



Guidelines for developing school policy on TCN parental involvement



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1. Introduction

Integration of Third Country National (TCN) children in the education system of the receiving country and helping them to reach their full potential has been a major challenge in most European countries for a number of years. Different strategies have been adopted often not only targeting TCN children but developing inclusive practices that can be beneficial to all pupils. Some of the obstacles that have been identified hindering the process of smooth integration are:

- Limited scope of initial assessment
- Inappropriate grade placement
- Language provision not adapted to the needs of the students
- Insufficient learning support
- Lack of social and emotional support
- Teachers who are not trained and/or supported to deal with diversity in the classroom
- Insufficient home-school cooperation

The project “Promoting Meaningful Integration of 3rd Country National Children to Education” (IntegratEd) supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Programme of the EU aims to tackle the above mentioned problem and “strengthen the successful participation of newly arrived third-country national children (TCN) in education and to contribute to the combatting of discrimination against TCN children in the educational environment in Greece, Italy and Spain, and the EU in general”. The project aims to achieve this through the development of an Educational Support Model, which supports students on academic matters, promotes their integration in the educational system and contributes to the tackling of the discrimination that these people suffer. One of the goals of the Educational Support Model is to promote and support greater TCN parental involvement in the education and school life of their children. For the latter to be achieved the schools hosting TCN students need to have a structured and organised policy that will facilitate and support TCN parental involvement.



The aim of this document is to provide schools with a set of guidelines in order to support them on creating a hosting school policy and attract greater TCN parental involvement. The document initially offers valuable information on the importance of parental involvement in educational achievement. It then offers a set of general guidelines that could be embedded in the school policy and specified guidelines in the use of the Education Support Platform that has been developed in the framework of IntergratED project and can contribute to the situation described above.

2. Parental Involvement

2.1. Definition of parental involvement

Parental involvement in the education of the children is generally considered very crucial in enhancing the educational process. Althoff (2010¹) defines parental involvement as the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to schooling and the child's life. It is also defined as the activities occurring between a parent and a child or between a parent and teachers at school that may contribute to the child's educational outcomes and development (Abdullah, Seedee, Alzaidiyeen, Al-Shabatat, Alzeydeen & Al-Awabdeh, 2011²).

Based on the definitions given, parental involvement takes place at home and at school on a regular basis. At home, parents can help in their child's learning by helping and monitoring the homework, providing encouragement, modelling behaviours, creating space for the child to study. At school, parents can establish fruitful communication with teachers, attend and actively participate on the preparation of school activities and conferences and help with governance issues.

¹ Althoff, R. 2010. *Dysregulated children reconsidered*. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 49(4), 302–305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2010.02.003>

² Abdullah AGK, Seedee R, Alzaidiyeen NJ, Al-Shabatat A, Alzeydeen HK & Al-Awabdeh AH 2011. *An investigation of teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement*. Educational Research, 2(8):1402–1408. Available at <https://www.interesjournals.org/articles/aninvestigation-of-teachers-attitudes-towards-parental-involvement.pdf>.



Nevertheless, parental involvement is achieved if efforts are two sided, from the side of the parents and the efforts of the school. Epstein et al. (2002)³, being leading researchers in the field, identify six types of parental involvement that can be reinforced by the school and have been found to be more effective as factors through numerous findings in research conducted. These types are: 1) Parenting, 2) Communicating, 3) Volunteering, 4) Learning at home, 5) Decision-Making, 6) Collaborating with community. Figure 1 shows the types of parental involvement identified by Epstein et al. along with the explanation of every type.

