in future reports.
10. Examples from City Corporation departments include:

Department / Service	Projects / Activities
Education Strategy Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Schools' Conference – The 2019 conference for leaders and teachers across the Family of Schools focused on pupil, staff and family wellbeing and included practical workshops on methods for parental, family and community engagement to support learning and wellbeing. Workshop facilitators in this area included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Cristina Odone - The Parenting Circle Charity</u> - The Parenting Circle charity supports parenting discussion groups through schools. ○ <u>Gillian Hampden-Thompson – University of Sussex</u> - This session provided delegates the opportunity to discuss wellbeing in the context of school-family relationships and

⁷ Parentkind, *Annual Parent Survey 2019*, 2019 <<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Research/Annual-Parent-Survey-2019>>

⁸ Parentkind, *Coronavirus Parent Survey 3*, 2020 <<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Research/Coronavirus-Parent-Survey-3>>

	<p>the benefits that positive interactions bring for the school, parents and pupils.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Kathy Weston - Parental Engagement Expert</u> - Kathy shared the highest quality research relating to the literature on parental engagement in children's lives and learning. ○ <u>Mary Taylor - Family Links: The Centre for Emotional Health</u> – This workshop considered practical examples of a whole school community approach on relationships and the emotional health of pupils, staff and parents. ○ <u>Moiria Hunt and Tim Richards - Better Learning Involves Families</u> - Provided a rationale for Parent and Family Engagement as a model for promoting pupil wellbeing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resources to support Home Learning – During school closures, the Education Strategy Unit developed and commissioned a number of practical resources for parents and families to use at home which were made available on the City Corporation website and shared directly with families through the Family of Schools. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Learning from Home – Hints and tips for families</u> supporting pupils who were learning from home ○ <u>Culture and Creativity at Home</u> – Practical activities, experiences and resources to keep pupils engaged in creative and cultural activities ○ <u>London Careers Festival Resources</u> – Activities for pupils and families to support pupils to find out more about careers and develop their skills ● Art Exhibition and School Concert – Each year, parents and families are invited to celebrate their children's creativity as audience members of the Family of Schools' Concert and cultural visitors of the Family of Schools' Art Exhibition. ● City Premium Grant Funded Projects – Each academic year, academies have consistently used the Education Board's enrichment grant to support parental and family engagement in learning. Example projects include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Galleywall Primary School and Redriff Primary School</u> – Both of these primary academies have submitted bids to use the 2020/21 grant funding to run family support programmes aimed at working directly with families to support pupils who may have disengaged with learning during school closures, or where children and families may have been effected by bereavements due to COVID-19. ○ <u>City of London Academy Islington (CoLAI)</u> – CoLAI used the 2019/20 grant to run early help services for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils with a strong focus on working with families to support pupils' emotional and mental health and educational outcomes.
Adult Skills and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family Learning – ASES deliver courses aimed at parents and families to encourage parental engagement in learning and

Education Service (ASES)	<p>learning activities where children and parents learn activities together. In the 2019/20 prospectus, this included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Homework Club</u> – Saturday sessions for primary school pupils and their parents and carers to provide the pupils with the support needed with their English and maths and the parents with the understanding of what their children are studying at school and how they can help them. ○ <u>Family Cooking</u> – Sessions for children and their parents to jointly learn and practice cooking healthy meals and snacks.
Culture Mile Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture Mile Play Packs - Since May, Culture Mile and learning partners have been designing and distributing creative Play Packs for families and children to do at home together. The packs contain creative activities inspired by cultural organisations and art materials including chalks, string, and coloured paper. So far over 7,000 packs have been distributed across London via food banks and charitable organisations to families most in need, including those without access to computers or the internet. Electronic versions can be viewed here: https://www.culturemile.london/playpacks
Education and Early Years' Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COLTale – The EEYS Service deliver this ongoing project aimed at parents of children under 5, explaining the importance of reading to very young children, promoting literacy and encouraging parents to read with their children every day.
Barbican and Community Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Reading Support – There are a number of activities delivered by the Libraries aimed at engaging families and their children to read together, these include: Children's' reading groups for 3 age groups; Read to Succeed –literacy support programme matching trained volunteers with children to listen to their reading; Summer Reading Challenge in partnership with The Reading Agency; Weekly Storytimes, Rhymetimes and Stay and Play sessions with toys; Regular craft activities for families; Author visits/ guest storytellers/ guest performances; In house library plays to promote reading; School holiday activities; Coding clubs at 2 libraries supported by volunteers from Lloyds Bank.

Points for Discussion

11. In consideration of the research on parental engagement in learning, and the City Corporation's strategic and operational efforts to support and facilitate effective practice in this area, Members of the Education Board may want to clarify its position by discussing the following:
 - a) What is the role of the Education Board in supporting the effective practice of parental engagement in learning across its Family of Schools?
 - b) How might the City Corporation ensure that its own parental engagement in learning projects/activities are effective and having a positive impact?
 - c) What is the role of the Education Board and City Corporation in influencing broader research and policy in this area?
12. Officers will use Members' discussions and comments to inform the continued work in this area by sharing with other relevant City Departments and the Family

of Schools and informing the 2020/21 Action Plan and associated reporting timeline.

Appendices

- N/A

Daniel McGrady

Lead Policy Officer (Education, Culture and Skills)

T: 020 7332 1864

E: daniel.mcgrady@cityoflondon.gov.uk