

Invitation to participate in a collaborative process

Taking a systemic approach to parental involvement in education

Reos Partners and JET Education Services are embarking on a process to combine their expertise to address systemic challenges in the education sector. Together, they have identified the potential lever of parental (or caregiver involvement)¹ in education as an opportunity to significantly improve educational outcomes, particularly in the Foundation Phase of the child's development.

Reos and JET co-hosted a webinar on the 27th of May 2021 on the theme: Collaborating for Education: A New Trajectory for Parental Involvement. See [here](#) for the replay. The webinar was attended by 234 participants from all across the world.

Seven key themes came to light from the webinar panelists and from the very engaging participants. These themes were:

- 1.** The issue of **absentee parents** who leave their children in the care of grandparents as they **move to the urban areas seeking employment**.
- 2.** The **lack of trust** between schools and parents.
- 3.** Many parents **do not have the knowledge required** to help their children with their education.
- 4.** Many parents **do not seem to understand that they have a role to play** in their children's education.
- 5.** **Illiteracy** is one of the major factors that militates against meaningful involvement by parents in schools.
- 6.** **Proper engagement of parents/caregivers** can enhance their **employment status**.
- 7.** **Technology** can be leveraged to fill significant gaps.

Our aim is to address these themes by running a series of 4 online capacity-building, prototyping **boot camps**. These boot camps aim to pull together a diverse group of stakeholders who are interested in any of the themes to define and find possible innovative approaches to parental involvement in education. These stakeholder interventions will be supported by data-driven input throughout the process. By enabling stakeholders to work together in this way, we maximise the potential of the education system by actively leading stakeholders to gain systemic insights and create transformative actions.

This effort will be broken down into phases as we co-create ideas. The first phase will include a high-intensity process over 8 weeks during which the bootcamps will run (a collaborative "sprint") to fine-tune and test ideas for implementation. Reos Partners, with many years of experience in facilitating such processes, will offer guidance to the groups. The pace of work will differ from group to group, determined by the groups themselves.

The outcomes of these bootcamps will serve as potential longer-term project proposals for implementation and for subsequent phases.

Interested in signing up?

Please [click here](#) to enroll.

Alternatively, email Mpinane Senkhane at senkhane@reospartners.com

For more background on the topic, read [JET Exchanges 3/2021: Parental involvement for school improvement: A South African perspective](#)



¹ We acknowledge that both parents and caregivers should be considered in this process. Where the term parent is used, caregiver is implied, unless noted otherwise.



Significance of the issue

Research indicates that parental involvement in children's learning and development, whether at home or at school, plays an important role in improved educational outcomes. When primary caregivers collaborate with the school, they have a greater potential to support children's learning and development. Benefits include strengthened relations between the school and parents; positive parental attitudes towards teachers and the school; improved learner performance in adaptive and social skills; an improved school climate; increased parental satisfaction with the school; and overall school improvement.

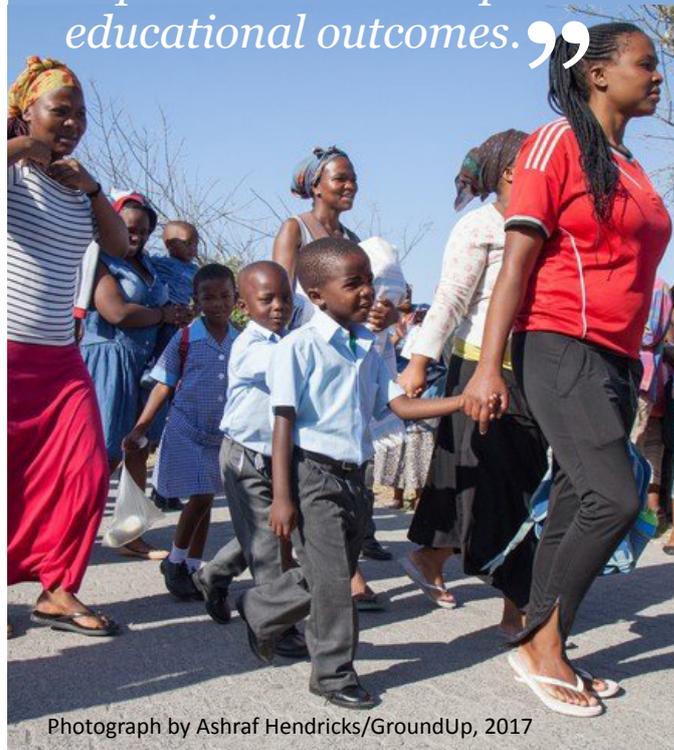
The current reality, however, is that in general, there is a disconnect between parents, their children's learning and development, and the school. This is particularly the case for parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many do not feel that they are adequately able to support their children with their learning activities, either because of their own low levels of literacy or lack of confidence. Others either do not know that they have a role to play in their children's education or do not feel it is their responsibility.

In many countries, while legislation and policy recognises parents or caregivers as legitimate partners in the education of their children, significant gaps in implementation remain. Poor relationships and low levels of trust between parents and teachers and lack of appreciation for the complementary roles that each can play hamper effective collaboration. Conversely, where there is trust between teachers, the school governing body, and parents, parental engagement increases.

Furthermore, the issue of parental involvement in their children's education is generally viewed as a stand-alone issue, disconnected from other structural and systemic issues parents or caregivers and their children may be facing such as poverty, unemployment, nutritional deficits, and sexual and gender-based violence in the home.

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Photograph by Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp, 2017

A new and bold approach

To address the issue of parental involvement in a holistic, integrated manner that builds trust amongst actors requires a **collaborative**, **systemic** and **experimental** response. A brief description of each of these approaches is provided below:



Collaborative: We will apply a design and facilitation that enables collaboration and genuine co-creation. Our approach is premised on the idea that the most resilient and sustainable solutions are those that are created and owned by the people who need to be involved in bringing these solutions to life, and embedded from the beginning in collaborative delivery partnerships.



Systemic: The process intends to help stakeholders to see their situation from a whole-system perspective and to identify key leverage points for change. The systemic perspective is partly developed through facilitated processes, but is also based on the composition of the group itself. The systemic perspective is most alive when the group reflects the diversity of people affected by and involved in the problem at hand. This enables more creativity and avoids the risk of imposing top-down solutions, which rarely take advantage of the full range of knowledge that can be brought to bear on the problem.



Experimental: There are no preconceived answers to developing an effective and appropriate response to any complex challenge. Trust is required of participants that, with the appropriate design and facilitation, and with their full engagement in the process, the answers will emerge. Our intended processes will enable participants to apply their collective creativity to developing, prototyping and testing a portfolio of ideas that can evolve into resilient solutions. When, by rapid iterations of trial and error, you have discovered what works, you can then grow it with confidence.