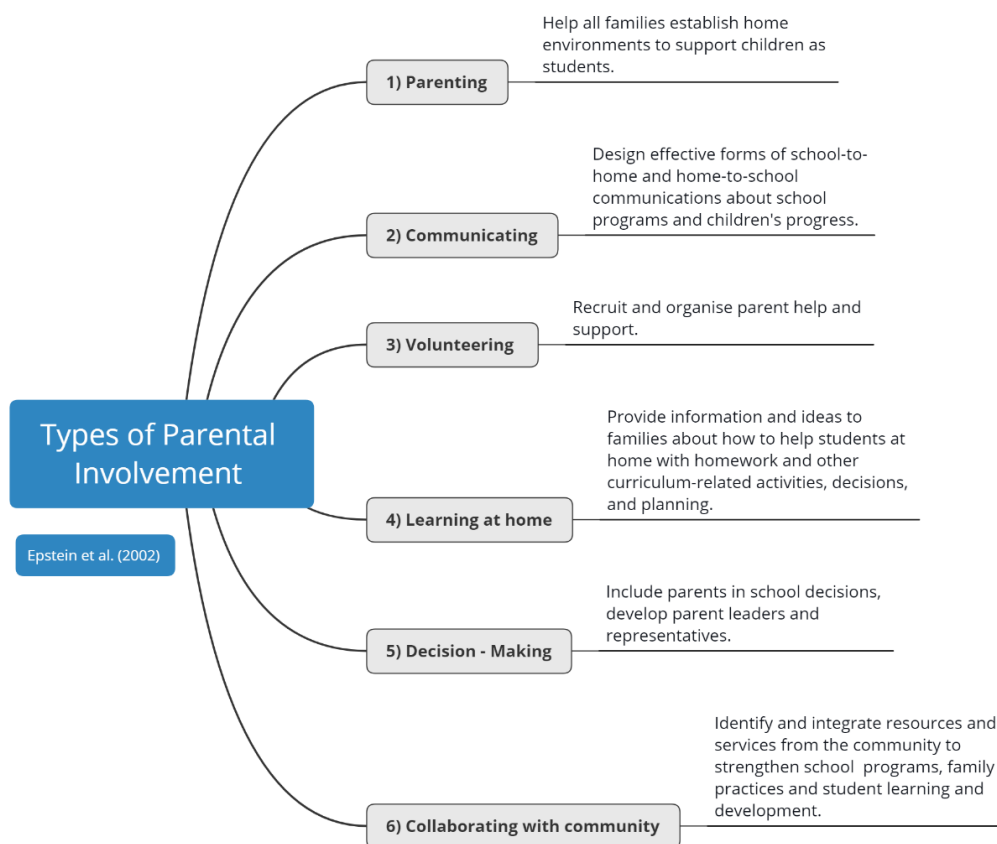


Figure 1 based on the work of Epstein et al. (2002)³

³ Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

2.2. The importance of parental involvement

Parents and families are considered one of the stakeholders of the school community among administrators, teachers, staff members, community members and officials. Parental involvement is conceived as a form of social capital⁴, i.e. participation in networks with shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups⁵. By nature, they are encompassed with an important role to play in the child's educational and environmental transformation from the beginning of the child's life. Their involvement with school, school life and their child's academic life has profound benefits for their child, their own selves and the school community. A lot of research has been conducted in order to identify the factors which are affected by greater parental involvement. Some of the effects of greater parental involvement for children and parents are listed below:

For children and adolescents⁶:

- Higher student achievement, regardless of their family's socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity or educational background
- Better attendance rates
- Improved behaviour at home and at school
- Better social skills and adaptation to school
- Higher motivation and future aspirations for adolescents

For parents⁷:

- Increased interactions and discussions with the children and greater involvement in their development

⁴ Hill, N. E., & Taylor, L.C. (2004). *Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: pragmatics and issues*. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 13(4), 161–164

⁵ OECD (2001), *The Well-Being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*, OECD, Paris.

⁶ Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis*. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

⁷ Sapungan, G. & Sapungan, R. (2014). *Parental Involvement in Child's Education: Importance, Barriers and Benefits*. Asian Journal of Management Sciences & Education. Vol.3 No. 2. 42-48.

- Greater confidence in parenting and decision- making skills
- Greater awareness of the child’s progress, teacher’s role, the curriculum and school policies
- Improvement of parents’ perception of school and creation of stronger ties with the school community
- Accumulation of new skills and social connections

Parental involvement is also beneficial for educators and the school at the same time. A more holistic approach to the needs of every child is established through two-way communication. Educators and parents can share information and achieve a greater collaboration for a more personalised approach for every child, its behaviour and its learning and reduce misunderstandings. Furthermore, the school benefits as a whole. It acquires better understanding of the student population as well as greater communication with the families. What is more through the establishment of communication channels between the school personnel and the families, educators can be further supported in their tackling strategies of the occurring problems, and their morale as professionals. With greater parental involvement, every stakeholder can fulfil their respective roles in mutual trust and confidence. Nevertheless, building this safe space between the stakeholders presents specific challenges for different groups.

2.3. Barriers faced by TCN parents

Although the value of parental involvement in the education of the children has been recognised for a long time now, parental capacity to get involved is not equal between class, race, ethnicity, gender and immigrant status⁸. When it comes to TCN parents, they face a great amount of barriers regarding the access to education for their children (e.g. governing regulations of stay and admissions), let alone their involvement in the school community and school life of their

⁸ Beauregard F., Petrakos H., and Dupont A. (2014). Family-school partnerships: Practices of immigrant parents in Quebec, Canada. *School Community Journal* 24(1): 177- 210

children. Some barriers⁹ that TCN parents already face and further impede their capacity to get involved in the school community are:

- Language barriers
- Financial and economic barriers
- Legislation barriers and bureaucracy
- Psychological challenges
- Risk for discrimination
- Culture differences – Acculturation stress
- Lack of social support
- Time availability due to work duties
- Lack of quality housing
- Prior parental education may not be sufficient to help children in their academic duties
- Lack of school support

Taking under consideration the stated benefits of parental involvement in education for children, parents, educators and schools, along with the potential increase that parental involvement can have on social capital, it is an absolute need to achieve greater parental involvement of TCN parents. Parental involvement can be seen as a means through which refugee and migrant families get closer to the culture and society of the hosting country. They can take up active roles in the school community, benefit as individuals and as parents and promote their children’s school achievement and adaptation in the new country they are living in. Therefore, parental involvement can also be seen as a means of empowerment of TCN parents.

⁹ Ennab F. (2017) *Being involved in Uninvolved Contexts: Refugee Parent Involvement in Children’s Education*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Available at: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2017/04/Refugee_parent_involvement.pdf



3. Developing a school policy for TCN parental involvement

3.1. General Guidelines

In order for a school to design and implement a strategy to increase TCN parental involvement, it has to view parental involvement as a **process** and **not an event**. Parental involvement is a dynamic procedure that will need effort, consistency and support from the whole school staff along with the families. Its benefits will be apparent in the course of the school year for students, parents and educators.

The general guidelines that follow are based on the 6 types of parental involvement¹⁰ that were referred in the section 2.1 of this document and are also combined with the work of Hamilton (2004)¹¹ on refugee parental involvement. They are addressed to school leaders and school personnel. More specifically:

1. *Parenting* → *Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.*
 - Understand the needs of TCN families, previous experiences, parent roles and family desires
 - Provide parents with explicit guidelines to help them create a healthy learning environment at home that establishes the need for rest for the children and adolescents, the importance of good breakfast, the creation of a quiet place for studying and the provision of sufficient study time.
 - Provide parents with information on the parental role in the educational process and contact details for relevant instructional programmes that might be held from community stakeholders or might take place in the school premises.

¹⁰ Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

¹¹ Hamilton, R. (2004) Schools, teachers and education of refugee children, in: R. Hamilton and D. Moore (eds) *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children* (London: RoutledgeFalmer)



- Provide parents with contact details to educational professionals such as special needs educators, psychologists that have previously worked with migrant and refugee populations.
 - Enable *all* families to share information about parenting and relevant good practices that they follow.
 - Make sure that the information and the guidelines you provide parents with are usable, understood by everyone involved and are related to children's school life.
2. *Communicating* → *Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and children's progress.*
- Develop communication channels with the parents through the incorporation of a cultural mediator. A cultural mediator that has deep knowledge and cultural understanding of the migrant/ refugee families and of the school culture.
 - Create a liaison based on the different languages the TCN parents speak and provide all materials, if possible, in all languages.
 - Share school specific information along with information on the education system of the country
 - Share answers to frequently asked questions regarding schooling to all parents
 - Give samples of notes that parents can use for the communication with the teachers such as child early arrival, delay of arrival, sickness, request of appointment to the teacher
3. *Volunteering* → *Recruit and organise parent help and support*
- Establish volunteering activities among parents with different skills and talents who are willing to share with the parental school community.
 - Establish a network with parents willing to give insight on teachers and other parents on their cultures and past experiences.



- Enable easier communication among parents with the sharing of contact information and the organisation of parent meet ups to get to know each other.
 - Take under consideration the cultural differences and the needs of the parents regarding their involvement in such activities.
 - Organise volunteering activities within a flexible schedule and with many options to enable the participation of working parents
4. *Learning at home* → *Provide information and ideas to families about how to help at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning*
- Provide usable information on the homework policy for each grade
 - Introduce parent – child activities that can be presented in the classroom and in parent meet-ups
 - Give students the responsibility to discuss with parents about their learning and development through discussion forms and record keeping forms (or digital forms) so that parents stay updated
 - Involve parents in curriculum discussion and goal setting activities for their children with teachers
5. *Decision- making* → *Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives*
- Introduce all parents in the parent leadership organisations and motivate them to take up leading roles
 - Train parents to become representatives of other parents and families
 - Create opportunities and support parents in listening the needs of other parents and families
 - Conduct an analysis to identify the specific needs of TCN parents and introduce it to the parent leaders and representatives or motivate parent leaders and representatives to conduct such an analysis



6. *Collaborating with community* → *Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development*
- Facilitate educational programmes for parents for learning the language of the host country in the school premises
 - Affiliate with community service organisations that have specific services for migrant and refugee inclusion and inform parents for the opportunities available
 - Play an active role in the expanding of the parents' network by introducing activities that take place in the school grounds and the community
 - Provide information for community services on social support and health
 - Inform families for community programmes of student support and extracurricular activities, sports and recreation

3.2. Explicit Guidelines

Following the general guidelines presented in the section 3.1., explicit guidelines are also suggested. The explicit guidelines mainly refer to the information that should definitely be passed on to TCN parents and all other parents of the school. In most countries the inscription process requires parents/caregivers to be present at the school in person. As this is in many cases the first meeting for both sides it is important to take advantage of it and dedicate sufficient time and resources (personnel, space etc.) to well establish contact. Therefore, schools should be prepared to:

- Create a welcoming atmosphere for all families by:
 - greeting parents and family members personally (not only as a group)
 - say your name and who you are and don't be taken aback if someone doesn't look into your eyes or doesn't shake hands, a bow for example might be as respectful in the other person's culture



- speaking slowly and using simple syntax to make it possible to understand even if people don't speak the language of schooling well (see further down for translation), avoiding jargon and dialectal expressions
- involving a cultural mediator (if possible) in order to favour their acclimatisation with the school environment

➤ Provide information material about:

- how the school system works (see the IntegratED website at: <https://ecourse.integrated-project.eu/educational-information-section/> or <http://parenthelp.eu>)

School systems vary a lot from one country to another, sometimes even within the country (e.g., Germany: 16 different systems), and most parents bring in their own school experience as the only source of knowledge and are not aware of all the changes that have taken place in the meantime let alone if they have been at school in another country or have received very little schooling themselves (some not at all). The knowledge that people involved in education on a daily basis might take for granted can be a source of misunderstanding and conflict. Here are some of the essential points that may need to be explained but this should be preceded by a phase of reflection on the eventual differences with other systems and ideally by a discussion with members from different communities to establish information leaflets, websites, apps, etc. with relevant and clearly understandable information on:

- how many years of elementary/primary/secondary/education
Explanation of the terms, if that seems too confusing go by age groups or other common denominators.
Example: grade 2 of an Austrian gymnasium corresponds to grade 6 in many other countries and concerns pupils of the age of 12-13 years.
- assessment and terms of passing to the next grade



Whether there are marks (which ones and how they count), short terms (acquired, in process, not acquired yet) or written descriptions.

Present the ways to obtain a positive mark/description, number of written and oral exams in different subjects etc.

- the different pathways that exist and how to access them

This information might only be relevant to pupils of a certain age, but the moment in time when the decision needs to be taken or which preparatory measures have to be taken to be able to make a certain choice later on varies greatly from one system to the next and should be well and timely communicated.

- school and holiday times
- weekly timetable and organization of learning and recreation time
- homework policy

Homework represents a regular link between home and school and as such represents a good opportunity for the development of a practical partnership between parents and teachers. The homework policy should be prepared in consultation with parents and children. It should give clarity to the whole school community about the purpose of the homework and what is expected at each class level.

- what the school offers
 - curriculum (regular classes, options – when and how to choose...)
 - equipment (books, digital devices, materials for arts and crafts...)
 - extra-curricular activities (sports, excursions, drama, choir, language classes)
 - lunch, snacks
 - after hour learning support, homework/study classes
- what the school expects from the family/home
 - logistic support (being on time, being adequately dressed)
 - equipment (exercise books, pencils, eraser, sports' dress, materials for arts and crafts)
 - homework support

- reading to and with children (in their mother tongue/first language)
- being a role model (use of digital devices, nutrition, exercise)

➤ Provide translation

- have material ready in various languages

Depending on the context you'll have to find out which are the most common languages spoken within your school community. As the general information will be the same for all schools your local authority might be willing to invest in translation of leaflets/brochures that can be distributed at all schools in their district/area of responsibility and you'd only have to add an information sheet with the specific data for your school – try to create synergies by working with other schools and/or the local/regional authority.

Using a website and/or an App to provide this information might help to adjust more frequently to necessary changes and avoid having to discard outdated printed material but experience shows that parents/families do like to be given information in print so make sure that there is a printable version easily available.

- get translators (either in person or via phone)

To be able to communicate properly in a meaningful way is one of the keys to successful parental involvement.

Example: In Portugal, translators for the most frequent languages are available through the migration centres (One-stop-shops also for other relevant issues like access to the health system or the labour market) in different parts of the country. They can be booked beforehand and will come and assist at meetings or be available via phone. Other parents preferably of children who have already been at the school for some time might be able to assist as well as other teachers or non-teaching personnel. It's strongly advised not to rely on the children as this will put them in a very difficult situation.



- Organising an Open Day before the inscription period might also be helpful as families can get to know the building as well as the personnel and other families (parents and already enrolled pupils), ask questions in a more relaxed atmosphere and get a better picture of the offers and demands of the school.
- Inviting parents/families of newly enrolled children before the beginning of the new term to an informal meeting at the school cafeteria for instance or any other suitable room for a meeting in a relaxed atmosphere can also provide the opportunity to talk about each other's' expectations and challenges.
- Organising regular parent meet ups can help the smooth integration in the parental community of the school and the establishments of relationships among parents

4. The Education Support Platform

IntegratED project as mentioned in the Introduction has developed the Education Support Platform that could also be used in order to achieve greater parental involvement. The Education Support Platform aims at supporting the teaching and learning process of secondary Third Country National students and also support the members of the school community. In particular, it offers modules for the intercultural capacity building of teachers, modules for mentors on how to support TCN students, an online homework club, a multilingual information section and a forum to facilitate communication between the parents and the school. More specifically:

The platform is composed of the following elements:

- Educational information section
- Homework support
- Courses:



- Enhancing intercultural self-awareness
- Module for teachers
- Module for mentors

In the educational information section readers can find essential information on the school systems of the countries of the participating organizations namely Greece, Italy and Spain. Information on other school systems of other countries along with information on general services and on parental involvement can be found on the ParentHelp website (<https://parenthelp.eu/>). The resources and information are offered in the languages of the largest groups of migrants/refugees in the respective countries.

The homework support section provides learners with help from volunteer teachers on issues students might have with their homework or the curriculum in general. Once registered the students can upload articles with specific exercises, proposed solutions and questions that they might have.

The courses are designed to be completed by participants in their own time and pace and foster intercultural learning as well as self-reflection and capacity building among teachers, parents and students.

One of the reasons given for TCN students' lower academic achievement is the insufficient home-school cooperation which is directly linked to parental involvement in schools. The platform therefore could be introduced to TCN parents and act as a liaison between the parent, the child and the school.

4.1. Information for parents of mentees and parent of mentors

In order to introduce the Education Support Platform to parents the school has to inform them on the following details and principles. These principles are also valid for introducing the mentoring programme and need to be taken into account in addition to the following points:

Parents of mentees will need to know how the mentoring programme works, in particular:

- Aim and content of the mentoring programme



- who is providing it (responsible institution, main contact person)
 - who are the mentors and the supervisors (names, which class they belong to, what training they have received)
 - where and when activities will take place (especially if not within the school building, dates and hours in international format)
 - what activities to expect (give examples, have parents participate in a session, regularly update parents on the progress)
 - complaint mechanism (to whom to turn in case of questions and /or dissatisfaction)
- Information on their role is in supporting their children’s learning based on the following engagement principles

school staff, mentors and parents

participate in supporting the learning of the child	value the knowledge that each brings to the partnership.	engage in dialogue around and with the learning of the child	act in partnership to support the learning of the child and each other	respect the legitimate authority of each other’s roles and contributions to supporting learning
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- How the mentoring programme complements this role.
- helping them to understand the school system and its requirements
 - helping them in fields they do not consider themselves competent enough yet
 - supporting the inclusion of children and the parents themselves



- How they can participate in the programme, especially in intercultural learning
 - o what opportunities there are for taking part in the mentoring process
 - o how and when their own culture and knowledge can become part of the programme
- Time commitment of their children when taking part
 - o taking cultural differences, religious requirements into consideration
- Expected outcomes
 - o better learning outcomes in school
 - o intercultural learning
 - o inclusion

In order to comply with the GDPR the organisation has to establish forms for mentees, mentors and their parents that take the following points into account and maybe even add specific formulations in accordance with the current legal situation in their respective countries.

Explicit consent by parents is needed for all minors regardless of whether they're participating as mentees or mentors to:

- the overall participation of their children
- data collection and use (according to GDPR)
 - o the organisation needs to outline what data will be collected and how it will be managed
 - o be prepared for answering questions on the necessity of collecting certain data
- taking photos or videos (according to GDPR)
 - o taking photos for research falls under a different category, and parents need to understand why they would sometimes be necessary
- using photos or videos publicly (according to GDPR)

- you can only use photos or videos you were given explicit consent to use, this applies to using them on the website as well as in project reports

Nothing about them without them principle:

- mentees need to actively agree in writing to participating in the programme
- for consent they need to understand
 - what the programme is about and what its aims are
 - what activities to expect
 - time commitment
 - expected outcomes
 - better learning outcomes in school
 - intercultural learning
 - inclusion
- mentees as well as mentors themselves also need to give written consent to data collection as well as taking and using photos/videos
- you are not allowed to use data or take/use photos and videos if either the parents or the mentee/parents or the mentors did not give consent



5. Conclusion

Parental involvement is of high importance for the life of the child in and out of school. It is also a means through which parents take up an active role in the education of their children. Now more than ever before the involvement of all parents is crucial, especially the involvement of migrant and refugee parents and children in education. This document provided information on the definition of parental involvement, the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children, some of the barriers faced by TCN parents that further hinder their involvement, general and explicit guidelines for the design of a school policy and information on the Education Support Platform that could help in the parental involvement of TCN parents.

Parental School involvement can happen in many different forms and should not be measured by the frequency by which meetings organised by the school are attended. Even though it might be easier for the school to maintain relations that way other forms of communication should be sought. These might include regular exchange via social media channels, mails, phone calls and even home visits which will help teachers and/or other school staff to better understand the family situation of a student.

Parental engagement in their children's learning might take diverse forms from showing genuine interest in what happens at school, providing a calm environment for learning at home, taking children to the local library, promoting exchange with classmates, fostering their participation in extra-curricular activities, providing healthy food and clean clothes and should be valued as an important contribution to their children's well-being and forthcoming at school.

Schools designing and implementing a TCN parent involvement support policy are taking a step further in enhancing the development of the children to their full potential and create numerous opportunities for them in the education system.

In order to be successful on the long run and therefore sustainable, the participation of all actors is needed through the creation of a whole-school-approach in which all stakeholders take part to the implementation of individual measures to ensure shared ownership and responsibility.



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